

TARRAGON THEATRE



Benevolence

Written and Directed by Morris Panych

STUDY GUIDE

**Starring: Colin Heath, Stephen Ouimette, Tom Rooney, Jennifer Wigmore,
and Gina Wilkinson**

Costume and Set Design by Ken MacDonald

Lighting Design by Andrea Lundy

Original Music and Sound Design by Thomas Ryder Payne

Stage Managed by Maria Popoff

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Benevolence Study Guide

Tarragon's Education and Outreach department supports and fosters a strong relationship between, teachers, students and professional theatre artists. As such, if there is further information that you would like about the production or more ideas about pre-show and post-show activities, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We are very pleased to be presenting the world premier of Morris Panych's ***Benevolence*** to kick off our season. This play examines the fine line separating an upstanding citizen from a social pariah and asks who truly profits from a benevolent act; the recipient or the benefactor? With Panych's typical sense of humour and desire to illuminate the unseen, ***Benevolence*** examines economic disparity and homelessness in a city rife with both, making it incredibly relevant to Toronto.

In this study guide you will gain a further understanding of what has gone into creating this production, as well as information and questions to apply to discussions and activities with your class.

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Benevolence

Written and Directed by Morris Panych

Two men, Oswald Eichersen, an orthotic shoe salesman (**Tom Rooney**) and Terence Lomy, a panhandler (**Stephen Ouimette**) have a surreptitious rendezvous in a porn house.

Oswald, in a pique of frustration with his mother, his job, his girlfriend Audrey (**Jennifer Wigmore**), her dog, and their psychiatrist, gives the panhandling Lomy a hundred dollar bill. For two days, Lomy harasses Oswald for a meeting, telephoning him over thirty times – Lomy wants to return the favour. What we are about to witness is the unforeseen consequences of a benevolent act.

A few days later, Oswald is waiting for Lomy at the same theatre. He's furious – Lomy has killed Audrey's dog, and left a note signed by Oswald. He demands that Lomy explain directly to Audrey, who is scheduled to arrive at the theatre at any moment but Lomy is evasive and flees. As he leaves down the theatre aisle comes Jackie (**Gina Wilkinson**), a friend of Lomy's and a somewhat reluctant prostitute who we learned wanted to be a paranormal psychologist but strayed. And so begins Oswald's downward spiral from orthotic shoe salesman to fugitive on the run from the police, hiding out in a porn house under a new identity – all a reciprocating gift from Lomy to his new-found friend.

From Morris Panych, playwright and director:

When asked what inspired ***Benevolence***, Morris replied: "Fear; fear inspired me to write this play. I am afraid of what I see and don't understand - people, everywhere, without hope, without connections, without support. I am afraid of how they will see me, and afraid of what they might do to me." Morris through his characteristic humour and humanity puts to the test familiar middle-class values and expectations by plunging Oswald into this fear of the dangerous "unknown".

From Richard Rose, Artistic Director of Tarragon Theatre:

In ***Benevolence***, Morris explores the unforeseen consequences of an act of charity. This assortment of eccentric characters repeatedly rendezvous in an unusual and disarming location - a porn house. Morris turns notions of charity, benevolence and middle-class expectations on their middle-class head. With caustic wit, the tables are turned on the benevolent one and what is charitable comes under humourous scrutiny.

About The Playwright - Morris Panych



Playwright, actor and director Morris Panych has been described as “a man for all seasons in Canadian theatre.” His list of awards is extensive. To date Panych has received Vancouver’s Jessie Award for theatre fourteen times, the Sidney Riske Writing Award three times and Toronto’s Dora Award twice. Panych has also Twice been the recipient of the Governor General’s Award for Drama (once in 1994 for *The Ends of the Earth*, and again in 2004 for *Girl in the Goldfish Bowl*). Panych is the author of 20 plays which are constantly being produced around the world, as well as a director in demand from coast to coast. When the spirit moves him, he sometimes deigns to act. There is even an *X-Files* episode on his resumé.

Born in 1952 in Calgary, Panych grew up in Edmonton with his parents and six siblings. He received a diploma in radio and television arts from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and went on to study creative writing at the University of British Columbia and then theatre at East 15 Acting School in London, England.

