

Teacher Resource Guide

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

Book and lyrics by **Howard Ashman**

Music by **Alan Menken**

Based on the film by Roger Corman

Screenplay by Charles Griffith

2023.24 Season

Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage

Sept 7-Oct 8 2023

A co-production with the Citadel Theatre

This show is generously sponsored by:

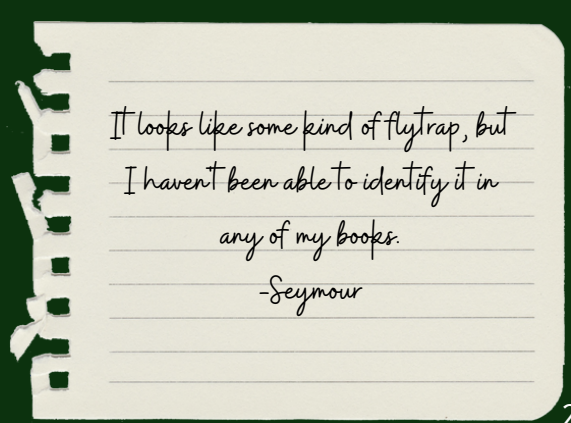
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It looks like some kind of flytrap, but
I haven't been able to identify it in
any of my books.
-Seymour



PRE ATTENDANCE RESOURCES

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, YOU
WILL FIND RESOURCES THAT MAY
BE HELPFUL **PRIOR** TO ATTENDING
THE SHOW



WELCOME

This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the musical's story as well as informative resources and activities for teachers and students. The guide aims to provide background knowledge and critical perspectives on the musical that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our Education Coordinator
Mikenzie Page
mpage@artsclub.com



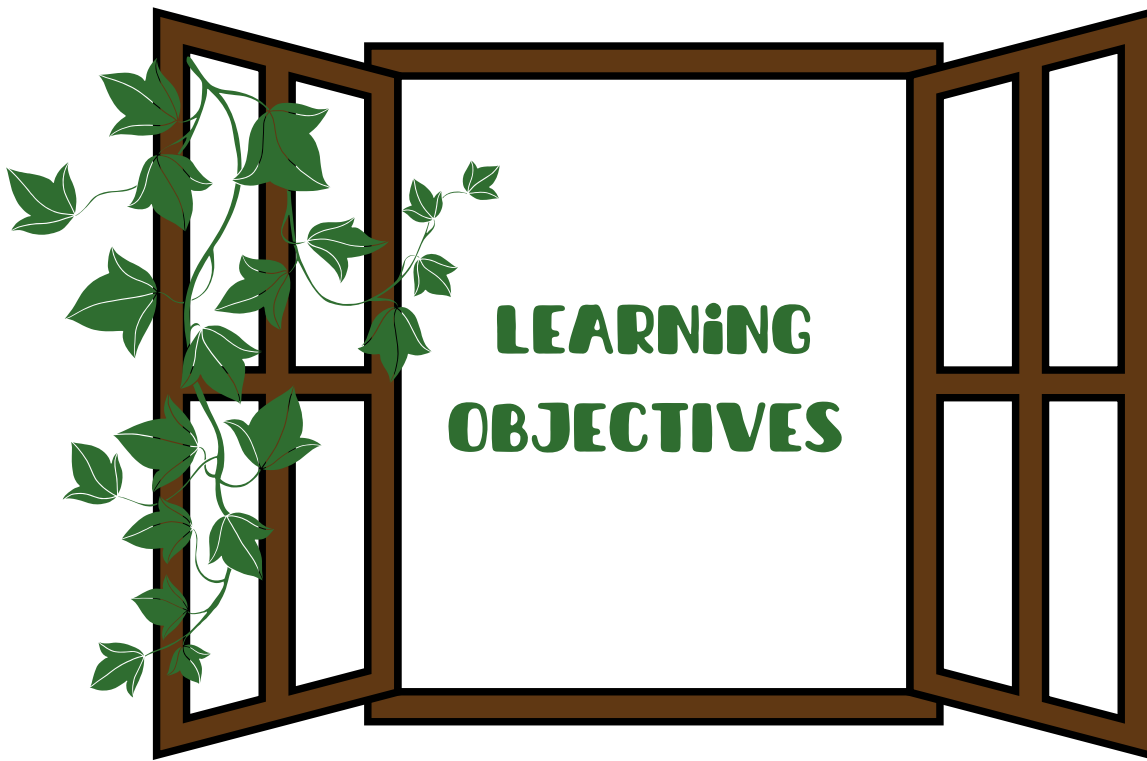
This Study Guide was created by Avrel Festinger

