

TARRAGON THEATRE

34th SEASON 2004-2005

“One of the most artistically adventurous and yet commercially stable companies in Canada” *The Globe and Mail*, 2004

“Is there a better evening of theatre to be had anywhere?”
David MacFarlane, *Globe & Mail*, 2003

“An unrivalled purveyor of Canadian drama”
Vit Wagner, *Toronto Star*, 1999

About Tarragon Theatre

Tarragon is primarily a playwright's theatre. Its mandate is to develop, encourage and produce new work; to attract or train new artists and technicians to interpret new work; and to inform and develop an audience for new work. The goal of the OutReach programs is to develop quality theatre education initiatives for students, educators, community members, and theatre patrons. The mandate of OutReach is “to use all its resources, programs, and facilities to promote, wherever possible, inclusion. Particularly through our OutReach initiatives we aim to support and foster relationships with community members, educators and students as together we develop the theatre practitioners and audiences of today and tomorrow”.

In 2003, our neighborhood association unanimously voted to adopt the official name Tarragon Village Community Association, making this the first neighborhood in Toronto to take its name from that of a theatre. Tarragon Village encompasses Dartnell Avenue to Bathurst Street and Bridgman Avenue to Davenport Road. An inaugural ribbon cutting ceremony took place on May 31, 2003.

Tarragon Achievements

- Over 175 Canadian premieres by such celebrated and award-winning playwrights as David French, James Reaney, George F. Walker, Judith Thompson, John Murrell, Joan MacLeod, Maja Ardal, Morris Panych, Jason Sherman, Guillermo Verdecchia, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Daniel Brooks, Diane Flacks, Richard Greenblatt, Ted Dykstra, Ken Garnhum, Michael Healey, Morwyn Brebner, Mavis Gallant, Kristen Thomson and a host of others.
- Tarragon is the foremost producer, in English Canada, of translated plays from Québec, most notably the work of Carole Fréchette and Michel Tremblay.
- Plays developed and produced at Tarragon have, on many occasions, toured nationally and internationally; they have also been widely published, broadcast and filmed.
- Tarragon has received more than 200 Dora Award nominations, many nominations (and winners) for the Chalmers Canadian Play Award and many nominations for the Governor General's Award for Drama (winners include Judith Thompson, Joan MacLeod, Guillermo Verdecchia, John Krizanc, Jason Sherman

and Morris Panych, all for Tarragon plays). Tarragon has received the Lieutenant Governor's Award 5 times in the past 7 years.

- Since the 1995/96 season, Tarragon subscriptions have risen 136% to a record 4,095 subscribers in the 2002-2003 season. Tarragon is deficit-free.
- The Urjo Kareda Playwrights Endowment Fund, named to honour Urjo's commitment to Canadian theatre, stands at just under \$1.2 million. Income from the fund is used to assist playwrights while they are writing their plays.

Tarragon Programs

- 7 or 8 major productions in two theatres each season. In the 2002-2003 season, there were seven productions (300 performances) with a total attendance of 46,950.
- Playwrights Unit (since 1982). As many as 7 playwrights, with works-in-progress, work individually and collectively with the artistic director and the associate artistic director over the course of a year. These plays are given a public reading during Play Reading Week, held in mid-December.
- 4 playwrights-in-residence.
- Tarragon Theatre/George Brown College New Play Development Project – a Tarragon playwright will write a play to be workshopped by second year acting students at George Brown College in order to give the students a sense of the development process and their role as actors within it.
- Spring Arts Fair (since 1985): an extraordinary free celebration of the performing arts, presented in spaces throughout the interior and exterior of Tarragon Theatre.
- Outreach programs aimed at youth including Spring Training Project, Young Playwrights Unit, *Under 20 for Under 20's* playwriting contest, high school and post-secondary co-op placements; Outreach programs aimed at educators including Teacher Nights and educator workshops.
- Apprentice programs in arts administration and stage management.

Tarragon Special Services

- Over 500 scripts professionally read and assessed annually without charge.
- Student and senior matinees; wheelchair accessibility throughout facility.
- Teachers provided with a complimentary study guide.
- Costume and prop rentals for professional and community companies.
- Pay-What-You-Can performances every Sunday afternoon.
- Tickets donated to community and social service groups for fundraising events.

TARRAGON THEATRE

Study Guide

Bea's Niece

by David Gow



**Starring: John Bourgeois, Patricia Hamilton,
Fiona Hight, Maria Ricossa
Directed by Richard Rose
Set and Costume Design by April Anne Viczko
Lighting Design by Kevin Fraser
Sound Design by Ben Grossman
Stage Manager: Thom Payne**

January 4 – February 6, 2005

About the **Bea's Niece** study guide:

This study guide has been created so that your theatre experience at Tarragon is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions.

The **Bea's Niece** study guide was coordinated and compiled by:

Avery A. Swartz Publicity and OutReach Associate

Joanna Falck Literary Manager

Fiona Jones Studio and OutReach Co-ordinator.

Mary B. Wood OutReach Consultant developing lesson plans grounded in Ministry Curriculum.

Special thanks and acknowledgements to April Anne Viczko.

The **No Great Mischief** study guide is divided into several sections.

1. **About Tarragon Theatre**
2. **About the Playwright**
3. **About the Play**
4. **Elements of the Play**
5. **Interview with playwright David Gow**
6. **Glossary of Terms**
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9. **Lesson Plans**

Point of Interest

We encourage you to make use of this study guide as effectively as possible and as such we want to highlight the fact that some elements of the guide are most useful prior to viewing the production and some are most useful post viewing. For example, while the structure, character breakdown and themes set up a context for viewing, the design elements are best understood after viewing. There are also lesson plans included for pre and post show activities.

**Feel free to contact us should you have any questions or comments at
416.536.5018 x243.**

Bea's Niece

"...scotch, a gun, and some opium are the three things you need most to be a lady in any circumstance."

In *Bea's Niece* there is a powerful intersection in the life of novelist Anne Hirsch, where truth and fiction, reality and fantasy, psychology and spirituality, life and death all cross paths. Anne, in her fifties and laid up in hospital, receives visitors. They include her Aunt Bea who offers practical and hilarious advice, a young and persistent psychiatrist who is a self-declared fan of the novelist, a female Rabbi, and Anne's husband Bill. All of them try to help Anne sort out the mystery of her rather complicated perception of time. Anne re-discovers magic in the ordinary and through the medicine of her own imagination finds the grace to continue living and the will to challenge herself to greater heights of understanding and wisdom.