Panych came to public attention for his two-hander (a play for two actors) *Last Call: A Post-Nuclear Cabaret* (1982). This apocalyptic musical co-starred Panych and Ken MacDonald, and MacDonald also wrote and played the music. The show was revised for CBC television, bringing Panych to national attention.

As artistic director of Tahmanous Theatre in Vancouver, Panych co-wrote two more musicals with MacDonald: *Contagious* (1984), and *Cheap Sentiment* (1985); and both Panych and MacDonald performed in *Simple Folk, Songs of a Generation* (1987), which toured to the Soviet Union. Ken MacDonald’s set design has been an important element in many of Panych’s plays, as it is in *Benevolence*.

Since his time with Tahmanous, Panych has gained international recognition and become a driving force in the Vancouver and Toronto theatre communities. His play *Vigil* (1995, renamed *Auntie & Me*) played in London’s West End in 2003 and in Paris in 2004 as well as in the US and in more than 30 Canadian cities. What many consider his first major play and one of his best, *7 Stories* (1989), was staged in Japan in 2003. *The Overcoat* (1997) toured Canada after its 2001 Vancouver Playhouse remount, and has since toured internationally; it has also been adapted for video by Principia Productions (2001, directed by Panych) and broadcast on the CBC.

Panych’s plays reflect a humorous, dark world full of absurdist allusions and bring out marvelously fresh and quirky observations of an existential and neurotic world. In a CBC interview in 2004, he pointed out that what fascinates him is the daily struggle of ordinary people with life’s bizarre minor annoyances rather than the major social or political issues of the moment.

Since 2000, Panych has directed extensively: opera, contemporary and period drama, and an episode of *Da Vinci’s Inquest*, as well. Panych has recently re-located to Toronto as well. All the while continuing to direct his own work. He has also acted on television, and continues to write, the activity that most interests him.

Benevolence is Morris Panych’s eighth play to be performed here at Tarragon Theatre. Panych’s previous productions at Tarragon Theatre are *7 Stories* (1991), *The Ends of the Earth* (1992), *Vigil* (1996), *Lawrence and Halloman* (1997), *Earshot* (2001), *Girl in the Goldfish Bowl* (2002), *The Dishwashers* (2005).

Ken MacDonald is an award-winning designer who has worked at Tarragon on many shows. Tarragon Membership Newsletter interviewed him about the design for **Benevolence**, set in a movie theatre that has come “down on its luck” and begun showing porn movies.



When designing a show like *Benevolence*, what is the biggest challenge?

Finding the right look - what period should the movie house have been built? Was it always a cinema or was it once a music hall venue? (I like the idea that it was a proper theatre once).

Do you prefer to design sets or costumes, and for this show, what is the advantage to letting actors go shopping with you for their costumes?

Well...I generally prefer to design just sets ...but, not always. Sometimes I find great fun in coming up with a look (again) for the outfits. This show is modern day...some of the actors I felt would like to have input into their look...and so off they went shopping with Chloe and me. It was actually only the women who I took shopping. The guys are easier - I understand what a guy will wear in most cases... but I really couldn't tell you a good purse from a bad one... or a pair of shoes that a woman might like to wear. So, we overbuy and choose stuff and return others.

What is your favourite design you've done for Tarragon, and why?

Some of my all time favourite designs have been done in this theatre... they would be *Seven Stories*, *Girl in the Goldfish Bowl*, *Dishwashers* and *Earshot* ... to name a few. I couldn't choose.

Apart from the budgets and stage area, is there a philosophical or emotional difference between designing at a large theatre (Shaw, Stratford) and a mid-size venue like Tarragon?

No... it truly is budget and size. The limitations are what make the design. Big theatres also have huge limitations, in fact budget *always* enters into it.

You and Morris relocated from the West Coast to Toronto; has that been a positive move, and is there anything you miss about BC?

I miss some of my dearest friends.....very much. Otherwise, I must say I am really glad to be in Toronto...it was a great move on our part. I think it helped open up our careers ...gave us way more opportunities and we both found the Toronto theatre community incredibly welcoming.

Ken MacDonald's Renderings of Set Design for *Benevolence*



The Final *Benevolence* Set



Portrait of a Theatre Artist

Monique Stewert is the Head of Props here at Tarragon Theatre and responsible for everything the actors touch and carry from their orange juice in paper bag, to the distressed theatre seats, to all the garbage on the floor.

