

TRINITY REP

presents

Suddenly Last Summer

By Tennessee Williams

Directed by Mark Sutch

PROJECT DISCOVERY STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by Sarah Zeiser, Education Assistant, and Tyler Dobrowsky, Acting
Education Director

TRINITY REPERTORY COMPANY 201 Washington Street Providence, Rhode Island 02903

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THEATER AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE AND DISCUSSION

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND GO OVER WITH YOUR CLASSES BEFORE THE SHOW

TEACHERS:

Speaking to your students about theater etiquette is ESSENTIAL. Students should be aware that this is a LIVE performance and that they should not talk during the show. **If you do nothing else to prepare your students to see the play, please take some time to talk to them about theater etiquette** in an effort to help the students better appreciate their experience. It will enhance their enjoyment of the show and allow other audience members to enjoy the experience. The questions below can help guide the discussions. Thank you for your help and enjoy the show!!

ETIQUETTE:

- What is the **role of the audience in a live performance**? What is its role in a film? Why can't you chew gum or eat popcorn at a live theater performance? Why can't you talk? What can happen in live theater that cannot happen in cinema?
- **Reiterate that students may not chew gum, eat, or talk during the performance. If there is a disturbance, they will be asked to leave and the class will not be invited back to the theater. Students may not leave the theater during intermission.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW AT TRINITY REP:

- What are the **differences between live theater and cinema**? (Two dimensional vs. three dimensional; larger than life on the screen vs. life-size; recorded vs. live, etc.) Discuss the nature of film as mass-produced, versus the one-time only nature of live performances. Talk about original art works versus posters. Which do they feel is more valuable? Why?
- **Observation #1** – When you get into the theater, look around. What do you see? Observe the lighting instruments around the room and on the ceiling. Look at the set. Does it look realistic or abstract? Try to guess how the set will be used during the show.
- **Observation #2** -- Discuss the elements that go into producing a live performance: the lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the “behind the scenes” elements of the theater are working backstage as the play unfolds before the students’ eyes. Tell them to be aware of this as they watch the show. Observe the lighting cues. How do special effects work? How do the actors change costumes so fast?
- **Actors in a live performance are very attuned to the audience and are interested in the students’ reactions to the play.** Ask the students to write letters to the actors about the characters they played and to ask questions of the actors. **Send these letters to:** Trinity Repertory Company, c/o Tyler Dobrowsky, 201 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903 **or email to:** education@trinityrep.com.

Please remember to bring bag lunches to the longer plays!

USING THIS STUDY GUIDE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

A Letter from Acting Education Director Tyler Dobrowsky

Welcome to Trinity Repertory and the 39th season of Project Discovery! The Education Staff at Trinity had a lot of fun preparing this study guide, and hope that the activities included will help you to incorporate the play into your academic study. It is also structured to help you to introduce performance into your classroom through a process developed in partnership with the Brown University Arts and Literacy Project, and with teacher Deanna Computaro of Central Falls High School.

The elements of the process include:

- Community Building in Your Classroom (Applied Learning New Standards: A1; A2; A5)
- Inspiration and Background on the Artist (English Language Arts New Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; Applied Learning New Standards: A2; A3; A5)
- Entering and Comprehending Text (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- Creating Text for Performance (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- Performing in Your Class (Applied Learning Standards: A1; A2; A3; A4; A5)
- Reflecting on Your Performance (E2; E3; A1; A2; A5)

We've also included a unit on design, as well as character descriptions and a plot synopsis. Please refer, as well, to the Audience Etiquette section on page 3, particularly for students who have never attended a live theater performance. **If you do no other preparatory work with your students, we strongly encourage you to spend some time talking to your students about appropriate behavior in the theater.**

We hope that this guide will be a useful classroom tool for you and your students. We are extremely interested in your feedback about the plays and study guides, as well as any ideas that you may have that can help us to better serve the teachers and students who come to Trinity. We hope that you will feel free to call us anytime at (401) 521-1100, ext. 255, or e-mail us at education@trinityrep.com. For further information on upcoming productions and other Educational Programs please visit our website at www.trinityrep.com.

Enjoy the show!

Tyler Dobrowsky
Acting Education Director

Unit 1: RESOURCE PAGES FOR STUDY

The Story

It's 1936 in the Garden District of New Orleans, and on the lush veranda of a domineering Southern matriarch, a family seeks the truth about one man's death and life. After Sebastian's death abroad, his mother Violet Venable is intent on preserving his memory, and has called Sebastian's cousin and travel partner Catharine to her house to hear the truth about Sebastian's violent end. The sole witness to his demise, Catharine has been hospitalized and mistrusted as she tried to speak the truth about an event which no one wants to believe, least of all Sebastian's overbearing mother.

The Characters

Mrs. Violet Venable: The old, proud, and fierce mother of the dead Sebastian.

Doctor Cukrowicz, called Doctor Sugar: The well-meaning doctor of Lion's View, a mental health facility and center of new, radical surgical procedures including lobotomies.

Miss Foxhill: Mrs. Venable's assistant.

George: Catharine's money-hungry brother.

Mrs. Holly: Catharine's mother, a softer Southern matriarch.

Catharine: Sebastian's cousin and niece to Mrs. Venable, a failed Southern debutante who accompanied Sebastian abroad and is the only witness to his gruesome death.

Sister Felicity: Catharine's strict guardian from Saint Mary's, the mental health facility where Catharine is being kept.

The Playwright:

Tennessee Williams

In 1911, Thomas Lanier Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi, the son of Cornelius Coffin and Edwina Dakin Williams. The family, which included a sister, Rose Isabel, lived with grandparents Rosina Otte and the Rev. Walter Edwin Dakin in small towns throughout the South. In 1918, the family moved to St. Louis, where Tom's father worked for the International Shoe Company. Tom's brother Walter Dakin was born a year later.

Between 1929 and 1938, Williams attended three colleges and worked at the International Shoe Company. In 1937 Williams was attending the University of Iowa—from which he would graduate in 1938—when his sister Rose was institutionalized for



schizophrenia. Williams was close to his sister and feared for much of his life that he, too, would lose his mind. While Williams was away from St. Louis, his mother consented to have a lobotomy performed on Rose. Because this was one of the first lobotomies in the country, there was no cost for the operation. Rose lost her anxieties, but also much of her mind, slipping into a dreamlike existence that lasted the rest of her long life. Williams never forgave his mother for allowing the operation.

Williams' early years as a writer were hard, and he worked with great discipline and energy. For his short plays, he received a \$100 prize from the Group Theatre in 1939; that year, he also received a \$1,000 Rockefeller Grant. He began to write under the name of Tennessee Williams. His play, *Battle of Angels*, was produced in Boston and in New York

by the Theatre Guild in 1940, closing after two weeks in New York.

For two years Williams traveled and wrote, spending much of 1942 in New York City performing odd jobs, working as a bell hop, elevator operator, and movie usher.

In 1943, his agent, Audrey Wood, secured him a job as writer at MGM in Los Angeles. He developed a script, *The Gentleman Caller*, for the company, but they turned it down, giving him the rights to the work. Williams revised the film script into a stage play, and in 1945, *The Glass Menagerie* opened on Broadway, starring Laurette Taylor and Eddie Dowling, and played for 563 performances. The play was a critical triumph, winning the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Sidney Howard Memorial Award, and the Donaldson Award. Williams' reputation was assured, and he was able to write with some financial security.

In 1947 Williams began his relationship with Frank Merlo, his secretary and lover. It would last until Merlo died of lung cancer in 1963.

In general, Williams' early plays were well-received by critics and audiences alike. Some of Williams' greatest successes include: 1947's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (855 performances), directed by Elia Kazan, which won the Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Critics Circle Award, and the Donaldson Award, 1948's *Summer and Smoke*, 1951's *The Rose Tattoo* (300 performances), 1955's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (164 performances), 1959's *Sweet Bird of Youth* (375 performances), and 1961's *The Night of the Iguana* (316 performances). There were some failures as well, such as 1953's *Camino Real* (60 performances), 1955's *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* (49 performances), and 1957's *Orpheus Descending* (68 performances).

In 1957, Williams, depressed by the poor reception of *Orpheus Descending*, began psychoanalysis, working through a combination of troubles, including: his feelings of failure, his sometimes tempestuous relationship with Frank Merlo, the death of his father, and his dependencies on alcohol and drugs. As he began analysis, he wrote the play that became *Suddenly Last Summer*.

A mid-length play, *Suddenly Last Summer* was paired with *Something Unspoken*, a shorter play Williams had written five years earlier, and the combination was presented under the title *Garden District*, their shared New Orleans locale. Discouraged with the Broadway establishment, Williams decided to produce the plays at the Off-Broadway York Theatre, a venue associated with unknown and new playwrights, not established writers. The circumstances of *Garden District*'s production were "so humble," writes critic Nicholas de Jongh, "that it looked as if Williams was on the verge of losing his box-office appeal." Although there was not a star in the cast, *Garden District* ran for 216 performances and was, likewise, a success with the critics.

Williams' later work was not as commercially successful in this country as his earlier work had been. *The Night of the Iguana* was his last stage success for over ten years. His dramas in the 1960s struggled commercially; he began to premiere his work abroad or in smaller theatres in places like Key West, Florida, or Bar Harbor, Maine. In 1969 he suffered a nervous breakdown, and his brother committed him to the psychiatric unit of the Barnes Hospital in St. Louis, from September to December.

In 1972, Williams enjoyed his last commercial success with *Small Craft Warnings*, which opened Off-Broadway and played 201 performances. Williams continued to write, as he had done since his youth, creating 13 more plays before his death in 1983.

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The Brilliance of Tennessee Williams

No one else can use ordinary words with so much grace, allusiveness, sorcery, and power. – Brooks Atkinson, in 1958 New York Times review of *Suddenly Last Summer*

It is only in his work that an artist can find reality and satisfaction, for the actual world is less intense than the world of his invention and consequently his life, without recourse to violent disorder, does not seem very substantial.
- Tennessee Williams, "The Catastrophe of Success"

"He was brilliant and prolific, breathing life and passion into such memorable characters as Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski in his critically acclaimed *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And like them, he was troubled and self-destructive, an abuser of alcohol and drugs. He was awarded four Drama Critic Circle Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was derided by critics and blacklisted by Roman

Catholic Cardinal Spellman, who condemned one of his scripts as ‘revolting, deplorable, morally repellent, offensive to Christian standards of decency.’ He was Tennessee Williams, one of the greatest playwrights in American history” (PBS).

Williams produced about 30 full-length plays, along with novels, short stories, and collections of poetry. His most successful plays won him Pulitzer Prizes and were made into famous films, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Williams became associated with Hollywood success, not just because of the filming of his plays, but also because many famous film stars performed on stage in his work, including Jessica Tandy, Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, Eli Wallach, Tallulah Bankhead, Burl Ives, Katharine Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, Montgomery Clift, and Bette Davis.

One of the most well-known 20th century playwrights, Williams wrote within the framework of what has been called the Southern Gothic style, a distinctly American form of literature which depicts supernatural, ironic, or unusual events feeding the plot, with a focus on exploring social issues and revealing the cultural character of the South. Williams described Southern Gothic as a style that captured "an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience." Other writers to use this style were William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O’Connor.

Williams was widely regarded as the best Southern playwright and one of the greatest American playwrights of the 20th century, along with such contemporaries as Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*) and Eugene O’Neill (*Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Strange Interlude*). Williams openly acknowledged being influenced by their work and the work of others like Anton Chekhov (*The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*). Williams’ writing style was extraordinarily poetic, and he surprised audiences with his emphasis on the fantastic.

He gave American theatergoers unforgettable characters, an incredible vision of life in the South, and a series of powerful portraits of the human condition. He was deeply interested in something he called "poetic realism," the use of everyday objects, which, seen repeatedly and in the right contexts, become imbued with symbolic meaning. His plays, for their time, also seemed preoccupied with the extremes of human brutality and sexual behavior: madness, rape, incest, nymphomania, as well as violent and fantastic deaths. Williams himself often commented on violence in his own work, which to him seemed part of the human condition; he was conscious, also, of the violence in his plays being expressed in a particularly American setting. As with the work of Edward Albee, critics who attacked the "excesses" of Williams’ work often were making thinly veiled attacks on his sexuality. Homosexuality was not discussed openly at that time, but in Williams’ plays the themes of desire and isolation show, among other things, the influence of having grown up gay in a homophobic world.

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Williams enjoyed experimenting with his work, from the time he began writing to his death. Drawing from his fascination with the world of film, Williams experimented with

a more fluid dramatic structure that attempted to emulate a more cinematic technique. Williams sought a “sculptural drama.” He wrote: “I visualize it as a reduced mobility on the stage, the forming of statuesque attitudes or tableaux, something resembling a restrained type of dance, with motions honed down to only the essential or significant.” His “plastic theatre” (which emphasized the representation of reality), when combined with his romantic lyricism, resulted in a new style and voice for the American stage.

The themes for Williams’ plays were often connected: violence, overt sexuality, madness, alienation, and dysfunctional families. Many of the most memorable American plays, like *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and *Buried Child*, depict familial tensions and alienations, the give-and-take of domestic warfare. “Indeed, the venerable tradition of dramatizing family strife is by no means uniquely America, as this motif transcends cultures and predates Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, even going back to the drama of Aeschylus. Tennessee Williams certainly realized that positioning crises of the heart within the immediate family would provide ample material for audience empathy and catharsis, as virtually anyone can identify with similar levels of emotional conflict” (Robert Bray).

These themes remain relevant today, and “the savagery of Tennessee Williams’ poetic drama delivers the same punch it always has” (Suzanne Weiss).

