

Classroom Connections

Before the performance...



Find the Subtext—Realism in Performance

Ibsen used very realistic dialogue in his plays. Use the text below to explore how an actor approaches Ibsen's text. The scene is from act 1, in which Peter Stockmann stops by for an unexpected visit at his brother's house.

PETER: *(entering from the living room)* Good Evening! Katherine!

MRS. STOCKMANN: *(entering)* Oh, it's you. How nice of you to come and see us.

PETER: I was just passing, so... *(looking upstage)* But you have company.

MRS. STOCKMANN: No. No no no... He just stopped by. Won't you have a little bite?

PETER: Me? No thank you. No cooked meals at night for me. Digestion problems.

MRS. STOCKMANN: Oh, but just for once...

PETER: No, no... That's very kind of you. I stick to bread and butter at this time of night. It's healthier and cheaper.

MRS. STOCKMANN: Are you suggesting that Thomas and I spend too much money?

PETER: Not you, my dear. It never entered my mind. *(looking at the study)* Isn't he in?

MRS. STOCKMANN: No. He's gone for a walk with the boys.

PETER: So soon after dinner? Not wise... *(hears a noise)* Ah, that must be him.

MRS. STOCKMANN: No, I think not yet.

Ask students to get into pairs and work on the scene. First, read the scene for meaning. What are the characters talking about? What happens in the scene? Then go back and try to find the subtext. What do the characters reveal about themselves and their feelings even if they don't say it outright? Read the scene again, keeping the subtext in mind. As a group discuss ways that actors use the subtext to play subtle, realistic characters during performance.



Sibling Rivalry, Creating Characters

In *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockmann and his brother, Peter, become enemies. As a group, brainstorm events that might make brothers turn against each other. Ask students to make a list of the qualities of both Dr. Stockmann and Peter Stockmann. (For example, Dr. Stockmann may be "passionate" and Peter may be "rigid.") Then ask students to move around the room in a neutral walk. Ask them to experiment with leading with different parts of their body: head, chest, hips and feet. After each type of movement, discuss with students how it made them feel, and what type of character may be inspired by that type of movement. Ask students to imagine that they are actors preparing to play the parts of either Dr. Stockmann or Peter Stockmann. How would the students portray each of those characters? What type of "lead" might inspire their movement? Ask students to move around the room as one of the characters, then the other. What did they learn about the characters by moving like them?



Would You Have the Courage to Stand up for What's Right?

Dr. Stockmann stands up against his brother, the mayor, and the entire population of the town for what he believes is right. Ask students to journal about a time when their beliefs contradicted those of their family or peer group, or when they had to stand up for the truth when no one believed them. What happened? What emotions did they feel in that situation? Did they stick to their beliefs, or did they go with the group? Ask students to share their responses, then break up into groups and develop one group member's journal entry into a short scene that students can perform.



Cover-ups and Scandals

The themes of *An Enemy of the People* are very relevant today, as the truth is continually hidden behind deception and cover-ups. Ask your class to become a watch-dog organization for government cover-ups. Ask students to search through the newspaper or the internet to find recent news stories about a government cover-up or scandal. Make a bulletin board in the classroom where students can post their news stories every day leading up to the

Classroom Connections

...After the performance



Do the Right Thing

Dr. Stockmann and his family had to make a great sacrifice to stay true to their convictions. Dr. Stockmann and Petra lost their jobs, the family was ostracized and their house was vandalized by the townspeople. Was telling the truth worth the cost? The Stockmanns then decided to stay in the town that had rejected them instead of fleeing to another country. Ask students to make a list of pros and cons of Dr. Stockmann's decision. Then ask students to make a list of any beliefs that would make them give up money, security and social standing to uphold their convictions.



Other Places and Times

Ibsen's plays are set in very specific locations, usually small coastal Norwegian towns, and deal with social issues that were relevant in the late-1800s. Despite this specificity, his plays have a universal quality that applies to other places and times. For example, Arthur Miller wrote an adaptation of *An Enemy of the People* in the 1950s, relevant to the McCarthy Era. In 1989, the famous Indian director Satyajit Ray directed an adaptation of *An Enemy of the People* called *Ganashatru*, set in modern-day India. If students were to write an adaptation of the play, where and when would they set it? Ask students to write a proposal for an adaptation of the play, explaining their setting and why they chose it. Present the proposals to the class for discussion.



Photo by Carol Rosegg.



Respond and Reflect

Ask students to read each of the quotes below. Discuss how each applies to *An Enemy of the People*. Ask students to choose one quote and write a brief journal entry about how it relates to the performance they attended.

"It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it."

— Upton Sinclair

"In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second hand, and without examination." — Mark Twain



The Majority is Always Right vs. The Minority is Always Right

The central debate of act 3 takes place between Dr. Stockmann and the group of townspeople at Captain Horster's house. Tempers flare as each side passionately defends what they believe to be right. The townspeople defy Dr. Stockmann, stating that "the majority is always right." They believe that fixing the baths will come at too great an expense to the town and that Dr. Stockmann is an enemy of the people. Dr. Stockmann cannot believe the the townspeople are willing to keep the contaminated baths instead of paying some extra taxes. Faced with the mob mentality of the group, Dr. Stockmann states that "the minority is always right." Ask students to choose one of the two statements to support. Split the class into two groups and assign one to argue the statement "the majority is always right" and the other the statement that "the minority is always right." Ask students to make lists in support of their statement, and then organize a class debate. Students can use examples from the play, knowledge from history or social studies classes, or their own experience to support their arguments. After the debate, ask if any students changed their minds from their initial thoughts.

Right: Michael Rudko as George Tesman and Judith Light as Hedda Gabler in the Shakespeare Theatre Company's 2000-2001 production of *Hedda Gabler*.