

Arts Club Theatre Company

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

The Matchmaker

2018/2019 Season

**THE
MATCHMAKER**



Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage

JANUARY 24 – FEBRUARY 24, 2018

**THE
Great-West Life**
ASSURANCE COMPANY



 **Canada Life**

STRONGER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER™

Contents

Welcome	1
About the Arts Club Theatre Company	1
Learning objectives.....	2
Connections to New BC Curriculum	2
Plot Summary	3
Meet the Playwright – Thornton Wilder	3
Characters.....	3
Discussion Questions	4
Activity 1: Status Exercise	5
Activity 2: Gender Roles – Script Analysis	7
Sources	8

Welcome

This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the play’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 play that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of the theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our group sales representative at 604.687.5315 ext. 253 or groups@artsclub.com.

This guide was created by Cassady Ranford, Kerri Lee, and Becky Gold.

About the Arts Club Theatre Company

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 55th 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 Goldcorp 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 <http://artsclub.com/>

Learning objectives

By viewing *The Matchmaker* and working through the following activities, students will:

- Explore and analyze the role that status and class plays in both the context of the play and the contemporary world they live in
- Examine the presence of gender roles in the play and compare how gender roles are perceived in the modern world
- Use critical and creative thinking to compose their own soliloquy to better understand the stylistic convention in the context of the play and the significance of why it is employed

Connections to New BC Curriculum

English Language Arts: Composition (10)

Big Ideas

- Texts are socially, culturally, geographically, and historically constructed
- The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world

Core Competencies

- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking
- Demonstrate speaking and listening skills in a variety of formal and informal contexts for a range of purposes
- Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences

Drama (9)

Big Ideas

- Identity is explored, expressed, and impacted through drama experiences
- Drama provides opportunities to gain insight into perspectives and experiences of people from a variety of times, places, and cultures

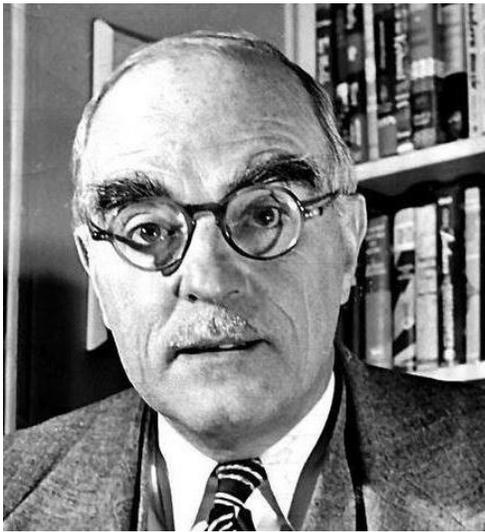
Core Competencies

- Create dramatic works both collaboratively and as an individual, using ideas inspired by imagination, inquiry, and purposeful play
- Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental in relation to drama
- Adapt and apply learned skills, understandings, and processes for use in new contexts
- Create personally meaningful bodies of artistic works that demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of social, cultural, environmental, and historical contexts different purposes and audiences

Plot Summary

Before audiences fell in love with the musical, *Hello Dolly!*, there was *The Matchmaker*. Horace Vandergelder is one of the wealthiest men in Yonkers and has enlisted Dolly Levi to find him a new wife. Meanwhile, his niece, Ermengarde, is trying to marry Ambrose, a simple artist who Horace has ordered to keep away. To make matters even more complicated, Vandergelder's employees, Barnaby and Cornelius, have taken the night off to sneak into New York City for an evening of adventure. This is a farcical and nostalgic tale of mistaken identities and hilarious manipulation that is grounded by an undercurrent of love and humanity. Will Dolly Levi, *The Matchmaker*, succeed in finding Vandergelder a match?

