THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

Directed by Michael Kahn
Adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher
From the original by Nikolai Gogol

SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY
FIRST FOLIO:
TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCE GUIDE
Consistent with the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this First Folio: Teacher and Student Resource Guide will prove useful to you while preparing to attend The Government Inspector.

First Folio is a supplemental guide to our Asides Magazine that provides additional information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before and after attending the production.

First Folio is designed as a resource both for teachers and students. All Folio activities meet the “Vocabulary Acquisition and Use” and “Knowledge of Language” requirements for the grades 8-12 Common Core English Language Arts Standards. We encourage you to photocopy these articles and activities and use them as supplemental material to the text.

Enjoy the show!
When locals in a small Russian town learn that an undercover government inspector is coming for a surprise visit, an unfortunate case of mistaken identity sends the village spiraling into a world of panic and greed. Fearing such a visit will expose the extent of the town’s corruption, Mayor Anton Antonovich and other local government officials set off in a flurry of activity to cover up their various misdeeds and prepare for the inspector’s arrival.

Gossiping local landowners Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky fuel the town’s frenzy when they discover that a stranger from the city has already been staying at the local inn for a week. Across town, a lowly and impoverished young civil servant, Ivan Alexandreyevich Hlestakov, fights with the Inn Keeper’s Wife and the Waitress over his mounting bills, as the Mayor arrives to officially welcome Hlestakov, who he mistakenly assumes is the government inspector.

Bribes fly as the corrupt officials – the Judge, the School Principal, the Hospital Director the Police Chief and the Postmaster – literally fall over themselves to offer fists full of rubles to the unsuspecting commoner. Shocked by his newfound wealth, and deciding to make the most of the town’s misconception, he begins weaving elaborate tales of his life as a high-ranking government official with the help of his seedy valet Osip.

The Mayor’s wife, wooed by the pedigree of the new visitor and hoping to wed her daughter Marya into further wealth, sets her sights on Hlestekov’s heart. Even the Mayor’s Maid, and trio of local merchants get into the act, helping put on a false front for the inspector, as a visiting Doctor quietly observes the antics from the background. It isn’t until after Hlestakov is long gone, and just moments before the real government inspector is revealed, that the townspeople discover their mistake.
WHO’S WHO in *The Government Inspector*

**Ivan Alexandreyevich Hlestakov**
A petty clerk who is believed to be the government inspector.

**Anna Andreyevna**
The Mayor’s wife who is very concerned with her looks and marrying off her daughter, Marya.

**Anton Antonovich**
Mayor of the town. He is extremely corrupt.

**Marya Antonovna**
The Mayor’s daughter who falls in love with Hlestakov.

**Osip**

**KEY**

- = family

- = love

- = Interest

- = employee

= servant

= Government worker

**The Postmaster**

**The Hospital Director**

**The Judge**

**The School Principal**

**Dobchinsky**
A landowner in the town who looks very similar to Bobchinsky.

**Bobchinsky**
A landowner in the town who looks very similar to Dobchinsky.
Corruption in Politics

In *The Government Inspector*, bribery is used to cover up the leaderships' failings. Is there such a thing as a non-corrupt politician? Are politicians ever able to detach their own beliefs or their agenda to make decisions for the good of the people and not themselves? Is Gogol pointing the finger solely at the Russian government? Or is the idea of government corruption universal?

Break up into groups and find four circumstances of government corruption:
- One example in history in another country.
- One example in history in America.
- One current example in America.
- One current example in the DC/MD/VA area.

Each group should research each example and the aftermath for the politician. Compare and contrast as a class and decide which politician was the biggest offender. After voting, break up back into the smaller groups and act out a scene that demonstrates the chosen corruption.

“It’s a bribe if you eat it, it’s a bribe if you drink it, it’s a bribe if you spend an hour with it and it tells you it’s always been attracted to powerful men but has another appointment at eight.”

-Mayor, *The Government Inspector*

What’s in a lie?

During campaign season, it’s hard to watch television or listen to the radio without being bombarded by campaign commercials. In many of the ads, the candidates make negative comments about their opponent; in others, they talk about their own policies. After watching/listening to many of these commercials, one realizes that they are not getting all of the facts from either candidate. In *The Government Inspector*, the head of the hospital, the head of schools, the mayor and the rest of the town try to convince the supposed government inspector that they are doing their job correctly. Candidates likewise try to convince the viewer that they are the best person for the job.

Are the characters in the play and the candidates blatantly lying? Or are they simply not telling the entirety of the truth? Is one of these options more acceptable than the other?

Break up into small groups and create two scenes; one that shows the telling of a blatant lie and one that shows the telling of the partial truth.

What is the outcome of these scenes? Is one option better than the other?
Classroom Activities for 
*The Government Inspector*

What makes something a satire?

**Satire** is defined as the following:  

a) the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule or the like, in exposing, denouncing or deriding vice or folly,  
b) a literary composition, in verse or prose, in which human folly and vice are held up to scorn, derision or ridicule,  
c) a literary genre comprising such compositions. Satire has been around for centuries. The earliest examples of satire are believed to have started in Ancient Egypt in 2 BC. Nowadays, satire can be seen in many artistic forms for example: literature, plays, commentary, cartoons and lyrics.