From Robert Bray, *An Introduction to The Glass Menagerie* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1999), Brooks Atkinson (*The New York Times*), Suzanne Weiss (*Culturevulture*), Eddie Borey (*GradeSaver*), PBS.

An Interview With The Director: Mark Sutch

This interview was conducted by Sarah Zeiser, Education Assistant, on 25 July 2005

Sarah Zeiser: What drew you to direct Tennessee Williams’ *Suddenly Last Summer*? What was it about this particular piece that appealed to you?

Mark Sutch: First of all, I’ve always been a big Tennessee Williams fan. The first play I ever directed was a one act play, an obscure one act play called *At Liberty*, by Tennessee Williams, and not only is he one of the great American playwrights, he’s also unique among American playwrights, in terms of his use of, first of all, a very specific, recognizable locale and set of characters that seem very much his. And also his use of language, which is very heightened, very poetic, very Southern. He may be, with O’Neill and Mamet, the only ones who you can actually say to someone on the street “Oh, this is very Tennessee Williamsish” and they’ll immediately understand what you’re talking about. He’s great in that way. This particular play, besides being appealing in a carnivalesque way, you’re sort of watching very extreme people do extreme things to each other. But it’s also a transitional play within Tennessee Williams’ work, from his more traditional narrative plot- and character-based work like *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, to very, very experimental, non-linear, very, very heightened, poetic work of his later life, which is not as often performed. And this play is sort of the transition between those periods, and as such, it’s interesting to watch him changing and to see the incorporation of both of those styles into one piece.

SZ: A lot has been written about the different themes running through all of Williams' works. They include violence, overt sexuality, madness, alienation, and dysfunctional families. How many of these do you think are universal themes throughout contemporary playwriting, and how many do you think are unique to Tennessee Williams' own life experience?

MS: First of all, all of them have their roots in Tennessee Williams' life. This play deals with lobotomy, homosexuality, domineering mother-figures. These are all subjects which Williams grappled with. His own sister, Rose, was lobotomized by his mother when he was away at school, and he grappled with that throughout his life, the guilt that he felt about that. He was, of course, gay, and loving it at a time when this was not an acceptable... it was still pretty taboo. And he definitely had issues with his own mother, who he did feel was domineering and overpowering. So all of the things that you've listed... madness- his sister was definitely mentally unbalanced. All of these things, violence, they all come from his life. I think the reason that we can watch a play by Tennessee Williams and understand it and feel that it is relatable to, is because he's writing from such a personal place, and this is something that all playwrights do. They take something that they know a lot about, they write from a very personal, and open, and honest place, and put it out for the world to see, and frankly we all have parts of ourselves that we grapple with, that we want to keep hidden, and that active seeing very brutal and very honest things on stage, even if we don't automatically know someone who's been lobotomized or have experience with cannibalism... it still allows us to empathize. We know that what we're watching is honest and real. So even if we walk away from it thinking that it's no more than a slice of life drama, or even an overwrought thriller or melodrama, through his voice, and through his honesty, he lifts it above that, those mere genres, and he has been able to invest it with a human dynamic and power that is universal. The relationship between these people is universal. And that's where the ability to connect with the plays lies.

SZ: Catharine says in the play "We all use each other and that's what we think of as love," which is sort of an extreme interpretation of human relationships. How do you think that relationship is shown throughout *Suddenly Last Summer*?

MS: Oh, it's shown over and over and over again. The language in this play comes back over and over again to predator and prey, to the user and the used, to survival of the fittest. It's very Darwinian, it's also a very dark way of thinking about human relationships. It's probably true, to a certain extent. I mean, anyone who's been in a serious relationship knows that they're not living solely for the person that they're with. There are things that they are getting from that relationship which are entirely selfish, and hopefully the other person is getting things as well, so it's a kind of mutual selfishness club, and maybe you break out of that sometimes and do nice things, but the point is that relationships, period, are a way to fulfill a need that everyone has. The relationships in this play are enormously dark and really selfish. And I think Catharine is coming from a place of being traumatized by the events that occurred with her cousin. But also, she really came of age over the course of that period of time. She was a very young girl when she went on that trip, I mean, suddenly she's coming out of this trip with her cousin who she just saw using people over and over and over again, including her, and is now being forced into a situation by her own mother, brother, aunt, and she feels like she is clearly being used. I think she has great reason for not having confidence or optimism in human behavior and human relationships. I don't think that is necessarily the way that we should all view life, but within this play, the way people treat each other is very dark and evil. And Catharine is really the victim of all this.

SZ: One interesting note about this play which I discovered while researching for the Guide, is that the material about the Encantadas was one of the last elements to be added.

The material only showed up in pre-production copies of the text. How do you think the inclusion of that anecdote by Mrs. Venable changed the texture of the play?

MS: I think it goes to heavily reinforce the basic theme of the play which, as I just stated, was kind of predator-prey, creatures using each other. It lifts it out of the human world, and gives it this background in the natural world around us. In other words, what we've evolved from, at first we're like this. You see it all the time, these birds eating these baby turtles, it's kind of the perfect image of the very innocent being used. So I think it's part of a fabric that he's weaving throughout the play of not only these themes that we've been talking about, the predator-prey issues, but also this understanding that all of this is coming from very deep, primordial, natural places, that these are instincts that we have, that are very difficult to shed, because they come from the animal world, and the world of nature. So I don't know what necessarily the play would have been like without that moment, I think that it's a very clear, ringing, perhaps even obvious explication of what he's talking about in the play. And by putting that very animalistic, Darwinian image in there, it helps bring us along. It's cannibalism in a big fabric-of-human-relationships way. It's not just people eating each other, or animals eating each other. But there is some of that too.

SZ: One of the most important elements of the play is the setting of Sebastian Venable's cannibalistic garden. How have you chosen to stage this production?

MS: Yes, it's clearly, and Williams talks about this very clearly, this is not a realistic world, or play. This is kind of an expressionistic, kind of abstract metaphorical place. So we've chosen to make the garden, which is really the central metaphor of the play, very big, very metaphorical. So it is this very primeval, dark, mysterious place, very thick with huge trees and huge leaves that are about four feet long and it is very thick and it's actually broken out of the boundaries that Sebastian originally planted it into to. So it's sort of taking over Mrs. Venable's back yard and the façade of her house, and we even have a false proscenium arch in the theater that we've put in and it's starting to creep around the edges of the proscenium and it's starting to come into the theater where people are sitting. So it's sort of taking over, and you should get the impression that you don't quite know what's living in there, but you're pretty sure it's not going to be friendly, and then we've taken it one step farther by actually taking some of the leaves and imprinting them with images from paintings by Hieronymus Bosch, who was a Dutch artist of the sixteenth century who painted these very, very disturbing psycho-sexual images of violence and religious imagery, and people having sex with bats and things, and it's very disturbing, and seems to fit right along with the nature of the play, and what Williams is getting at and really what Sebastian was, which really, Sebastian in this play is the garden, that's really his representation on stage. So we sort of spread these paintings on these leaves throughout the garden and over the course of the play as it becomes more extreme and in fact, more heightened and abstract, because the play does sort of take a journey from essential naturalism to this very broken and poetic thing at the end of the play, these images are going to sort of start to pop out a little more, to help us make that leap.

So when you first come into the theater you're looking at a naturalistic space, and then as the play begins to progress and the play becomes less and less naturalistic and more and more abstract and poetic, these weird things start to pop out at you. And at the same time, Mrs. Venable's world, which is represented in this very trim, proper house that she lives in, actually begins to crumble a little bit as well, and these cracks begin to appear in her wall, and actually one wall begins to separate from another, just to help us all make the leap. It too is a little obvious, but the play sort of leads you down that path. It's not a subtle play.

SZ: A director of another production of *Suddenly Last Summer* wrote that in writing this play, Williams was “at his most pagan extreme.” The characters, the setting, and the very outcome of the play are all rather fierce. How have you as a director interpreted the violence and madness of the play for your production? It’s just such an interesting play because I think it could very easily be done over-the-top.

MS: Yes, it’s going to be interesting to test the balance and where that lies because it has to be big and extreme, otherwise you’re not really doing the play. And probably the tension that you’d be creating would be so obvious that it would seem strange. At the same time it is from a time in American theater when people were much more used to out-and-out melodrama than we are today, and the issues of the play would have seemed much more sensational than they do now. So it’s going to be interesting, especially in the acting style, to see how those things balance off each other, and how far we can go without it feeling ridiculous. This is part of the reason that I think the hugeness and metaphorical nature of the set is actually going to help us, because it can help bring people along a little down that path towards being not naturalism and it’s just going to be a question of where we go from there, and I really don’t know. This is the stuff that I’m really interested in finding working with the actors in rehearsal. In terms of violence, it’s really interesting because there’s actually no violence in the play; it’s all in the language, in the dialogue, in what we hear people say about other people, and events that have happened in the past. So in that sense it’s a little like a Greek tragedy where everything that occurs occurs off stage, and you kind of hear about it secondhand, which helps actually to mute the violence, and in fact there’s a danger, because the play works like a detective story, what actually happened, why does Mrs. Venable want this girl to get a lobotomy, what is the deal with Sebastian. When we finally hear the story of what happened suddenly last summer, there’s a real danger that it’s going to be a little bit disappointing. Oh, he molested kids and then they killed him and ate him. I mean, it could be a let down if they’re not seeing it right in front of them. And the language at that point is so broken and poetic, “red roses splashed against a white wall,” it’s just completely over the top. This is the part of the play that worries me the most. Am I going to be able to find that balance between being honest and being real, about who these people are and these characters and being what people expect to see on a theater stage, and at the same time be true to the hugeness and size of the play which demands that you go there in order to not be let down. I feel like if it was flat naturalism all the way through, like we’re used to seeing in any kitchen-sink drama, you would get to that moment and it would be like “What the hell am I watching? This is ridiculous!” If it doesn’t have that hugeness, that size, that metaphorical- even in the acting style, if it doesn’t grow to that point, it’s not going to work. And I don’t have the answers yet.

SZ: What are you hoping the student audiences take away from your production?

MS: First of all, I think that the play is enormously entertaining, because it is about these very primal and big issues, like violence, like sex, like cannibalism. The sensationalism of it is there for a reason, because it makes it entertaining. We’re all interested in the extremes of human nature. And I think these particular elements are particularly enticing to young audiences. At least I know when I was young I ate up violence in popular culture like it was candy; I could not get enough of it, and of course sex. So because the central character, actually the person we’re really rooting for is essentially a teenager, hopefully young audiences will be able to have even maybe a unique perspective on the play from adult audiences, seeing it through the eyes of one of their peers. But I think it is a play that could be really very interesting from a young person’s perspective, to see how they react, not only to all the violence and sex, but also to the fact that we actually see the play through the eyes of a teenager. This is probably going to be more interesting to teenagers than *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which, I mean, they’re not going to know what it’s like to be married to someone and not want to have sex with them, it’s just not within their world yet.

This is a lot shorter, which helps, and it's a lot more brutal, and relentless than even *The Glass Menagerie*. So we'll see.

Mark Sutch has been Trinity Repertory Company's Artistic Associate for the past four years. Most recently, he directed 'A Christmas Carol' during the 2004-2005 season.

Production History

Tennessee Williams began writing *Suddenly Last Summer* in 1957, soon after entering psychoanalysis. At the same time he began visiting his paranoid schizophrenic sister, Rose, who had been institutionalized at the request of Williams' mother, who had also authorized a prefrontal lobotomy on Rose. The dramatic change the procedure wrought on Rose's personality had a profound effect on the playwright. Williams described his writing of the play as a "catharsis, a final fling with violence" and no doubt it allowed him to wrestle with some of the ghosts that haunted him: his homosexuality; the growing guilt in not opposing his mother's decision to have a lobotomy performed on his sister; and his struggle with alcoholism and prescription drugs.

The play was first performed on January 7, 1958 at the Off-Broadway York Playhouse in New York, under the direction of Herbert Machiz. The production consisted of two one-act plays: *Suddenly Last Summer* along with *Something Unspoken*. The entire production was entitled *Garden District*. The production was received well by the critics,



with New York Times reviewer Brooks Atkinson writing: "As an exercise that is both literary and dramatic, this brief, withering play is a superb achievement" (New York Times, Jan 8, 1958).



The next step for the play was first a move to Chicago, and then a film adaptation, which was released in 1959. The film, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, starred Katharine Hepburn as Mrs. Venable, Elizabeth Taylor as Catharine, and Montgomery Clift as Dr. Cukrowicz. Despite garnering several Academy Award nominations, including Best Actress nods for both Hepburn and Taylor, the film was not critically praised, with the largest complaint being the careful censorship of the more distasteful aspects of the play. New York Times reviewer Bosley Crowther wrote: "There's no doubt that a great deal of the feeling of dank corruption that ran through the play has been lost or pitifully diluted by a tactful screening of the words" (New York Times, Dec 23, 1959).

Suddenly Last Summer was first published in book form in 1958 by the New Directions publishing company. The second printing in 1959 was revised – Williams omitted dialogue from

Scene One about the Doctor's operations at Lion's View, as well as Sebastian Venable's vision in the Encantadas. Most current productions, including the one at Trinity Rep, use the unabridged 1958 publication of the play.

Suddenly Last Summer, while not the most critically successful or famous of Williams' plays, remains one of the most fierce and powerful, and is frequently revived in America and also abroad, including a recent 2004 production in London at the Albery Theatre. It is most often performed alone, without its sister play *Something Unspoken*.