Before you see *Bea's Niece*

The play is a challenging one for audiences because the lines between what is real and what is not real in the play are often not clear. The challenge and enjoyment of the play is often in trying to decide whether an event has actually taken place or not, whether a character is actually on stage or is a figment of this writer's imagination, and whether a scene is a memory, a hallucination or real.

At times, confusion is part of the experience of this play for the audience. But this need not be a negative feeling. We are watching this world through Anne's eyes so like Anne, we in the audience feel confused about what 'time' some events are taking place in. Our experience mirrors Anne's experience so by the end of the play, what may not have made sense is made more clear and we, like Anne, have a better grasp of the world.

About the Playwright

The playwright David Gow began working on this play as part of his MFA at York University and the play was first read at Factory Theatre in 1999 where David was a playwright-in-residence. The play then premiered at 25th St. Theatre in Saskatoon and has since been produced in Canada at the Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa and in regional theatres throughout the U.S. David's association with Tarragon began in 1993 when he was invited to join the Playwrights Unit. The play that he developed in the Unit, *The Friedman Family Fortune*, was produced at Montreal's Centaur Theatre. This production of *Bea's Niece* also re-teams David Gow with director Richard Rose, who directed a highly successful production of David's play *Cherry Docs* at Factory Theatre.

About the Play

The play *Bea's Niece* centres on Anne Hirsch (played by Maria Ricossa), a famous Canadian novelist who has been hospitalized after a mental breakdown. Anne is also "Bea's niece" and she is visited by her Aunt Bea (played by Patricia Hamilton) who advises her in her no nonsense and hilarious way about how to cope with any situation in which a lady would find herself:

Bea: You need a decent home, there's no question of that. You need to have somewhere to entertain. You need to have a handsome ottoman, a comfy chair or two. Décor, yes that will help. You need to have a strong sense of yourself for when you encounter difficult people. You will need to have a nice set of dishes, for example Willowware. People won't feel at all uncomfortable with that, but still, it's a standard. In a sideboard's drawer, and this you need more than anything else, dearie...Can you guess? No? Well I'll tell you. Just for herself, not guests. A lady needs a very full bottle, say twenty-six ounces, of Scotch whiskey on hand at all times. That is paramount, dearie. You'll also need to have a clean, well-oiled forty-five-caliber revolver, that's very important for a lady especially if your husband has a tendency to wander. Now if you're lucky, if you want to spoil yourself, but only occasionally and only if the nerves are at their very worst...you will want to have a stainless steel syringe and just the tiniest supply of opium. Those last three things: scotch, a gun and some opium are the three things you need most be a lady in any circumstance.

Anne's husband, Bill (played by John Bourgeois) also visits and brings another kind of comfort to Anne. He brings her important things from home and reminds her of their life together.

Bill: Do you think this is easy for me? Do you think I can stand to see you like this for one second? You are my best, brightest, friend, my lover, and companion, my one and only Annie. Titan of the typewriter; and I have to tell you every moment who you are. How do you think it feels? It's a knife in my back, sweetheart.

Anne's psychiatrist, Dr. Beth Ottis (played by Fiona Hightet) struggles with how to cope with this famous novelist, a "national treasure" with a powerful intellect and imagination. As she says to Anne, "...you have a very big mind, a very large imagination. Once you allow yourself a little disorder, it's as though...I don't know...it's like... Anne: ..It's like trying to dust the Banff Springs Hotel with a Q-tip."

Elements of the Play

All of the components that make up a play are called the dramaturgical elements. These include the **structure** (how the story is 'built') the **genre** (comedy or tragedy), the **language**, the **characters** and **themes** (the larger issues the play is examining).

Structure

- The structure refers to how the playwright has arranged the events in his/her story.
- A story can be told in many different ways, for example the playwright can begin at the beginning of the story and move forward until the story reaches a logical ending.
- Or a play can begin long after the events have happened and unfold in random order in one character's memory.
- Shakespeare's plays always have five acts with the rising action in the first two acts, the climax in the third act and the falling action or denouement in the final two acts.
- Many modern playwrights reject this structure and they arrange the events in the play in a less logical way.
- How a playwright chooses to arrange the events in the play can tell us how he/she wants the audience to experience the story.

Bea's Niece has a two-act structure and each act is divided into five scenes. For this production, the original first scene of Act One has been cut.

The world of the play is seen through Anne's mind and as the play progresses, the ideas of reality and fantasy/imagination/memory become more and more intertwined.

From Act One, Scene One, which is very much based in reality, we move into Scene Two where a character, who we have been told is dead, suddenly appears. By the end of Act One, Anne's delusions seem to have grown and she seems to be at the height of her mania at the beginning of Act Two (which begins with her typing only numbers in order to maintain some order in her mind). Act Two builds up to the scene where Anne finally confronts her biggest fear – the death of her husband Bill and the role she played in his death.

Each scene is separated in the production by blackouts and sound cues, indicating that the scenes are separate from each other, that each occurs in isolation from the other.

Genre

Genre is a French word meaning type, species or class of composition. Determining a play's genre helps the reader/spectator understand how to 'view' the play – what is the worldview of the playwright? How is s/he asking us to look at the world? Knowing a play's genre helps us understand better the 'rules' of the play – how the play is operating in terms of its portrayal of the world.

Comedy, in general, is defined as a play written, "chiefly to amuse its audience... It will normally be closer to the representation of everyday life than a tragedy and will explore common human failings rather than tragedy's disastrous crimes" (*The Concise*

Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms). Shakespearian comedies are also defined as ending in marriage. The pursuit of love is often a strong element of comedy.

Tragedy, in general, is defined as “a serious play representing the disastrous downfall of a central character”. The central character is led to this disaster through “an error” and “the tragic effect usually depends on our awareness of admirable qualities in the protagonist which are wasted terribly in the fated disaster” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*).

Modern plays are difficult to categorize because they often contain elements of both the tragic and the comic. *Bea’s Niece* has elements of humour (particularly in Anne’s scenes with her Aunt Bea), but it cannot be defined strictly as a comedy. There are also tragic elements in the play (the death of Anne’s husband) but it cannot be strictly defined as a tragedy either.

In general, the journey of the play is one from hopelessness (Anne’s suicide attempt) to hope (her return to writing). Although she may not be entirely “cured” (she still sees her Aunt Bea in her final interview with Dr. Ottis), she is more able to control herself and her relationship to the illusionary figures around her. There is a triumph at the end of the play, and so the play can be seen as being more of a comedy in terms of its movement from sadness to triumph.