Meet the Playwright – Thornton Wilder



Thornton Wilder was born in 1897 in Madison, Wisconsin. His father was a newspaper editor and a consular general to Hong Kong as a part of the Foreign Service. Wilder moved between China and the United States as he was growing up, before settling in California for high school. He attended Oberlin College and Yale University. It was at Yale where his first play was published before receiving his master's degree in French Literature. His second novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, won him a Pulitzer Prize and later he won a second Pulitzer for his play, *Our Town*. The final Pulitzer he won was for the play, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, in 1942. After serving in the Air Force during the Second World War, he did not write as much, partly because his writing was less well-received. He passed away in Connecticut in 1975.

Characters

Horace Vandergelder: An irritable and vain middle-aged merchant of Yonkers, New York. He is Ermengarde's uncle, and has forbidden the marriage of Ermengarde, who is in love with Ambrose. Horace has hired a matchmaker to find a wife for himself.

Cornelius Hackl: Cornelius is Vandergelder's chief clerk. He becomes tired of his lifestyle and decides to seek some adventure and fun of his own.

Barnaby Tucker: Barnaby is a junior clerk at Vandergelder's store. He agrees to accompany Hackl in search of an adventure.

Malachi Stack: Malachi is the newest member of Vandergelder's staff of clerks.

Ambrose Kemper: Ambrose is an artist who is in love with Ermengarde. Horace does not approve of Ambrose as he feels that Ambrose would not be able to support a family on an artist's salary. He tries to convince Ermengarde to elope with him.

Joe Scanlon: A barber.

Rudolph and August: Waiters at the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant.

Mrs. Dolly Levi: Dolly is one of the play's central characters. She is a talented matchmaker, and an old friend of Vandergelder's late wife. She does not mind making up stories to get the results she wants.

Miss Flora Van Huysen: A friend of Vandergelder's late wife.

Ms. Irene Molloy: Mrs. Malloy has been set up as a prospective wife for Vandergelder.

Minnie Fay: Mrs. Malloy's assistant.

Ermengarde: Ermengarde is Horace Vandergelder's niece. Although she is in love with Ambrose, her uncle has forbidden this marriage, and sends her to live in New York to keep her away from Ambrose.

Gertrude: Vandergelder's outspoken housekeeper.

Waiters

Cabman

Miss Van Huysen's Cook

Discussion Questions

These questions can be used as writing prompts, as well as prompts for small-group and large-group discussions.

Pre-show discussion questions:

The following questions have been included to spark discussions and to get students thinking about what they might experience prior to viewing the production.

- Have you seen any live performances on stage before? What are your expectations about what you will see on stage in this production?
- What do you already know about the play, including the plot, production elements (such as lighting, sound, costumes, and sets) and the characters? How do you anticipate that these elements will come together in the play?
- What is *farce*? How do you think that farce will contribute to the structure of the play?
- A series of adventures and events will be unfolding during *The Matchmaker*. What is your idea of an adventure? What kinds of adventures do you anticipate seeing and experiencing as you watch the play?

Post-show discussion questions:

The following questions are ideal for engaging students in reflection and exploration of the major themes, characters, and other elements of the production.

- What ideas or themes did the play make you think about?
- What did you notice about the ways in which the characters communicated with one another?
- What did you notice about the ways in which the characters displayed their emotions?

- What did you think about the technical elements of the production: which elements stood out to you the most, and why? What effects did this have on your understanding of the play?
- Do you identify with any particular character's journey?
- Imagine that you could meet with members of the cast, crew, artistic team, or production team. What questions would you ask them about the choices and elements in the production?
- Think about the time period in which the play is set, and compare and contrast that period with our current day. What are some similarities and differences that you have noticed? Which period would you prefer to live in, and why?
- Do you believe in love at first sight? Why or why not?
- What examples of status did you see in the show? How did the gap between classes affect the storyline and the characters' relationships with one another?
- What did you notice about gender roles and gender equality in the play? Do you think that gender equality and gender dynamics have improved since the time of *The Matchmaker*? If so, how? If not, why?
- Think about the use of soliloquys (a speech that a character gives directly to the audience); what purpose did these serve in the play? Which characters gave soliloquys and what did this reveal about their personal thoughts, intentions, and characteristics?