Monique's formal education was in English Literature and she spent several years writing, researching and illustrating material for non-for-profit community organizations. In addition to that, Monique was producing her own work as a visual artist. It was her 3-dimensional sculptural collages that prompted people to say "You know this work is very theatrical." and pointed her towards a career path in theatre that she had never thought of before.

Monique made a conscious decision to go into theatre. She volunteered at Red Pepper Spectacle Arts in Kensington market as an assistant and a builder, she then continued to build floats for Santa Clause Parade in their prop shop. With portfolio in hand, Monique visited theatre companies in Toronto and landed herself happily at Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People (LKTYP). She spent a summer at Fourth Line Theatre and applied for a Metcaf Professional Development grant the following year. This enabled her to train at LKTYP as an Apprentice Head of Props. For the next year and half, Monique continued to work as a builder and designer with Soulepepper and several independent theatre companies including B-Current, Little Lamb Theatre and Converse-Station. Monique just joined Tarragon Theatre this season as the Head of Props.

An Interview with Monique Stewart - Head of Props

What sort of research did you need to do for *Benevolence*?

There wasn't too much research for this show. It really depends on the designer, some will give you pages and pages, and period shows are different of course. Most of the props for ***Benevolence*** were picked up at the drug store or grocery store.

Did you need go shopping for the pornography that is up on the walls?

Yes, I was sent out three times for porn. I always went to the same store. They must have thought I was just a lady who was into porn. I never told them why I was there. They wouldn't have believed me.

It is true you spent three hours gluing cigarette butts to the floor?

Longer actually. The rubber gloves and condoms needed to be stapled down as well. There is a lot of that kind of work in props, but it is very meditative and I don't mind it at all. It is all just illustrating a story, just the same as drawing, or painting or making a quilt.

These Chairs Might Look Familiar...

*Audience members will hardly recognize the chairs facing them from the Mainspace stage – but you may have sat in those very chairs before. They were donated to Tarragon from the St. Lawrence Centre when renovations recently began in the Bluma Appel Theatre. We inherited the chairs in fairly good condition, but to turn them into the theatre seats of the seedy porn theatre for the *Benevolence* set design; our Head of Props **Monique Stewart** had to abuse them severely. In her own words:*

Before



After



We call it “breaking down” or “distressing” when we want to make something, a piece of furniture for instance or a costume, look worn. Distressing is a way of visually accelerating the aging process. I like to start by saying mean things to the items; that’s always distressing!

I literally did start by beating the chairs up – I banged on them with hammers and even an axe to dent them. I used sand paper and steel wool to make the wood and metal surfaces look more worn and used. For the fabric I had to use a knife to make the holes and an awl and wire brush to fray the edges; it was so strong I couldn’t rip it. I also removed parts from some of the chairs: pried off the back of the seat, popped out the cushion, removed some wooden arms. A surprising number of staff wanted a turn at this destruction process - possibly because it’s a chance to do something we’re not usually allowed to do!

Once the general denting and breaking was finished I began making them appear more worn and used. We wanted the seats to look like they’ve been sweat-stained and had things spilled on them. A lot of this work was done by applying paint and spraying it with water to make stains look more natural. Once they had dried I tried to burn cigarette holes in the fabric, harkening back to a day when it was possible to smoke in a theatre and people did. Burning the fabric proved incredibly difficult – as it should given that they were heavily fireproofed in their capacity as seating chairs.

Once the seats are put in their place on stage I will remove some parts, bolts and springs particularly, to give some of them that satisfying “lurch” when an actor sits on them. This is also the point when they’ll receive the final dressing: gum under the seats, spilled popcorn, some final unsavoury stains and items left behind by patrons.

What the designer wants is the look of a posh theatre of the 1920’s that has fallen in its standing to its current state as a neglected, seedy porn theatre, treated poorly over the years by many patrons.

An Interview with Chloe Anderson- Head of Wardrobe

Chloe Anderson is the Head of Wardrobe here at Tarragon Theatre. She is responsible for everything that an actor wears while on stage, not just for **Benevolence**, but for every production we do this year.