Dialogue

What’s significant in *Bea’s Niece* in terms of the use of language is also a central theme of the play – the power of words. The use of words in this play have both the power to heal and the power to destroy.

- Anne is a novelist and so for her how words and language are used is very important to her. Storytelling is a major element of the play – Aunt Bea tells Anne several stories, which seem funny but perhaps not related to Anne’s struggles. But, upon closer examination, they all relate very closely to Anne’s life.
- Anne believes that a book she wrote about a painter whose husband gets ill and dies may have been the reason for Bill’s death. She believes that the writing of this book may have, in some way, made Bill ill.
- Dr. Beth, Anne’s psychiatrist, constantly urges Anne to write down her thoughts but Anne refuses to do so, typing only numbers as a way to control her mind. Anne also begs Dr. Ottis not to use the word “dead” – whenever she hears this word Anne becomes very agitated.
- Dr. Paula Stern, a rabbi who visits Anne, warns her of the power her words can have: “You have to be careful, the things you call upon, what you ask for, wish for and want. They will come. To you in particular, and especially now.” Later, Anne merely repeats the words “I wish it” three times and suddenly Dr. Stern is transformed into Aunt Bea.
- Words also have the power to heal as we see in the scene with Anne and Bill. Anne and Bill are both followers of the Kabbalah and in his death scene, he asks Anne to repeat important words, phrases and prayers from the Kabbalah for him.

Characters

Anne is the central character in the play and each of the other characters can be seen as representing different elements of Anne's life, or of her mind. Each person that visits her tries to help her progress by talking to her about different ways she can try helping herself.

Dr. Beth Ottis, her psychiatrist, obviously uses psychiatry to help Anne. This includes using hypnosis and talking about her 3-year-old id (a Freudian term referring to one of three divisions of the mind, the id, the ego and the superego) as a means of helping her to confront the truth.

Bill, her husband, reminds her of their life together and acts as her memory, telling her about both the good and bad times in their life. While he was alive he took care of Anne in every way and without him, Anne feels lost. He must remind her of how to do even the simplest of tasks, like what she does with her loose change. He also brings her some religious items from home: a menorah, a mezuzah, some Sabbath candles, and a siddur. (see Glossary for explanation of these items).

Aunt Bea represents a kind of opposite to Dr. Ottis' clinical, scientific approach to healing Anne. Bea also suffers from what she calls "the family nerves" and has also dealt with, as she says "psychologists, psychiatrists, ministers, priests and rabbis, concerned family and nosy neighbours". She recommends some fairly outrageous cures including a sleeping cure and a drinking cure. Mostly she helps Anne by telling stories – about a gay daschund and how to kill a moose.

Dr. Paula Stern, a rabbi and a former patient, appeals to Anne's sense of mystery and spirituality. She plays some simple card tricks on Anne and she also magically seems to make tea appear. More seriously, she has Anne's father's tefillin (see Glossary for explanation) and talks to her about the Kabbalah and her powers of healing.

Themes

Coping

As was already discussed in the section "Characters"(above), each character provides Anne with strategies with how to cope with her mental breakdown. Each gives Anne another way with which she can try and cope with the world and with her imagination. At the end of the play, Anne asks Dr. Beth how it is she got better. Aunt Bea (as Dr. Ottis) replies, "It is a gradual process, a letting go. How does anyone kick the habit of suffering? Heroin, alcohol, self-inflicted misery of any kind? They're all heads of the same Medusa. In your case, the monster died from the absurdity which constructed it. The imagination could no longer support it."

Storytelling/Mythology

Again, as was discussed in the section “Dialogue”, stories and storytelling are a central theme of the play. Anne is a novelist and Aunt Bea is a master story teller. Her stories may seem unrelated, but in fact provide both comfort (through humour) and insight for Anne. Her first story is about Willy, an “insulin dependent, diabetic gay daschund” who cannot breed when he is placed in a cage with another dog. When Bea explains the significance of this story to Anne, she explains that it is about her husband Bill and says, “He couldn’t do more than he did, that’s all.” Later, Bea tells a story of how she had to shoot a moose who was in her lettuce patch. Although she was frightened, she knew she had to kill him for her own survival. Again, this story relates to Anne’s role in the death of her husband and Anne seems to understand this connection because the story greatly disturbs her.

Storytelling relates to the notion of mythology and the comfort that stories can bring to us. When we are told a story of people and events that seem distant to us and unrelated, it is often easier to understand something about our own world and problems after hearing the story. They provide comfort, they can often explain the unexplainable, offer role models and give us guidelines for our own lives.

The play does mention several figures from Greek mythology including:

Titans: In Greek mythology, the Titans are a race of godlike giants who were considered to be the personifications of the forces of nature. They are the twelve children (six sons and six daughters) of Gaia and Uranus. Each son married, or had children of, one of his sisters. They are: Cronus and Rhea, Iapetus and Themis, Oceanus and Tethys, Hyperion and Theia, Crius and Mnemosyne, and Coeus and Phoebe. Bill calls Anne his “Titan”.

Prometheus: Prometheus was the son of Iapetus who was one of the Titans. He tricked the gods into eating bare bones instead of good meat. He stole the sacred fire from Zeus and the gods. He also gave mortals all sorts of gifts: brickwork, woodworking, telling the seasons by the stars, numbers, the alphabet (for remembering things), yoked oxen, carriages, saddles, ships and sails. He also gave other gifts: healing drugs, seercraft, signs in the sky, the mining of precious metals, animal sacrifice and all art. Prometheus did not tell Zeus the prophecy that one of Zeus’s sons will overthrow him. In punishment, Zeus commanded that Prometheus be chained for eternity in the Caucasus. There, an eagle (or, according to other sources, a vulture) would eat his liver, and each day the liver would be renewed. So the punishment was endless, until Heracles finally killed the bird. Anne names Prometheus as an example of a writer who suffers.

The Furies: The Roman goddess of vengeance. They are equivalent to the Greek Erinyes. The Furies, who are usually characterized as three sisters (Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaera) are the children of Gaia and Uranus. They resulted from a drop of Uranus’ blood falling onto the earth. Virgil placed them in the Underworld and it is there that they reside, tormenting evildoers and sinners. However, Greek poets saw them as pursuing sinners on Earth. The Furies are cruel, but are also renowned for being very fair. Anne tells Dr. Beth she will be consumed by Furies when she thinks Dr. Beth is trying to kill her.

