

TEACHER LITERARY AND CURRICULUM GUIDE SPRINGTIME FOR HENRY

By Benn Levy
Directed by Nicholas Martin

STAFF

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Background & Objectives

Springtime for Henry takes place in upper class London society in the 1930s. Henry Dewlip is a bachelor who inherited and runs his father's automobile business, but spends most of his time gambling, drinking and pursuing women. His playboy lifestyle changes abruptly when he hires a new secretary, Miss Smith, who convinces him that he needs to stop his foolish ways and become an upstanding citizen. Miss Smith dedicates herself to reforming him. Henry goes along with her plan and actually changes until he discovers something in Miss Smith's past that causes him to rethink his decision to become a better man.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Identify themes in *Springtime For Henry* including:
 - hedonism versus respectability
 - standards of behavior and morality in society
 - honesty and deception
2. Relate themes and issues of *Springtime for Henry* to their own lives.
3. Analyze the play's themes and issues within the character's cultural, social and historical context.
4. Identify elements of farce in the text of *Springtime for Henry* and consider farce as a larger genre.
5. Participate in hands_on activities to enhance understanding of the play.
6. Evaluate the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Springtime for Henry*.

Preparation for SPRINGTIME FOR HENRY

Benn Levy

Read "Benn W. Levy" (pages x).

In groups, have students research the life and the works of Benn Levy and then present their findings to the class. Suggested categories for research include, but are not limited to:

His development as a playwright

His career as a screenwriter

His work with Alfred Hitchcock and the significance of the film BLACKMAIL

His career in the military and politics and its relationship to the theatre

His relationship to Noel Coward

His marriage to Constance Cummings and their work together

The Great Depression

While *Springtime for Henry* is set in 1930s London and enjoyed a successful run in that city, it was also enormously popular in the United States during the Great Depression, becoming the hit of the 1931 New York season.

Have students explore the New Deal Network web site (<http://newdeal.feri.org>) in an effort to learn more about the Great Depression. Students should spend time looking at The Great Depression and the Arts, specifically Lesson Four, The New Deal's Federal Theatre Project. As this web site explains, "The Federal Theatre Project provides an opportunity to see how the New Deal addressed the Great Depression. It provided employment for hundreds and it established a federal government presence in the arts. Through this promotion of artistic expression the New Deal impacted the cultural life of the Depression years and contributed significantly to changes in American life during the 1930s." The web site suggests that students select a key issue from the 1930s and create a Living Newspaper play on this topic to share with an audience. During this work, have students discuss whether or not it is important for the federal government to support the arts and arts organizations, especially at a time, like the Great Depression, when resources are scarce.

KEY ISSUES

Hedonism Versus Respectability

Hedonism is defined as the pursuit of or devotion to pleasure, especially to the pleasures of the senses, while *respectability* requires an individual to maintain proper behavior or conventional conduct. In class discussion, consider if individuals in general must make a choice between the two. Would someone who practices hedonism be necessarily unrespectable? How might being a respectable person change over time? Is a hedonist's behavior likely to change with the time period or society in which she is living? Have students consider which is more gratifying to them as individuals: pleasing themselves or being considered worthy by others.

Standards of Behavior and Morality in Society

Every society creates moral standards, distinguishing between good and evil. After researching the Great Depression, have students consider what morality may have meant to a person living at that time. How might Henry Dewlip, a man living a comfortable and at times extravagant lifestyle, have been received by an audience in the 1930s? Would the audience find him despicable? Refreshing? Insulting? Humorous? What relief might Henry's story bring to an audience living in depressed conditions?

At the beginning of the play, Miss Smith is considered a moral person, disapproving of all indecent behavior. Under her influence, Henry stops his drinking, gambling, and womanizing. But when Henry discovers that Miss Smith has a scandalous past of her own, he begins to question her influence. Miss Smith claims that the murder of her husband was not a crime, but rather an act of "public service," which the judge and jury recognized as such. Why might an

individual or community, such as the French court, consider Miss Smith's actions, even though others, including Henry Dewlip, consider it morally reprehensible? In your opinion, is Miss Smith still a moral individual after the scandal is revealed? Is it surprising that moral standards vary according to time and place?

Honesty and Deception

Henry Dewlip undergoes a significant transformation in only three months. In an effort to win Miss Smith's affection, he gives up his old ways. But instead of being impressed with Henry's improved behavior, the people closest to him, Johnny, Julia Jelliwell and his own mother, are hurt by his actions. Henry's new attitude toward business and romance threaten to destroy his relationship with the Jelliwells. Ask students to consider whether it is common for individuals to change their behavior or appearance in order to attract a mate. What consequences might result from a relationship in which one person changes behavior in order to please the other? When is Henry making the "right" decision for his relationships __ at the beginning of the play when his actions make him a hedonist, or later in the play when he has become respectable? Could Henry be both true to himself and decent in the eyes of Miss Smith?

