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Boston, MA
September 2000

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This Teacher Curriculum Guide

for

DEAD END

by

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The John Hancock Student Matinee Series is funded in part by a generous grant from the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company.

ABOUT THIS CURRICULUM

This curriculum package has been developed for use in conjunction with the Literary Guide for the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Dead End* by Sidney Kingsley. The guide is appropriate for English, social studies, history, and drama classes for middle school through high school, and can be integrated into discussions and activities of an historical, social, literary, artistic, or interpersonal nature.

Students may explore themes, characters, and issues while using their curiosity, creativity, writing skills, and analytical and critical judgment skills. The curriculum includes classroom activities, discussion questions (both group and individual), research topics which can be worked on in groups or individually with information presented orally or in writing, and suggestions for writing assignments. Teachers are encouraged to pick and choose, and to change and adapt entries to meet the preferences and needs of individual classes and students.

We recommend that teachers read the literary guide for *Dead End* before approaching this curriculum guide, and that they then read the curriculum guide in its entirety.

This curriculum includes the following sections:

Audience Etiquette introduces students to the concept of drama and audience etiquette.

Objectives provide teachers with measurable goals.

Preparation offers background information and introduces issues of the play without requiring special knowledge.

Question & Answer Breakdown of the Action of *Dead End* helps students assess the main points of the play.

For Further Discussion encourages students to develop independent judgments about the issues and a clearer understanding of complexities of the play, and helps them to relate such issues to their own lives.

For Further Exploration allows students to explore independently and creatively some of the issues and background of the play.

Writing Assignments affords students opportunities for self-expression and analytical thought and for developing their writing skills.

Questions for After Attending a Performance of the Play encourages students to consider the aesthetic and practical elements of a live performance.

Activities provides hands-on and interactive challenges that can inspire further consideration of the play.

Vocabulary offers a hand-out sheet without definitions for work with words and language. (The definitions are supplied in the *King Hedley II* study guide.)

Related Works (now contained in Literary Guide) encourages students to read other literature and to see movies with similar themes, conflicts, and characters, and identifies computer web sites for additional research.

Bibliography lists valuable sources used by the Education Department in developing this Curriculum Guide.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Dear Teachers,

We haven't changed this section of our curriculum very often over the eleven years we've been producing curriculum to accompany the student matinee series. I'm sure we would all agree that in 11 years, attending a live performance of any format has changed dramatically. The explosion of reality television, and much of the media's propensity to exploit violence, as well as embrace content that is sexually explicit and loaded with profanity, and the lack of a common agreement in our society on what constitutes **appropriate behavior**. Such ambiguity tests producing organizations and creates a need for clarity on the Huntington's part in defining our substantial goals for attaining and maintaining audience behavior that enhances the viewing and hearing pleasures of all audience members, as well as supports the actors on stage as they perform *Ain* the moment.

While we may sound cautionary, overall, the Huntington's student matinees receive rave reviews from students, teachers, actors, stage managers, corporate and

1. What are the differences between live theatre and the movies?
2. How does one respond to a live performance of a play, as opposed to when seeing a film at a local cinema or watching a video at home?
3. What is the audience's role during a live performance?
How do you think audience behavior can affect an actor's performance? **Ask students to describe an instance when they were interrupted by audience noise during a performance. How did it make them feel? How did it affect their performance?**
4. How does a play script differ from a novel?
5. What do you know about the theatrical rehearsal process?
Have you ever participated in one as an actor, singer, director or technical person?
6. What are some of the elements involved in producing a play?
(set, costumes, lighting, actors, director, stage management, tech direction, etc.)
7. What is a professional stage actor's life like?