Medusa: One of the Gorgons, and the only one who was mortal. Her gaze could turn whoever she looked upon to stone. There is a particular myth in which Medusa was

originally a beautiful maiden. She desecrated Athena's temple by lying there with Poseidon. Outraged, Athena turned Medusa's hair into living snakes. The hero Perseus with the help of Athena and Hermes killed Medusa. He killed her by cutting off her head and gave it to Athena, who placed it in the center of her Aegis, which she wore over her breastplate. From Medusa's dead body the giant Chrysaor and the winged horse Pegasus, her son by Poseidon, sprang forth. Aunt Bea refers to all different kinds of unhappiness as being "heads of the same Medusa".

In the past, what purpose does mythology serve?

From website, "Encyclopedia Mythica" at www.pantheon.org :

Broadly speaking myths and mythologies seek to rationalize and explain the universe and all that is in it. Thus, they have a similar function to science, theology, religion and history in modern societies. Systems of myths have provided a cosmological and historical framework for societies that have lacked the more sophisticated knowledge provided by modern science and historical investigation.

Apart from an explanation of the creation of the universe, mythologies also seek to explain everyday natural phenomena. The Egyptian scarab god Khepri, who rolled the ball of the sun across the sky each day thus provided an explanation of the rising of the sun each day, its progress across the sky and its setting in the evening. Similarly, the Maori of New Zealand attributed the morning dew to the tears of the god Rangi (Heaven) for the goddess [Papa](#) (Earth) from whom he was separated. This class of myth is sometimes called a nature myth.

Playwright David Gow answers a few questions about the play and its origins:

Why is it called "Bea's Niece" - beyond the obvious sound-alike to the phrase 'the bees knees' and the fact that Anne is Bea's niece?

The title "Bea's Niece" reflects how much Anne's parents thought of her as being like her Aunt Bea. It's also a nickname that Anne lends to the character of Hannah Rosenblum in one of her novels, and can be heard in the play. In some families one member or another is referred to as Bob's son, or Joyce's niece in a way that points to a relation beyond the stated relationship, such is the case with Anne as "Bea's Niece", and of course it sounds good.

Was there something specific that inspired you to write this play?

The character of Aunt Bea, is based more than a little on my father's mother Dorothy Vernon Wood (Gow) who did her final disappearing act this spring. A licensed mountain guide into her seventies, Dorothy made many dramatic appearances and disappearances over the years. In her eighties she left a dozen boxes in my father's front hall in Chelsea, QC -when asked where she was headed, as Dorothy got into her car she declared "North" and was not heard from for months or years, until detective work tracked her down. At one point near the end of her life, in hospital care, Dorothy rigged a door closed with shoe laces in such a way that a locksmith had to be brought in to get the door off its frame. Discovered inside, she would be as likely to invite the invader for tea, as anything else. As for Anne, there is something about a writer disconnected from reality that fascinates at a minimum, writers. When a person does their finest living in reporting on their experience of reality- it is catastrophic when the experience of living turns dark and sour, how does one get out of such a bind?

Glossary of Terms

The following are an explanation of some words, phrases or references made in the play.

Bill brings Anne a siddur, a menorah and a mezuzah.

Siddur: a Jewish prayer book which contains the year's prayers for weekdays, Sabbaths, holy days, and fast-days.

Menorah: A candle holder with either seven or nine candles. The seven candle menorah represents the creation of the universe in seven days, the center light symbolizing the Sabbath. The seven branches are the seven continents of the earth and the seven heavens, guided by the light of God. At Hannukah a nine candle menorah is used.

Mezuzah: A case attached to the doorposts of houses, containing a scroll with passages of scripture written on it.

Paula and Bill both talk about tefillin:

Tefillin: In Deuteronomy, God commands Jews to keep His words constantly in their minds and in their hearts, by (among other things) writing them on the doorposts of their house (with a mezuzah) and to bind the words to their hands and between their eyes. They do this by laying tefillin (usually translated as phylactery). They bind to their arms and foreheads a leather pouch containing scrolls of Torah passages. At weekday morning services, one case is tied to the arm, with the scrolls at the biceps and leather straps extending down the arm to the hand, and then another case is tied to the head, with the case on the forehead and the straps hanging down over the shoulders. Appropriate blessings are recited during this process. The tefillin are removed at the conclusion of the morning services. It is said that, "As long as the tefillin are on the head and on the arm of a man, he is modest and God-fearing and will not be attracted by hilarity or idle talk, and will have no evil thoughts, but will devote all his thoughts to truth and righteousness."

Kabbalah and the Ten Sefirot

The Hebrew word kabbalah means 'receiving' or 'that which has been received' and is also translated as 'tradition'. Kabbalah originated in Spain and France around the 13th century, when a Spanish mystic named Moses de Leon is credited with having written the Zohar (Book of Splendor), the text upon which Kabbalah is based. Traditionally, only Jews were allowed to study Kabbalah, and then only those who were at least 40 years old, male, and well versed in the Talmud. Kabbalah is one of the most misunderstood parts of Judaism. The teachings of the Kabbalah have been badly distorted by mystics and occultists. Kabbalah was popular among Christian intellectuals during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, who reinterpreted its doctrines to fit into their Christian dogma. Today, celebrities like Madonna have popularized the study of a form of Kabbalah, and the American chain store "Target" recently stopped selling red strings, a protector against the evil eye according to Kabbalah, after receiving complaints.