From Richard Connema (*Talkin' Broadway*), Alan Bird (*London Theatre Guide*), [The New York Times](#), [Tennessee Williams: Plays 1957-1980](#) (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 2000).

Symbolism within *Suddenly Last Summer*

Tennessee Williams' plays are full of rich personal and symbolic metaphors. As with so many of his earlier plays, *Suddenly Last Summer* contains themes of homosexuality, dominant parents, savagery, self-destruction, and madness. Perhaps the most overarching theme in all Williams' work is the dichotomy between reality and fantasy, between truth and lies. Tennessee Williams wrote: "We tell lies to sustain our fictions about ourselves and others. When the truth is so horrible, we must consider it a lie."

These themes, as well as religion, alienation and sexuality, have been discussed by authors and by the playwright himself. Keeping them in mind, we shall look at how these themes are related to *Suddenly Last Summer*, and seek to understand why the playwright included them in the work.

A Visit to the Encantadas An Essay by Tom Shafer

In support of Indiana University Theatre

Mrs. Venable: One long-ago summer- now, why am I thinking of this?- my son, Sebastian, said, "Mother?- Listen to this!"- He read me Herman Melville's description of the Encantadas, the Galapagos Islands. (...) He read me that description and said that we had to go there. And so we did go there that summer on a chartered boat, a four-masted schooner, as close as possible to the sort of a boat that Melville must have sailed on... We saw the Encantadas, but on the Encantadas we saw something Melville hadn't written about.
- *Suddenly Last Summer*, Scene One

Early in *Suddenly Last Summer* Williams lets the play, through Mrs. Venable's narrative, take two of its main characters, Sebastian and his mother, to the Galapagos Islands to witness a grotesque dance of nature: newly hatched sea-turtles hurry from the beach to the protection of the sea, under attack by "flesh-eating birds." From the crow's nest of the ship, Sebastian spends the day viewing the black beach of the volcanic island, literally crawling with life, under attack by the carrion birds, "birds that made the sky almost as black as the beach!" It is a day of attack, killing, and eating, a day that, for Sebastian, defines his view of life and his view of God.

According to Brian Parker, the Encantadas material was one of the last elements that Williams added to the play; it only first appears in drafts associated with pre-production work on the script.

Herman Melville wrote "The Encantadas, Or the Enchanted Islands" as a series of short travel sketches for *Putnam's Magazine* in the March, April, and May 1854 issues. The stories were later collected as part of *Piazza Tales*, which was published in 1856.

"The Encantadas" relates a tour of the Galapagos Islands as remembered by Melville from his sailor days (he had long since given up the sea). In a series of ten sketches, Melville narrates an island-by-island travelogue of this equatorial landsite, which was later made famous by Charles Darwin, whose visit to the Galapagos prompted his early work in evolutionary theory.

Two critics have discussed the relation of Melville's island sketches to *Suddenly Last Summer*. James R. Hurt's "*Suddenly Last Summer: Williams and Melville*," connects the "Sketch Second," as Melville titled his pieces, to the play's moral view.

Melville's "Sketch Second" discusses turtles, but not the turtle's birth and their being killed by predators, the sex and violence that Sebastian observes in Williams' play. Melville simply describes the turtles of the Encantadas:

In view of the description given, may one be gay upon the Encantadas? Yes: that is, find one the gayety, and he will be gay. And indeed, sackcloth and ashes as they are, the isles are not perhaps unmitigated gloom. For while no spectator can deny their claims to a most solemn and superstitious consideration, no more than my firmest resolutions can decline to behold the spectre-tortoise when emerging from its shadowy recess; yet even the tortoise, dark and melancholy as it is upon the back, still possesses a bright side; its calapee or breastplate being sometimes of a faint yellowish or golden tinge. Moreover, every one knows that tortoises as well as turtles are of such a make, that if you but put them on their backs you thereby expose their bright sides without the possibility of their recovering themselves, and turning into view the other. But after you have done this, and because you have done this, you should not swear that the tortoise has no dark side. Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest and don't deny the black. Neither should he who cannot turn the tortoise from its natural position so as to hide the darker and expose his livelier aspect, like a great October pumpkin in the sun, for that cause declare the creature to be one total inky blot. The tortoise is both black and bright. – "Sketch Second"

James Hurt discusses the above passage not in terms of nature writing but in terms of a moral vision: Melville's view of the world, Hurt argues, is essentially neutral. There is a black side and a bright side to both turtles and to life, and people who mistakenly view life as only one way or the other are opening themselves up to disappointment or destruction. Melville's Ahab views his great white whale not as an essentially neutral beast, but as an embodiment of evil: Ahab's warped vision ultimately leads to his death. Sebastian, too, argues Hurt, after viewing the black carrion sea birds attacking and eating newly hatched turtles, comes to the conclusion that he has seen the face of God.

"Sebastian's fascination with Melville's account," Hurt writes, "is consistent, then, with his own fascination with the primeval and with his own vision of the evil face of God. But ironically Sebastian does not see the other theme of "The Encantadas:" the theme that the universe will be 'one total inky blot' for him who sees it thus. And ironically the world which Sebastian sees mirrored in the spectacle of the turtles and the birds will turn and devour him as it devoured the turtles."

Another critic, Carol F. Reppert, has looked at another sketch in “The Encantadas” and thinks she has found a similarity between Catharine and a character in Melville’s “Sketch Eight,” “Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow.” In the narrative, Melville’s crew discovers a woman shipwrecked on the Norfolk Island in the Encantadas. They rescue her, and Melville tells her story of abandonment, loss, and despair. Reppert does not successfully align the story of the Chola widow with that of Catharine Holly, although her observation that Catharine’s story is too often accepted simply at face value is a good one.

Whose vision of the world is correct? Who is telling the truth about the past and about life itself? These questions, like all good questions in a “trial” play such as *Suddenly Last Summer*, are ones that the reader or audience member is given to ponder and to resolve.

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CONSIDER the playwright’s motives in including the story of the Encantadas in *Suddenly Last Summer*. Particularly take into account the fact that the story was added to the manuscript after most of the play had already been written. What is Tennessee Williams trying to express through the story of the carnivorous birds? Is it merely foreshadowing, or is it a wider judgment on the world? Is this Sebastian’s definition of God? Is it Tennessee Williams’?

Suddenly Last Summer in New Orleans

Suddenly Last Summer, like many of Tennessee Williams’ plays, is set in the sweltering heat of the south. Mrs. Venable is a rich widow residing in a mansion in the Garden District, one of the wealthiest areas of New Orleans.

These mansions stand in the center of large grounds and rise, garlanded with roses, out of the midst of swelling masses of shining green foliage and many-colored blossoms. No houses could well be in better harmony with their surroundings, or more pleasing to the eye. -- Mark Twain, speaking of the Garden District.

The Garden District was developed between 1840 to 1900. It may be one of the best preserved collections of historic southern mansions in the United States (over 40,000 houses in New Orleans have been listed in the National Registry of Historic Places, more than many cities, including Washington, DC). Originally, the whole area was an enormous plantation, but it was parceled off to wealthy Americans who refused to live in the French Quarter with the Creoles, or the descendants of the original French settlers. The area developed with only a few houses per block, each surrounded by a large garden, which gave the district its name. Towards the end of the 19th century, most of these large lots were further subdivided as Uptown New Orleans became more populous, and more concentratedly urban. This produced a pattern of early 19th century mansions surrounded by smaller, late Victorian "gingerbread" houses. The Garden District is now known more for its architecture than for gardens.

Mrs. Venable’s home is a stately mansion in the Victorian Gothic style, within which is a verdent jungle garden. The rich soil of the District would have fed Sebastian’s garden, which teems with violent, carnivorous plants like the Venus flytrap, further heightening the sense of impending violence.

Another area of New Orleans which is referenced in the play is the French Quarter, where Williams once lived. The French Quarter is the oldest and most famous section of the city of New Orleans, stretching along the Mississippi River from Iberville Street to Esplanade Avenue (mentioned in the play) and back from Decatur Street to Rampart Street. The area is also known as the *Vieux Carré* ("Old Quarter" in French) and the *Barrio Latino* ("Latin Section" in Spanish). To many it is simply called "The Quarter". From the 1920's through the 1980's the area was famous as a gathering place of painters of widely varying talents, including proficient professionals, talented young art students, hacks, and dreadful caricaturists. In the 1990's the artists were largely driven away by tarot card readers, mimes, and fortune tellers.

The Quarter is also famous for its relation to the birth of jazz circa 1900 in nearby Storyville, which nurtured musical legends Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, Bunk Johnson, Nick LaRocca, and other jazz and ragtime greats. By 1920 the legacy of a storied past first celebrated by George Washington Cable and Lafcadio Hearn in the 1880's attracted writers and artists in increasing numbers. William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, and Truman Capote were among American writers attracted to the French Quarter for its freewheeling urbanism, quaint surroundings and creative stimulus, even as the building stock declined.

While conservation remains an issue in both the French Quarter and the Garden District, the memory of the society which flourished there in the early 20th century lives on in the work of Tennessee Williams.

DID YOU KNOW?: Louisiana is the only state to have once been a French royal colony – it was claimed by King Louis the XIV in 1699. The U.S. bought Louisiana from France in 1803. The two most predominant styles of food in New Orleans are Cajun and Creole. The current population (2000) of the city is just under 500,000. Finally, there is an annual Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival to celebrate the work of Tennessee Williams and to honor contemporary local playwrights. More information about the festival can be found at www.tennesseewilliams.net.

From Wikipedia.org, FrenchQuarter.com and neworleansonline.com.

Religious Characters and Symbols

The Saint in Sebastian

The dead poet in the play, named Sebastian Venable, has frequently been compared to his namesake, the Christian Saint Sebastian. In the play, the character of Sebastian grapples with his desires as well as his own religious fervor. As his mother says, Sebastian was a man looking for God.

According to legend, Saint Sebastian, born to a wealthy family in the third century, converted to Christianity as a young adult. A favorite of the Emperor Diocletian, Sebastian was appointed Captain of the Guard in the Imperial Roman Army. Diocletian was unaware of Sebastian's faith, but during the emperor's persecution of the Christians, Sebastian visited Christian prisoners in order to provide them supplies and solace; furthermore, he converted, among others, the jailers and the Prefect of Rome. An infuriated Diocletian demanded Sebastian renounce Christianity, and Sebastian refused. The emperor ordered that Sebastian be executed. Roman soldiers tied him to a tree, and archers shot him with arrows. Miraculously, however, he did not die, and after his

wounds healed, he returned to the emperor's palace, where he intercepted Diocletian and denounced his persecution of the Christians. Diocletian ordered Sebastian be clubbed to death and tossed into a sewer. Subsequently, Christians retrieved Sebastian's corpse and buried his remains on the Appian Way. Sebastian is revered as a martyr and is the patron saint of archers, soldiers, athletes, and sufferers of the plague.

Starting in the Renaissance, artists frequently portrayed Sebastian as a young man, virtually naked, bound to a tree, and pierced with arrows, his face either passive or displaying religious ecstasy. According to art historian Richard E. Spear, the St. Sebastian story provided artists the rare opportunity to paint the male form at a time when images of the nude female predominated in the art world. Depictions of St. Sebastian's martyrdom were popular and appeared in the work of many artists, including Guido Reni, Giuseppi Cesari, Carlo Saraceni, and Giovanni Bazzi, the latter known as "Il Sodoma" due to his proclivity for painting and consorting with young men.

Alongside the Christian legends of St. Sebastian, there developed stories that led to the martyr's being appropriated as a homoerotic icon. Some tales speculate that the Emperor Diocletian made romantic advances upon Sebastian and was enraged when Sebastian rejected him on Christian grounds. Other stories actually refer to Sebastian as the emperor's lover. Whether or not such accounts are legitimate, the image of St. Sebastian has been linked to homoeroticism, the critic Georges Eekhoud being the first to note this connection in 1909.

Gay artists and critics, too, have responded to the homoerotic elements in Sebastian's portrayal. For instance, in novelist Yukio Mishimi's autobiographical *Confessions of a Mask*, the narrator ties his homosexual awakening with his discovery of a copy of Reni's *St. Sebastian*. Oscar Wilde, who used the name "Sebastian" as an alias while in France and regarded Reni's *Sebastian* as the artist's most beautiful work, visited Sebastian's grave, reflecting, "the vision of Guido's St. Sebastian came before my eyes as I saw him at Genoa, a lovely brown boy, with crisp, clustering hair and red lips, raising his eyes with divine, impassioned gaze towards the Eternal Beauty of the opening Heavens." And gay critic James Saslow, in a discussion of Sodoma's *Sebastian*, notes that the saint "writhes in ostensibly religious ecstasy open to multiple personalized interpretations, from the epitome of sado-masochism to the artist's comment on his own public 'martyrdom.'"

Twentieth-century artists have utilized the homoerotic facets of the St. Sebastian legend in their own work. Klaus Bodanze has clad Sebastian in leather (*St. Sebastian in Leather*), Alfred Courmes has incorporated him into a 'fetish painting' (*St. Sebastian Sailor*), and Julian Schnabel has linked him with the devastation of AIDS (*Fox Farm Paintings*).

Tennessee Williams, who came from a "high church" Episcopalian tradition and converted to Catholicism, was familiar with the images and tales of St. Sebastian. His poem "San Sebastiano de Sodoma" celebrates both the religious aspects of St. Sebastian's story, as well as the tradition that has made the saint an icon of homosexuality.

