

Classroom Connections

Before the performance...



Name Game

One of the customs of Restoration Comedy was to name characters descriptively. For example, Lady *Bountiful* is rich and generous, her son *Sullen* is rude and gloomy, and *Archer* and *Aimwell* are “hunting” for a rich bride. Ask students to create a sketch for a costume design for one of the characters in *The Beaux’ Stratagem*. What do students think their character will look like based on their name? Students can use crayons, pencils or markers or cut and paste a collage with fabric scraps to create their design. Present and display the costume designs in preparation for the matinee. For an additional activity, ask students to choose their favorite movie and rename its characters based on their personality or function in the story, a la Restoration Comedy.



What Do You Do When the Law Is Wrong?

Mrs. Sullen is trapped in a loveless, unhappy marriage by the laws and customs of her society. Ask students if they have ever experienced a law, rule or tradition that they knew was wrong or prevented their happiness. What actions did the student take? Did they understand the importance of the rule, or did they feel it was unnecessary and unfair? Ask students to journal about their experiences and compare them to Mrs. Sullen’s predicament.



Pass the Play

The Shakespeare Theatre Company’s version of *The Beaux’ Stratagem* was created by three different authors in three different centuries. Have students practice adapting each other’s work in class. First, ask each student to write a short script for homework—about a page long, including two characters who have a conflict, and a third one who enters and resolves the conflict. Then, have each student exchange papers two or three times throughout the class so each student has a different script than his/her own. Ask students to take the script that they have and create an adaptation—students can change the setting or the theme of the original script while keeping elements of the original story. Finally, have students exchange papers again and have another student further develop the adaptation. Collect all scripts and give each student a copy of his/her own original script with the adaptations of his/her classmates. Lead a class discussion about the process. What did students find easy/difficult/fun about the process? How did their scripts change?



Status Game

In the 18th century, class structure in England was very rigid. Students can see this class structure reflected in *The Beaux’ Stratagem*: Lady Bountiful and her relatives are in the upper class, but Boniface, Cherry and Scrub are in the lower class. In order to give students a better idea of class structure, ask students to stand in a line, shoulder to shoulder. Pass out a deck of cards, one to each student. Have each student look at his/her card, but not show it to anyone else. This card is an indication of the student’s status—aces are lowest status, while kings are highest. Ask students to imagine they are at a fancy party and interact with each other, remembering their status. Then deal the deck of cards one more time, but this time have each student put the card on his or her forehead without looking at it first. (Each student will know the status of the other students around them, but not his/her own.) Ask students to guess their status and make a shoulder to shoulder line from highest to lowest, placing themselves where they think they should be, based on the way they were treated by their classmates. How close was each student to the status reflected on the card on his/her forehead? What behavior classmates led them to their conclusion? Wrap up the class with a discussion of status and how it affects behavior. How do students imagine people of different classes would have acted in 18th-century England?



Love and Marriage

Each culture has its own specific set of rules and customs regarding dating and marriage. Ask students to make a list of customs about dating from our own time. Are there different customs and rules for men and women? Then ask students to think about marriage in our own time. What rules and customs govern the institution of marriage today? After brainstorming these lists, have students reread “Til Death Do Us Part—Marriage and Divorce in 18th-century England” and make a list of marriage customs from Farquhar’s time. How have these customs changed over the centuries? Do students think they have changed for the better or worse? Ask students to imagine that a character from *The Beaux’ Stratagem* has been transported machine to 2006. Have students write an instructional booklet for this character, preparing them for love, dating and marriage in the modern era.