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- identify central themes and issues in *Dead End* including:
 - America during the Great Depression
 - Urban poverty and its influence on crime
 - Youths at risk
 - Heroism and personal sacrifice
 - America's class system
 - Capitalism
 - Organized crime
- relate the themes and issues of *Dead End* to their own lives
- identify their own generation's struggles and triumphs while coming to understand those of the characters in *Dead End*
- examine the social and economic pressures presented in *Dead End* and compare these to pressures they experience each day
- identify conflicts in interpersonal relationships of their own while coming to understand those of the characters in *Dead End*
- participate in hands-on activities, including acting, music, visual arts and movement
- evaluate the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Dead End*.

PREPARATION

Background

Dead End is a realistic play depicting the lives of street kids during the Great Depression. Unlike the affluent dwellers of the adjacent upscale apartment building, who see only the filthy, foul-mouthed exterior of these children, the audience is given a richer, more detailed examination of them and their home lives where violence and poverty daily degrade them. First performed in 1935, the effect of this play upon its audiences must have been tremendous because America was still mired in the Depression. To view the effect of poverty and violence on these characters as an early 20th century historical phenomenon, however, would undermine the play's relevancy to today's inner cities where similar violence and poverty still degrade and where a life of crime may appear as the only alternative for escape.

America in the Great Depression

The time of the main action of *Dead End* was the Great Depression, a time when the huge middle class of America was Amatriculating in a school for the blind, essentially ignoring the warning signs of war on the horizon while focusing in their own economic struggles at home. The national backdrop of the play is the economic depression that held the United States in its grip for nearly ten years, from the stock market crash of Black Tuesday, October 29th, 1929, through the United States' build-up for World War II. The sudden collapse of the U.S. economic structure after the crash of 1929 resulted in a decade of widespread unemployment and poverty.

The subsequent rush in the banks as stock prices fell from 1929 on, resulted in the failure of many banks, who found that they did not have the capital to repay all of their depositors. Banks were forced to close due to panic, and those that did remain open struggled to stay in business with very little money to invest. Businesses simultaneously laid off workers, or sometimes shut down completely. Millions of people lost their savings and their homes.

Until World War II neared, the US attempted many remedies but never ceased to struggle to restore its prosperity and assist its destitute populace. The progress made was primarily due to the innovative and assertive programs of the New Deal instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt, elected in 1932.

Have students in groups research the Great Depression by answering the following discussion areas, and share their findings with the class:

- According to John Kenneth Galbraith's book *The Great Crash, 1929*, there are five primary causes for the Great Depression. Divide the students into 5 groups and have each group study one of the causes. Have each group answer the following questions: Are any of these causes present in today's society? Could a Great Depression occur today? Why or why not?
- Research Black Tuesday and answer the following questions: What is Black Tuesday? When did it occur? What economic consequences did it have? Why is it significant?

- Research one of the following types of people to determine how the great depression affected all Americans: farmer, uneducated farm worker, factory worker, teacher, child, gangster, banker, factory owner, lower class worker, and middle class worker.
- The depression affected all segments of business. Have students research the costs during the depression of the following items: man_s suit, new home, shirt, pair of shoes, quart of milk, pound of steak, and loaf of bread.
- Briefly answer the following questions in order to gain a better overall perspective on the great depression:
 - How many workers were unemployed in 1933. What percent of the total workforce?
 - How many banks failed from 1929 to 1933? How much money was lost in savings accounts?
 - Who is J.P. Morgan and how did he try to stop the economic slide?
 - What is U.S. Steel?
 - What is a soup kitchen and why were they important during the depression?

Presidents during the Great Depression

17. Herbert Hoover was the president at the start of the depression. Research Hoover and his presidency to answer the following questions: What were the dates of Hoover_s presidency? What did he believe to be the cause of the depression? What did he do, if anything, to help the poor and starving during the depression? What was a _Hooverville ? What was _Hoover blanket ?
- Hoover refused to accept any responsibility for the depression saying, _No president must ever admit he has been wrong. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Do you think presidents are directly responsible for the economic prosperity or decline of the nation? If yes, do you believe President Clinton is directly responsible for the current economic prosperity in America? Why or why not?
 - During his campaign for reelection, Hoover_s slogans were _The Worst is Past and _Prosperity is Just Around the Corner. Do you think these are effective campaign slogans given the economic times? If you had been living during the depression, would you have re-elected Hoover? Which characters in Dead End would have reelected Hoover? Why? Which characters would not have reelected Hoover? Why not?
 - Franklin Roosevelt beat Hoover to become president using the slogan, _Happy Days are Here Again. Is this slogan different from Hoover_s? If yes, in what way? If no, why was it more effective than Hoover_s? Do you think the characters in Dead End would agree with this slogan? Why or why not?