ABOUT THE ARTS CLUB

The Arts Club of Vancouver was founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. It became the Arts Club Theatre in 1964 when the company opened its first stage in a converted gospel hall at Seymour and Davie Streets. Now in its 59th season of producing professional live theatre in Vancouver, the Arts Club Theatre Company is a non-profit charitable organization that operates three theatres: the Granville Island Stage, the Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, and the Newmont Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre. Its popular productions range from musicals and contemporary comedies to new works and classics.

Learn more about the Arts Club Theatre Company at artsclub.com





After viewing *Little Shop of Horrors* and working through the following activities, students will:

- Engage creatively with theatrical and literary form, specifically parody.
- Make connections between theatrical performance and real-world events and personal experience.
- Reflect and think critically about individual versus social responsibility.



CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS



Arts Education 8

Big Ideas

Individual and collective expression can be achieved through the arts.

Curricular Competencies

- Respond to works of art using one's knowledge of the world
- Describe, interpret and evaluate how artists (dancers, actors, musicians, and visual artists) use processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments to create and communicate ideas

Drama 11

Big Ideas

Drama communicates ideas, emotions, and perspectives through movement, sound, imagery, and language.

Curricular Competencies

- Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences
- Reflect on dramatic experiences and how they relate to a specific place, time, and context

Social Studies 8

Curricular Competencies

- Demonstrate debating skills, including identifying, discussing, defining, and clarifying a problem, issue, or inquiry.
- Make ethical judgements about past events, decisions, or actions

Drama 9

Big Ideas

The arts provide opportunities to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of people from a variety of times, places, and cultures.

Curricular Competencies

- Reflect on creative processes to make connections to personal learning and experiences
- Describe, interpret, and evaluate how performers and playwrights use dramatic structures, elements, and techniques to create and communicate ideas

Drama 12

Big Ideas

Drama encourages creativity, innovation, and collaboration in a variety of contexts.

Curricular Competencies

- Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences
- Document and respond to dramatic works and experiences in a variety of contexts

Social Studies 9-11

Curricular Competencies

- Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond

Drama 10

Big Ideas

Drama communicates ideas, emotions, and perspectives through movement, sound, imagery, and language.

Curricular Competencies

- Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences
- Reflect on dramatic experiences and how they relate to a specific place, time, and context

Literary Studies 8-9

Big Ideas

Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world.

Curricular Competencies

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking

Philosophy 12

Curricular Competencies

- Use philosophical inquiry processes and reasoning skills to respond to arguments and questions related to major issues in philosophy

For more information please visit:
<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/>



SHOW INFORMATION + SYNOPSIS

Genre: Musical

Show Dates: September 7-October 8, 2023

Age Range: Recommended for grades 8-12

Venue: Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage

Disclaimer/Content Warning: References to abuse, violence, and death

Brief Synopsis

Little Shop of Horrors follows meek but well-meaning Seymour, as he works for a flower shop on Skid Row. One day, Seymour's luck begins to change when a mysterious, smooth-talking, plant appears out of nowhere, promising the young botanist fame, fortune, and the love of his life, Audrey, for the mere price of human blood. A parody of 1950s horror and science fiction movies, Little Shop of Horrors explores the lengths we are willing to go in order to succeed.





DETAILED SYNOPSIS: ACT ONE

*Spoilers ahead!