Classroom Connections

...After the performance

Inn vs. House

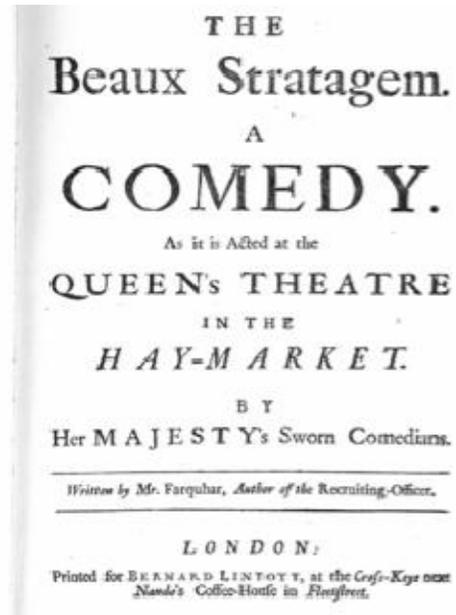
In *The Beaux' Stratagem*, location makes a big difference in people's behavior. Ask students to remember the difference in environment in the scenes that took place in Boniface's Inn and the scenes that took place in Lady Bountiful's house. What kind of people inhabited each scene? Who had power or status? What kind of behavior was allowed or encouraged in each environment? Students can practice creating different environments with their bodies. Ask students to sit in an "audience" in front of a cleared "stage" area. Then ask one student to enter the stage and establish one part of the "inn" environment by doing a silent, repeatable action. (For example, a student may choose to be an innkeeper and wipe down the bar.) Then ask students to enter the scene one by one and establish another part of the environment with their bodies, remembering what type of people and behavior would be found in the inn. Students can be encouraged to create inanimate objects as well. After the entire environment has been created, ask students to have a seat and perform the same activity, this time with the "house." What was the difference the students experienced between the two environments? What felt or looked different between the two? How did students create pieces of the environment with their bodies? Why is creating a full environment important to theatre and physical storytelling?

Lady Bountiful's Medicine Cabinet

In *The Beaux' Stratagem*, Lady Bountiful is known as a healer, providing creative cures for the ailments of her neighbors. In the 18th century, medicine had some great advances, but most people still relied on folk healers, age-old traditions and home cures. Ask students to imagine what supplies Lady Bountiful might have in her medicine cabinet and create their own "cure" for an ailment. (For example, a student may decide that frog's legs cure headaches.) Ask students to draw a picture of their cure-all and write a list of directions for use. Post all "cures" on a classroom wall to make Lady Bountiful's Medicine Cabinet.

Formula for Comedy

The plays that fall into the genre of Restoration Comedy have certain elements in common. Character types include the penniless gentleman, the libertine and the young heiress. Themes include love and marriage, and the dialogue is often witty and full of amusing double-meanings. Ask students to think about a certain genre of comedy today—for example: sitcoms, romantic comedies, slapstick, gross-out humor or parodies. Then ask students to imagine that they are a theatre (or film/television) historian writing 200 years in the future about this genre of comedy, just as a theatre historian would write about Restoration Comedy today. How would they describe the features of this type of comedy? How would they differentiate it from other genres popular at the time? Are there any character types or plot devices common to this type of comedy?



Title page of the first quarto of George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem*.

Cambridge University Library

Happily Ever After?

As most comedies do, *The Beaux' Stratagem* ends happily. The robbers are pardoned, Aimwell and Dorinda plan to get married (with their newfound fortune) and the Sullens decide to dissolve their unhappy marriage, freeing Mrs. Sullen to pair up with Archer. Break students up into small groups and ask them to imagine what happens to each of the characters over time, writing a short epilogue for each one. Encourage students to be creative and come up with humorous and apt endings for each of the characters in the play. Then, ask the groups to create a silent tableau (or posed statue) for each of their characters' epilogues. Have the groups present their tableaux while reading the epilogues.

Do the Ends Sometimes Justify the Means?

Archer and Aimwell set up a robbery of Lady Bountiful's house in order to stop the thieves and win the love and admiration of the ladies. In addition, Aimwell lies about his identity to Dorinda. While the play ends happily for everyone, our "heroes" went about achieving their goals in some very dishonest ways. Do the ends ever justify the means? Ask students to imagine that Archer and Aimwell are on trial for "aiding and abetting" the robbery of Lady Bountiful's house. Divide students up into two teams—prosecution and defense. What arguments can students make to prove that Archer and Aimwell committed a crime? What arguments can students make to prove that they are innocent? Have a class debate where each side gets introductory remarks, a rebuttal and a conclusion. Then have the class vote on the verdict for Archer and Aimwell.