Activity 1: Status Exercise

(Recommended for Drama and English Language Arts)

Rationale: Status is a central theme within *The Matchmaker* and was also a very prevalent reality at the time when the play was set. The gap between the classes was not only vast but also affected how people interacted with each other. This gap is reflected in the play most blatantly between Vandergelder and his clerks, Cornelius, Barnaby and Malachi. As this is a very important aspect of the play, it is helpful for students to explore and internalize the experience of status in order to better understand the intricacies of the relationships and tensions between the characters.

Step One: Brainstorm various examples from the play when privilege or disparity of economic status was made apparent between the characters.

Step Two – Embodying Status: Ask students to move around the space at a moderate pace with a calm body. With the following instructions, request that they respond physically, but not vocally, with a focus on **STATUS**. Remind them there is no 'right' answer and however they respond to the prompts physically is correct for them.

HIGH STATUS:

1. Start moving around the space like a person or character with HIGH STATUS. (*Give examples like 'royalty' or 'boss' or 'people of power'*). How do they move? What part of their body do they lead from? Do they move fast or slow? What kind of person or character moves like this? How does your character view other people?

2. Now that you have physically created a character with HIGH STATUS, how do they interact with other people? Start noticing the other people in the room and without speaking and without touching, see how you might interact with other people.

3. Try to be the person with the HIGHEST STATUS in the room. How does this inform how you move through space? How does it inform the way that you interact with other people?

LOW STATUS:

1. Start moving around the space like a person or character with LOW STATUS. (*Give examples like 'child or 'nervous people'*). How do they move? What part of their body do they lead from? Do they move fast or slow? What kind of person or character moves like this? How does your character view other people?
2. Now that you have physically created a character with LOW STATUS, how do they interact with other people? Start noticing the other people in the room and without speaking and without touching, see how you might interact with other people.
3. Try to be the person with the LOWEST STATUS in the room. How does this inform how you move through space? How does it inform the way that you interact with other people?

Step Three – Secret Status:

Materials needed: Cue cards with numbers 1-6 written on them

Have six students try this activity at a time. The other students will be able to observe and participate later, if comfortable. Hand out a concealed card to each of the students and get them to look at it. 1 = lowest status and 6 = highest status. Based on the number reflected on their card, they must interact with the other students while embodying their 'Secret Status', either in the form of another status exploration or as an improvisation. They may not reveal their status to other students participating or observing during this time. Allow this to go on for a few minutes so that they may interact with as many other statuses as possible.

CHARACTER STATUS LEGEND:

- 1 LOWEST STATUS: BABY, ANIMAL – MALACHI
- 2 LOWER STATUS: CHILD, ASSISTANT STAFF, NERVOUS PERSON – BARNABY
- 3 LOW STATUS: STORE EMPLOYEE, SECRETARIAL STAFF, TEENAGER – CORNELIUS
- 4 MIDDLE/NEUTRAL STATUS: TEACHER, STORE MANAGER – MRS. MOLLOY
- 5 HIGH STATUS: UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, DOCTOR, VICE PRICIPAL – DOLLY LEVI
- 6 HIGHEST STATUS: BOSS, ROYALTY, PRIME MINISTER – VANDERGELDER

Step Four – Status Sort: After the interaction, the students who were outside observers will work together to arrange the students in the status activity into status order from low (1) to high (6) based on their outside perceptions. Outside observers may discuss with one another as they arrange the students but status students may not help them or reveal their status in any way. Once they are settled, students will reveal their 'secret status' and see how close they got to sorting accurately. Remind students that this is an exploration, not a competition and if they did not get it correctly, it is not a failure – it is all part of the experience. Debrief why certain students perceived others as certain statuses.

Step Five – Debrief: After the activity, have a group discussion with these questions or discuss them in small groups.