The Ten Sefirot

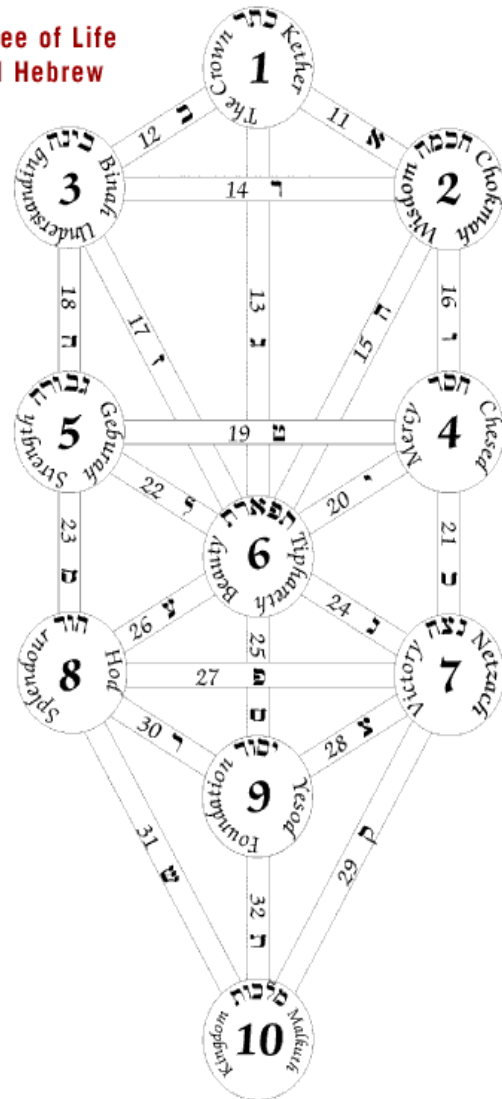
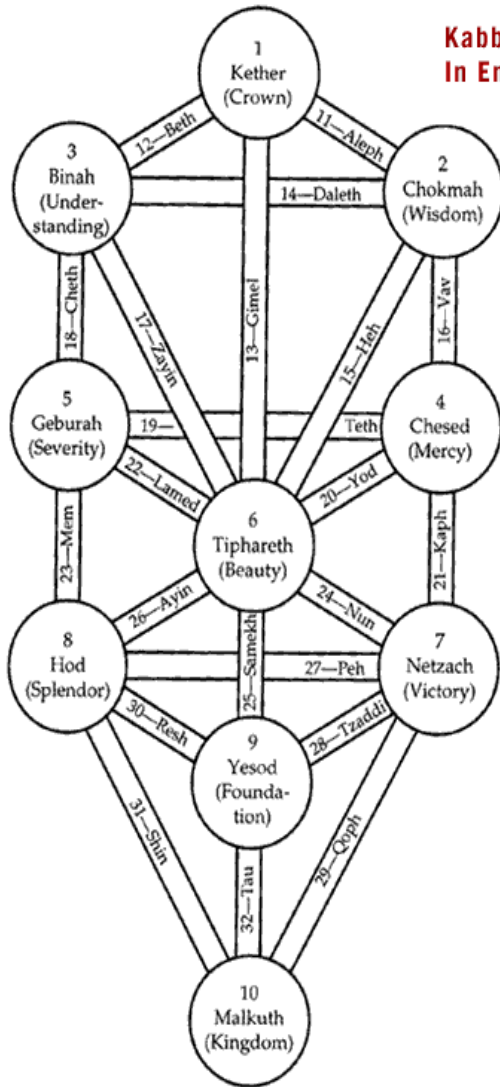
According to Kabbalah, the true essence of God is so transcendent that it cannot be described, except with reference to what it is not. This true essence of God is known as Ein Sof, which literally means "without end" which encompasses the idea of His lack of boundaries in both time and space. The Ein Sof only interacts with the universe through

ten emanations from this essence, known as the Ten Sefirot. These Sefirot correspond to qualities of God. They consist of, in descending order:

1. Keter – the crown, also called Ayin, nothingness
2. Hokhmah – wisdom
3. Binah – understanding
4. Hesed – love, grace
5. Gevurah – judgement
6. Tipheret – compassion
7. Netzah – infinity
8. Hod – radiance
9. Yesod – beginning and end
10. Shekhinah – conception

For Bill, the reciting of these sefirot by Anne brings him great comfort in his final moments. David Gow says of Bill and Anne's connection to the Ten Sefirot, "What you will see of Jewish belief, practice and ritual in this play describes the highly personalized observance of the characters, it is not an accurate depiction of a particular or given form of Judaism. (Sound like a disclaimer? It is.) Their practice relates much more to a connection to the traditions of Judaism than a strict adherence to a rigorous system of beliefs and laws. However, it would be accurate to say that Mosaic law, the ten commandments are held as sacred by Anne and Bill...Anne & Bill have a shared personal experience of "the ten sefirot" as ten aspects of the divine. Certainly their connection to these symbols and mythology, have nothing to do with worldly gain. The best I can say of this part of the material is, watch it and experience it, but don't break your head trying to figure it out. What you see is a reflection of the experience of the characters and if it is different from your own, so much the better."

**Kabbalistic Tree of Life
In English and Hebrew**



For more information about the Kabbalah, look at Daniel C. Matt's book *The Essential Kabbalah*.

Elements of Design

The following section combines general information about areas of design (including information from Tarragon production staff, design websites, and the textbook: *Theatrical Design and Production* by J. Michael Gillette) with specific examples of how design elements have been employed in the production you are attending. A brief glossary is also included to assist with technical terms used in this section of the guide.

Design Overview

A script can be performed numerous times without ever being interpreted the same way. Although text stays the same from production to production, the way the piece is conceptualized changes.

The designers (set, costumes, lighting, sound, etc.) and director thoroughly discuss the play to ensure all parties share a similar vision of the play, and explore how this vision will be represented through design. Design elements should create an environment for the play that supports the production concept: the creative interpretation of the script.

There are some artistic and practical considerations that apply to all areas of design. These include:

- mood and spirit of the production
- historical period of the production
- locale of each scene
- season of the year and time of day for each scene
- needs of other designers
- health and safety

Bea's Niece is about a writer's battle with mental illness. The design elements work together to accentuate Anne's distress. Originally, in the stage directions of the script, playwright David Gow asks that there are ten screens on the set that can travel left and right. They are to indicate the hospital room and other locations. The number ten is also important as it refers to the ten sefirot of Kaballah. The play's structure also consists of ten scenes; five per act.

Richard Rose (the Director) and April Anne Viczko (the Set and Costume designer) had several meetings and decided to present the play realistically. Richard felt that a realistic representation would create more confusion for the audience - not knowing what is real and what is not. Anne calls it a "meta-reality", and she says to her husband Bill, "I have lost my place in time." The story plays out in Anne's mind and the audience sees everything from Anne's point of view. Because Anne suffers from a mental illness her view is skewed. The only design elements that remain from the original script are the entrances and exits of the characters and the stage magic / sleight of hand that Tom Baxter (the Magic Consultant) helped out with.