Was Sebastian's death, then, a violent martyrdom, or did he sacrifice himself in an act of atonement? One director of a production of *Suddenly Last Summer* wrote: "Sebastian's death is the result of a search for atonement, this atonement being the surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt. "This is Williams at his most pagan extreme" (Howard Jensen, Indiana University, 2000).

Sebastian's cousin Catharine also can be associated with religious saints; while there have been quite a few Saint Catherine's throughout history, they all represent a part of Williams' Catharine.

The most obvious parallel between Williams' Catharine and a saint can be found in fifteenth-century Italy, in the person of St. Catherine of Bologna, who kept a diary, had visions in which the living flesh of Christ was consumed during the sacrament of communion, and was shut away in a convent because of those visions. In Catholic theology, St. Catherine is also the patron saint of artists, just as Catharine was the emotional patroness of Sebastian. And, like St. Catherine, Williams's Catharine is placed in the keeping of nuns. Saint Catherine of Alexandria was martyred for speaking what she believed, and Saint Catherine of Siena also wrote of visions.

CONSIDER the religious aspects in *Suddenly Last Summer*:

- The naming of two main characters after Christian saints
- The discussion of "the face of God" in Scene One
- The treatment of Sebastian's poetry as "the Host before the altar"
- Sebastian's desire to enter a Buddhist monastery
- Sebastian's idea of God, as put forth by Catharine in Scene Four

COMPARE the uses of religious imagery and metaphors throughout the play. What is Tennessee Williams implying with the character of Sebastian? Was he saint or sinner? Is it reasonable to view Catharine's persecution like a saint's?

The Use of Cannibalism in *Suddenly Last Summer*

One of the strongest themes in Tennessee Williams' play is the idea of cannibalism, in animals and in people, in both a physical and metaphorical sense. While the most obvious examples of cannibalism bookend the play (the story of "flesh-eating birds" in the Encantadas foreshadowing the revelation of Sebastian's own death, when "the flock of featherless little black sparrows" consumed him), it is interesting to explore what other kinds of "cannibalism" can be found in the play.

Williams wrote *Suddenly Last Summer* to show the very essence of life, which the playwright viewed as cannibalistic. He said: "Man devours man in a metaphorical sense. He feeds upon his fellow creatures, without the excuse of animals. Animals actually do it for survival, out of hunger... I use that metaphor to express my repulsion with this characteristic of man, the way people use each other without conscience." Catharine says in Scene Four: "Yes, we all use each other and that's what we think of as love."

From Richard Connema (*Talkin' Broadway*)

Williams presents the physical aspect of cannibalism through the birds and children, but what other forms of cannibalism exist within the play? Think of the relationships between the characters in the story -- who is feeding off of whom? Who is being used? Who is a predator in the story? Who is the prey?

Sexuality and Social Outcasts

Based on the work of Darryl Erwin Haley, 1999, <http://www.etsu.edu/haleyd/DissHome.html>

Tennessee Williams' plays are known for their shocking content, both in violence and in sexual explicitness. The audiences of the 1950s and 1960s were duly shocked by his ferocious characters and their sins. Williams defined his plays by the characters within them, most notably using a series of social outcasts to draw attention to the moral depravity of the culture. "Through these outcast characters Williams outlines a struggle between the moral values of nonconformists, who are outcasts because they can not, or will not, conform to the values of the dominant culture; and conformists, who represent that culture. The outcast characters in Tennessee Williams' major plays do not suffer because of the actions or circumstances that make them outcast but because of the destructive impact of conventional morality upon them. They are driven, in the conflict between their values and those of conventional morality, to 1) confess their transgressions against humanity and 2) suffer, at their own hands or by placing themselves in dangerous situations, in atonement for their violations of conventional morality" (Haley). Tennessee Williams consciously sought to reveal the nature of humans in his plays. He wrote to his agent Audrey Wood in 1939: "I have only one major theme for my work which is the destructive impact of society on the sensitive non-conformist individual."

In the 1950s Tennessee Williams' own sexuality was a topic which he sought to express through his characters, including Sebastian Venable. Haley suggests that there are three different types of outcasts in Williams' plays: "...first are sexual outcasts who, like the playwright, offer insight into Williams' feelings about his own sexuality; second are religious outcasts, who are vehicles for the playwright's commentary on contemporary Christianity; and third, fugitive outcasts, whose flight reflects Williams' own insecurity and alienation" (Haley).

What characters in *Suddenly Last Summer* can be seen as outcasts? Are they social outcasts? Religious? Sexual? How did their position affect their relationship with their family, with their world, and with society as a whole?

The Freeman Watts Standard Lobotomy

In *Suddenly Last Summer*, Mrs. Venable is attempting to bribe Dr. Cukrowicz into performing a lobotomy on her niece Catharine, in order to stop Catharine speaking about the death of Sebastian Venable. The procedure, called the Freeman Watts Standard Lobotomy, was developed in the 1930s and was extremely dangerous and controversial. The same procedure was performed on Tennessee Williams' sister Rose in 1943, when she was being treated for paranoid schizophrenia. Williams' inclusion of this detail in the play was an indictment of the procedure and the domineering mother who ordered it.

In this procedure, which they named the 'precision operation,' the brain was approached from the lateral surface of the skull rather than from the top. (...) 'Burr' holes were drilled on both sides of the cranium at points designated by distances in millimeters from 'landmarks' on the skull. A 6-inch cannula, the tubing from a heavy-gauge hypodermic needle, was inserted through one hole and aimed toward the hole on the opposite side of the head. The cannula was inserted about 2.5 inches into the brain and, if no fluid oozed out (...) it was lowered to the bony (...) ridge at the base of the skull. The cannula was then withdrawn, and a blunt spatula—much like a calibrated butter knife—was inserted about 2 inches into the track left by the cannula. Care had to be taken to avoid damaging major arteries located near the midline of the brain. After the spatula was inserted, its handle was swung upward so that the blade could be drawn along the base of the skull, and a cut was made as far to the side as possible. The spatula was then withdrawn, and the site was rinsed. That was only the first of four quadrants to be cut...

—Elliot S. Valenstein, *Great and Desperate Cures*, 1986

Unit 2: The Role of the Actor and Playwright

COMMUNITY BUILDING

We are absolutely convinced that community building must be the first order of business in entering into any type of group project, no matter what subject matter you are teaching. At first, and on the surface, it may seem a frivolous use of time. Students may resist at first. However, be assured that community building is absolutely imperative to the success of and dedication to the project. As a result of their involvement in activities connected to community building, your students will develop relationships with each other and with you in a much more human way.

- Deanna Camputaro and Len Newman

All the community-building exercises in this section should be used to set the tone of your class and to create a safe space for performance. It is important for teachers to participate in and model these exercises.

BLIND WALK – Building Trust

Ask six students (three pairs) to leave the room, asking three to blindfold their partners. Then ask the remaining students to create a maze with their bodies in the classroom. Bring the six students back into the classroom. The blindfolded three should be led into the room with their partners and led around and through the student-created maze. The leaders should use voice and gentle, respectful touch to lead them through the room. The leader may let the follower feel different objects and textures in the room to acclimate them to their environment. Repeat until everyone in the class has had a chance to be a leader or a blind follower.

Post-Activity Reflection: Ask students what was challenging about that exercise. Did it become easier over time? What kind of faith do you need to have in the leader? What responsibility does the leader have? What responsibility does the blind follower have?

TRUST FALLS

(Model this exercise first!)

Divide students into groups of 10 and have them stand in tight circles, shoulder to shoulder. Ask for one volunteer to go into the center of the circle and “fall.” The volunteer must set his or her feet firmly on the floor, cross his or her arms over the chest, close his or her eyes, and fall backwards or forwards into the wall of the circle. The falling student should be relaxed, but should help the circle by keeping his or her body straight. Students in the circle must gently catch and move the volunteer around, supporting his or her weight. The student in the center **MUST NOT MOVE** his or her feet. All of the movement must come from the ankles up. After a short period of time, have the first volunteer rejoin the circle and ask for someone else to enter the circle. Have every student take a turn at “falling.”

Post-activity reflection: Did you trust that your circle would catch you? Did you find it easy or difficult to “fall?” Was the experience frightening? Exciting? Liberating? Was it difficult to be in the circle, catching the person in the center? Did you feel responsible for the volunteer in the center? Did you prefer to be in the circle, or in the center of the circle?

FAINT BY NUMBERS

Clear a space in the center of the classroom and have everyone find a little open space of their own, away from furniture, walls and other people. Ask them, on the count of three, to do a slow-motion faint to the floor. Do this several times until everyone has a clear idea of SLOW MOTION! Next, have the students count off until everyone has a number. Ask the students to mill around the room, keeping close to the center, keeping an eye on everyone else. Explain that when you call out a number, the person with that number must slowly faint, collapsing his or her body. It is the job of everyone else to catch that person before he or she reaches the floor. Encourage concentration and respect for other members of the class. Call out the numbers at random. After one person “faints”, get the class moving again and then call out a different number. As students begin to get more proficient, call out more than one number at a time.

Post-activity reflection: Did you trust that someone would “catch” you? Was it easier to fall knowing that you were actually in control of your descent?

THROW AND CATCH: Communicating intentions

Everyone stands in a circle. The exercise begins with someone throwing an imaginary object to another person in the circle. The object can be heavy and large or light and small—any and all variations can be used. For example, the object may be caught by an imaginary baseball glove and then blown from the hand as if it were a feather. The students’ movements should define the weight of the object and the student catching the object should receive it in the manner that it was thrown. Once they have caught the object, they can redefine it and pass it on to the next person.

Post-activity reflection: How successful were students at reflecting their intentions through body language? Were they able to communicate the weight and dimensions of their object?

POWER CLAP: Concentrating on Communicating

Ask students to stand in a circle and pass a “clap” around the circle. This is done by two people standing next to each other clapping their hands at the same time. The student on the left then turns to the student on her other side, and together they clap. The clap rhythm continues in this clockwise direction around the entire circle. Once students get a smooth rhythm ask them to speed up the passing claps. Then let students who receive claps reverse its direction spontaneously.

Post-activity reflection: How long did it take for students to develop a rhythm? Did it happen right away, was it gradual, or did it not happen at all? What are the elements that allow the clapping to proceed smoothly? What prevents the development of rhythm, or disrupts it once it has been established?

PASSING NOTES: Reflection

End your class five minutes early. Ask students to write you a personal note about how they thought the class went for them. Each day give students a new prompt such as:

What was successful about today’s class? Why was it successful?

What could you/your group do to improve your work?

What questions do you have about the work we’re doing in class?

INSPIRATION / ENTERING THE TEXT

The arts are forms of communication. Whether looking at a piece of visual art, choreography, or a theatrical performance, we are touched by the communication that occurs between ourselves as an audience, and the artwork we experience. In searching for what may have inspired an artist to create a particular work, we revitalize our own search for the inspiration inside and outside of ourselves. In looking at multiple artworks and resources related to a piece of theater, students can begin to look at how the piece might relate to their lives.

-Deanna Camputaro and Len Newman

TALKING TO YOURSELF: WRITING MONOLOGUES

This exercise serves to introduce the students to dramatic storytelling by acting out improvisations and writing one-page monologues based on themes from *Suddenly Last Summer*.

Monologue:

Whatever its form, it is and always has been a character talking to himself out loud, or to absent characters, or to objects surrounding him at a given time, in a given place, for a specific reason at a moment of crisis. Whether the monologue deals with plot or character problems, or even if the character talks aloud to himself because he is insane, a monologue will always be words representing the character's thoughts or parts of his thoughts.

- Uta Hagen, *Respect for Acting*

A monologue is a playwriting device that can serve to forward the plot or to introduce the character and his/her personality and conflicts. Monologues are often intensely personal, as the character often believes himself/herself to be alone, or lost in a personal reverie and is oblivious to those surrounding them. *Suddenly Last Summer* has been described as two monologues anchoring a series of dialogue. First Mrs. Venable presents her version of Sebastian, and at the end Catharine reveals the truth of his death. While some dialogue interrupts the speech of these characters, it is the theme of the narrative which strikes the listener the most. The following excerpt is from Scene One of *Suddenly Last Summer*, in which Mrs. Venable speaks about her relationship with her son:

MRS. VENABLE:

My son, Sebastian, demanded! We were a famous couple. People didn't speak of Sebastian and his mother or Mrs. Venable and her son, they said "Sebastian and Violet, Violet and Sebastian are staying at the Lido, they're at the Ritz in Madrid. Sebastian and Violet, Violet and Sebastian have taken a house at Biarritz for the season," and every appearance, every time we appeared, attention was centered on *us!*-- *everyone else!*
Eclipsed! Vanity? Ohhhh, no, Doctor, you can't call it that—

Activity: Read the monologue aloud to students, or distribute copies for the students to read themselves. What were they able to discern about Mrs. Venable through this

monologue? Did her words evoke any images in their minds? What might she be doing while she is talking? How old do they imagine she is? How does she look? How does she dress? Is she educated? Is she intelligent? How important are monologues to the audience in terms of understanding a character and his/her motivations?

COMPREHENDING THE TEXT

Using performance for entering and comprehending the text can help students physicalize and internalize themes, plot, and character. It provides an opportunity for students to wrestle with some of the challenging themes and language in the text, and to be introduced to the characters' emotions and motivations.

- Deanna Camputaro and Len Newman

This section includes performance, writing, and reading exercises to help introduce students to the characters and language of the play. Selected monologues and exercises will help you work with students on comprehending scenes in the play.