Little Shop of Horrors opens with Seymour, working at Mr. Mushnik's flower shop on Skid Row. Seymour's coworker Audrey arrives late to work, dawning a black eye, while Mr. Mushnik complains about the flower shop's lack of customers. At the end of another unsuccessful day at the flower shop, Mr. Mushnik tells Audrey and Seymour not to come to work tomorrow. Audrey and Seymour suggest that Mr. Mushnik should start advertising the interesting plants Seymour works on. Seymour explains that during the solar eclipse, he found an unusual plant and decided to name it Audrey Two, after Audrey. They place Audrey Two in the store window and customers start arriving, inquiring about this strange and unique plant. The problem is that Audrey Two is sickly and will not eat regular plant food. As Seymour works on the plant, he pricks his finger on a thorn and Audrey Two opens its mouth. Seymour realizes that the plant will only eat blood, so he squeezes a few drops from his own finger into the plant's mouth. The human blood satiates Audrey Two and it begins to grow.

Seymour is interviewed about Audrey Two, while customers flock to the store. Meanwhile, Audrey rushes back to the shop, only to find out that she missed Seymour's radio interview. Crystal, Chiffon and Ronnette try to tell Audrey that her boyfriend, Orin, is bad news. However, Audrey does not believe she deserves someone better.

Mr. Mushnik's shop continues to succeed, and it's now closed for renovations. Despite this triumph, Seymour is run down due to the amount of his own blood he is feeding Audrey Two. Orin comes to pick Audrey up from work. He explains to Crystal, Chiffon, and Ronnette that he is a dentist because he enjoys inflicting pain onto others. Orin mistreats Audrey in front of Seymour and tells Seymour that he should capitalize off Audrey Two. Mr. Mushnik starts to worry that Seymour will leave the shop and take Audrey Two with him. So, he devises a plan to adopt Seymour -then they are bound by blood. Mushnik is most concerned about keeping the shop a success and he needs Seymour to do so. Seymour agrees to become Mr. Mushnik's legal son.

To Seymour's surprise, Audrey Two speaks. The plant begs Seymour to "feed me". Exasperated and anemic, Seymour exclaims "what am I supposed to do kill people?" Audrey Two then promises Seymour anything he desires in return for blood. Seymour is hesitant to kill anyone, as he does not think anybody deserves to die. Right at this moment, Orin walks into the flower shop muttering unkindly about Audrey. Seymour rationalizes that Orin does in fact deserve to die due to the way he treats Audrey. The following day, Seymour visits Orin at his work and pulls a gun on him. However, Orin easily snatches the gun out of Seymour's hands and decides to give Seymour a check-up. Just as he is about to begin attacking Seymour's teeth, Orin decides to use his special gas mask on himself. However, the gas mask gets stuck on his face. Orin asks Seymour for help, but Seymour remains still and lets him suffocate. He leaves the office and feeds Orin to the plant.

DETAILED SYNOPSIS: ACT TWO

Mr. Mushnik's shop is busier than ever, and the phones are ringing off the hook. Audrey tells Seymour that she is relieved that Orin has mysteriously disappeared. The two have a heart-to-heart and kiss. Mr. Mushnik sees, and suspects that Seymour killed Orin. He tells Seymour that the police found a Mushnik's flower shop bag at Orin's office. Seymour denies killing Orin, but Mushnik demands that the two go to the police. Fearing that his murder will be found out, Seymour leads Mushnik to the plant, and Audrey Two eats him.

Seymour continues to attract fame and attention. Various individuals offer him contracts and deals. Meanwhile, Audrey Two demands food from Seymour. Seymour is agitated and stressed about feeding the plant. He asks Audrey if she would still love him if he was a nobody and Audrey replies of course. Accordingly, Seymour decides that after his Life Magazine interview he will kill Audrey Two. In the meantime, Seymour agrees to get Audrey Two some roast beef to hold off the plant's hunger. While Seymour is at the store, Audrey comes back into Mr. Mushnik's, and the plant speaks to her. Audrey Two asks Audrey for water and the latter obliges. Audrey Two then traps Audrey and begins to eat her. Seymour manages to rescue Audrey from the plant's clutches, but it's too late, and she dies.