For Further Exploration

1. Theatrical farce is defined as a play using greatly exaggerated characters and events to produce broad, absurd humor. Sexual jokes and innuendoes, physical prats and absurd situations are all part of this classical comedy. List three current films and three television sitcoms which you believe employ all or most of these criteria. Argue whether or not contemporary films and television shows could be considered farcical.
2. Free_write for five minutes on morality. Consider the following questions as you write: What does it mean to be moral? Who defines morality? Do you have to be actively good to be considered a moral human being, or is it enough simply to refrain from doing harm to others? Is morality a learned behavior? Which activities are immoral? Which activities are moral?
3. Form small groups of three or four. Each group should discuss what they know about the Great Depression and create a list providing as much information as possible. Next, the group should discuss what life would be like during this time period. What leisure activities might you enjoy? Would you go to the theatre? Why or why not? Who would go to the theatre and what kind of theatre would they want to see? What type of media (film, television, radio) would be most entertaining if you lived during the Great Depression?
4. If you were assigned to be the dramaturg for a production of *Springtime for Henry*, what research and visual stimulation would you provide for the director and actors at the first rehearsal? Perhaps a picture of a gramophone or magazine clippings of clothes, cars, or buildings from 1930s London?

Mastery Assessment

Act One

1. Why does Henry Dewlip have difficulty keeping his secretaries employed? Describe the state of the apartment and Henry's condition in the opening scene.
2. What is the nature of the relationship between Johnny Jelliwell and Henry? How long have they known each other?
3. Why does Henry decline Johnny's offer to go into business together? What does Henry mean when he says, "When my father died last year, he left me the business just as he left me his watch and chain. And I never tinker with either."
4. Describe the relationship between Julia, Johnny's wife, and Henry? Why does Henry tell Julia that he is married and that his wife is living in a home? Do you believe this story? Henry calls the situation with his wife "inconvenient" __ what might this statement reveal about his personality?
5. What event interrupts the meeting between Julia and Henry? What do Julia and Henry try to tell Johnny when he returns to the apartment? Johnny says, "Who steals my wife steals trash." What does this statement reveal about Johnny and Julia's marriage?
6. Exactly what has happened to Miss Smith before she arrives at Henry's apartment? Describe Johnny's reaction to Miss Smith. What does Miss Smith mean when she says she likes the "decent thing," and how is Johnny indecent?
7. Why does Henry change his mind about working with Johnny? Henry says, "I happen to believe that women shouldn't be bought." What is Henry referring to and why does Johnny seem not to understand what he is saying?
8. How do Henry and Miss Smith get along after their introduction? Despite their turbulent beginning, Henry invites Miss Smith to become his secretary, but says "If one of us has to change, it won't be me." Based on their first interaction, whom do you believe has a stronger disposition __ Miss Smith or Henry?

Act Two

9. Three months have passed. What noticeable changes do you see in Henry? How would you describe his attitude toward work and his employee, Miss Smith?
10. Miss Smith agrees to go to the theatre with Henry, despite her resistance to "accept hospitality from her employer." What has Henry done that pleases her so greatly and causes her to change her mind?
11. Why are the Jelliwells disgusted by Henry's behavior? What has Henry done to Johnny to

make him so upset? How does Henry remedy the situation?

12. Describe the conversation between Julia and Henry. How has their relationship changed and what is the cause? Do you think Henry still cares for Julia and is not being true to himself, or do you believe that his devotion to Miss Smith is stronger than his attraction to Julia? How does the conversation between Henry and Julia end?

13. Miss Smith and Julia meet for the first time. How do they react to each other? What does Miss Smith reveal about her relationship with Henry? How does she describe Henry's feelings for Julia? How does Julia respond? When Henry returns to the room, Julia says, "When I fall in love, it's with a man: not with ___ with "a sunny smile that helps!" What is the meaning of this statement?

14. Do you believe that Henry has found true love, and that he has "pure love for a pure woman"? Do you believe that his feelings for Julia were untrue?

15. Who is Pierre? How does Henry respond to this news? Given that Henry and Miss Smith have worked together for three months and have supposedly grown into a more intimate relationship, is it surprising that Henry did not know about Miss Smith's family history?

Act Three

16. Johnny arrives at Henry's house in a rage only to discover that Henry is not at home. Why is Johnny angry with Henry? Does Miss Smith know that Johnny is Mr. Jelliwell?

17. What has happened to Henry's mother? What is the cause of this unfortunate occurrence? Do you think it is right of Henry to blame Miss Smith for this incident?

18. Miss Smith explains her marital history to Henry. What scandal is revealed? How does Miss Smith excuse the murder? Describe Henry's reaction to this story.

