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*This Teacher Curriculum Guide
For*

HEDDA GABLER

by Henrik Ibsen

A new version by Jon Robin Baitz



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Huntington Theatre Company*

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ABOUT THIS CURRICULUM

This curriculum guide has been developed for use in conjunction with the Literary guide for the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen. The guide has also been connected to the Massachusetts State Learning Standards - Grades 6-12 for Language, Literature and Composition and the Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework Theatre and Connections Strands (see Addenda). **We recommend that teachers read the literary guide for *Hedda Gabler* 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.

Learning Standards - 1,2,3

Objectives provide teachers with measurable goals.

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

Learning Standards - 1,2,3,8,9,7,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25

Question & Answer Breakdown of the Action of *Hedda Gabler* helps students assess the main points of the play. *Learning Standards - 1,2,9*

Critical Viewing and Reading helps students to develop specific skills by encouraging them to focus on particular elements of the play.

Learning Standards - 1,2,3,8,9,11,24,25

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.

Learning Standards - 1,2,3,8,9,11,24,25

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

Learning Standards - 1,2,3,8,9,10,11,12,13,15,16,17,18,21,22,23,24,25

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

Learning Standards - 1,2,3,5,8,9,10,11,12,13,15,17,18,19,21,22,23,24,25

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

Learning Standards - 1,2,9,15

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

Learning Standards - 1,2,9,15 *Theatre Standards and Connection Strands*

Quotations allows students to approach relevant thoughts from the script on the themes of the play.

Learning Standards - 1,2,3,5,8,9,10,11,12,13,15,17,18,19,21,22,23,24,25

Scene from Rehearsal Script of *Hedda Gabler* to analyze.

Learning Standards - 2,9,15

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

Addenda Massachusetts State Learning Standards - Grades 6-12 Language, Literature & Composition
Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework Theatre & Connections Strands

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Because many students have not had the opportunity to view live theatre, we are including an audience etiquette section in this curriculum guide. **Teachers, please spend some time on this subject since it will greatly enhance your students' experience at the theatre.**

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?
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?



Unlike at a movie theatre, no food, gum or beverages are allowed at a Huntington Theatre Company performance. Book bags should be left at school or on the school bus. Beepers, cameras, flashlights, laser lights, walk-men, and cell phones are also not allowed in the theatre. Hats must be removed.

The acoustics in the theatre are such that whispers in the balcony can be heard as clearly on the stage as the actors' voices are heard in the balcony. **Audience members should refrain from talking during the performance.**

THANK YOU!

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

☞ identify central themes and issues in *Hedda Gabler* including:

- individual identity vs. society's conformity
- women's role in a masculine world
- the struggle for self-realization
- the conflict between ideals and action

☞ identify personal, gender and social conflicts of their own while coming to understand those of the characters in *Hedda Gabler*

☞ relate themes and issues in *Hedda Gabler* to their own lives

☞ familiarize themselves with Ibsen's contributions to the development of the modern theatre

☞ understand the political, social and cultural contexts of the play's themes and issues

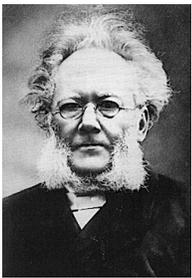
☞ participate in hands-on arts activities, including acting and visual arts

☞ evaluate the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Hedda Gabler*.

PREPARATION

INTRODUCTION

Hedda Gabler written by Henrik Ibsen and presented through a new version by Jon Robin Baitz is a masterpiece of the modern theatre, a powerful drama about a proud and complex woman searching for passion and meaning in her life. First performed in 1891, *Hedda Gabler* is a play with a female protagonist who is a difficult character to know; Hedda revels in contradictions, poses and postures to



amuse, confuse, and sometimes frighten. The character of Hedda, with her wiles and stratagem, her cruelty and her charm, her cowardice and her cunning, has always been at the center of our fascination with Ibsen's play. While perhaps not as shocking for today's audiences, *Hedda Gabler* still exposes the universality of each

individual's search for personal identity. For young audiences especially, the questions which appear to haunt Hedda's existence will resonate clearly. In what ways does society try to stop and limit us? How much of our lives can we truly expect to control? Is there a point of no return which prevents us from fulfilling our destiny?

THE WORK OF HENRIK IBSEN

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) wrote, "in these times every work of creative writing should attempt to move the frontier markers." Because of the immense influence that Ibsen's work has exerted in the century since he lived, he is generally considered one of the major "movers" in the development of dramatic literature. He has been called the father of modern drama, the creator of a new realism, and the inventor of a theatre of ideas.

Divide your class into four groups and have them research facets of Ibsen's life and work. What influences can your students cite that contributed to Ibsen's

development as a playwright? How has he been influenced by his personal experience, his family, religion, culture, etc? Where specifically are these influences reflected his plays?

In addition to reference material, each group of students should consider the following social issues of Ibsen's time:

society
marriage

family

codes of sexual and ethical behavior

Ask students to choose a play by Ibsen that matches an issue above, i.e. *An Enemy of the People* - social issues, *Ghosts* - codes of sexual and ethical behavior, *A Doll's House* - marriage. If there isn't enough time for reading the entire play, help your students locate a synopsis and character outline. Invite students to bring in a selection of scenes from several of Ibsen's plays. Also, have your class read the scene from *Hedda Gabler* found in this curriculum guide. Have them compare characters, themes and conflicts.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN NORWAY

"I must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for women's rights. I am not even quite sure what women's rights really are. To me it has been a question of human rights...My task has been the portrayal of human beings." From Ibsen's speech to the Norwegian Society of Women's Rights (1898).