How was *Benevolence* different than other shows you've worked on?

I don't often work on shows where the actors have as much input from the start.

What did they suggest?

They kind of suggested everything. The women had ideas in their mind of what they would like and we (Chloe and Ken) went shopping with them to find their initial costumes.

Was this the first time you had taken actors shopping for costumes?

*No, there was one other time at Shakespeare by the Sea in Halifax a number of years ago. The GAP had sponsored the show, so we took over 20 actors to the GAP. This was not very workable. *Benevolence* was much more manageable as we took Gina (Jackie) and Jennifer (Audrey) individually so we could focus on one character at a time.*

Did you end up coming back to Tarragon with lots of options?

We did over buy, but it was definitely less than if Ken and I had gone without the actors. Surprisingly it didn't really cut down on the fitting time that was required afterwards.

What about the men?

They were much more straightforward. There will be a lot of breakdown happening with the costumes that Stephen (Lomy) will be wearing. This will be a personal challenge for me as I like things to be nice. Although, making things dirty is fun.

What type of things will you be doing to break them down?

Mostly acrylic paint for the dirt and I'll be doing some sanding to get areas of wear, like his shoes for example. In general the sanding provides a worn effect. I might also be doing some cutting, slashing and further distressing.



What are the advantages with this show?

It's a small cast and since it's the first show I'm not doing maintenance on a second show.

Questions to Consider during *Benevolence* and for Discussion Afterwards

be·nev·o·lence [buh-nev-uh-luhns]

–noun

1. desire to do good to others; goodwill; charitableness: to be filled with benevolence toward one's fellow creatures.
 2. an act of kindness; a charitable gift.
-

Below are a few questions to give students to consider during the show and for discussion afterwards. These can be given out to your entire class or to smaller groups to report on following the performance.

- What is the importance of the \$100?
- How does the director use all the areas of the set?
- How does the silent character add to the play?
- What does each character learn or discover in the play?
- What are the different ways the production shows the passing of time?
- How does the writer use different notes as a device?
- How does the dog move the play forward?
- What does Lomy do on Oswald's behalf?
- How does Lomy take power in the play? What does he use?
- What is the importance of the stone?
- How does the sound and/or lighting design add to the production?
- What do you think is the importance or significance of the title?

Recent Links Related To Benevolence

Freakonomics Quorum: The Economics of Street Charity

A question is put to five people from different walks of life on panhandling and street charity.

“You are walking down the street in New York City with \$10 of disposable income in your pocket. You come to a corner with a hot dog vendor on one side and a beggar on the other. The beggar looks like he’s been drinking; the hot dog vendor looks like an upstanding citizen. How, if at all, do you distribute the \$10 in your pocket, and why?”

<http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/08/09/freakonomics-quorum-the-economics-of-street-charity/>

Are the poor allowed to ask for help?

Anti-panhandling law may not be legal

A one-page PDF of information regarding Toronto’s own defeated anti-panhandling bill from last year.

“The law courts have ruled that there is “expressive content” in begging that is protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In plain language, people are free to tell others that they are poor and to ask for their help. “

<http://wellesleyinstitute.ca/ITGUpload/doc/83/antipanhandlinglaw.pdf>

Does freedom of expression include the right to beg?

An interview with Professor Arthur Schafer, the director of the Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics at the University of Manitoba on the anti-panhandling by laws in Winnipeg.

“I think that there are anti-social consequences even of peaceful panhandling. These consequences flow from the fact that pedestrians - many of whom are middle-class, but not just those who are middle-class - feel embarrassed at being asked for money. But more than that, they feel squeamish about being in close proximity to people who are of dishevelled appearance, who may not have bathed for days or even weeks, who may show symptoms of mental illness.

In a sense, these beggars are forcing us to ask ourselves: Who is my neighbour? What are my responsibilities?”

<http://www.rbcinvest.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/PEstory/LAC/20070922/PANHANDLING22/Headlines/headdex/headdexComment/7/7/20/>

Homeless man film fest's hottest celebrity

“Cassandra's Dream star Colin Farrell took Stress on a shopping spree at a camping store and supposedly fronted his rent for up to a year.”