- Research FDR and his presidency to answer the following questions: What was the name of his economic policy designed to pull America out of the depression? What were the three R_s which were the cornerstone_s of the policy?
- Have students form groups. Each group will research and identify the following elements of FDR_s economic policy: Civilian Conservation Corps, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Public Works Administration, Norris-LaGuardia Act, and the National Labor Relations Act.
- Each group will answer the following questions based on their research on the above element: What was the primary purpose of your element? How did it help to relieve the depression? Did it work, in your opinion? Name three things which occurred as a result of your element. What lasting results, if any, occurred because of your element? Is your element currently part of the government? Would your economic element have helped the characters in *Dead End*? Why or why not?

Labor Unions

1. List 10 rights which you believe all workers should have, i.e. lunch breaks, bathroom breaks, etc. Research labor unions to determine which of these rights were granted as a result of the efforts of labor unions. What rights should workers have which they currently do not have? Which rights would have benefited the Dead End kids?
- Why would membership in labor unions rise from 2.7 million in 1933 to 8.5 million by 1939? What reasons did Tommy_s sister give for joining a union and picketing? What happened to her as a result of her union membership? Research the formation of unions to determine if this was typical.

Prohibition and Gangsters

1. In Dead End Baby Face Martin was a killer who originally came from the same streets as the Dead End boys. Organized Crime and the gangsters who ran the organizations arose during the depression primarily as a result of prohibition. What is prohibition? What was its purpose? How long did it last? Did it work? Did many people agree with it? Why or why not? Would the Dead End boys have agreed with it? Why or why not? What do we prohibit today with which many people disagree? How is it similar to prohibition?
- In the 1930_s gangsters were glamorized with nicknames which evoked mystery and violence. Today many would argue that films such as The Sopranos and Goodfellas make gangsters seem appealing. Research and identify Al Scarface Capone, Lucky Luciano, and George Bugs Moran. Do you think they are glamorous? What kind of lives did they lead? How did prohibition help their careers? Devise a gangster nickname for yourself based on your personality. Next, devise gangster nicknames for the Dead End boys.
 - What was the St. Valentine_s Day Massacre? When did it occur? Why did it occur?

- Since Gangster Rap is so popular with inner city youth today, the Dead End kids would have enjoyed it, too. Write a rap song for the Dead End kids describing their life, their goals, and their problems with attaining these goals.

Introducing the Issues

Group Dynamics

1. Discuss what group dynamics are. Have students in small groups develop role playing situations that capture a certain group dynamic.
 - (a) The Outsider - In this situation have students create scene en in which one individual is not accepted, does not belong, is an outcast. Actual scenes from the book *The Outsider* by S.E. Hinton could be developed as well. Questions to think about: What is the role of the outsider? Why do groups tend to snub members of their team, office, neighborhood, etc.? What purpose does such exclusion serve?
 - (b) A pecking order - In this situation students should create a scene in which some order of importance/strength/power is clearly established by the group. *The Lord of the Flies* could offer specific material for scene work. Role play scenes where there is a bully or a dominating force in a group that weaker members follow.
 - (c) The strong protecting the weak - This is another dynamic that could be role played effectively. Scenes involving Lennie and George from *Of Mice and Men* could be effective.
 - (d) A scapegoat - This is a poignant group dynamic focused on in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*. After reading or viewing *Bang The Drum Slowly* have students consider the ways in which Bruce served as a scapegoat for the teams' anxieties and tensions. Then ask students to create an original scene in which one person is the scapegoat.