The next morning, a man named Patrick Martin proposes a plan to Seymour. He suggests that they take leaf cuttings from Audrey Two and grow mini plants, so that every household in America can soon have their very own Audrey Two. Seymour realizes that this was Audrey Two's master plan all along: world domination. Seymour shoots Audrey Two but nothing happens. He thus steps inside the plant to kill it from the inside. However, his plan fails, and Seymour dies. Martin reappears and begins to take samples from Audrey Two.

The musical ends with Chiffon, Ronnette, and Crystal telling the audience that many Audrey Twos soon populated households across America, promising their new owners fame and fortune in return for blood. The girls share that the plants have spread to this very theatre and warn the audience "don't feed the plants".

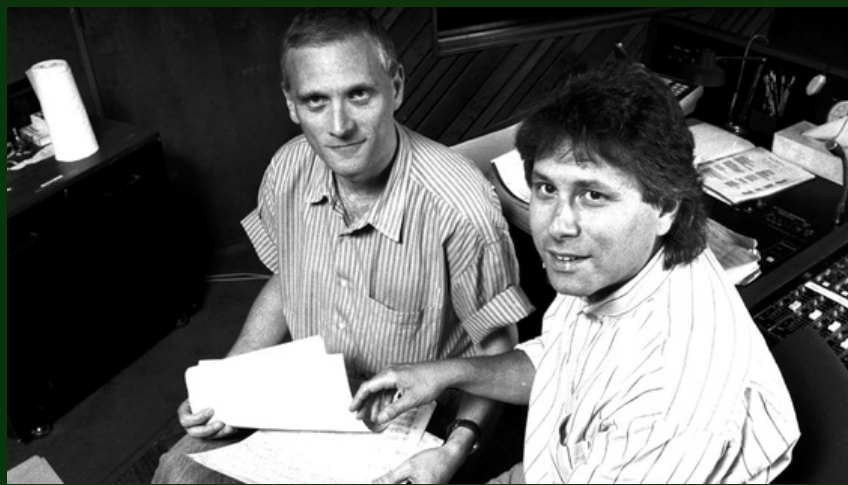


ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

Lyricist and playwright Howard Ashman (1950-1991) and composer Alan Menken (b. 1949) met in the 1970s, in New York City. This meeting would spark a legacy of collaboration between the two, resulting in a musical adaptation of Kurt Vonnegut's *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1979) and *Little Shop of Horrors* (1982). The latter musical would go on to break records for highest grossing off-Broadway show of all time. This marked merely the beginning of Menken and Ashman's partnership.

The two would go on to work for Disney, contributing to classics such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*. Sadly, Ashman's life was cut short, and he died of AIDS in 1991. However, he left behind him a legacy of joyful, laugh-inducing, and thought-provoking work.

Today, Menken continues to work as a composer and is an EGOT (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony) recipient. He also continues to honour his friend, Howard Ashman and the worlds the two created together.



From left to right: Howard Ashman, Alan Menken
Photo credit: Tribeca Film Festival

CHARACTERS

Seymour: Meek, but well-meaning Seymour has always lived on Skid Row. Working for the failing, Mr. Mushnik's flower shop and hopelessly in love with his coworker Audrey, Seymour does not have much experience with success.

Audrey: Kind and sweet, Audrey works alongside Seymour at Mr. Mushnik's. She struggles with low self-esteem and self-doubt.

Mr. Mushnik: Audrey and Seymour's boss. He is concerned with his failing business and getting it to succeed.

Orin: Audrey's abusive and narcissistic boyfriend. Orin is a dentist and obsessed with inflicting pain onto others.

The Plant/Audrey 2: Smooth-talking/singing carnivorous plant, that has big plans for world-domination.

Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette: Three women who form a Greek Chorus of sorts, hanging around in the background as Seymour and Audrey's story unfolds.





CONTEXT: PARODY

Little Shop of Horrors is a parody of 1950s horror/science fiction films, meaning that it copies elements from these movies and often exaggerates and makes fun of them.

One way that *Little Shop of Horrors* takes after 1950s science fiction films is the musical's inclusion of the "invader from space" motif. In 1950s sci-fi films there are often invaders from outer space that pose a threat to humankind. In the case of *Little Shop of Horrors*, the invader from space is the plant (Audrey Two).

So, what makes the original "invader from space" films different from *Little Shop of Horrors*? One answer is parody! While these original movies were intended to make audiences truly fear this invader from space, *Little Shop of Horrors* does not take itself as seriously. While watching the show, we can recognize that this magical mysterious plant from outer space is often ridiculous, rather than terrifying. In this way, parts of the show are so exaggerated that they become humorous.



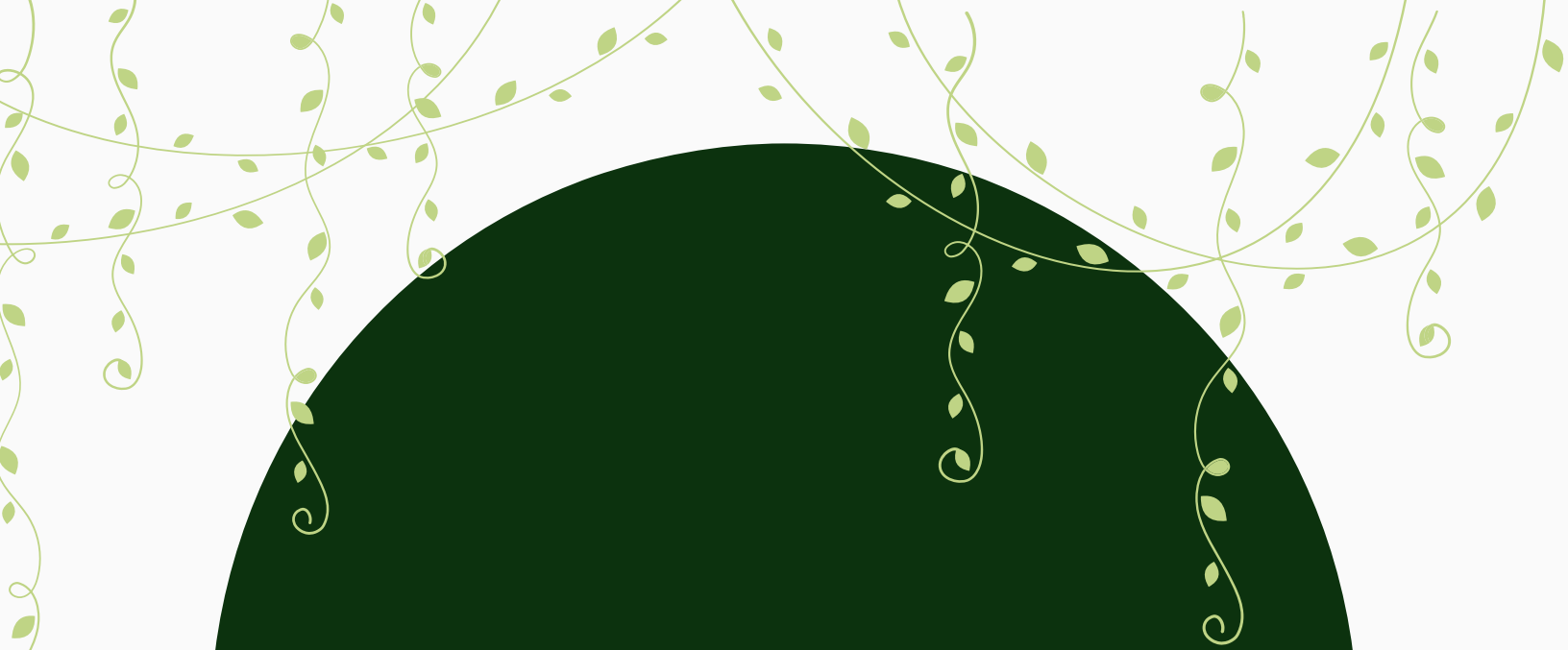
PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Parody

1. Were you familiar with the term parody before? Can you give other examples of parody?
2. What do you think the purpose of parody is?