In *The Government Inspector*, Gogol satirizes the kind of corrupt government that could be found anywhere in the world. Gogol, however, was not intentionally criticizing Russian political officials and was extremely apologetic and embarrassed when critics thought that was his objective.

In America, we have Jon Stewart and his co-workers on *The Daily Show*, the actors on *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) and political cartoonists who purposefully satirize the current events in politics and the news media.

So what are the necessary ingredients to make a satire? Does it need to be intentionally written that way? Must the audience understand the satirical relevance? Does it need to be funny?

Find an example of a satirical cartoon, television show and piece of literature and answer the following for each:

♦ How do you know it’s a satire?
♦ What are they satirizing?
♦ What are the elements that they are exaggerating to make these a satire? And how do you know it’s an exaggeration?
♦ What are the authors saying about the subject matter? What point are they trying to get across?

**Slavic Satire** (an excerpt)

The adapter of *The Government Inspector* discusses the play’s Russianness—and it’s universality  
By Jeffrey Hatcher

If Russia’s situation is so specific unto itself, why is *The Government Inspector*—surely the most Russian of Russian plays—so universal? One reason is the play’s completely original idea. A hapless nobody is mistaken for a powerful government official by a gaggle of corrupt, small town officials. Another reason is that its characters are recognizable to anyone in any age who has ever attended a city council meeting, met a contractor or had an inflated opinion of himself…

Does *The Government Inspector* have contemporary significance? The answer is yes, of course. But that doesn’t mean the script has been updated and set in 2012. If I’d placed the story in, say, Washington and re-cast its characters as recognizable spoofs of John Boehner, Joe Biden and Michelle Bachman, it’s see-by date would be November 12, if not sooner. Besides, audiences can see the contemporary versions of Gogol’s mayor and his cohorts every minute of the day on television. They will have no problem making the connection between an 1830’s Russian backwater and a House of Representatives oversight committee.

To read this entire article and for more information about *The Government Inspector*, visit ASIDESonline: http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/_pdf/asides/Gov_Asides_lowres.pdf
Classroom Activities for
The Government Inspector

What’s Status Got To Do With It?

In The Government Inspector status is very important. Characters are treated well or poorly based on their perceived status—but what happens when perceptions are wrong? These activities will explore how people behave and interact with others solely based on their statuses.

- The facilitator will hand each participant a piece of paper with a number between 1—10 on it. 1 equals the lowest status and 10 equals the highest.
- Each participant will only know their own status.
- Participants should begin to walk around and talk to each other as their status. For example, a person with a status of 10 might walk around with their chest up high, looking down on people and barely speaking to them, while a person with a status of 1 might walk around with their shoulders hunched and their head hung down.
- After about two minutes of walking around, have the participants line up in order of their status.
- Reflection questions:
  - How did people show their status physically and vocally?
  - Was anyone surprised about the number that other participants had?
  - Who found it hard to play their status number?

Now to switch it up a bit.

- Participants should break up into partners.
- The facilitator will give each partner a post-it with a number between 1—10 on it and put it on their shirt so that they cannot see it. 1 equals the lowest status and 10 equals the highest.
- Choose three questions as a large group that the partners will ask each other. For example: What is your favorite meal? What was your best vacation? What is your favorite television show?
- Partners will have two minutes to ask/answer these questions. Partners should speak to each other according to the other persons status.
- Switch partners and ask the same questions.
- Switch one more time.
- After switching three times, have the participants line up where they think they fit in the status train.
- Reflection questions:
  - Who was lined up in the correct place in the status train? How did they know where they belonged?
  - For those who had a sense of their status, how did that affect their interactions with others?

After completing both versions, discuss the following:
- Who felt more comfortable knowing their own status? Why? Why not?
- Was it easier to treat people well or poorly when you knew your own status but didn’t know theirs? Why or Why not?
- Should status have an effect on the way we treat people? Why or why not?

Standards of Learning

The activities and question sequences found in the Folio supports grade 8-12 Common Core standards in English Language Arts. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

- Understanding of Classical Literature
- Vocabulary and Content Development
- Stagecraft
- Argument and Persuasive Writing
- Inference
- Performance
- Questioning and Listening
- Research
- Analysis and Evaluation
Theatre Etiquette

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below:

Before you go:

- *The Government Inspector* plays take place before cell phones and other fun technology existed. Please help us create the environment by turning off your cell phone and other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.). Not only will it be historically inaccurate, but it can be very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The lights from cell phones and other electronic devices are also a big distraction, so please no text messaging.

- We’re sure that you would never stick your gum underneath your chair or spill food and drinks, but because this theatre is so new and beautiful, we ask that you spit out your gum before entering the theatre and leave all food and drinks in the lobby or the coat check.

- We don’t want you to miss out on any of the action of the play, so please visit the restroom before the performance begins.

During the performance:

- Please feel free to have honest reactions to what is happening on stage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it … You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”