19. How has Henry "wrecked" the lives of Johnny and Julia? Are you surprised by Johnny's reaction to his wife's affair? Why is Johnny disturbed by the change in the relationship between Julia and Henry?

20. In Henry's speech at the end of the play he describes the results of his recent transformation. What does he ultimately conclude about the change in his behavior? Why does he now feel that it would be wrong not to kiss Julia?

21. What feelings does Miss Smith reveal for Henry? For Johnny? Does Johnny seem upset by the news that Miss Smith killed her husband? Is it likely that Johnny and Miss Smith will develop a relationship?

22. "I am told on good authority that Ibsen said, 'Be yourself.' I have decided to do what Ibsen said." How does Henry's statement support and relate to one of the key themes of this play?

Open Response & Writing

Open Response Assessment

Instructions to students: Please answer the following as thoroughly as possible in one well planned and carefully written paragraph. Remember to use topic sentences and examples from the text.

1. What is *Springtime for Henry* about? What message does it have for young people today?
2. Trace the journey of one character from the beginning to the end of the play. What does this character want, and what has stood in the way? Does the character ultimately reach her goal?
3. What does this play suggest about doing the "decent thing?"
4. Who is the most moral character in this play? Who is the most immoral character? Use evidence from the text to support your opinion.
5. How would you describe Miss Smith? What impact does the revelation about Miss Smith have on our perception of her character and her need for the "decent thing?"
6. Why was this play so successful during the Great Depression? What elements of this play appealed to audiences at that time?
7. Do you think the author of this play, Benn Levy, agrees with society's interpretation of morality? Why or why not?
8. One reviewer commented that "Mr. Levy's piece has a mischievous gleam throughout in that the triumph of the sinner fills all of us with merriment." How does the "sinner" in this play triumph, and why might this please the audience?
9. Benn Levy, the author of *Springtime for Henry*, said, "Triviality is what the public has been forced to have and triviality is now what it has come to expect ... backing away from anything serious." Relate this statement to his work *Springtime for Henry*. Would you consider this piece trivial? Serious? What has Levy set out to accomplish by writing this play?

Writing Assignments

1. Congratulations! You wrote this play as a pilot episode for a sitcom and the network has decided to have it run for 6 episodes. Write a story line for each episode starting from the end of the play. Try to maintain the same farcical elements and the same characters, but you may add characters as needed. Present your sitcom to the class.
2. Choose a character from the play. Write a journal entry in his or her voice as if it were the end of the second act of the play. What does the character expect the next day will bring? What does he or she feel towards the other characters in the play?

3. You have noticed significant changes in your friend since he/she became involved in a new romantic relationship and you are quite concerned. Write this friend a letter. Offer advice about the situation by using Henry Dewlip's romantic history as an example.
4. Examine one of the central themes in *Springtime for Henry*. What is the significance of the play's title in relationship to the theme? Note whether setting, tone, symbolism, and point of view may suggest theme.
5. Write an essay in which you explain why *Springtime for Henry* is a farce. Which parts of the play are absurd and does this absurdity make the play more or less humorous? Cite examples from the text to support your opinion.
6. Henry Dewlip, the play's protagonist, makes a number of important decisions throughout the course of the play. Explore how one area of his life (business, love, entertainment) has been affected by his personal choices and the consequence of these choices at the end of the play.
7. Write a monologue for Johnny or Julia Jelliwell at the end of the play. How does he/she feel about Henry's speech? What might he/she expect from their future relationship with Henry or with Miss Smith? Present your work to the class.
8. Write a critical review of the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *Springtime for Henry* and submit it for publication to your school newspaper. Be sure to send us a copy.

Media Assessment

These questions and hands_on exercises are interactive challenges in Drama, Music, Dance, Visual Arts, and Design that inspire further consideration or understanding of the play.

Creating Characterization

Have each of your students choose a character from *Springtime for Henry* to portray. As though they were preparing for the role in rehearsal, have them answer the following questions about their characters:

- a. What do I want in the play? What is my overall objective?
- b. What stands in the way of what I want? What or who are my obstacles in the way of achieving my objective? Does what I want 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 transformation?
- d. What are the contradictions inherent in my character?

Role Playing/Improvisation

- a. Have students improvise an important moment from the play, *Springtime for Henry*. Students should test the effects of changing something about the performance __ tone of voice, character

trait, or a vital remark. How does such a change affect the selected moment? How does the pacing or posturing of an actor affect the comic timing of the piece? Is it possible that a change in the tone of voice can turn a humorous moment into a serious one?

b. Have students improvise a scene after the conclusion of the play. What happens to Henry, Miss Smith, and the Jelliwells? This exercise will help students understand that creating a work always involves an interrupted process or a decision to stop what could be endlessly revised. Look to see if students have been able to identify some of Benn Levy's main points.

c. Divide the students into three groups and assign each group to represent one act in the play. Students should create a tableaux or stage picture that represents the characters during that act of the play. Students should take turns looking at the each other's tableaux and be able to identify which part of the play it represents.