THE CHARACTER REVEALED

Divide the class into equal groups, and hand out one monologue to each group. Have each group read through their monologue for sense and understanding. Encourage students to look up any word that they do not understand. Once the group has determined what they feel the monologue is about, they must find a way to stage the monologue for presentation to the rest of the class. Encourage the students to be unconventional with their staging choices. Either one individual or the entire group representing one character can present the monologue.

1) MRS. VENABLE:

One long-ago summer—now, why am I thinking of this?—my son, Sebastian, said, “Mother?—Listen to this!”—He read me Herman Melville’s description of the Encantadas, the Galapagos Islands. Quote—take five and twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot. Imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot, the sea. And you’ll have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, the Enchanted Isles—extinct volcanoes, looking much as the world at large might look—after a last conflagration—end quote. He read me that description and said that we had to go there. And so we did go there that summer on a chartered boat, a four-masted schooner, as close as possible to the sort of a boat that Melville must have sailed on....We saw the Encantadas, but on the Encantadas we saw something Melville *hadn’t* written about. We saw the great sea-turtles crawl up out of the sea for their annual egg-laying....Once a year the female of the sea-turtle crawls up out of the equatorial sea onto the blazing sand-beach of a volcanic island to dig a pit in the sand and deposit her eggs there. It’s a long and dreadful thing, the depositing of the eggs in the sand-pits, and when it’s finished the exhausted female turtle crawls back to the sea half-dead. She never sees her off-

spring, but we did. Sebastian knew exactly when the sea-turtle eggs would be hatched out and we returned in time for it....

2) DOCTOR:

I can see how he *might* be, I think he *would* be disturbed if he thought he'd seen God's image, an equation of God, in that spectacle you watched in the Encantadas: creatures of the air hovering over and swooping down to devour creatures of the sea that had had the bad luck to be hatched on land and weren't able to scramble back into the sea fast enough to escape that massacre you witnessed, yes, I can see how such a spectacle could be equated with a good deal of—*experience, existence!*—but not with *God!*

3) MRS. VENABLE:

Oh yes, that long-ago summer....In the Himalayas he almost entered a Buddhist monastery, had gone so far as to shave his head and eat just rice out of a wood bowl on a grass mat. He'd promised those sly Buddhist monks that he would give up the world and himself and all his worldly possessions to their mendicant order.—Well, I cabled his father, "For God's sake notify bank to freeze Sebastian's accounts!"—I got back this cable from my late husband's lawyer: "Mr. Venable critically ill Stop Wants you Stop Needs you Stop Immediate return advised most strongly. Stop. Cable time of arrival...."

4) MRS. HOLLY:

Y'ais, she has, she's had an elevator installed where the back stairs were, and, Sister, it's the cutest little thing you ever did see! It's paneled in Chinese lacquer, black an' gold Chinese lacquer, with lovely bird-pictures on it. But there's only room for two people at a time in it. George and I came down on foot.—I think she's havin' her frozen daiquiri now, she still has a frozen daiquiri promptly at five o'clock ev'ry afternoon in the world...in warm weather....Sister, the horrible death of Sebastian just about *killed* her!—She's now slightly better...but it's a question of time.—Dear, you know, I'm sure that you understand, why we haven't been out to see you at Saint Mary's. They said you were too disturbed, and a family visit might disturb you more. But I want you to know that nobody, absolutely nobody in the city, knows a thing about what you've been through. Have they, George? Not a thing. Not a soul even knows that you've come back from Europe. When people enquire, when they question us about you, we just say that you've stayed abroad to study something or other. (*She catches her breath.*) Now. Sister?—I want you to please be *very* careful what you say to your Aunt Violet about what happened to Sebastian in Cabeza de Lobo.

5) MRS. VENABLE:

Go on! What did I have? Are you afraid to say it in front of the Doctor? She meant that I had a stroke.—I DID NOT HAVE A STROKE!—I had a slight aneurism. You know what that is, Doctor? A little vascular convulsion! Not a hemorrhage, just a

little convulsion of a blood-vessel. I had it when I discovered that she was trying to take my son away from me. Then I had it. It gave a little temporary—muscular—contraction.—To one side of my face....(*She crosses back into main acting area.*) These people are not blood-relatives of mine, they're my dead husband's relations. I always detested these people, my dead husband's sister and—her two worthless children. But I did more than my duty to keep their heads above water. To please my son, whose weakness was being excessively softhearted, I went to the expense and humiliation, yes, public humiliation, of giving this girl a debut which was a fiasco. Nobody liked her when I brought her out. Oh, she had some kind of—notoriety! She had a sharp tongue that some people mistook for wit. A habit of laughing in the faces of decent people which would infuriate them, and also reflected adversely on me and Sebastian, too. But, he, Sebastian, was amused by this girl. While I was disgusted, sickened. And halfway through the season, she was dropped off the party lists, yes, dropped off the lists in spite of my position. Why? Because she'd lost her head over a young married man, made a scandalous scene at a Mardi Gras ball, in the middle of the ballroom. Then everybody dropped her like a hot—rock, but—(*She loses her breath.*) My son, Sebastian, still felt sorry for her and took her with him last summer instead of me....

6) CATHARINE:

At a Mardi Gras ball some—some boy that took me to it got too drunk to stand up! (*A short, mirthless note of laughter.*) I wanted to go home. My coat was in the cloakroom, they couldn't find the check for it in his pockets. I said, "Oh, hell, let it go!"—I started out for a taxi. Somebody took my arm and said, "I'll drive you home." He took off his coat as we left the hotel and put it over my shoulders, and then I looked at him and—I don't think I'd ever even seen him before then, really!—He took me home in his car but took me another place first. We stopped near the Duelling Oaks at the end of Esplanade Street....Stopped!—I said, "What for?"—He didn't answer, just struck a match in the car to light a cigarette in the car and I looked at him in the car and I knew "what for!"—I think I got out of the car before he got out of the car, and we walked through the wet grass to the great misty oaks as if somebody was calling us for help there!

7) CATHARINE:

I lost him.—He took me home and said an awful thing to me. "We'd better forget it," he said, "my wife's expecting a child and--."—I just entered the house and sat there thinking a little and then I suddenly called a taxi and went right back to the Roosevelt Hotel ballroom. The ball was still going on. I thought I'd gone back to pick up my borrowed coat but that wasn't what I'd gone back for. I'd gone back to make a scene on the floor of the ballroom, yes, I didn't stop at the cloakroom to pick up Aunt

Violet's old mink stole, no, I rushed right into the ballroom and spotted him on the floor and ran up to him and beat him as hard as I could in the face and chest with my fists till--Cousin Sebastian took me away.—After that, the next morning, I started writing my diary in the third person, singular, such as “She's still living this morning,” meaning that *I* was....—“WHAT'S NEXT FOR HER? GOD KNOWS!”—I couldn't go out any more.—However one morning my Cousin Sebastian came in my bedroom and said: “Get up!”—Well...if you're still alive after dying, well then, you're obedient, Doctor.—I got up. He took me downtown to a place for passport photos. Said: “Mother can't go abroad with me this summer. You're going to go with me this summer instead of Mother.”—If you don't believe me, read my journal of Paris!—“She woke up at daybreak this morning, had her coffee and dressed and took a brief walk—“

8) CATHARINE:

We had a late lunch at one of those open-air restaurants on the sea there.—Sebastian was white as the weather. He had on a spotless white silk Shantung suit and a white silk tie and a white panama and white shoes, white—white lizard skin—pumps! He—(*She throws back her head in a startled laugh at the recollection*)—kept touching his face and his throat here and there with a white silk handkerchief and popping little white pills in his mouth, and I knew he was having a bad time with his heart and was frightened about it and that was the reason we hadn't gone out to the beach....

(During the monologue the lights have changed, the surrounding area has dimmed out and a hot white spot is focused on Catharine.)

“I think we ought to go north,” he kept saying, “I think we've done Cabeza de Lobo, I think we've done it, don't you?” I thought we'd done it!—but I had learned it was better not to seem to have an opinion because if I did, well, Sebastian, well, you know Sebastian, he always preferred to do what no one else wanted to do, and I always tried to give the impression that I was agreeing reluctantly to his wishes...it was a—game....

9) CATHARINE:

Cousin Sebastian seemed to be paralyzed near the entrance of the café, so I said, “Let's go.” I remember that it was a very wide and steep white street, and I said, “Cousin Sebastian, down that way is the waterfront and we are more likely to find a taxi near there....Or why don't we go back in?—and have them *call* us a taxi! Oh, let's do! Let's do *that*, that's better!” And he said, “*Mad*, are you *mad*? Go back in that filthy place? Never! That gang of kids shouted vile things about me to the waiters!” “Oh,” I said, “then let's go down toward the docks, down there at the bottom of the hill, let's not try to climb the hill in this dreadful heat.” And Cousin Sebastian shouted, “Please shut up, let me handle this situation, will you? I want to handle this thing.” And he started up the steep street with a hand stuck in his jacket

where I knew he was having a pain in his chest from his palpitations....But he walked faster and faster, in panic, but the faster he walked the louder and closer it got!

SCENARIO

This exercise serves to introduce the students to dramatic storytelling by acting out improvisations and writing one-page dialogues based on themes from *Suddenly Last Summer*.

Divide the students into pairs. Hand each pair the following scenario. Each pair of scene partners must develop a one-page dialogue and a short improvisational scene between two characters of their own creation based on the following scenario:

CHARACTER A is an acquaintance of CHARACTER B. CHARACTER B is shocked when CHARACTER A suddenly reveals a very disturbing secret that affects CHARACTER B deeply. How does CHARACTER B respond?

In each student pair, assign one student the role of CHARACTER A and the other student the role of CHARACTER B. Have the students begin work on their original scenario by writing a short character monologue following the guidelines in the next exercise.

MY NAME IS...

As playwrights begin their plays, they often write out detailed character descriptions to fully flesh out their characters. As your students begin to work on their scenarios, have them develop a monologue that helps to establish the identity of their character. The monologue must be written from a first person point-of-view. Use the following questions to prompt writing. The prompts can be used in any order. Encourage students to include any information that they can think of regarding their character.

- *What is my full name?*
- *What seems to be at stake at this moment? What is my conflict?*
- *Where do I live?*
- *What are my morals and values?*
- *What is my everyday behavior and mood?*
- *What is something I would never tell anyone about myself?*
- *What do I want to do for a living?*
- *Who takes care of me? Whom do I take care of?*
- *Who do I love? Hate?*
- *How do I feel about myself?*
- *How do I handle the loss of loved ones?*
- *What is my relationship with my friends and family?*
- *What are my personal habits and lifestyle conditions?*

An example of a character monologue:

My name is Adah Brown. I like to ride horses and eat artichokes. In fact, I only eat artichokes, and it worries my mother. I live with my mom here in California on the edge of an artichoke farm. I know every way you can eat an artichoke, like Bubba and shrimp in that movie "Forrest Gump" with the guy who was in "BIG." It would be

cool to grow up really fast like that. I'm 11 and sometimes I wish I could just fast-forward through the next ten years. Past the angst of adolescence and high school and going to college. I just want to be done with school so I can come back here and grow artichokes. I like artichokes. A lot.

Encourage your students to write a full page about their character. Have the students read their monologues aloud, either to each other, or in front of the class. Once the characters have been introduced, have the students begin to develop improvisations based on the original Character A/Character B scenario.

CHARACTER CONVERSATIONS: DEVELOPING DIALOGUE

Once the students have completed their monologues have them develop a scene between their two characters. Begin by working improvisationally. Keep the scene self-contained, meaning that it must meet each of the following criteria:

- The entire scene takes place in one location
- The scene has a clear beginning, middle, and end
- The characters come into conflict with each other

As the students continue working, have them begin to write out their improvisation in script form. Encourage them to revise consistently as they begin to develop a scene that captures the major points of their improvisation. What do the characters have to say to each other?

SCENE STUDIES

Now that the students have had the opportunity to participate in the playwriting process, and have worked a bit with character development, it is time for them to work with previously written text. The following scenes are excerpted from *Suddenly Last Summer*. Divide the class into groups, and hand out the following scenes. Have each member of every group read at least one character. Let the students read through the scene once amongst each other, and ask them to guess what sort of character they have from their speech patterns and responses. Encourage them to make clear, bold choices as a group to best show what their character is about.

SCENE ONE: THE MISSING SON

Mrs. Venable has just shown the visiting Dr. Cukrowicz the garden in her house, which was created by her dead son.

Mrs. Venable: Well, now, Doctor Sugar, you've seen Sebastian's garden.

(They are advancing slowly to the patio area.)

Doctor: It's like a well-groomed jungle....

Mrs. Venable: That's how he meant it to be, nothing was accidental, everything was planned and designed in Sebastian's life and his—*(She dabs her forehead with her handkerchief which she had taken from her reticule)*—work!

Doctor: What was your son's work, Mrs. Venable?—besides this garden?

Mrs. Venable: As many times as I've had to answer that question! D'you know it still shocks me a little?—to realize that Sebastian Venable the poet is still unknown outside of a small coterie of friends, including his mother.

Doctor: Oh.

Mrs. Venable: You see, strictly speaking, his *life* was his occupation.

Doctor: I see.

Mrs. Venable: No, you *don't* see, yet, but before I'm through, you will.—Sebastian was a poet! That's what I meant when I said his life was his work because the work of a poet is the life of a poet and—vice versa, the life of a poet is the work of a poet, I mean you can't separate them, I mean—well, for instance, a salesman's work is one thing and his life is another—or can be. The same thing's true of—doctor, lawyer, merchant, *thief!*—But a poet's life is his work and his work is his life in a special sense because—oh, I've already talked myself breathless and dizzy.