What was the status of women in Norwegian society during the 19th century? What is their status today? Have students research (via the Internet) the history of women's liberation in Norway and create a time-line of significant events and contributions. Ask them to include the following individuals in their report:

Anne Lise Ryel

Grete Berget

Camilla Collett

Hang the completed time line up in the classroom so that the class can refer to it while contributing to study *Hedda Gabler*.

What is the significance of the **Gender Equality Ombud** in Norwegian society?

Organize a debate in which students argue the roles and issues of gender equality for men as well as for women.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENT IN THE MODERN THEATRE

Ibsen was a leading proponent of the realistic movement in the modern theatre which was a response to the Romantic period of literature and the melodramas and “mechanical” farces of mid-late nineteenth century theatre. One of the basic concepts of realism is that environment shapes a person’s behavior.

Environments are fascinating. They contain so much to connect with, to ponder and wonder about.

1. Have students draw a floor plan of their bedroom, including every detail in the room, e.g. what is contained on their dresser, what hangs on the walls, etc. Have them make a list of everything that they can recall in the room. Ask them to consider what information such a list provides about them personally. Finally, have them write an essay explaining how their bedroom reflects them and choose a musical selection that supports their choice. Have the students share their floor plan, essay and song/musical piece with the rest of the class or in small groups.
2. After students have seen HTC’s production of *Hedda Gabler*, suggest that they return to this exercise and make a list of everything that they imagine may be in Hedda’s bedroom. (Note: Ibsen never intended for the audience to see that room as it was never written in the script.)
3. The following are two improvisational exercises for further exploration of this

topic from *The Craftsmen of Dionysis* by Jerome Rockwood.

a) Assign a specific environment to a pair of student actors. The students are to create their own situation. The environment is to be fully justified; that is, it must be an integral, organic part of the scene to be improvised. The environment must play a vital role, almost like that of another actor. To have an argument which could take place anywhere is not using the environment. The scene must be such that it could not possibly happen anywhere but in the designated moment. Consider the following possibilities:

Locked museum at night	Lighthouse
Top of the Empire State Building	Space ship
Restaurant in a foreign country	Archeological dig

b) Designate an environment and assign two student actors to create a scene in which one of them is at ease in this particular place and the other is uncomfortable. This will make both individuals keenly aware of all those things in the environment which work on a person – either things which he or she can comfortably use or things which make the character ill-at ease. This dichotomy of feeling can be found in a number of scenes in *Hedda Gabler*. Remind students to look for such scenes when they see the play.

IS HEDDA HORRIBLE?

Many critics, whether European, British, or American, were horrified by *Hedda Gabler*. A Norwegian critic called her a “monster created by the author in the form of a woman who has no counterpart in the real world.” Do you know someone like her who is dangerous to be involved with, but interesting to watch? What fascinates us about destructive and manipulative characters in literature,

movies and television shows? Remember Hedda is complex, not easy to understand; she has so many “faces.” Have students read the synopsis of the play (found in the **Literary Guide**) and have them agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Hedda is predatory and selfish. She sees others merely as a way to get what she wants. If she can't have it, she wants to destroy it.
- Hedda is empty. She has no life of her own so she chooses to live others' lives either through vicarious substitution or by exercising power over them.
- Hedda has little emotional capacity. She has spent so many years trying to conform to her father's wishes and to society's conventions that she has no idea who she is or how she really feels about things.
- Hedda is dominated by the past. You can imagine from her upbringing that her father wanted a boy.
- Hedda is trapped by society. She'd like to live a daring, creative life but is afraid of society's condemnation.
- Hedda is a coward. She's afraid of acting out her inner desires because she has no confidence in herself.
- Hedda is attracted to death. Her favorite toys are her father's pistols. Her attraction to an honorable death and to suicide may have come from the combination of military tradition with popular 19th century Romantic ideas about love and death.

After students have seen the Huntington's production, return to the above statements in a “talk show” format. Invite students to become Aunt Julia, Thea Elvsted, George Tesman, Eilert Lovborg and Judge Brack and allow them to argue the dimensions of Hedda's personality in character.

INTRODUCING THE ISSUES

Individual Identity vs. Society's Conformity

As a play, *Hedda Gabler* describes a society that “sacrifices to itself freedom and individual expression.” It opposes the true self-expression of Hedda (as a woman) and Lovborg (as a creative spirit). It approves of Aunt Julia’s mothering, self-sacrifice and Tesman’s mediocrity, and elevates to positions of authority men like Judge Brack, a manipulator who cares little for the law and less for people.

1. Invite students to create a collage that discloses their own individual identity. Encourage them to use clippings from magazines, newspapers, poster, or any visual media that would shape and reinforce their “self-portrait.” Ask them to write an essay that explains their collage. Have them consider such questions as:

What does this collage tell the viewer about you?

What do individual pieces of your collage represent?

What made you pick those particular images?

Which do you consider “positive” and which “negative”?

Why do you think we use the words, “positive” and “negative” when we talk about views of ourselves and others?

What do you think has influenced the image you have of yourself?

2. Have students refer to the *Guide to 19th Century Behavior and Etiquette* found in the **Literary Guide**. Ask them to brainstorm and compare the ways in which society pressured individuals to behave in certain ways during the 19th century and the decades of the 20th century. Continue with a general discussion that includes a definition of “conformity.” Record students ideas on the board.

a) Next have your class break into groups to share specific information regarding pressures of conformity that the members of the group have

experienced personally. Have students think in terms of parental expectations, boy-girl relationships, peer pressures, fashion, academic demands, sports competition, the internet and the media. Have each group share three instances from their group discussion.