Wishing upon a plant

3. If a genie granted you one wish, what would you wish for? Why?
4. Do you agree with the saying: be careful what you wish for? Why or why not?



POST ATTENDANCE RESOURCES

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, YOU
WILL FIND RESOURCES AND
ACTIVITIES THAT MAY BE HELPFUL
AFTER ATTENDING THE SHOW



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS


Happily, Ever After...Or Not?

1. Little Shop of Horrors has sparked quite a debate over its ending – some wish Audrey and Seymour would end up married and alive. Did you like the way the musical ended? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Ashman and Menken chose this non-happy ending? Would the show's meaning change if Audrey and Seymour ended up alive and happy?
3. Can you think of any other plays/books/movies/tv shows that also do not have happy or satisfying endings? How do you feel about them?

Character and Parody

4. Compare Chiffon, Crystal and Ronnette to the other characters in the show. How do these three characters stand out from the rest?
5. Did you find the show scarier or funny? Explain your answer. Why was it scary? Or why was it funny? Note specific techniques (for example, lighting, sound, costume etc.) that made the show either scary or humorous.

Connecting to Today

- 
6. The musical finishes with the warning “don’t feed the plants.” How do you think this statement connects to this day and age? Can you think of examples of people who are motivated by success/money/fame and in turn, harm society? (Example: think of the climate crisis).

ACTiViTY #1: DiSRUPTiON!

Recommended for Drama 8-12

As previously discussed, parody often exaggerates that which it is parodying. Accordingly, parody often seems ridiculous. In this warmup, students will have a chance to engage with the unrealistic through improv.

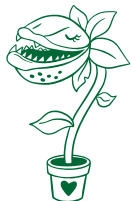
Step 1: Pick 4-5 students to get up in front of the class. They will begin acting out a simple scene, choosing from the options below.

- a) A class during a lesson at school.
- b) Passengers riding a bus.
- c) A birthday party.
- d) A crew delivering the morning news.

Step 2: After a minute of delivering this scene, select 1-2 students from the audience to join in-making the scene a little sillier and a little less realistic. They will do this by creatively coming up with a way to disrupt the scene. For example, if students are pretending to ride the bus, another student can join in and announce: "it's raining microwaves outside!" The other students will then have to stay in character, reacting to this disruption to the best of their ability.

Note: You can either keep adding students from the audience to create a large scene or restart the activity every few minutes with smaller groups.

The goal of this warmup is not to create a parody but begin to engage with the exaggeration and silliness that is often integral to parody. Have fun and enjoy yourself!



ACTiViTY #2: PLANT VS HUMAN

Recommended for Drama 8-12, Literary Studies 8-12

*Note for Drama teachers: This activity can be adjusted to skit form, in which one student plays the plant and the other plays a person as they negotiate. Reflection can stay the same.

Part 1: Create a dialogue

In the final moments of Little Shop of Horrors, we are told that Audrey Two has spread all over the world and plants everywhere are demanding human blood from their new owners. Write a short scene between one of these plants and a random person. You should include the plant promising the owner whatever they want in return for blood. For example, in the show, Audrey Two promised Seymour fame. Then, include the person's response to the plant's promise. It is your choice to decide whether this person will agree to feed the plant or not.

Part 1: Steps

1. Create a dialogue between a plant and a human.
2. Include the plant promising the human their greatest desire (you can decide what that is).
3. Include the human's response (will they feed the plant or not).