Post-activity reflection: What can be seen of the characters in this brief dialogue? How does Mrs. Venable view her dead son? What sort of relationship might they have had? What is the Doctor's reaction to the mother's speech? What do you make of Mrs. Venable's description of her son's "occupation?" What can be surmised about Sebastian's character?

SCENE TWO: THE POET

Mrs. Venable is discussing her son's career with Dr. Cukrowicz ('Sugar').

Mrs. Venable: Poets are always clairvoyant!—And he had rheumatic fever when he was fifteen and it affected a heart-valve and he wouldn't stay off horses and out of water and so forth.... "Violet? Mother? You're going to live longer than me, and then, when I'm gone, it will be yours, in your hands, to do whatever you please with!"—Meaning, of course, his future recognition!—That he *did* want, he wanted it after his death when it couldn't disturb him; then he did want to offer his work to the world. All right. Have I made my point, Doctor? Well, here is my son's work, Doctor, here's his life going *on!*

(She lifts a thin gilt-edged volume from the patio table as if elevating the Host before the altar. Its gold leaf and lettering catch the afternoon sun. It says Poem of Summer. Her face suddenly has a different look, the look of a visionary, an exalted religieuse. At the same instant a bird sings clearly and purely in the garden and the old lady seems to be almost young for a moment.)

Doctor *(reading the title): Poem of Summer?*

Mrs. Venable: *Poem of Summer*, and the date of the summer, there are twenty-five of them, he wrote one poem a year which he printed himself on an eighteenth-century hand-press at his—atelier in the—French—Quarter—so no one but he could see it....

(She seems dizzy for a moment.)

- Doctor:** He wrote one poem a year?
- Mrs. Venable:** One for each summer that we traveled together. The other nine months of the year were really only a preparation.
- Doctor:** Nine months?
- Mrs. Venable:** The length of a pregnancy, yes....
- Doctor:** The poem was hard to deliver?
- Mrs. Venable:** Yes, even with me! *Without me, impossible*, Doctor!—he wrote no poem last summer.
- Doctor:** He died last summer?
- Mrs. Venable:** Without me he died last summer, that was his last summer's poem.

Post-activity reflection: How does Mrs. Venable see her own relationship with her son? Is there any significance to the reference of childbirth in writing a poem? What is your reaction to the treatment of the poetry as a holy relic?

SCENE THREE: LOOKING FOR GOD

Mrs. Venable has just recounted a trip she and her son Sebastian took to the Encantadas, islands near the Galapagos Islands. While there, she and her son saw birds attacking and eating newborn sea turtles. Sebastian saw something deeper in the display of death on the beach, and Mrs. Venable is trying to explain this to Doctor Sugar.

- Mrs. Venable:** My son was looking for—*(She stops short with a slight gasp.)*—Let's just say he was interested in sea turtles!
- Doctor:** That isn't what you started to say.
- Mrs. Venable:** I stopped myself just in time.
- Doctor:** Say what you started to say.
- Mrs. Venable:** I started to say that my son was looking for God and I stopped myself because I thought you'd think 'Oh, a pretentious young crackpot!'—which Sebastian was *not*!
- Doctor:** Mrs. Venable, doctors look for God, too.
- Mrs. Venable:** Oh?
- Doctor:** I think they have to look harder for him than priests since they don't have the help of such well-known guidebooks and well-organized expeditions as the priests have with their scripture and—churches....

Mrs. Venable: You mean they go on a solitary safari like a poet?

Doctor: Yes. Some do. I do.

Mrs. Venable: I believe, I *believe* you! *(She laughs, startled.)*

Post-activity reflection: Why was Mrs. Venable reluctant to say Sebastian was looking for God? Why would it be difficult to believe other professions looked for God as well? Do you think the Doctor is a religious man? Do you think Sebastian was a religious man? What about Mrs. Venable?

SCENE FOUR: WHAT LOVE IS

Mrs. Venable's niece Catharine has arrived at her house with her mother and brother. The family wants to hear the truth about how Sebastian died, and Mrs. Venable has enlisted the help of Doctor Sugar to get the truth. The Doctor is trying to figure out what Catharine thinks of her aunt and of her dead cousin.

Doctor: Miss Catharine?

Catharine: What?

Doctor: Your aunt is a very sick woman. She had a stroke last spring?

Catharine: Yes, she did, but she'll never admit it....

Doctor: You have to understand why.

Catharine: I do, I understand why. I didn't want to come here.

Doctor: Miss Catharine, do you hate her?

Catharine: I don't understand what hate is. How can you hate anybody and still be sane? You see, I still think I'm sane!

Doctor: You think she did have a stroke?

Catharine: She had a slight stroke in April. It just affected one side, the left side, of her face...but it was disfiguring, and after that, Sebastian couldn't use her.

Doctor: Use her? Did you say use her?

(The sounds of the jungle garden are not loud but ominous.)

Catharine: Yes, we all use each other and that's what we think of as love, and not being able to use each other is what's—*hate*....

Doctor: Do you hate her, Miss Catharine?

Catharine: Didn't you ask me that, once? And didn't I say that I didn't understand hate. A ship struck an iceberg at sea—everyone sinking—

Doctor: Go on, Miss Catharine!

Catharine: But that's no reason for everyone drowning for hating everyone drowning! Is it, Doctor?

Doctor: Tell me: what was your feeling for your cousin Sebastian?

Catharine: He liked me and so I loved him.

Doctor: In what way did you love him?

Catharine: The only way he'd accept -- a sort of motherly way. I tried to save him, Doctor.

Doctor: From what? Save him from what?

Catharine: Completing!—a sort of!—*image!*—he had of himself as a sort of!—*sacrifice* to a!—*terrible* sort of a—

Doctor: --God?

Catharine: Yes, a—*cruel* one, Doctor!

Doctor: How did you feel about that?

Catharine: Doctor, my feelings are the sort of feelings that you have in a dream....

Doctor: Your life doesn't seem real to you?

Catharine: Suddenly last winter I began to write my journal in the third person.

Post-activity reflection: What is your initial impression of Catharine from this dialogue? What was her relationship like with Sebastian? How does she relate to the rest of the family now, and to the Doctor? What can be deduced about her character and state of mind from her definition of love?

SCENE FIVE: LONELINESS LIKE DEATH

Doctor Sugar has given Catharine a truth serum to calm her and get her to speak truthfully about Sebastian's death in Cabeza de Lobo. Catharine is just beginning to feel the effects of the drug.

Catharine: I can't get up! Tell me to. Then I think I could do it.

Doctor: Stand up.

(She rises unsteadily.)

Catharine: How funny! Now I can! Oh, I do feel dizzy! Help me, I'm—

(He rushes to support her.)

--about to fall over....

(He holds her. She looks out vaguely toward the brilliant, steaming garden. Looks back at him. Suddenly sways toward him, against him.)

Doctor: You see, you lost your balance.

Catharine: No, I didn't. I did what I wanted to do without you telling me to.

(She holds him tight against her.)

Let me! Let! Let! Let me! Let me, let me, oh, let me....

(She crushes her mouth to his violently. He tries to disengage himself. She presses her lips to his fiercely, clutching his body against her. Her brother George enters.)

Please hold me! I've been so lonely. It's lonelier than death, if I've gone mad, it's lonelier than death!

George *(shocked, disgusted):* Cathie!—you've got a hell of a nerve.

(She falls back, panting, covers her face, runs a few paces and grabs the back of a chair. Mrs. Holly enters.)

Mrs. Holly: What's the matter, George? Is Catharine ill?

George: No.

Doctor: Miss Catharine had an injection that made her a little unsteady.

Post-activity reflection: How do the characters react to Catharine's desperation? Was she being deceptive; if so, why? What was she hoping to gain? How does it change the Doctor's perception of her?

SCENE SIX: SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

Mrs. Venable has come to hear Catharine speak after receiving the truth serum. Mrs. Venable asserts that Catharine was the reason Sebastian didn't write a poem the last summer, and led to his death.

Catharine: She's right about that. I failed him. I wasn't able to keep the web from—breaking....I saw it breaking but couldn't save or—repair it!

Mrs. Venable: There now, the truth's coming out. We had an agreement between us, a sort of contract or covenant between us which he broke last summer when he broke away from me and took her with him, not me! When he

was frightened and I knew when and what of, because his hands would shake and his eyes looked in, not out, I'd reach across a table and touch his hands and say not a word, just look, and touch his hands with my hand until his hands stopped shaking and his eyes looked out, not in, and in the morning, the poem would be continued. *Continued until it was finished!*

(The following ten speeches are said very rapidly, overlapping.)

Catharine: I—couldn't!

Mrs. Venable: *Naturally not!* He was *mine!* I *knew* how to help him, I *could!* You didn't, you couldn't!

Doctor: These interruptions—

Mrs. Venable: I would say “You *will!*” and he *would,* I--!

Catharine: Yes, you see, I failed him! And so, last summer, we went to Cabeza de Lobo, we flew down there from where he gave up writing his poem last summer....

Mrs. Venable: Because he'd broken our—

Catharine: Yes! Yes, something had broken, that string of pearls that old mothers hold their sons by like a—sort of a—sort of—*umbilical* cord, *long—after...*

Mrs. Venable: She means that I held him back from—

Doctor: *Please!*

Mrs. Venable: *Destruction!*

Catharine: All I know is that suddenly, last summer, he wasn't young any more, and we went to Cabeza de Lobo, and he suddenly switched from the evenings to the beach....

Doctor: From evenings? To beach?

Catharine: I mean from the evenings to the afternoons and from the fa—fash—

(Silence: Mrs. Holly draws a long, long painful breath. George stirs impatiently.)

Doctor: Fashionable! Is that the word you--?

Catharine: Yes. Suddenly, last summer Cousin Sebastian changed to the afternoons and the beach.

Post-activity reflection: How does Catharine react to Mrs. Venable's possessiveness? Is Catharine behaving like a woman under the influence of a drug? How does the Doctor handle Mrs. Venable's domineering behavior? Do we learn anything new about the characters here?

SCENE SEVEN: A ONE-PIECE SUIT

Catharine is continuing her account of vacation with Sebastian while the family and the Doctor listen. She recounts how Sebastian used her on holiday.

Catharine: He bought me a swim-suit I didn't want to wear. I laughed. I said, "I can't wear that, it's a scandal to the jay-birds!"

Doctor: What did you mean by that? That the suit was immodest?

Catharine: My God, yes! It was a one-piece suit made of white lisle, the water made it transparent! *(She laughs sadly at the memory of it.)*—I didn't want to swim in it, but he'd grab my hand and drag me into the water, all the way in, and I'd come out looking naked!

Doctor: Why did he do that? Did you understand why?

Catharine: --Yes! To attract!—Attention.

Doctor: He wanted you to attract attention, did he, because he felt you were moody? Lonely? He wanted to shock you out of your depression last summer?

Catharine: Don't you understand? I was PROCURING for him!

(Mrs. Venable's gasp is like the sound that a great hooked fish might make.)

She used to do it, too.

(Mrs. Venable cries out.)

Not consciously! She didn't know that she was procuring for him in the smart, the fashionable places they used to go to before last summer! Sebastian was shy with people. She wasn't. Neither was I. We both did the same thing for him, made contacts for him, but she did it in nice places and in decent ways and I had to do it the way that I just told you!—Sebastian was lonely, Doctor, and the empty Blue Jay notebook got bigger and bigger, so big it was big and empty as that big empty blue sea and sky....I knew what I was doing. I came out in the French Quarter years before I came out in the Garden District....

Mrs. Holly: Oh, Cathie! Sister...

Doctor: Hush!

Catharine: And before long, when the weather got warmer and the beach so crowded, he didn't need me any more for that purpose. The ones on the

free beach began to climb over the fence or swim around it, bands of homeless young people that lived on the free beach like scavenger dogs, hungry children....So now he let me wear a decent dark suit. I'd go to a faraway empty end of the beach, write postcards and letters and keep up my—third-person journal till it was—five o'clock and time to meet him outside the bathhouses, on the street....He would come out, *followed*.

Doctor: Who would follow him out?

Catharine: The homeless, hungry young people that had climbed over the fence from the free beach that they lived on. He'd pass out tips among them as if they'd all—shined his shoes or called taxis for him....Each day the crowd was bigger, noisier, greedier!—Sebastian began to be frightened.—At last we stopped going out there....

Post-activity reflection: What have we learned about Sebastian here? How will this revelation affect Mrs. Venable? Is Catharine speaking the truth? Do you think the other characters will believe her?

CREATING PERFORMANCE

A WRITER'S WORKSHOP AND SCENE SHOWING

Each playwright typically goes through an extensive process of rewriting when creating a dramatic piece of work. After the initial writing session, she or he may ask to hold a reading, in which actors read the play aloud. After the playwright hears their piece aloud, she or he may return to revising and rewriting. The play can be put into workshop, where a director, dramaturg and the actors work together to stage the play in a staged reading. When the play is ready, the playwright looks for a production venue.

Hold a writing session in which the students rewrite their Scenario scenes as short ten-minute plays. Revise and rewrite the scenes as needed, encouraging them to look back at the questions and prompts for help in strengthening and enhancing their work.

Hold an informal reading for each work to allow the students to hear their pieces and appropriate feedback. When scenes are reworked to the playwrights' satisfaction, cast each original scene and three of the students' favorite scenes from *Suddenly Last Summer* for a director and actors. Rehearse each piece, rewriting the student-created work if desired. Hold a performance of all the scenes interspersed.

Before beginning rehearsals and the showing of your students' performances, write the following question on the board:
What makes a good performance? (Commitment, focus, energy, audibility, movement, etc.)
Take time to brainstorm with your students what contributes to achieving their best.