Set Design

The set designer's job is to create a physical world that helps the audience understand and enjoy a play by providing a visual representation of the production concept. Before rehearsals begin, the set designer meets multiple times with the director. From these meetings design drawings and a maquette (a scale model of what will be onstage) are developed. The model and drawings are used by the actors, stage managers and production staff to better understand the design goals; to imagine and replicate the space the production will be set in; and to build and decorate the set pieces.

Specific practical elements considered by the set designer are:

- number and position of entrances and exits needed
- number and position of entrances and exits already in the space
- the seating formation of the theatre – can it be changed?
- the type of stage that comes with the theatre (i.e. proscenium, thrust, arena, catwalk etc.)
- will the set tour after the first production

It will be interesting to take notice of the following:

- How the mood and spirit of the production is relayed through the design
- How many different locales are represented on the stage
- What information the set gives about the characters

In order to present the play realistically, April visited a suicide watch room in a psychiatric ward of a hospital. In these rooms there is little furniture except for the necessary bed. There are windows all around so that the patient is always under observation. There is no privacy and the patients are totally dependant upon the hospital staff to do the most basic tasks (eat, go to the bathroom). As their condition improves patients are usually integrated into a room on the ward. To represent this in the production, furniture pieces are slowly added. Personal items (typewriter and teacups) are given to the patient in an attempt to bring them back into the "real world".

The large window gives the opportunity to show not only that Anne is constantly under observation, but to play with the reflections and create illusions with it. By carefully lighting the actors on both sides of the glass, their images merge into one image; "I have lived in my aunt, as she has lived in me, as I did in my mother, as I did even in my husband. As I do in you and you in me", says Anne to Dr. Ottis.

The set is not "broken down" which usually indicates use and wear. This set is pristine, clinical and sterile, as one would perhaps see it in a memory. The corridors and the room itself house several "tricks" in order to create an unstable world for both Anne and the audience.

Watch for:

- Actors/characters to appear/disappear.
- Be able to change clothes as they pass through the doors
- Sleight of hand effects.
- Out of place objects

Sound Design

Sound design consists of music, effects and reinforcement (such as microphones).

The sound designer obtains a lot of information directly from the script i.e. “a phone rings”, “it begins to rain”, or “a sad song is heard through the window”. S/he must think about the transitions between scenes and what sound elements will shift the audience from the mood of one scene to the next. Sound design also extends to the elements the audience hears when they first enter the theatre, during the intermission, and even the curtain call and post-show music.

Some practical elements the sound designer considers are:

- speaker and microphone placement
- live or recorded sound, or both
- length of scene changes
- equipment available

As well as establishing and reinforcing mood and atmosphere, sound elements also provide information to the audience:

- When you enter a theatre take a minute to listen to the pre-show music or soundscape – does it offer any clues about the nature of the show?
- What sound cues did you hear that helped establish time and place?
- Were any special effects used? Were they useful in moving the story forward? Why or why not?

Ambient sounds of a hospital merged with sounds of the outside world (a convenience store, outside in Bea’s garden) give us a sense of where Anne’s mind is at the moment. Practical sounds of the typewriter have been recorded so that the sound designer, Ben Grossman can play with the location that the sound seems to be coming from. Microphones are also used to boost the actors’ voices and give them qualities like echo that heighten the complicated perception of reality.

The one recurring sound we hear is that of the cocking of a rifle, a gun shot and shattering glass. This relates to a story that Aunt Bea tells about shooting out the windows in her house to be able to breathe, to Bill’s laboured breathing from lung cancer, and the shattering of Anne’s mind. The sound is played in reverse too as Anne recovers.

Lighting Design

Effective stage lighting not only lets the spectators see the action of the play but also ties together all the visual elements of the production and helps create an appropriate mood and atmosphere to heighten the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the play.

The lighting designer wants to give information such as time and place, mood, and where the focus of a scene is. Lighting design is often not noticeable because it has been created in such a way as to enhance the mood of the play as unobtrusively as possible. However, many directors will employ unnatural lighting or hyper-realized lighting to add another layer to the production.

Lighting includes the use of coloured gels to create different effects; intensity to determine how dark or bright a scene is; direction to establish the angle at which the light hits the stage; and movement to decide the duration and components of cues.

Lighting and sound often work together to create an effect (i.e. a fade to black that is timed to a piece of music).

Lighting also works closely with set pieces when 'practicals' are used. These are light sources that are manipulated by the actors (i.e. a desk lamp). In this case the set designer will determine the look of the lamp and the lighting designer will decide how it functions.

Some practical considerations for a lighting designer are:

- the number of locations in a set
- the number of lighting instruments available
- the type of performance (i.e. drama, dance, opera, etc.)
- whether the lighting board is manual or computerized
- alternate light sources (i.e. video or slide projection)
- set materials requiring special lighting (i.e. a scrim or cyclorama)

Some lighting elements to notice are:

- when and how lighting indicates a change in time or location
- how lighting interacts with sound elements
- how lighting is employed to reinforce a mood
- how colour is used in the lighting instruments

A balance is used to create the visual effects. If the lights are too bright downstage (closest to the audience) then we will not be able to see what is happening upstage of the window glass (furthest from the audience). In order to make these tricks work a lot of time is spent on getting the balance right.

The walls are light in colour that it creates a lot of "bounce". The light reflects off the walls and back onto the actors.

Costume Design

Costume design includes all clothing, underclothing, hairdressing, makeup, and accessories such as hats, scarves, fans, umbrellas, and jewellery, worn or carried by each character in a production. A costume design suggests specific personal information about each character.

Through discussion with the director, the costume designer will decide whether or not to make the costumes 'period accurate'. The designer researches clothes of a period in many ways including: looking through store catalogues of the era (i.e. Sears or Eaton's); going to a reference library, art gallery and/or museum; perusing picture archives; or even looking at old family photographs. Similarly, if the costumes are contemporary, designers look to current fashion magazines, tv and film, and stores for research.

The designer also works from indications within the play's script and looks for hints into the characters' personality. They then make artistic choices for the colour of the costumes, their shape, and the fabrics to be used.

Finally, the designer works with the costume team and the actors in fittings to make certain that the costumes are comfortable and as easy as possible to manipulate.