<http://www.thestar.com/Film%20Fest/article/256457>

Street Health Report 2007

This study was conducted in the winter of 2006/2007 by Street Health, a community-based health care organization working with homeless and under-housed people in downtown Toronto.

<http://streethhealth.ca/Downloads/SHReport2007.pdf>

Pre Show Activity 1: Status Is All Around Us

In *Benevolence* the status of the two lead characters, a homeless man and a businessman, is turned upside down. The one with the power, or holding all the cards, is not necessarily the one you might expect. Use this activity to help prepare you students for the notion of status in the play.

All you need:

One pack of playing cards (without the royal and ace cards), some scrap paper, pencils and an open space.

Discussion:

Have a discussion with you class about status. Below are some questions to get you started:

- What is status? – let your students define this term
- If someone has a higher status, does that mean they have more money?
- What type of status do famous people have? Is that because of money?
- What is the relationship between status and power?
- In your home who has higher status?
- In school – who has higher status and who has the same status?
- Do you have different status in different situations?

In pairs or small groups:

Have the students separate their group's piece of paper in three columns and label them: LOW, MEDIUM and HIGH. Then give them five minutes to list as many occupations (e.g. doctor), people (e.g. Oprah), roles (e.g. parent) in each as they can (MEDIUM being them). Be sure to go around checking that they are covering all three.

When time is up ask each group to share a few from each list, checking in with the class to make sure the other groups agree – find the common dialogue.

Introduce the scale:

Explain to the students that for this exercise you will be using a scale from 2-10.

LOW				MEDIUM				HIGH
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Pre Show Activity 1: Status Is All Around Us - continued.

As a class:

Fan the small deck of cards face down (no aces or royal cards). Have each student take a card from the small deck and keep it a secret. Once they all have one ask them to walk around the room pretending to be that level of status (they can use an occupation, person or role from their list to help).

Short discussion:

Stop them and ask for a few students to guess what status number another student was playing. Check in with the other students to see if they agree, and then let the student reveal their number to see how close everyone was.

The final step:

Collect the playing cards, shuffle them and fan them face down. Have each student take a card and this time hold it on their forehead facing out (so everyone can see their number except for them). Once they all have one, ask them to walk around the room and treat everyone according to their number.

Discussion:

Have a discussion about how status can be given to you. If a famous person walks into a room, they may just think they are medium status but everyone there treats them with high status. Ask the students to explain how they change their status in their everyday lives.

Pre Show Activity 2: Complete The Scene

Terrence Lomy is given \$100 by Oswald Eichersen before the play begins. The first excerpt gives us some background between these two characters and finishes with Oswald's impression of what happened. Use this activity to introduce students to the style and rhythm of Morris Panych's writing, and give them an opportunity to be playwrights themselves.

All you need:

Enough copies of EXCERPT #1 for students to share as well as paper and pencils to write.

In pairs:

Have the students each take a role and read the scene out loud.

Short discussion:

Have a discussion about what the students think of the relationship and the situation.

Individually or in pairs:

Have the students complete the scene by continuing from where the excerpt leaves off.

Scene sharing:

Have each group read or present the scene to the rest of the class

Pre Show Activity 2: Complete The Scene – Excerpt From *Benevolence*

EXCERPT – *Benevolence* by Morris Panych

Terrance Lomy is a street person; dressed in tattered clothes. His hair is matted and tied to one side with a small pink ribbon. He wears cotton gardening gloves, and hasn't shaved in while. He has that kind of sun-beaten complexion one expects from people who sleep over a sewer grate in all seasons. Oswald Eichersen is a forty something man in a cheap business suit.

LOMY

Even good people do bad things. That isn't what qualifies you. What qualifies you is what's in your heart.

EICHERSEN

There's nothing in my heart. I don't have a heart. I'm a complete subhuman anomaly. I don't even like my mother.

LOMY

Yes you do.

EICHERSEN

I don't. I'm going to have her committed to a mental institution.

LOMY

Is she insane?

EICHERSEN

Yes. No. Yes, she's insane; except that I'm only one who can see it; apparently. She washes used plastic wrap and hangs it out to dry, then puts it back on the roll. She's used the same roll for fifteen years. This is a woman who named her own son Oswald, but insists on calling him Michael; why? I don't know. But it doesn't help my feelings of distance and inadequacy I have to tell you.