Unit 3: THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNERS

Deep and meaningful comprehension of a play is not limited to actors and playwrights. The insightful perceptions of designers, and their profound knowledge of the world of the play, help to create an environment in which the actors can tell their story.

If you have students that are reluctant to take part in performance as actors, encourage them to participate as designers. The following information and activities are included to encourage student comprehension through the process of design and the designer's approach to the text.

INSPIRATION: Exploring the World of the Play

While it is the playwright's job to write a good script, and the director's and actors' jobs to bring those written words to life, designers play an invaluable role in creating the visual and aural world of the play. While a play could be presented on a bare stage with a minimum of sets, lights, props, and costumes, the creation of a complete physical environment helps both the actors and the audience fully realize and enjoy the story. Design elements such as sets, lights, costumes, and sound help to establish a number of details for the audience, such as:

- ❑ **Time period:** Is it modern-day, Victorian, in the future?
- ❑ **Location:** Indoors, outdoors, a home, a prison?
- ❑ **Time of day:** Morning, night?
- ❑ **Time of year:** Winter, summer, spring, fall?
- ❑ **Circumstances of the characters:** Rich, poor?
- ❑ **Personalities of the characters:** Flashy, subdued, somber?

Designing a play is a very detailed process and involves a deep understanding of the play and a lot of research. The first thing a designer does is read the script, recording their responses to the play, and what they envision as the world of the characters.

Next, designers meet with the director to become aware of the director's intentions in his or her interpretation of the script. The directors will tell the designers if they have specific requirements for the set, costumes, lighting, etc., and will explore and brainstorm the world of the play with the designers. With this information, the designers will go off on their own to do their own research. This often involves historical research in addition to finding images, colors, and patterns that they think are important and relevant to the direction in which the play is headed. They begin to sketch ideas for their designs and then meet with the director again to discuss them.

As the designs are solidified the designers may build set models, draw lighting plots, or costume sketches for different characters. The designers will tweak their designs throughout the process, so that all of the pieces of the show create a unified vision of the world of the play to be presented to the audience.

INSPIRATION: Who Does What?

THE SCENIC DESIGNER

The scenic designer is responsible for designing the set. It is his or her job to create scenery that appropriately represents the physical world of the play.

THE LIGHTING DESIGNER

Although the lighting designer's work may be subtler than that of the scenic designer, it is lighting that allows us to see the actors and the stage. And, indeed, the first rule of lighting design is *making sure the audience can see everything they need to see!* Once that is accomplished, the lighting designer helps the audience to see everything from time of day to time of year to the mood of the characters. Color and quality of light can make a scene feel warm or cool, can make characters look well or sickly or ghostly, and can also help to create a number of spectacular effects on stage.

THE COSTUME DESIGNER

Like the scenic designer, the work of the costume designer has an immediate impact on the audience. Costumes are the clothes that the characters wear, and are very important in communicating a great deal of information to the audience. In addition to all of the background types of information (time period, location, etc.) costumes say a great deal about the characters that are wearing them. Costumes often tell us about a character's profession, status in life, age, and personality.

THE SOUND DESIGNER

The sound designer is an increasingly important figure in the production process of a play. In addition to creating or finding sound effects (i.e. door bells, car horns, any other background noises) sound designers select (and sometimes compose) music for plays. If a production requires amplification, the sound designer must select the appropriate equipment and find a way to make the amplified voices sound appropriate.

THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Although not directly related to the production of the play, the graphic designer does something very important. He or she designs the advertising materials and posters that let people know that a show is going on. The graphic designer has a very difficult and specific task, which is to try and sum up the entire play in one image that will be striking and attractive to prospective audience members.

These are just a few examples of the other artists whose expertise contributes to the production of a play. Depending on the production, other participating designers may include make-up designers, pyrotechnics experts, dance choreographers, combat choreographers, props designers (sometimes called props masters) and special companies that create effects such as "flying" the actors!

ENTERING THE TEXT: What Am I Looking For?

Designers read the text of a play in a slightly different way than the actors do. Designers are looking for clues that tell them about the physical world of the play. Divide the class into several groups representing the different design elements. Ask for volunteers to read the following scene

description aloud. These are stage directions, written in parentheses within the play. Have the designers note how many “clues” there are in the text that tell them what they need for their design:

(The set may be as unrealistic as the décor of a dramatic ballet. It represents part of a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans on a late afternoon, between late summer and early fall. The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature....

The jungle tumult continues a few moments after the curtain rises; then subsides into relative quiet, which is occasionally broken by a new outburst.

A lady enters with the assistance of a silver-knobbed cane. She has light orange or pink hair and wears a lavender lace dress, and over her withered bosom is pinned a starfish of diamonds.

She is followed by a young blond Doctor, all in white, glacially brilliant, very, very good-looking, and the old lady’s manner and eloquence indicate her undeliberate response to his icy charm.)

Activity: How much information were the students able to extract from the text and the scene breakdown? See if they can answer the following questions:

- What type of building are they in?
- How many rooms does it have?
- How many doors?
- What time of day is it?
- How many props are needed in this scene?
- Are the owners well off or poor?

These are some of the questions that the students must ask themselves in order to begin their work as designers. First they must answer the broad questions like time and place. Then they can start to work on the details.

COMPREHENDING THE TEXT: Details, Details!

The designer does not take all of his or her ideas from the text. Much functional information is provided by the playwright, but many of the details of the design come from the director’s and the designer’s imagination, and their vision of the play. While these choices must work within the context of the whole play and should be based on information found in the script, most text is not proscriptive. Design choices help to communicate this collaborative interpretation to the audience.

THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNERS: Perceptions

Ask for volunteers to read the following characters:

Mrs. Venable: Most people's lives—what are they but trails of debris, each day more debris, more debris, long, long trails of debris with nothing to clean it all up but, finally, death....

Sister: You're still in my charge. I can't permit you to smoke because the last time you smoked you dropped a lighted cigarette on your dress and started a fire.

Catharine: The Doctor's still at the window but he's too blond to hide behind window curtains, he catches the light, he shines through them.

Catharine: I think I'm just dreaming this, it doesn't seem real!

Doctor: Give me all your resistance. See. I'm holding my hand out. I want you to put yours in mine and give me all your resistance. Pass all of your resistance out of your hand to mine.

Doctor: I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true....

Post-activity Reflection: What impressions did these lines make on you? Did you have a picture in your mind? What did the character look like? How was he or she dressed? Would this character wear a particular color? Style? Texture?

FOR THE COSTUME DESIGNERS:

Designs and essay by Alexandra Morphet, Indiana University

Tennessee Williams is very specific about the costumes in *Suddenly Last Summer*, from the entrance of Mrs. Venable to Catharine's recollection of the purchase of her sweater. In 1999, Indiana University put on a production of *Suddenly Last Summer* and the costume designer, Alexandra Morphet, made the following notes:

The time and place very much shape the costume choices. The play takes place on a summer's evening in New Orleans at the end of the 1930s. The other controlling feature of Tennessee Williams' work is its symbolic register. The play is imbued with religious imagery, literary allusions, and metaphoric images of savagery and death. There is reference to Melville's white whale. The naming of Dr. Cukrowicz suggests bleached whiteness.

Alexandra Morphet chose to echo that symbolic resonance by using the color white as the organizing principle of the costumes. White is an ambiguous signifier. Traditionally, white has represented death, but in Christian-influenced society, it has come to signify purity and redemption. The silhouette of the 1930s and the European couture clothing of Elsa Schiaparelli were the inspiration for

the design. Schiaparelli is, in fact, mentioned by Catharine in the play. Schiaparelli was a Paris designer involved with the Surrealists and other avant-garde artists. Her uncompromising designs capture the edgy, slightly off-key or over-the-top nature of Tennessee Williams' characters. His characters are living at the boundaries of emotional control. Schiaparelli pushed the boundaries of fashion with her sometimes savage, sometimes outrageous designs, yet she was a designer to the highest of the high society and displayed a refined elegance in her clothing.

Catharine appears in the play dressed in an outfit purchased on her European trip. She has been granted an escorted leave from the asylum to meet with her family, and she is trying to make the best of herself to prepare for the inevitable confrontation with her aunt. She is crossing the line from being merely feminine, youthful, and vulnerable to becoming a woman of character with some fight in her. We can't be sure she will make it.

Mrs. Venable is venerable, as her name suggests. She is a lady of distinction, traveling in the highest reaches of New Orleans society. Yet, the audience must feel that there is a savage undercurrent beneath the venerable veneer. Alexandra Morphet designed an evening cocktail gown that had some swaths of strident color to unbalance the image of studied elegance. As her caped sleeves suggest, she is one version of the ambiguous angel, the protector and destroyer in one.

Dr. Cukrowicz, "Sugar," as he calls himself, must be as white as refined sugar. But again, white is an ambiguous signifier, perhaps a little scary and clinical, perhaps luminescent. We are not sure whether he will be an angel of death or of salvation.

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Costume Samples from Indiana University, 1999:

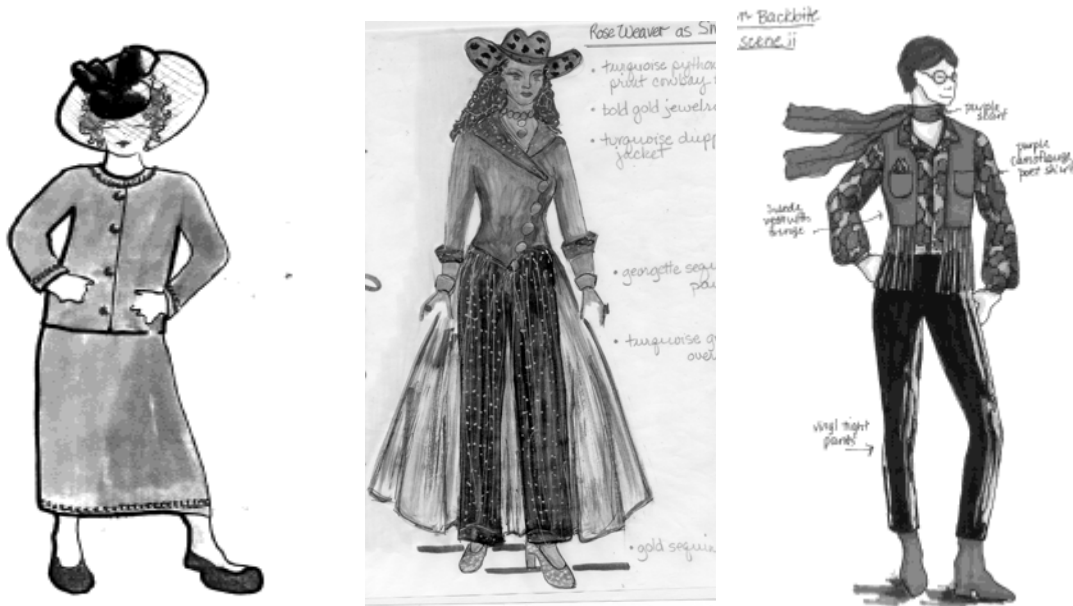


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Ask each student to design costumes for the *Suddenly Last Summer* characters. Refer to any of the text samples that are found in this guide, or to a copy of the script. Pass out the costume design examples below, and ask them to answer in their designs the following questions:

- *What taste does this character have?*
- *How is their personality expressed through their clothing?*
- *How concerned are they about their appearance?*
- *What are some of their favorite things to wear?*
- *What sorts of fabrics and colors would they wear?*

Examples of Varied Costume Designs:



Encourage the students to use fabric and other material swatches, and to draw their own designs with pastels, watercolors, pens or pencil, or to make a collage/composite from magazines. Ask them to use their imaginations as they experiment – the designs need not be realistic or perfect. Continue to stress that design is a process!

Once students have completed some preliminary design ideas, clear a space in the classroom. Announce a character’s name, and ask the costume designers to come into the space and share their designs for that character, describing how and why they made their choices. Repeat for the remaining characters.

Post-activity reflection: How did your perceptions of the characters differ from other people in the class? Did your vision of the character change as other people shared their ideas?

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:

Design a poster for the play *Suddenly Last Summer*, using any scene or character monologue as the basis for your idea. To begin, look over each of the posters Trinity Rep’s graphic designer Michael Guy has designed for previous shows at Trinity Rep. What do you learn about each show

from the poster? Which posters are you most interested in? Why? Which poster makes you want to come see the show? What is the function of the poster in the artistic process? Create a poster you feel best represents the show, using any variety of creative materials. Include the following criteria on the poster:

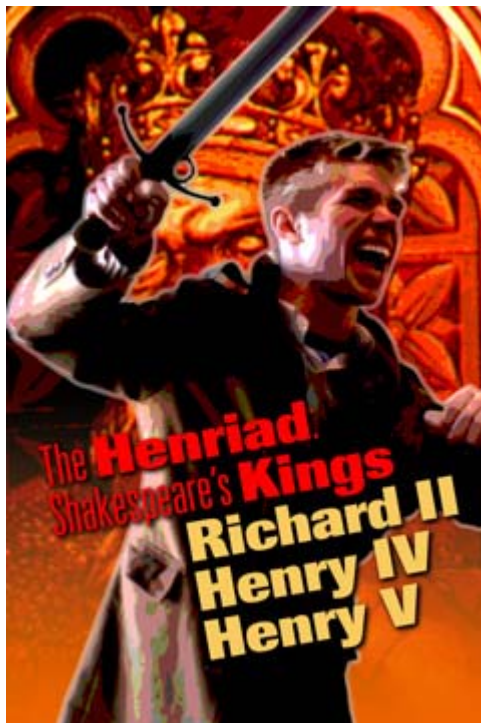
Name of Play: *Suddenly Last Summer*

Playwright's Name: Tennessee Williams

Director's Name: Mark Sutch

Address of Theater: Trinity Repertory Company, 201 Washington St. Providence

Phone Number of the Box Office: 352-4242



SET DESIGNERS:



Wes Peters. Scenic design for the Indiana University Production of Tennessee Williams' *Suddenly Last Summer*, October 1999, Copyright 2000, The Trustees of Indiana University

Create a model or collage of the world that the play *Suddenly Last Summer* could occur in. How would you approach the design of a show? What does the world of these characters look like? What will be interesting both theatrically and functionally? What colors, shapes, textures, and materials (wood, steel, glass, fabrics) will you use? Feel free to use pictures, magazines, household products, or anything that you feel belongs in your conception of the world of *Suddenly Last Summer*.