Follow up questions to think about: How do group dynamics evolve? In which kind of group interactions do you feel safest? How did individuals communicate with one another in the role plays given the group dynamics? Have students formulate a list of other group dynamics they've seen or experienced, such as Good vs. evil, or Us vs. them. Have them consider what purpose do group dynamics serve in our own social groups and in society as a whole? Encourage students to identify the group relationships they encounter in reading or viewing *Bang The Drum Slowly*.

2. To add a twist to this activity divide students into groups and on a slip of paper assign each group a dynamic to communicate in its role play. Don't share this information with other groups. As each group finishes performing its role play have students observing guess the

dynamic that the performers were trying to communicate. What were the cues that helped identify the dynamic? How did physicality and language used make the dynamic clear?

3. There are many interesting acting exercises to help students understand the importance of achieving and maintaining high (and sometimes low) status in our everyday experiences. Start with the following simple dialogue and ask students to think of their own who, where, why and what individually. The students do not need to concur on these answers before they create their scene.

Hello.
Hello.
Been waiting long?
Ages.

The objective of this activity is to obtain and hold high status or low status. Students observing should attempt to judge who wins. Elements to consider include eye contact, body stance, rhythms, movement, and vocal quality. Discuss why someone would want to attain lower status than someone else.

Class and Class systems

Following the group dynamic activity, encourage students to think about different groups or classes in society. Have students identify some of the class systems in this country. Record their responses on the board, creating a column for each mentioned. Have students brainstorm about different characteristics that place persons into given categories. Next have the students identify attitudes that people from each social class have about people from another class. Record the attitudes held about a class in the column of that class.

Have students in groups do the same for your school. Identify some classes in your school (these might be thought of in terms of cliques or social classes groups) and list characteristics that place students into the various class categories (students may consider status, grades, behavior, dress.)

Ask students to examine the attitudes that different groups hold towards each other - the dynamics between groups. Have each group report its findings in class. Hold a general discussion of the inaccuracies of the ascription of characteristics to each class and of the dangers of labeling. Have students consider mobility from one class to the next. Encourage students to draw conclusions about the fairness and ramifications of the class systems.

Finally, after reading or viewing *Bang The Drum Slowly*, have students utilize the information gained from above discussions and frame the class structure represented by the characters in the play.

**QUESTION AND ANSWER
BREAKDOWN OF ACTION OF
*DEAD END***

1. What does the title of the play *Dead End* symbolize?
2. Where does the action of the play take place? What inferences can be made about its characters from the setting?
3. Why are the East River Terrace tenants upset as they leave their apartment building?
4. What street games do the boys play? How are these activities similar/different from the games of urban youth today?
5. Which one of the boys appears to be the leader of the gang?
6. What does the nickname T.B. signify? Gimpty?
7. Describe how do the boys initiate Milty into the gang?
8. What is Tommy's relationship to Drina?
9. Why has Baby-face Martin returned to New York?
10. What errand does Milty agree to run for Martin?
11. Discuss Gimpty and Drina's relationship. What do you learn from their conversation about Tommy?
12. What has Gimpty dreamed of building? What obstacle is in his way?
13. What does Gimpty confess about his feelings for Kay? What is Kay's reaction?
14. Discuss the realities of Kay's relationship with Hilton. How does she defend this relationship?
What is she willing to live without? What determines her position?
15. Describe Martin's strategy for fighting the Second Avenue gang. What is his philosophy for winning? How does Tommy react to this idea? How does Gimpty react?
16. What does Gimpty mean when he remarks to Kay, A New York with its famous skyline.. Its Empire State, the biggest Goddamned building in the world. The biggest tombstone in the world!@
17. How does Mrs. Martin greet her son at their reunion? Explain why. How does Martin react?
18. What does Griswald accuse Tommy of stealing? Describe the violence that surrounds Tommy's escape. In what manner does Griswald react to Gimpty's offer of help?
19. In a conversation with Gimpty, what action does Drina propose to take as a possible solution for Tommy's welfare? What is she really hoping will happen?
20. Why doesn't Francey want to leave with Martin? How does Martin respond to Francey?
21. What motivates Gimpty's action at the end of Act 2?
22. What are *mickeys*?
23. What is Drina's attitude toward the police? Discuss her fears for Tommy.
24. Why does Tommy decide to reveal himself to Mulligan?
25. Discuss Gimpty's arguments against reform school? What impact has reform school made on the kids in the gang?