Encourage students to identify and relate their cultural pressures to conform and those expectations concerning their own individual expression. Compare their answers to the pressures and expectations presented by the characters in *Hedda Gabler*.



b) Students might enjoy creating role playing situations that explore this idea of cultural conformity more deeply. For such role playing, they might use the ideas that were recorded on the board. Such situations could include - getting good grades so that you can get into college, interracial dating or being pressured to dress and behave in certain ways.

Women's Role in a Masculine World

Hedda seems to be caught in a male image that she has of herself. She was raised with great freedoms more typical of males of the period, including experience with horsemanship and guns. She has been granted masculine leisure and tastes, but she can never be the son that General Gabler would have wanted.

Have students refer to the *Guide to 19th Century Behavior and Etiquette* found in the **Literary Guide** again. From research discovered on etiquette and behavior, have students discuss and compare the inequalities in societal expectations and permissible freedoms between the sexes during Hedda Gabler's time and the present day. In today's society, women have gained many freedoms unimaginable in Hedda's time. Ask students, both male and female, to write a letter to a close friend or a journal entry in the character of Hedda Gabler as a young woman discussing her dreams, goals and possible frustrations.

The Struggle for Self-realization

To Ibsen, self-knowledge was very important. He believed that one shouldn't be forced into a mold by gender, religion, society, or family, nor drift aimlessly through life. Identifying your own uniqueness and special needs is a preliminary to a productive life. Although Hedda is aware of her inner conflicts, it can be argued that she never finds a true self. Perhaps she finds two selves that cannot be reconciled.

Have students work in pairs to present a role-playing scenario based on their own conflicts with their public and private images. Have them consider the variety of contradictions highlighted by different attitudes and behavior that they assume at school, home, work and in their neighborhood. Their different personas might even have different vocabularies, different speech patterns, or even different clothes for their respective environments. Allow each pair to mirror their scene from the perspective of the outside persona and the true inner self.

Suicide

According to critic Martin Esslin, "Hedda Gabler ultimately constitutes a plea to allow women to develop their creativeness." Do you agree with this statement? Does Hedda evolve during this play? Or is it Ibsen's intention not to change Hedda but to watch fate bring about the logical conclusion to her personality and actions. What do you think? What makes Hedda the way she is? Is there any way she could have been saved?

Have student teams look up statistics on suicide in this country. It exchanges second and third place with homicide in the leading causes of death among young people. Ask students to consider the following questions: What are some of the causes of suicide? How

can people contemplating suicide be helped? Have you or anyone you know been affected by the suicide of a loved one? How did you feel? What are some of the views on suicide in other cultures? How did they develop?

Teacher's Note: *Your local Mental Health Association will have pamphlets on teenage suicide. Call them in advance of this activity to order enough for your class. Pass them out to the teams in order to help them begin discussions. Invite someone from your local Mental Health Association or the Samaritans Organization to come and talk to you your class.*

QUESTION AND ANSWER BREAKDOWN OF HEDDA GABLER

1. What do Aunt Julia and Berta discuss in the opening dialogue of the play? Does their conversation favor or frown upon Hedda?
2. What background information (the exposition) do they establish?
3. Where have Tesman and Hedda been for the last six months?
4. What do you think Aunt Julia wants to know when she asks Tesman if he has anything "special" to tell her?
5. Who is Judge Brack?
6. What financial support has Aunt Julia secured for her nephew?
7. How does Aunt Julia foreshadow information about a man named Eilert Lovborg?
8. What is the first indication that there may be some tension between Hedda, Tesman, and Aunt Julia?
9. Why does Hedda recoil from Aunt Julia's touch?
10. Who is Mrs. Thea Elvsted and why is she so flustered? What is her relationship to Eilert Lovborg?
11. What information does Hedda attempt to draw out of Mrs. Elvsted?
12. Can you guess who the woman from Lovborg's past is?

13. What complication does Brack propose that may undermine Tesman's academic appointment?
14. What unusual activity opens Act II?
15. Do Hedda and Brack share an intimate history? What makes you think so, or not, based on their extended dialogue?
16. Why does Hedda find "respectable poverty" hugely problematic?
17. What is Hedda's great "aptitude" in the world?
18. Why does Hedda always refer to her husband as Tesman?
19. What was Lovborg's objective in writing his first book?
20. Why, do you imagine, is Hedda eager to be alone with Mrs. Elvsted and Lovborg, instead of accompanying her husband to Brack's house?
21. Why does Lovborg keep repeating the name Hedda Gabler?
22. What kind of relationship did Lovborg and Hedda have? Do they want the same things from each other?
23. Do you find it surprising that Hedda admits to being "frightened of scandal" and being "a terrible coward?"
24. What do you think was Hedda's "worst cowardice" with Lovborg?
25. Why does Hedda insist that Mrs. Elvsted and Lovborg drink the punch?
26. What secret fear of Mrs. Elvsted does Hedda reveal to Lovborg? Why does

Hedda disclose this?

27. Why is Hedda obsessed with Mrs. Elvsted's hair?

28. What image does Hedda have in mind when she imagines seeing Lovborg "with vine leaves in his hair?" What does she want to see happen?

29. What does Mrs. Elvsted fear happened at the "stag party?" Did it?

30. What happened to Lovborg's manuscript?

31. Why won't Hedda go with Tesman to his dying Aunt's house?

32. Who is Madame Diana, and what is her occupation, in addition to being a singer?

33. What happened to Lovborg, following the evening at Brack's house?

34. When Brack confides to Hedda, she realizes that "a triangle has to be fortified and defended," what does that symbol mean? How does Lovborg threaten Brack's future relationship with Hedda?