Some practical considerations in costume design include:

- the background and personality of the characters
- the limitations created by the set or staging (i.e. a raked stage makes spiked shoes impractical)
- the actors can move about on the stage as required (i.e. run up a set of stairs or engage in stage combat)
- the costumes remain effective under stage lighting
- costumes that need to be changed quickly are built accordingly
- costumes can last for an entire run and be laundered

Because the play takes place in Anne's mind, the reality of the costumes is heightened. Elements of how an unbalanced mind works and processes information were also brought to bear on the costumes. The colours get progressively bolder as the play goes on. For example, the Doctor's costumes start out very neutral and become brighter. Bill's costume when he is sick, and perhaps dying in the hospital, is a representation of Anne's memory of how he looked; what she remembers is multiplied and it looks unrealistic to the audience. Her rational mind knows it's impossible but it's what she sees. The vividness of Aunt Bea's suit makes her a very present character, but we find out later that she exists only in Anne's mind.

The only reference to the passage of time in the play is the progression of Dr. Ottis' pregnancy. The costumes have to accommodate the padding that the actor wears underneath.

Additional Resources

Glossary of Useful Technical Terms

Acoustics	The sound transmission characteristics of a room, space or material
Cue	A directive for action (i.e. a change in the lighting, sound, or an actor's entrance)
Cyclorama	A large piece of scenic material used to surround the stage on to which colour can be projected
Gel	Generic name for the film used in lighting instruments to change colour. It can also be used as a verb (i.e. to 'gel' the lights)
Gobo	A thin metal template inserted into a lighting instrument in order to cut a pattern into the light that is projected onstage
Flyhouse	A theatre space with the ability to "fly" set pieces and/or backdrops from a fly gallery located high above the stage using ropes and cables
Maquette	A scale model 3-D representation of the set design
Plot	A scale drawing showing the placement of various elements (i.e. lighting instruments) relative to the stage configuration and theatre
Prompt book	A copy of the script with each actor's blocking, all the technical cues, and details/lists of all technical elements involved in the production
Raked stage	A stage that is higher at the back than at the front
Scrim	A scenic panel made from translucent gauze-like material

Stage Configurations

Arena Stage	A stage configuration where the audience completely surrounds the playing space
Catwalk Stage	A stage configuration where the audience surrounds the playing space on 2 sides – also known as an Alley stage
Proscenium	A stage configuration where the audience watches the action through a rectangular opening that resembles a picture frame (proscenium arch)
Thrust Stage	A stage configuration where the audience surrounds the playing space on 3 sides

Pre Show Lesson Plan 1

Perception of Truth through various Characters

Expectations:

CRV.01: use various ways to sustain a role within a drama;

ANV.02: CRV.02: create and present an original or adapted dramatic work;

CR1.04: apply appropriate voice and movement techniques in rehearsal and performance;

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Materials:

Photos collected from magazines or pictures attached herewith.

Warm up:

Physical and introductory warm up (based on a 2004 Drama workshop instructed by Margaret Young)

Ask students to move around the room as:

- Slowly
- Quickly
- Heavily
- Lightly
- Shyly
- Noisily
- Quietly
- Hopping on one leg
- On hands and knees etc.

On signal (clap or beat a drum, or press pause if playing music), tell a fact about yourself to the nearest person.

On signal begin again.

Bring all students together in a circle and share information i.e. Jake likes spaghetti, Tim loves wrestling etc.

Main Activity:

Telling stories based on varying character perspectives

- Divide students into groups of 4 or 5
- Distribute photograph to each group and assign each group a character to focus on (each group performs this exercise from the perspective of one of the character's, groups may need to imagine other people beyond the photograph if they wish)
- Students improvise a scene
- Students remember to include events from before the photo, during and after from their character's perspective
- Students perform the scenes in front of each other

Closure:

Questions for the class to consider after the performances:

- 1) How does creating your scene and watching the others' shape your perception of truth or what is real?
- 2) How do we decide what is real?
- 3) How might we show different elements of reality in the theatre in order to tell the "whole" story?

Pictures to be distributed in class:

The entire photo story can be found on

"Photos of the Year International" <http://www.poyi.org/60/wua/0301.php>



"HEAVY HANDS" Grupo Beta undercover police agents subdue a youth near an immigration checkpoint in Chiapas, Mexico. Along the rail line, Beta agents pursue crooks who prey upon hapless migrants.



"THE WAY TO SCHOOL" A Palestinian schoolgirl walks carefully past an Israeli tank during clashes near her school in the West Bank town of Nablus, April 19, 2003.

Pre Show Lesson Plan 2 Character Discovery in Role

Expectations:

TH1.01– demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief ” both as performer and as audience;

TH2.01– demonstrate an understanding of the control of volume, tone, pace, and intention in an expressive speech;

TH3.02– explain how dramatic forms may effectively communicate more than one perspective;

CRV.01– use various ways to sustain a role within a drama;

CR1.02– demonstrate an understanding of the element of risk in playing a role (i.e. adapting to challenges to personal and social beliefs); **Ontario Dramatic Arts curriculum**

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Warm-up:

- Review the concept that in *Bea’s Niece* the audience will be taken through a similar journey as Anne, the protagonist.
- As outlined in the thematic guide, our experience as audience mirrors Anne’s experience, so we too may feel confusion as to whether scenes are a memory, a hallucination or real.

Main Activity:

Students will try to understand and empathize with the motivations of the actor(s) and other characters.

- Divide students into pairs.
- Students decide who will be the “interviewer” and who will be the “interviewee”.
- Distribute to each student pair the following character descriptions to the interviewee (there will be duplications of roles).

Anne is the central character in the play (a writer in her 50s) and each of the other characters can be seen as representing different elements of Anne’s life, or of her mind. Each person that visits her, tries to help her progress by talking to her about different ways she can try helping herself. Anne has been institutionalized after an outburst at the bookstore where she started to destroy copies of her books.

Dr. Beth Ottis, Anne’s psychiatrist, obviously uses psychiatry to help Anne. This includes using hypnosis and talking about her 3-year-old id (a Freudian term referring to one of three divisions of the mind, the id, the ego and the superego) as a means of helping her to confront the truth.

Bill, Anne’s husband, reminds her of their life together and acts as her memory, telling her about both the good and bad times in their life. While he was alive he took care of Anne in every way and without him, Anne feels lost. He must remind her of how to do even the simplest of tasks, like what she does with her loose change. He also brings her some religious items from home: a menorah, a mezuzah, some Sabbath candles and a siddur (see Glossary for explanation of these items).

Aunt Bea represents a kind of opposite to Dr. Ottis' clinical, scientific approach to healing Anne. Bea has also suffers from what she calls "the family nerves" and has also dealt with, as she says "psychologists, psychiatrists, ministers, priests and rabbis, concerned family and nosy neighbours". She recommends some fairly outrageous cures including a sleeping cure and a drinking cure. Mostly she helps Anne by telling stories – about a gay daschund and how to kill a moose.