Acting

Have students act out a scene from *Springtime for Henry*. They should use props and elements of costumes, if possible. Have them consider their placement on the stage, blocking (who moves where and when), gestures, vocal tone, music, and the intended emotional impact of the scene.

Visual Art

Have students choose a character from the play. Create a collage out of paper, drawings, magazine and newspaper clippings that represent the character in her actions, relationships, attitudes, personality, etc. Include quotations from the play that reveal something about the character. These can be quotations from the character as well as quotations about the character. Encourage students to consider texture and color when making decisions about how best to represent the character. Have students share their work with the class. By picking out the qualities of each collage, have them guess which character in the play each collage represents.

Music/Dance

Have students bring in tapes or CDs of music that they feel represents a central theme in the play *Springtime for Henry*. Ask them to play an excerpt for the class and explain what mood the music creates, why they chose this particular piece, and how it relates to the play. The class should then select the piece of music that they feel best represents the play and create an interpretive dance for the class to perform. The dance along with the music should represent a key idea in the play. Allow time for students to talk about the process they used in creating, rehearsing, and performing their dance.

The Design Process

Students should research clothing styles from 1930s London. After reading the two scenes in which Miss Smith and Julia appear together, students should design their contrasting apparel for each scene. The designs should reflect what we know about the characters' personalities, social and economic standings, personal histories and convictions. Students should be able to defend their design choices and explain how each woman's clothing is a reflection of her character.

Lesson Plans

ONE_DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the plot, character, author, and themes of the play. Requires one class period before viewing the play.

DAY ONE __ Introducing the Play

1. Distribute Master Assessment questions for *Springtime for Henry* for students to read before and to review after attending the performance.

Optional: Distribute Vocabulary Handout and ask students to define each word. A vocabulary test could be administered after viewing the play.

2. Read the synopsis of *Springtime for Henry* in the literary guide. Discuss other works the students have studied that have similar themes and issues.

3. Copy and distribute the information about the playwright, Benn Levy. In groups or individually, have students underline the highlights in the playwright's life and report to the class.

Optional: To save time, narrate highlights to students.

4. If time allows, highlight key points or distribute copies of "Henry's Springtime Roots in Boston" and discuss the production history of the play.

FOUR_DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the play and then, after viewing the performance, asks them to think more critically about it. Includes time for class discussion and individual assessment.

DAY ONE __ Introducing the Play

Same as Day One above; completed before seeing the play.

DAY TWO __ The Play

Attend the performance at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Homework: Students should answer the Mastery Assessment questions.

DAY THREE __ Follow_Up Discussion

Discuss Mastery Assessment answers in class.

DAY FOUR __ Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the Open Response Assessment or one question from Writing Assignments for students to answer in one class period.

Optional: Students may choose one of the For Further Exploration or Media Assessment tasks to complete for extra credit.

SEVEN_DAY LESSON PLAN completely integrates *Springtime for Henry* into your schedule. Within seven school days, you can introduce the play, assign reading and vocabulary, and assess your students on both a group and individual level. Student will ideally view the play after completing all assigned work.

DAY ONE __ Introducing the Play

Same as Day One above

Optional: Distribute Vocabulary Handout due on Day Four.

Homework: Read Act One of *Springtime for Henry* and answer the corresponding Mastery Assessment questions.

DAY TWO __ Act One

Discuss Act One and answers to questions.

Homework: Read Act Two of *Springtime for Henry* and answer corresponding Mastery Assessment questions.

DAY THREE __ Act Two

Discuss Act Two and answers to questions; assign parts to students and read/act out scenes.

Homework: Read Act Three and answer corresponding Mastery Assessment questions.

DAY FOUR __ Act Three

Discuss Act Three and answers to questions; assign parts to students and read/act out scenes.

Optional: Review definitions of vocabulary words.

Homework: Prepare work from Preparation, Key Issues, For Further Exploration or Media Assessment sections.

DAY FIVE __ Group Work

Meet in groups to prepare presentations; schedule library for this period if necessary.

DAY SIX __ Presentations

Group Assessment: Students present their work to the class.

Homework: Compile sample questions from Open_Response or Writing Assignments (page x) in preparation for the test.

DAY SEVEN __ Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the Open Response Assessment or one question from Writing Assignments for students to answer in a one class period.

Optional: Administer vocabulary portion on the test.

Optional: Students may choose to complete one of the For Further Exploration or Media Assessment tasks for extra credit.