35. How is Lovborg's manuscript perceived to be like his and Mrs. Elvsted's child?

36. Why doesn't Lovborg tell Mrs. Elvsted the truth about the missing manuscript?

37. The destruction of the manuscript could be viewed as a multi-faceted act of revenge. Discuss.

38. Why does Hedda smile when she tells Tesman that she burned the manuscript for him?

39. Why does Tesman suddenly become so happy? What untold secret, hinted at by Aunt Julia at the beginning of the play, does he think he's discovered?

40. Brack reveals that Lovborg has shot himself. Why does Hedda find that action so "beautiful?"

41. For their own personal reasons, Mrs. Elvsted and Tesman decide, as a team, to piece together Lovborg's manuscript. How is this decision dramatically ironic in the play?

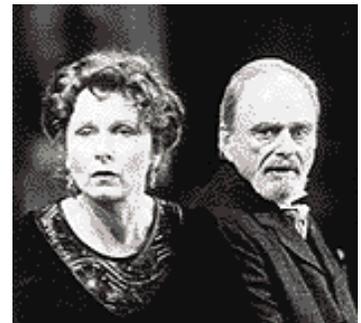
42. In what ways could Hedda be implicated in Lovborg's death?

43. Why does the manner of Lovborg's death distress Hedda so?

44. How does Brack plan to blackmail Hedda?

45. What is the significance of Hedda shooting herself in the temple?

46. How is Brack's last line of the play a social commentary on the confinement Hedda felt in the world?



CRITICAL VIEWING AND READING

THE ART OF TRANSLATION

In viewing/reading *Hedda Gabler* you are not simply involved in a drama by Henrik Ibsen. You are also viewing/reading the work of a skilled translator who has tried to convey the meaning of Ibsen's Norwegian in lively English prose. Many foreign languages have several possible English equivalents, and some words may have no English equivalents. Idioms or expressions specific to a particular language cannot be translated literally, although most languages probably do have an equivalent figurative expression that conveys the same meaning. Here are two separate translations of some lines of dialogue from *Hedda Gabler*. The first lines of dialogue were translated by Edmund Gasse and William Archer; the second by Rolf Fjelds. The third are from the new version of *Hedda Gabler* which was not translated by Jon Robin Baitz, but adapted from a translated version of the play. It is this new version that is being performed at the Huntington Theatre Company. Read each set of lines aloud and discuss how they differ in diction, naturalness of language, rhythm, and ultimate meaning. Which version do you prefer and why?

LOVBORG

1. *Yes, Hedda, and when I made my confessions to you - told you about myself, things that at that time no one else knew! There I would sit and tell you of my escapades - my days and nights of devilment. Oh, Hedda - what was the power in you that forced me to confess these things?*
2. *Yes, Hedda - and the confessions I used to make - telling you things about myself that no one else knew of. About the way I'd go out, the drinking, the madness that went on day and night for days at a time. Ah, what was it in you, Hedda, that made me tell you such things?*

3. *And me pouring my heart out to you, confessing things about myself that nobody else knew! About how I'd go out drinking, insane, degrading myself in any way I could, day after day, for weeks at a time – what was it, Hedda, that made me tell you so much?*

1.

HEDDA

And there he was found!

BRACK

Yes, there. With a pistol in his pocket discharged. The ball had lodged in a vital part.

HEDDA

In the breast - yes.

BRACK

No - in the bowels.

2.

HEDDA

Then there - that's where they found him..

BRACK

Yes, there. With a discharged pistol in his pocket. The bullet had wounded him fatally.

HEDDA

In the chest - yes.

BRACK

No, in the stomach - more or less.

3.

HEDDA

And that's where he did it?

BRACK

Yes. The pistol in his breast pocket. One round discharged. The bullet-wound was absolutely horrible.

HEDDA

Yes. A bullet in the chest.

BRACK

Much lower, actually. Below the stomach.

1.

HEDDA

So, I am in your power, Judge Brack. You have me at your beck and call, from this time forward.

BRACK

Dearest Hedda - believe me - I shall not abuse my advantage.

HEDDA

I am in your power not the less. Subject to your will and your demands. A slave, a slave then! No, I cannot endure the thought of that! Never!

2.

HEDDA

So, I'm in your power, Judge. You have your hold on me from now on.

BRACK

My dearest Hedda - believe me - I won't abuse my position.

HEDDA

All the same, I'm in your power. Tied to your will.

3.

HEDDA

So, in other words - I'm in your power. From now on.

BRACK

Dearest Hedda - believe me - I never abuse my power.

HEDDA

All the same. I'm in your power. Dependant on your will. Essentially - your prisoner. Not free! Still! I can't do it, I just can't stand it.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Note to teachers: You might assign various groups questions from this section to focus on while attending a performance of the play. After your class sees *Hedda Gabler* in performance, these students might lead class discussion on their topic.