Dr. Paula Stern, a rabbi and a former patient, appeals to Anne's sense of mystery and spirituality. She plays some simple card tricks on Anne and she also magically seems to make tea appear. More seriously, she has Anne's father's tefillin (see Glossary for explanation) and talks to her about the Kabbalah and her powers of healing.

- Through a series of improvised questions, the interviewer asks the interviewee as many questions on the spot about their character, their feelings, their objectives, desires etc. as possible.
- Interviewees, in character, answer the questions as much as possible off the top of their heads in order to give immediate (authentic) responses.
- Roles reverse and then the interviewer takes on a different character role and repeats the process.
- Students gather together as a class and brainstorm on chart paper or on the board what discoveries they have made through the improvisation. Were there similarities in character and/or story? What were they? Did natural links emerge?

Extension Possibilities:

1. Discuss with the students if any of their discoveries in role were actualized on the stage? How were these reinforced in performance?
2. How did taking part in the character exercise help inform your experience at the Tarragon?

Post Show Lesson Plan 1 **From Hopelessness to Hope**

Expectations:

THV.01: demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of role playing and structuring dramatic works etc.

TH1.01: demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief ” both as performer and as audience;

ANV.03: explain how dramatic arts represent, influence, and contribute to culture and society;

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Warm-up:

- As outlined in the thematic guide, review the idea that Anne’s journey has been one from hopelessness (her suicide attempt) to hope (her return to writing and publication of a new novel)
- Anne’s passion, in this case writing, is part of what helps her get better
- There are many stories of when an individuals’ focus on their passion has helped them come through great adversity.
- Students can brainstorm such examples from current events, lives of people studied in history, or even personal family stories

Main activity:

- Divide students into groups of 4 or 5.
- Ask students to discuss what gives them personal hope?
- Ask them to tell a story they feel comfortable sharing with their group, about overcoming adversity, or one they’ve read about in the news (think of recent events, such as the tsunami in South East Asia).
- Students decide to improvise a scene, where through someone’s passion, they attained hope and eventually overcame the adversity.

Closure:

- Do these stories of hope align themselves in some way with Anne’s journey?
- Is maintaining hope an easy process?
- What is so challenging about maintaining hope in the depths of despair when one feels completely isolated from a shared reality?
- How may mental illness be unique to other challenges such as a physical illness?

Post-Show Lesson Plan 2

Personal Connection with Character

Expectations:

TH1.01– demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief ” both as performer and as audience;

TH2.01– demonstrate an understanding of the control of volume, tone, pace, and intention in an expressive speech;

TH3.02– explain how dramatic forms may effectively communicate more than one perspective;

CRV.01– use various ways to sustain a role within a drama;

CR1.02– demonstrate an understanding of the element of risk in playing a role (i.e. adapting to challenges to personal and social beliefs);

Ontario Dramatic Arts curriculum

Warm-up:

- Ask the students to select a character from **Bea’s Niece** that they felt a connection with.
- Students should walk around the room as that character and work their way up from their feet: how do your feet feel? from which body part are you leading your walk? is it your shoulders, your head, your pelvis?
- Ask the students to move within these emotions: happily, angrily, sadly etc.
- Ask the students to come into a circle in character and review the concept that in **Bea’s Niece**, the telling of stories, specifically Aunt Bea’s stories, helped Anne over the course of her stay in hospital.

Main activity:

Monologue Presentation

- Individually students do a 10-minute free write on their character explaining why they have a connection with them.
- Students do not lift the pen off the page and keep writing, allowing for a flow of ideas to come through with no internal editor in the initial stages of writing.
- Students regroup with others in the class who shared connections with the same character (depending on the size of groups you may want to split them in half).
- Students read their writing to each other and perform a “splicing” of their writing and bring it together as a performance.
- Students can perform this piece as a traditional scene with dialogue between different shades of the same character, or the scene could be in tableau while other students choose to speak some of the material from the free write.
- Students express this “splicing” and this “mixing” of ideas in whichever context they prefer and in this way create another path or way of understanding the character.

Closure:

1. What surprised you about this exercise?
2. What were some of the challenges of working in a group? How were they overcome?

Post-Show Lesson Plan 3

Whole Group Role Play based on *Bea's Niece*:

Expectations:

TH1.01– demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief ” both as performer and as audience;

TH2.01– demonstrate an understanding of the control of volume, tone, pace, and intention in an expressive speech;

TH3.02– explain how dramatic forms may effectively communicate more than one perspective;

CRV.01– use various ways to sustain a role within a drama;

CR1.02– demonstrate an understanding of the element of risk in playing a role (i.e. adapting to challenges to personal and social beliefs); **Ontario Dramatic Arts curriculum**

Warm-up:

Review with students the important elements of creating a whole group role-play:

- a. Maintaining focus throughout the role-play.
- b. Maintaining the physicality of your character throughout the role-play.
- c. Sustaining the vocal quality of your character throughout the role-play.
- d. Ability to take on, and commit to, your characters' attitudes and beliefs.

Materials:

Bea's Niece program from Tarragon Theatre

Main activities:

In class role-play

- Distribute two pieces of paper to each student.
- Ask students to write down a question(s) that they have for any member of the *Bea's Niece* production (writer, director, actor, designer).
- Try to encourage diversity to who the questions are directed.
- Collect questions.
- Divide the class into two groups. Group “A” and “B”.
- Take group “A” and distribute one of the following roles on separate pieces of paper to students: actor(s), set designer, costume designer, director, lighting designer, sound designer, playwright etc.
- Ask group “A” students to discuss quietly and prepare for their role as a member of the *Bea's Niece* production team in one part of the Drama room.
- Distribute the already collected questions for members of production to the Group “B” students.
- Group “B” are told that they are media at a press conference.
- The “media” must ask the “artists” their already drawn up questions (additional questions are encouraged and everyone on the artist panel must answer at least one question).
- After each question has been asked, reverse Group “A” and “B” roles and distribute remaining questions.

In this activity students develop role-playing, reflective thinking, focusing and application of knowledge skills. Students discover that through their own creative work, experience in Drama class and viewing the production, they inherently know some of the answers to the artistic choices being asked.

Journal:

What surprised you about your character? List two things and give examples.

What was your favourite part of the role-play? Use specific examples from the exercise.