1. How did it feel to be low status? How did it feel to be high status?
2. How do you think that status is represented in today's society? Is it still as distinct and relevant as in the time of *The Matchmaker*?
3. The characters of Barnaby and Cornelius break out of the confines of their class and status to have an adventure, how do you think this defiance reflects how class has changed in modern times?
4. Why do you think class/status was as important as it was during the era that *The Matchmaker* occurs?
5. Do you think it is important for shows that represent status/class in the manner that *The Matchmaker* does still be produced and performed? If so, why?

Activity 2: Gender Roles – Script Analysis

(Recommended for Drama and English classes)

Rationale: Gender representation is a central theme in *The Matchmaker* and it is therefore important for students to become familiar with the gender dynamics in the play before viewing it. By examining two scenes from *The Matchmaker* and analyzing them through the lens of gender role dynamics, students will have a better understanding of how gender functioned at the time the play was set. Students will also be able to make connections to how gender roles operate in the modern world and reflect on the similarities and differences of how gender roles function contemporarily.

Step One: Provide students with the two sample scenes, either by projecting them or handing them out. Discuss or brainstorm how gender dynamics are represented in both scenes.

Guiding Questions:

1. Is gender equality present in both scenes? If so, how?
2. Is there any sexism present in either scene? If so, how?
3. How does gender affect the power or status dynamics in both scenes? What characters have power in each scene? Is this based on their gender?

SAMPLE SCENE #1: Vandergelder and Ermengarde Scene from *The Matchmaker*:

VANDERGELDER: Ermengarde, I told him that when you were old enough to marry you'd marry someone who could support you. I've done you a good turn. You'll come and thank me when you're fifty.

ERMENGARDE: But Uncle, I love him!

VANDERGELDER: I tell you, you don't.

ERMENGARDE: But I *do*!

VANDERGELDER: And I tell you, you don't. Leave those things to me.

ERMENGARDE: If I don't marry Ambrose I know I'll die.

VANDERGELDER: What of?

ERMENGARDE: A broken heart.

SAMPLE SCENE #2: Vandergelder, Irene Molloy and Dolly Levi Scene from *The Matchmaker*

VANDERGELDER: Mrs. Molloy, I've got some advice to give you about your business.

MRS. LEVI: Oh, advice from Mr. Vandergelder! The whole city should hear this.

VANDERGELDER: In the first place, the aim of business is to make a profit.

MRS.MOLLOY: Is that so?

MRS. LEVI: I never heard it put so clearly before. Did you hear it?

VANDERGELDER: You pay those girls of yours too much. You pay them as much as men. Girls like that enjoy their work. Wages, Mrs. Molloy, are paid to make people who do work they don't enjoy

MRS. LEVI: Mr. Vandergelder thinks so ably. And that's exactly the way his business is run up in Yonkers.

Step Two: After discussion, allow students to choose between the scenes and instruct students to re-imagine the scene by gender-swapping the characters. This can be done either by re-writing the scene and discussing as a class how it affects the gender dynamics, or by having the students read the scenes aloud.

Step Three: After the activity, have a group discussion with these questions or discuss them in small groups.

1. Why is it important to analyze how gender roles were represented in older works?
2. Is the script for *The Matchmaker* sexist? If so, should it still be performed/produced?
3. How did this activity help to reflect on how gender roles function in the modern world?
4. Do you think that gender equality and gender dynamics have improved since the time of *The Matchmaker*? If so, how? If not, why?

Sources

Curriculum Documents

British Columbia Ministry of Education. "Arts Education: Drama 9." (n.d.): n.pag. Web.

British Columbia Ministry of Education. "English Language Arts: Composition 10." (n.d.): n.pag. Web.

"Introduction & Overview of *The Matchmaker*." *BookRags*, BookRags, www.bookrags.com/studyguide-matchmaker/#gsc.tab=0.

"Characters: *The Matchmaker*." *Utah Shakespeare Festival*, 2018, www.bard.org/study-guides/characters-the-matchmaker