1. Who would you say is the protagonist in *Hedda Gabler*? Why do you think so? Cite specifics from the play to support your position.
2. Hedda is first pictured, by Aunt Julia, as a woman who used to gallop down the road with “the General” in “that long, black cape – that giant feather in her hat.” What is your first impression of Hedda, based on this description?
3. Why does Hedda use the excuse of the leaves she notices (shortly after her first entrance) as “so yellow” and “so withered” to describe her state of mind?
4. A glimpse of the social climate of the play is suggested in Act II when Tesman fears it wouldn’t be “quite proper” for Hedda to entertain Mr. Lovborg alone. Yet Tesman quite easily suggests that Brack could entertain Hedda at the end of the play, when Tesman plans to work on the lost manuscript with Mrs. Elvsted. What are some of the “unwritten” rules, or accepted practices of that society?
5. *Hedda Gabler* is a play loaded with innuendo, double meanings and suggestive subtext. Can you find examples when characters just open the door to their desires, without specifically inviting other characters to respond?
6. Conflicting views of death are frequently mentioned in this play. How do Hedda and Aunt Julia’s perspectives of a “beautiful” death differ?
7. Hedda is trapped by society’s expectations and terrified of scandal. What do

you think were the expectations she had for herself? Why was it so difficult for her to accept her life? Why is she so unhappy in the choice she has made to marry? Do you think she would have experienced the same conflict today? Why or why not?

8. Use questions raised in the post-show discussion with the actors to form the basis for class discussions. (If you do not stay for the post-show talk, use questions from the interview with actress Kate Burton found in the **Literary Guide**. For example: Do we know someone like Hedda? Why do we tolerate someone who is apparently so manipulative and self-serving? How or why do we give this power?) You might energize the discussions by using the "Harvard Debate" technique. Frame questions so that they have two answers. Students will initially place themselves on one side of the room or another based on the answer they feel is most valid for them. When they hear something that changes their mind, they move to the other side. You may find that they even move as they are debating the question—changing their minds in mid-thought.

9. Ideally, a clear **point of view** should inform and permeate every aspect of a theatrical production, helping to create in each play a truthful world which spectators can enter and inhabit with full belief. After your students have viewed the play, have them discuss Nicholas Martin's point of view for *Hedda Gabler*. Ask your students for specific examples of point of view in the acting and design of HTC's production. Are there any ways that these elements failed in this effort? Was the interpretive point of view the same as the authorial one?

10. Playwright Henrik Ibsen knew that inner conflict was a common human problem. Have you ever known what you should do in a situation, but didn't do it? And why not? How did this make you feel?

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

1. Jon Robin Baitz's new version of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* was first produced in 1999 at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles and featured Annette Bening. It was then restaged for the 2000 summer season at the Bay St. Theatre and the Williamstown Theatre Festival with the Huntington Theatre Company's Artistic Director Nicholas Martin directing Kate Burton as Hedda. Ask students to research these productions via the internet or contact the marketing departments of the theatres and request educational and marketing materials for their production. Also, have students compare and contrast what reviews report about the previous productions. After seeing the Huntington production (with the same director and most of the cast from Williamstown), they should include it in their analysis.
2. Assign students to become dramaturgs for a production of *Hedda Gabler*, or a member of a team researching production context for the director and actors, and name the materials that they would provide at the first rehearsal (e.g., information on Ibsen, production history, critical comments, etc). What images, photographic or otherwise, would they display in the rehearsal hall? Ask students to bring in some of these pictures and hang them around the classroom.
3. Have students discuss French playwright Augustin Eugene Scribe and the playwriting structure known as the *piece bien faite*. Ask them to describe this form, the characters and the dramatic situations in these plays. What type of audience were these plays intended for?
4. A review of *Hedda Gabler* once stated: "She was the original chick with a gun. Before Jackie Brown, before *la Femme Nikita*, even before Bonnie Parker (Bonnie & Clyde), there was Hedda Gabler." Ask students if they agree. What impact did these women in film have on society? What other women (real and fictional) may be seen as Hedda Gablers? Why?

5. Author James Joyce said, "Ibsen's knowledge of humanity is nowhere more obvious than in his portrayal of women." Looking at *Hedda Gabler* and other work by Ibsen, have students find evidence to support Joyce's point of view.
6. Invite students to become detectives and, in character, have them interview other students portraying the characters of Judge Brack, George Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted after Hedda's death. Why do each of them think that she did it? Do any of these characters blame themselves?
7. Ibsen's plays shocked some of the audience members of his day. In *A Doll's House*, Nora walks out on her husband. Some critics refer to Hedda's final act as "the shot heard 'round the world'." Ask your students what they think the cause of the shock might have been. Can audiences still be shocked by these actions?
8. *Hedda Gabler* is one of the most sought after roles in the history of theatre. Hedda isn't one of the more noble, selfless or admirable of women – or is she? Have students research the production history of the play and find out what famous actresses have played Hedda. Ask students why they think so many women would seek to play this character.
9. A question that troubles some people is why Hedda agrees to marry Tesman if she's so unhappy. Ask students to list some of the reasons why they believe that Hedda consented to marry Tesman. Why was she unable to walk out on her marriage? Are these reasons similar or different from women of today?



WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Have students write an obituary for Hedda. Then ask them to write and deliver a eulogy for her in Tesman's voice.
2. Ask students to write an essay analyzing a central theme presented in *Hedda Gabler*: purposeful existence, meaningful acts of self-expression, fate, hypocrisy, etc.
3. Have students write a critical examination of the performance by one of the actors in the Huntington production of the play. Consider how well the chosen character you was portrayed through the actor's use of voice, body language, mannerisms (especially a "signature" gesture), and movement. Have them consider also how well the actor "played off" the other performers. Was this a solo performance or was this actor a team player? Suggest that students give examples for each of their criticisms. Remind them that being critical does not mean only being negative; be sure that they include both things they believe were done well and those they think were not done so well.
4. Divide the class into small groups of students and ask them to write sequels to the play. Have them consider what they think will happen to Tesman, Brack, Thea and Aunt Julia? How has each character's journey been influenced by the people and events around them? Encourage students to share, discuss, revise, and perform their plays.
5. Often, when people near to us die, we wish that we could have shared certain thoughts with them. Ask students to write a journal entry in which one of the surviving characters records his/her thoughts on his/her relationship with Hedda, on Hedda's death, his/her future without Hedda, etc. What do they think Tesman or Brack would write about Hedda after her death? And what of Lovborg? What might Thea write?