LOMY

You should talk to her about that.

EICHERSEN

That would mean I had to talk to her. I don't talk to her.

LOMY

Why not? She's your mother.

EICHERSEN

She signed me up for flamenco lessons. What is she doing?

Pre Show Activity 2: Complete The Scene – Excerpt From *Benevolence* - continued

LOMY

Maybe she sees potential.

EICHERSEN

Why am I talking to you about this? I don't want to talk to you about this.

LOMY

Maybe you do; as a friend. Maybe that's what this is all about. Don't you get it? Two guys, alone in the world? Suddenly, not alone? Or at least together in their aloneness? Now that's a story.

EICHERSEN

You're not my friend. Let's get that - out of the way. Let's -- I'm sorry. You're not.

LOMY

I understand.

EICHERSEN

Do you?

LOMY

I understand.

EICHERSEN

Good. So we can go back to our - old relationship. In other words, no relationship.

LOMY

Sure. I get it.

Beat. As Lomy tries not to be hurt, Eichersen writhes a little with feelings of guilt.

EICHERSEN

Are you being - is this - ?

LOMY

I'm fine.

EICHERSEN

I just - I felt more comfortable, somehow, knowing, well, knowing that you don't care about me one way or the other.

LOMY

You would be wrong about that, but fine. I don't feel hurt by your rejection.

EICHERSEN

This is not rejection. Rejection implies that there was something there in the first place.

LOMY

Sure.

EICHERSEN

You can't say you care about me. You don't know me.

LOMY

I've been on that corner for two years. You pass by every day and pretend to ignore me. That isn't nothing. That's a lot of pretending.

EICHERSEN

I'm not pretending.

Beat.

EICHERSEN

This is some sort of social commentary, isn't it? You're trying to make some kind of social commentary. We are not together in our aloneness or anything like that. I am alone in my aloneness.

LOMY

Not if you give me a hundred dollars.

EICHERSEN

Here's how that happened; okay. Just so we can end the speculation. As I rounded the corner, and I saw you there for the umpteenth time, with your supercilious grin, and that sleeping bag, that filthy - that - and the cardboard sign about being hungry which offends me deeply because it's so manipulative, and patently false because anybody can get a meal in this town if they really want it; and so I saw you standing there and I thought to myself 'if I gave this man enough money, would he go away forever, and leave me alone?' Because frankly, frankly I'm sick of having to step over a homeless person going to and from my stinking boring job that is to me a living hell but I do anyway, because I have a sense of personal responsibility which clearly this man lacks. So I thought, 'what would it cost to make him disappear from my conscience, so at least I wouldn't feel like such a loser for actually working for a living at such a hateful,

Pre Show Activity 2: Complete The Scene – Excerpt From *Benevolence* - continued

tedious job? While people sit in the street with signs draped around their necks, resenting me, and implying in some back-handed way, that I don't care about them'. Does that explain it?

LOMY

I never resented you.

EICHERSEN

That's a lie.

LOMY

I felt sorry for you on occasion, but I never resented you.

Post-Show Activity 1: Orphism Applied To *Benevolence*

ORPHISM

n. a mystical religion of ancient Greece, originating in the 7th or 6th century BC and based on poems (now lost) attributed to Orpheus, emphasizing the mixture of good and evil in human nature and the necessity for individuals to rid themselves of the evil part by ritual and moral purification throughout a series of reincarnations.

Research:

Have students research Orphism in the library and/or on the internet.

Share findings:

Have the students share their findings with the rest of the class.

Discussion:

Have a discussion about how Orphism relates to ***Benevolence***. Below are some questions to get you started:

- Which characters in the play went through a change or purification?
- Which characters (if any) would you consider good or evil?
- What about the human nature is being explored in ***Benevolence***?

Further:

Have the students write about how they might have explored Orphism in their own play, that could be set anywhere at anytime.

Post-Show Activity 2: Letter To Oswald

LOMY: Why don't you go to the police?

EICHERSEN: That is a very good question.

LOMY: We both know the answer.

EICHERSEN: Do we.

Writing:

Have the students write a letter to Oswald Eichersen telling him what they think he should do (or should have done).

Sharing:

Have the students share these letters with the rest of the class.

Notes