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Often, when a director chooses a play to direct, he or she does so with a "vision" for the play. The director might wish to give the audience beautiful visual images, or raise questions about human relationships, or address social or political concerns. Can you describe Nicholas Martin's vision for the Huntington production of *Dead End*? Do you agree with his interpretation? If you were selected as a director, how might you choose to direct this play? What would you emphasize? What would you de-emphasize?

Group Roles

1. Initiator - proposes ideas and goals, suggests procedures, defines the problem and initiates conversation.
2. Clarifier - interprets terms for the group; clears up misunderstandings.
3. Harmonizer - attempts to reconcile differences; reduces tensions, explores both sides of the issue.
4. Gatekeeper - helps others into the discussion; keeps communication channels open between people.
5. Aggressor - deflates opinions of others; attacks group attitudes as a whole; unwilling participant.
6. Blocker - disagrees with the opinions of others; sees the negative aspects of the problem; fails to see other viewpoints.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

You are about to observe a group discussion. Decide who is playing each role described above and fill it in the space provided.

You are to be a member of a discussion group. You are to assume # ____ above. Before you begin, choose a controversial topic or discuss with the other group members in the hall.

Dennis (Spit): It's like Nick says, there are 44 different characters in *Dead End*, which means 44 living, breathing lives onstage. You could ask any actor what *Dead End* is about, and they would tell it in a different way. You could ask the French governess, and she could start off by saying, it's about this governess . . .

Reflect on and describe how characters in the play represent different solutions' or reactions to poverty and place. Gimpy, Baby Face, Tommy, Drina, Kay and Francey.

Are there connections between the *Dead End* kids and kids today. What are the similarities in how which group was/is treated. Can you personally draw parallels? If you see similarities describe them, and what you think has remained the same in social conditions and society. If you don't see similarities describe the differences and what you think has changed in conditions or society?

ACTIVITIES

Warm Up Activities

The following introductory exercises are excerpted from the International Schools Theatre Association publication *Drama and the Active Study of Literature* by Tim Williams.

! Five Minute Performances

1. Arrange the class in small groups. Tell each group it is going to have to present the story of the play in exactly five minutes. The students can use whatever methods seem appropriate -- action, prose narration, mime, movement, song, background music, pictures or whatever. Point out that each group must select the most important features, events, and purposes of the play. Send the groups away for a class to discuss and practice. At the next lesson have them perform their five minute versions to the rest of the class, and then compare versions in terms of what was missing, interesting, important, surprising, in common, and emphasized. Discuss why the versions may have differed.

! Still Life

1. This exercise is especially useful if you're trying to talk about relationships between characters. Take a willing student and ask him or her to stand in front of the class. Get the student to stand in a pose which he or she thinks is in some way characteristic of one of the characters -- it could be kneeling and supplicant, or head bowed and despairing, or poking a nose into someone else's affairs, or looking behind or ahead, or... The student will look no doubt hopelessly bemused and embarrassed to begin; but get the rest of the class to make suggestions, either by saying something or by simply coming and moving the student to what seems a better position without speaking. This latter point is quite important. Add another student character to the tableau. The way that the second student stands in relationship to the first person is significant. He or she may be turning away or towards the other, be spurning or supporting, an enemy or a friend, or ambivalent or unrelated in any sense (and note that it is often a revelation to students that characters may not meet or know what the reader knows).