6. All of the characters in *Hedda Gabler* have guilty secrets and experiences they wish to keep private. Some secrets are revealed and some are not. Have students write a monologue for one of the characters that explores such a secret. Why does this character desire to keep information from the others? Is there one character in particular s/he would not want to discover his/her secret? Why?

7. Use a word web to have students create word choices for poems. Ask them to write the given word in the center of their page, along with a simple definition of the word. (Suggested words/phrases for themes in *Hedda Gabler*: **secrets, freedom, status, cowardice, manipulation, selflessness, etc.**) Then have them write the words and phrases that come to mind by association in their web: radiating outward from their central word. Once their web is complete, have students write their poem in whatever meter they choose. Another strategy for creating word choices in preparation to writing poetry is to have students write their words and phrases on small cards or pieces of paper (post-it notes work well for this). They can then use these words in the same manner as do the commercial "refrigerator magnet" words for writing poems. They'll need to add the extra words: articles and prepositions (a, an, the, on, to, etc.) and word endings (ly, ed, s, es, etc.)

8. Ask students to write a review of the HTC production of *Hedda Gabler*. Have it published in the school paper. Be sure to send us a copy.

9. What is so fascinating about *Hedda Gabler's* character that Ibsen felt compelled to write an entire play about her? Have students free write to defend or argue that Hedda:

has superior intelligence, is at war with inner forces that even she can not understand,
is both predator and prey,
feels intensely but cannot express anything except negative words and actions,

*loves freedom but is afraid to act,
is female, yet hates femininity,
wants to be with men but threatens to shoot them if they want too
much from her,
hates weak people and is herself a coward.*

QUESTIONS FOR AFTER ATTENDING A PERFORMANCE OF THE PLAY

Above the stage of the Huntington Theatre there is an inscription that states: "To hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature." There is also an inscription in the theatre's entryway that says "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays many parts." From what plays are these lines? What do you think they mean? Why do you think the original owners of the theatre had these quotations inscribed? With these quotations in mind, consider the following questions while watching a performance of *Hedda Gabler*.

About the Play and Production

A. What was your overall reaction? Were you moved? Shocked? Empathetic? Explain your reactions. How was the play structured? Did it build to a single climax? Was it episodic? Did this structure help or hinder your understanding of the play? Was the dialogue interesting? Appropriate? Were you aware of imagery and symbolism during the course of the play?

B. Was the pace and tempo of the production effective and appropriate?

About the Characters

A. Did the characters touch you personally in some ways? Did you care about them?

B. Were the characters three-dimensional and believable?

C. Were the motivations of the characters clear?

D. What qualities were revealed by the actions and speech of the characters?

E. Did the characters change/develop/undergo transformation during the course of the play?

F. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the play?

About the Set

A. Was the set usable and workable?

B. Was the set compatible with the production as a whole? Were there any features of the set that distracted from the action of the play?

C. Did the design reflect the themes, type and style of play as written by the author?

D. Were the artistic qualities of unity, balance, line, texture, mass and color used effectively?

E. Did the set provide appropriate environment and atmosphere?

F. Was the set used to present any symbolic images or did it simply represent the space in which the action of the play occurred? Did it contain elements of both a "realistic" and a "symbolic" approach?

About Lighting and Sound

A. Did the lighting establish mood and atmosphere? How? Was the illumination sufficient? Did the lighting harmonize with, and contribute toward, the unity of the production?

B. Were the music and sound effects appropriately conceived? Did the music set an appropriate "mood" for the play?

About Costumes/ Makeup/ Hairstyles

A. Were all of these elements correct in terms of the period fashion? Were they suitable in terms of character and storytelling for the production?

B. Did the costumes and make-up serve to illuminate the themes, type and style of the play? Did they express any particular choices of interpretations in this production?

ACTIVITIES

Warm Up Activities - In the past we have included some excellent introductory activities from the International Schools Theatre Association publication *Drama and the Active Study of Literature* by Tim Williams. We have always included them in the curriculum because they are so clear in their explanations, and are very helpful for teachers who are not accustomed to and/or are a little reticent to use theatre arts exercises in their classrooms. For those of you who have attended at least one matinee in the last seven years, you will find those exercises in any curriculum of that season. **If you are new to the Huntington Student Matinee program**, and don't have warm-up activities that you feel comfortable with, please contact Donna Glick at 266-7900, ext. 2548 and she'll fax you a copy or send you one in the mail.

- **Five Minute Performances**

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.

- **Creating Characterization**

Have each of your students choose a character from *Hedda Gabler* that he/she would like to portray. As though they were preparing for the role in rehearsal, have them ask the following questions about their characters:

- a. What do I want in the play? What is my overall objective?
- b. What is in the way of what I want in the play? What are my obstacles? Who is/are my obstacles? Does the obstacle(s) get in the way of what I want and does it change throughout the course of the play? How?
- c. Does my character change during the course of the play? What is my character's journey, or plot of transformations?
- d. What are the contradictions inherent in my character?

- **Role Playing/Improvisation**

1. Have students improvise some moment from *Hedda Gabler* and then test the effects of changing something -- tone of voice, some important trait in a character, or a vital remark. How does such a change affect the selected moment? What repercussions would such a change have on other aspects of the play? Students could improvise what happens before or after some point, or what happens after the play's end. Both these exercises help the class understand how a work of art always involves an interrupted process,

or a decision to stop what could be endlessly revised. See if the students can identify some of the writer's main points of choice or decision in their story.