CREATING PERFORMANCE: EXHIBITION: *Suddenly Last Summer* in 3-D

Hold an exhibition of all student-created work from this unit of study.

GALLERY:

Ask students interested in showing their original art and posters to name, frame and mount their work, encouraging creative use of the space around the classroom. Arrange the set and costume designs around the room on small tables, and ask students to write short descriptions of their designs and to justify and explain the choices they made when creating the work.

FOUND SPACE:

Choose several of the original scenes from the Scenario writing exercise. Cast actors and a director for each scene and schedule rehearsal time while the gallery is being assembled. In one corner of the room, clear a playing space. Perform the student-created scenes in repertory with the actual *Suddenly Last Summer* scenes after the students have finished looking at the art, designs, and posters on the walls.

Unit 4: CREATING PERFORMANCE PIECES

Performance happens in all shapes and sizes. It occurs when groups present creative solutions to kinesthetic challenges during “entering the text phase.” Performances can be presentations of writing, excerpts from skills-building activities, reflections about artwork, opinions about seeing the play, or exercises in finding one’s personal aesthetic. Performances do not need to be elaborate productions, but can be presented in the classroom, some without much practice, others with some revision. The emphasis is on content and experiential learning more than on developing artistic skill.

-Deanna Camputaro and Len Newman

INTERPRETATION: THE ARTIST’S PREROGATIVE

Now that the students have had a chance to work with text, and to see the play performed, they may be interested in crafting their own piece for presentation. As you have seen, both actors and directors (not to mention designers!) take great liberties in interpreting the text to support their vision of the play. Encourage your students to think creatively as they envision their production. Have them ask themselves the following questions:

- Where else could the events of this play take place?
- What themes of this play are most relevant today?
- What other language style could be used in this play?

Before you begin to feel overwhelmed by the idea of a full-blown production, keep in mind that a culminating event can take any number of different forms. The primary goal of the performance is to share the work of the students, not to have a full set or lighting design or professionally built costumes. Below are a few ideas for culminating events. Keep in mind that a performance is simply a sharing of work that has been done. Also, be sure to set a realistic goal for the group, based on your timeline for the project!

The Pastiche Model: This model, which is probably the easiest to assemble, consists of a selection of the scenes from the play. The presentation usually consists of three or four scenes or monologues from the play linked thematically, performed in the original language of the text.

The Tableau Model: Using short pieces of text that can be read individually, or as groups, the students form tableaux to help tell the story of the play and physicalize its salient themes.

The Framing Model: To tell the story in a slightly different way, characters from the play are placed in a different context. For instance, Catharine and Mrs. Venable wind up telling their respective stories on the Oprah Winfrey Show. This model allows the students to develop their own script for one part of the presentation, while allowing for them to intersperse actual scenes from the play.

The “Concept” Model: This one could be anything! Students identify themes from the play and develop their own scenes in response to those themes. Keep in mind that the student’s interpretation may take the form of scenes, songs, poetry, artwork, or all of the above. This is, of course, the most difficult and time-consuming model, but probably the most rewarding for the

students. If you choose to go with a concept, be certain to allow yourself enough time for development and rehearsal!

Once you have developed and rehearsed your piece, the next step is to share it with an audience. Be sure to invite an audience with whom the students will be comfortable, and to stage your performance in a space that is conducive to student success.

WARMING UP ON THE PERFORMANCE DAY

All performers get nervous prior to performing, so assure your students that this is a perfectly natural (and healthy) reaction to appearing on stage. The nervous energy is one of the elements that make your performance exciting! Still, it's a good idea to focus all of that good energy so that it doesn't turn into pure stage fright. The following exercises will help students to prepare themselves both mentally and physically for performance.

SHAKE IT OUT

Model this exercise first. Have students stand in a circle, placing yourself in a position for all to see you. For a backwards countdown of five each time, shake out each arm and each leg. Have everyone call out the numbers, and encourage full energy and shakes. After five, do each appendage for four counts, then three, and so on.

BREATHING FOR CONCENTRATION AND STAGE FRIGHT

Practice the following deep breathing exercises to focus and prepare students to deal with the rush of adrenaline before performance.

Inhale into the diaphragm.

Hold.

Exhale slowly counting backward from 10. (It helps to have one person count aloud.)

Roll the head slowly from side to side, ear to shoulder.

Drop the head slowly toward the floor on an exhale, bending at the knees and hips.

Return to standing on an inhale, with the head slowly coming up last, building back up through the vertebrae.

Lift the shoulders on an inhale.

Drop them on an exhale.

DICTION AND VOCAL WARM-UPS

The following exercises are the same techniques used by actors to learn how to speak clearly, increase clarity of diction, and to warm up their voices before a performance. As a group, clearly and distinctly repeat the vowel sounds "A-E-I-O-U" out loud, concentrating on how your lips and jaw go from a wide position on "A" to a narrow position on "U." Exaggerate this motion and the difference between the sounds. After a few repetitions, try saying the following phrases out loud as a group. Try to speak as clearly and forcefully as possible, and exaggerate the sounds of the words.

- **"You know you need unique New York."**
- **"Red leather, yellow leather, good blood, bad blood."**
- **"Sally sells seashells by the sea shore."**
- **"Whether the weather is cold, or whether the weather is hot, we'll be together whatever the weather, whether you like it or not."**
- **"I see Isis's icy eyes."**

If you have extra time, try saying the tongue twisters with a particular accent – Southern, “very proper” British, Cockney, New York or Long Island, stereotypical “Ro Dilun,” etc. What happens to the vowels in each of these accents? Ask the students how the tongue twisters feel to practice. Which ones are harder or easier?

OTHER ELEMENTS OF CULMINATING EVENTS

You may have students that are not interested in performing. Some students are shy, others are simply disinterested, and many have other talents that they bring to the table that should be utilized. Some students have already begun to act as playwrights. Be sure to display their written work as a part of the culminating event. In the theater, all of the members of the ensemble work together to develop a performance piece, so everyone is recognized.

While you may not have the ability to build a set, visual artists may want to design the set upon which their performance piece belongs. Drawings, paintings and models displayed for the audience will help them create a setting in their mind’s eye. The same is true for costume designs. Illustrations of their vision of the play are fun to look at, and indicate, just as clearly as performance, a student’s comprehension of the play.

MORE IDEAS FOR PREPARING FOR THE PERFORMANCE DAY

ADVERTISEMENTS

- Ask students to create posters and programs on the computer or by hand (recruit the artists in your class)
- Make copies of the scripts available to teachers and students
- Create and sell tickets
- Invite other classrooms, family and friends

WELCOME THE AUDIENCE

- Explain the process of creating the performance and the goals of the unit
- Demonstrate some of the warm ups and exercises used during the unit
- Introduce each section of the performance with excitement, enthusiasm and respect for the performers

POST-SHOW CELEBRATION

- Bow to your audience. This is a very important aspect of the performance, which allows the actors to salute the audience, as well as giving the audience the opportunity to applaud the actors. This takes rehearsal, so reserve some time during your unit to practice.
- Have a post show discussion with students and audience. Ask the audience to offer their constructive feedback on what they observed about the performance

Unit 5: Reflection

Reflection should be an ongoing process. Whether your students are reflecting on their own aesthetic understanding of material, or on their process of community building, time should be allotted for reflection and assessment. Reflection should also take place in the form of critique and development of rubric.

- Deanna Camputaro and Len Newman

Though we've listed this part of the process last in the study guide, developing a rubric and a language for reflecting on student work should be one of the first things you do. We suggest you develop a set of questions and a rubric for assessment **WITH YOUR STUDENTS**.

Please develop these sets of standards early in your unit so students will know what makes their work effective and how they can improve upon it.

BUILD A RUBRIC

One of the first reactions that students have to seeing a performance is their need to identify whether it was “good” or “bad”. It is imperative that you take the time to develop a constructive language for reflection on all activities, as the students will eventually be assessing not only themselves, but also their classmates. Developing a rubric with your students will help to discourage such sweeping, negative and ultimately useless comments, such as “That was horrible!” by forcing students to explain their reaction to an activity, based on a set of standards developed by the group. It is also a good idea to have students identify elements that worked and elements that didn't work, no matter what the activity. Different activities will have different criteria for success, so take these student-generated rubrics and post them visibly in your classroom to use throughout your performance unit.

Remember that art is subjective and people tend to have completely emotional responses to it. Avoid the use of the words “good” and “bad” in discussions as these carry a value judgment. Try, for example, “effective” and “less effective”, which are not absolute, and require a more informed explanation. While emotional responses will play a role in the building of your rubric, the students should also use their knowledge of the art form, the content of the play, and other relevant information to inform their opinions and their assessment tool. In fact, the development of the rubric is one more way in which we measure the student's comprehension of the material. Use some of the following questions to begin to develop a rubric for performance:

- When you see a performance, what makes you enjoy it?
(Potential responses: it's funny, it tells a story, it makes me cry)
- What do you think are the elements of a good performance?
(Potential responses: you're loud, you show your emotion, focus)
- What steps did you need to take to create a performance?
(Potential responses: brainstorming, an outline, rehearsal)
- What elements of your performance were effective?
(Potential responses: we were loud, there was action)
- What would you change for next time to make the work stronger?
- What elements were used in the performance to clearly communicate to the audience?

There are limitless ways in which to build a rubric. First you must decide what outcomes you expect and are trying to measure, and then formulate questions that address those outcomes. It is important to be consistent. If you have been building rubrics in your classroom to conform to standards-based curriculum frameworks, keep your performance rubrics in line with your academic rubrics. If not, we've found that the following model can be very useful.

Discuss each activity with the group and allow them to set the standard. For example, the group establishes the following standard for effective performance:

- **I can be heard by everyone in the room.**
- **I show my emotion.**
- **I have good energy.**
- **I am focused on what I'm doing.**

Keep in mind that these are just examples and that it is important that you develop the rubric with your students, depending upon what you would like to measure. Now, each criterion will have to be scored, both for student self-assessment and critique of other students or other performances. This can be very a simple measure, such as "Yes" (we met the standard) or "No" (we didn't meet the standard) or a fairly sophisticated system for measuring improvement. We suggest giving the students a fairly broad method of scoring. For instance:

1= No 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Mostly 5=Always

It will make your life much easier if your scoring method works for each of your rubrics, and it could certainly be broader than the example above. The following is example of how this type of a rubric might look for student self assessment:

What Makes A Good Performance?	1	2	3	4	5
I could be heard by everyone in the room					
I had good energy					
I showed my emotion					
I was focused					

Now, many of these students have never been on stage before and may not have a clear idea about what makes for effective live performance. If you are attending a performance at the theater, use that performance as your standard-setting experience. What did they observe the actors doing that made the performance enjoyable or affecting? Ask both before and after the performance what the students think is important. Does seeing the play influence their opinions? This model can also be adjusted to allow students to critique performances and other related activities.

KEEP A LOG

A log is the record of a journey. Ask students to keep a record of their own journey as you study and see the production of *Suddenly Last Summer*. Leave time at the end of each class for students to write in the journal. Help them with prompts such as:

- What are some of the lines you particularly enjoyed? Why?
- Personal impressions of the characters and reactions to the ideas or subjects that come up as you read and participate in the activities and scenes
- Notes on how you would perform one of the characters. What draws you to them?

- Comments on the importance of a reoccurring word or phrase.
- What do you think the title signifies?
- Which exercises in class did you enjoy? What made the scene or activity engaging and interesting for you?
- What skills do you think you need to improve on the scene you performed?
- What was the best part of the performance you took part in and/or saw at Trinity Rep?
- What were your impressions of the set, acting, lighting and staging after watching the show at Trinity Rep? How was the space used? Were the actors committed to their performance? Do you agree with the choices of the director, actors and designers? What would you have done differently?

REFLECT INDIVIDUALLY – USE NOTE CARDS

- Read the students journals and create note cards to pass out to students that include your reflections.
- After each class ask students to reflect on the work of the day on the note card. Ask them specific questions that came up in the class. Read the student reflections to plan for the next day’s class or to learn more about individual issues and questions.

REFLECT IN SMALL AND LARGE GROUPS

- Using the prompts above ask the entire group to reflect on the performances
- Ask individual students to reflect on one specific aspect of the performance
- When doing small group work, ask students to focus on a specific aspect of the performance to work on (i.e. focus on improving commitment of your performance)

ORIGINAL REVIEW

Ask students to review *Suddenly Last Summer* from their unique perspectives as young adults. Send the reviews to your local newspaper or to Trinity Rep at education@trinityrep.com. The Education department will choose one or two reviews to print in the theater’s newsletter and to exhibit at the end of the school year.

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