You are encouraged to make this scene as long as you want. The human does not have to make their decision on whether they want to feed the plant right away. Rather, it can be a negotiation between the two. Perhaps the human at first says no, but then the plant convinces them.

Part 2: Reflection

After writing this scene, in a 1-2 paragraph response, reflect on the following prompts:

1. Why did you choose for your character to either feed or not feed the plant?
2. Do you think if this situation were to happen in real life, humankind would feed the plants? Why or why not?
3. Begin thinking about social versus individual responsibility. In the play, Seymour is only thinking about himself (the individual) rather than what is best for society. Do you think we have a responsibility to take care of our society and others? Why or why not?

MODIFICATION OF ACTIVITY 2:

PLANT VS HUMAN

Recommended for Social Studies 8–12, Philosophy 12

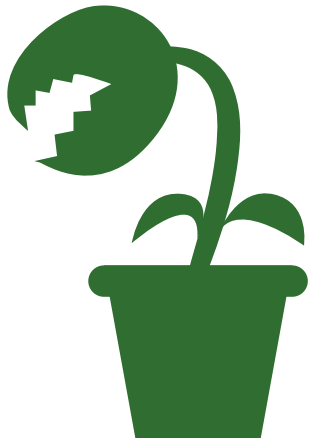
In the final moments of *Little Shop of Horrors*, we are told that Audrey Two has spread all over the world and plants everywhere are promising humans fame, fortune etc. in return for food i.e.. human blood.

Set up a debate between these plants and humans. Half the class will take the side of the plant and the other will take the side of a human.

This is a debate on the question: do we have a moral responsibility to others, or just to ourselves? Plants say no, humans say yes. Both parties should utilize tools of persuasion, considering ethos, logos, and pathos.

Steps

1. Split the class in two (half plants, half humans)
2. Give each 15 minutes to prepare statements/arguments
3. Begin the debate



Things to consider

Ethos, Logos, and Pathos

Ethos: Speaker should establish themselves as credible/reliable.

Logos: Speaker should appeal to the jury/judge's logic and reason.

Pathos: Speaker should appeal to the jury/judge's emotions and empathy.

Basic Debate Structure

- Opening statement from affirmative
- Opening statement from opposition
- Argument 1 from affirmative
- Argument 1 from opposition
- Argument 2 from affirmative
- Argument 2 from opposition
- Rebuttals
- Closing statement from affirmative
- Closing statement from opposition

RESOURCES



For further information on the history of *Little Shop of Horrors*

Websites

- <https://playbill.com/article/how-howard-ashman-and-alan-menken-created-the-iconic-little-shop-of-horrors>
- <https://playbill.com/article/how-has-little-shop-of-horrors-changed-over-the-years>

Books

Attack of the Monster Musical: A Cultural History of Little Shop of Horrors by Adam Abraham

For further information on Howard Ashman and Alan Menken

- <https://www.howardashman.com/>
- <https://www.alanmenken.com/>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/the-remarkable-story-of-howard-ashman-who-changed-disney-forever-while-battling-aids-1.5943730>

For Further information on parody

<http://www.woodheadpublishing.com/literary-devices/parody>

For further information on debate/speech

- https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/frame_found_sr2/tns/tn-13.pdf
- <https://louisville.edu/writingcenter/for-students-1/handouts-and-resources/handouts-1/logos-ethos-pathos-kairos>

SOURCES



Curriculum Information

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/>

***Little Shop of Horrors* and 1950s Sci-Fi movies**

<https://www.hfcc.edu/news/1990/hfc-presents-little-shop-horrors>

Howard Ashman and Alan Menken biography information

<https://www.npr.org/2020/08/06/899642706/a-new-documentary-shines-a-spotlight-on-the-lyricist-behind-the-disney-renaisan>

<https://www.howardashman.com/>

<https://www.alanmenken.com/>

Debate structure and resources

https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/frame_found_sr2/tns/tn-13.pdf

<https://louisville.edu/writingcenter/for-students-1/handouts-and-resources/handouts-1/logos-ethos-pathos-kairos>