2. Have each student select a line from the play that best captures the essence of a particular character. Have students present their lines and explain the reasons for their selections. After each character is completed and all the chosen lines have been read aloud and explained, discuss the rationale for choices.

3. Have students find parallels between situations in the characters' stories in *Hedda Gabler* and their own lives. Have them recall when they have been courageous, proud, angry, hurt, bitter, cruel, inspired, grateful. Can they act or portray their own emotions? Do they disguise or hide what really happened? What is difficult to portray, and why? Do you have to have had a similar experience in order to understand what is being said in a play? This is obviously a difficult and sensitive area for most adolescents to deal with, especially in the company of their peers, and it's not productive to push too hard. It's not meant to lead to a psychotherapy session, but if we believe literature to be of value, then we should be stressing the fact that it is about our own personal experiences as much as the writer's; just getting students on their feet to start playing some experience of their own involves much more commitment than almost any seated, abstract discussion.



- **Acting**

1. Define subtext and motivation in the context of performance. Using the scene from *Hedda Gabler* contained in this Curriculum Guide, have students examine the subtext or motivation of the lines and action by discussing the following questions:

- Does the character say precisely what he or she means, or does the character intentionally mislead other characters?
- Are words the character's only expression at this point in the play?
- Why does the character speak at this particular time?
- Why in this way?
- Why to this person?
- If the character is silent, why?
- Why does the character stop speaking?
- What does the character want to accomplish in the scene?
- How does the character's intention determine the character's action, tone of voice, or facial expressions?

2. Have students act out a scene from *Hedda Gabler*. Before they begin, have the students consider what experiences of the characters might be like experiences of their own, and how the characters' feelings might resemble feelings of their own. Try to have students

relate their own personal truth to specific lines of the dialogue. As students perform, have them use props and elements of costumes. Have them consider who stands where, who moves when and where, gestures, tone of voice, music, and intended emotional impact. Have students videotape their performances as a project.

3. Have each student select a line from the play that best captures the essence of a character. Have the students present their lines and then provide an explanation for their choice. After every student has presented his/her line, discuss the choices in class.

4. Actors often view their roles in terms of journeys. The way their characters change and the creative tensions between each turning point are potential building blocks for creating any given role. Ask your students to imagine that they are actors playing roles in *Hedda Gabler*. Have them trace the journey of their characters, addressing the following questions:

- What does my character want in the beginning of the play?
- How does each scene affect the “want” or objective, and how does my character change in response to the events in this particular scene?
- Is there a “pivotal scene” or moment for my character? A scene or moment in which he/she experiences a “turning point,” or transforms in such a way that he/she will never be the same again?
- Does the initial objective for my character change by the play’s end? Define what that change may be.

Students should summarize what the overall journey of their character is during the course of the entire play. How can each character’s journey be outlined?

5. Have students develop scenes around the characters and events that are made reference to by Ibsen’s play but are never actually seen on stage in *Hedda Gabler*. (For instance, Aunt Rina and Mademoiselle Diana.)

- **Visual Art**

1. Ask students to bring in a photograph from a newspaper or magazine that might suggest a character from *Hedda Gabler*. Ask the students to write or explain orally what they see in the chosen photo that suggests Hedda, Tesman, Lovborg, Brack and Thea.

2. Have each student make a collage, in the medium or media of their choice (paper, cloth, wood, metal, plastic, photographs, illustrations, words or phrases cut from print media), related to themes, moods, individual characters. Display the collages and ask the students who created them to discuss the selection and arrangement of the work.

Or, have students create a collage comparing the world of the 19th century with the 21st century. What is the visual effect of these very different outlooks?

3. Some students might design a set for a production of *Hedda Gabler* and build a model of their design. Make sure the design materials include the important functional elements of the set. Have your class compare its set designs to the Huntington Theatre Company's set design.

- **The Design Process**

1. Scenic designer Alexander Dodge and costume designer Michael Krass collaborated extensively to select a color palette for this production which reflects the world of and the characters in *Hedda Gabler*. Assign students to work in teams and design scenery and costumes which would appear harmoniously on stage. The students should pay attention to color, fabric and materials.

2. Discuss the role that Lighting Designer Kevin Adams and his work have played in the Huntington production of *Hedda Gabler*. Discuss how color, angle, and intensity helped to suggest time of day, mood, focus and action. Students should look for pictures or use watercolors and create their own pictures to illustrate these properties.

- **Music/Dance**

1. Compose and perform a musical score for *Hedda Gabler*. Make an audio or video tape of your class performance.

2. Create background music and/or sound effects to accompany scenes in the play. Or, use music and/or effects to supplement any of the role-playing activities listed above.

3. Conceive the final scene of *Hedda Gabler* between Hedda, Brack, Tessman and Thea as a movement composition without words. Select a choreographer and dancers, as well as a movement style, i.e., ballet, jazz, hip-hop, blues, or modern. Have students develop a performance together for the class. Is the group's presentation accurately reflective of the characters in this dramatic and disturbing scene?

4. The passion of many classic dramas has inspired composers to adapt these plays into operas, including Rossini's and Verdi's *Otello* (based on Shakespeare's *Othello*), three versions of Goethe's *Faust* which became the operas *Faust* by Gounod, *La Damnation de Faust* by Berlioz and *Mefistofele* by Boito, Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* (based on *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman) and Lee Hoiby's *Summer and Smoke* (based on the Tennessee Williams' play). Bring recordings of these operas to class and after listening to them, look at selected scenes from the plays that inspired them. Compare similarities and differences between the plays and their operatic adaptations with a goal of forming an opinion of the adaptability of *Hedda Gabler*.

QUOTATIONS

Teachers can use the following quotations to discuss specific scenes in *Hedda Gabler* in context, or to discuss the universal ideas of the quotations projected out of context; or they may use the quotations as springboards to role playing, essay writing, creative writing, or research.

HEDDA

“Yes. Courage. Ah! If one only had that...One could perhaps actually live.”

LOVBORG

“No. I will not compete with you for a job, Tesman. No. I only want to win over you. To be more respected, and more admired than you. In the eyes of the world.”

HEDDA

“This cheapness, this penny-pinching little world I’ve ended up in. That’s what makes life so ridiculous. So absolutely ludicrous. Because that’s what it is.”

MRS. ELVSTED

“I have no idea what I’m going to do. It’s just all...blackness...ahead...”

HEDDA

“Oh, if you had any idea how poor I am. And you’re allowed to be so rich! So rich!”

MISS TESMAN

“And the ones who were against you, and tried to block your way- have all fallen. Collapsed!”

HEDDA

“You mean- you’re leaving your marriage?...But what will people say?...How will you live?”

MISS TESMAN

“Beautiful. She is beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. God bless and keep Hedda Tesman. For George’s sake.”

TESMAN

“This is exactly what happens when you let your fantasy life run away with you!”

HEDDA

“God, what about me? I’ve been so insanely bored!”

BRACK

“People don’t do such things!”

HEDDA

“For once in my life, I would like to have some power over someone’s destiny.”

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Massachusetts State Learning Standards - Grades 6-12

Language, Literature, and Composition

- #1 Students will use agreed-upon rules for informal and formal discussions in small and large groups.
- #2 Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions and interviews in order to acquire knowledge.
- #3 Students will make oral presentations that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience, purpose, and the information to be conveyed.
- #4 Students will acquire and use correctly an advanced reading vocabulary of English words, identifying meanings through an understanding of word relationships.
- #5 Students will identify, describe, and apply knowledge of the structure of the English language and Standard English conventions for sentence structure, usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
- #6 Students will describe and analyze how oral dialects differ from each other in English, how they differ from written standard English, and what role standard American English plays in informal and formal communication.
- #7 Students will describe and analyze how the English language has developed and been influenced by other languages.
- #8 Students will decode accurately and understand new words encountered in their reading materials, drawing on a variety of strategies as needed, and then use these words accurately in speaking and writing.
- #9 Students will identify the basic facts and essential ideas in what they have read, heard, or viewed.
- #10 Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics of different genres.
- #11 Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of theme in literature and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.

- #12 Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.
- #13 Students will identify, analyze and apply knowledge of the structure, elements and meaning of nonfiction or informational material and provide evidence from the next to support their meaning.
- #14 Students will identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the structure, elements, and themes of poetry and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.
- #15 Students will identify and analyze how an author's choice of words appeals to the senses, create imagery suggests mood, and sets tone.
- #16 Students will compare and contrast similar myths and narratives from different cultures and geographic regions.
- #17 Students will interpret the meaning of literary works, nonfiction, films, and media by using different critical lenses and analytic techniques.
- #18 Students will plan and present effective dramatic readings, recitations, and performances that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience and purpose.
- #19 Students will write compositions with a clear focus, logically related ideas to develop it, and adequate detail.
- #20 Students will select and use appropriate genres, modes of reasoning, and speaking styles when writing for different audiences and rhetorical purposes.
- #21 Students will demonstrate improvement in organization, content, paragraph development, level of detail, style, tone, and word choice (diction) in their compositions after revising them.
- #22 Students will use knowledge of Standard English conventions to edit their writing.
- #23 Students will use self-generated questions, note-taking, summarizing, precis writing, and outlining to enhance learning when reading or writing.
- #24 Students will use open-ended research questions, different sources of

information, and appropriate research methods to gather information for their research projects.

#25 Students will develop and use rhetorical, logical and stylistic criteria for assessing final versions of their compositions or research projects before presenting them to varied audiences.

Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework Theatre and Connections Strands

Theatre is an art form concerned with the representation of people in time and space, their actions, and the consequences of their actions. Theatre education expands the ability to understand others and communicate through language and actions, and provides a unique opportunity for integrating the arts, linking dance, music, and visual arts elements in performance and production. Theatre includes acting, improvisation, storytelling, mime, playmaking and playwriting, directing, management, design and technical theatre, and related arts such as puppetry, film and video.

Theatre Standards:

4. **Acting.** Students will develop acting skills to portray characters who interact in improvised and scripted scenes.
5. **Reading and Writing Scripts.** Students will read, analyze, and write dramatic material.
6. **Directing.** Students will rehearse and stage dramatic works.
7. **Technical Theatre.** Students will demonstrate skills in using the basic tools, media, and techniques involved in theatrical production.
8. **Critical Response.** Students will describe and analyze their own theatrical work and the work of others using appropriate theatre vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.

Connections Strand:

9. **Purposes and Meanings in the Arts.** Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings.
10. **Roles of Artists in Communities.** Students will describe the roles of artists, patrons, cultural organizations, and arts institutions in societies of the past and present.
11. **Concepts of Style, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change.** Students will demonstrate their understanding of styles, stylistic influence, and stylistic change by identifying when and where art works were created, and by analyzing characteristic features of art works from various historical periods, cultures, and genres.
12. **Inventions, Technologies, and the Arts.** Students will describe and analyze how performing and visual artists use and have used materials, inventions, and technologies in their work.
10. **Interdisciplinary Connections.** Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering.