Dear Educators,

This fall, we’re taking on one of Shaw’s well-known comedies, Arms and the Man. In my research into this play, I came across comments by George Orwell, describing this play as his favorite of Shaw’s, in part because even as Orwell was writing — 50 years after Shaw penned his plays — it was one whose relevance had not faded at all. The story that war is not a romantic adventure or an opportunity for heroism is one that is equally important today as it has ever been.

As you prepare to bring your students to this production, I encourage you to talk with them about both this theme of war and its realities, and of the “performance” of relationships in this play. Several of the main characters in this play — in particular Raina and Sergius — have romantic, idealized expectations of both love and war that are shown to be unrealistic by the end of this play. It is the practicality of Bluntschli that proves more robust and realistic in matters of both troop movement and marriage in the end.

No matter what lens you choose to look through as you teach this play, we hope you enjoy Arms and the Man, and find that it sparks discussion with your students.

Best,
Michelle Burce
Education Director

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2018–2019 Student Matinees

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Production Sponsors
**Plot Synopsis**

A fleeing member of the Serbian army desperately climbs through Raina Petkoff’s bedroom window to escape capture, but he turns out to be a Swiss mercenary officer by the name of Captain Bluntschli. Raina scolds him for being cowardly and informs him of the bravery of her fiancé, Sergius, a cavalry officer who led the Bulgarian victory. Bluntschli informs her of the foolish nature of Sergius’ charge in the battle and then explains that chocolates are more valuable in a war than bullets, a statement that outrages Raina. He shocks her even more when he reveals that he is afraid and unwilling to die. However, when the soldiers come seeking out the runaway, Raina hides the fugitive, and only her maid, Louka, is aware of her actions.

(Four Months Later) Raina’s father and fiancé have returned after the war. The two men talk about a young Swiss officer who had impressed them with his practical approach to the exchange of soldiers. The men also laugh about the tale of the officer’s escape from the front and how a young girl had given him shelter in her bedroom, little suspecting that it had happened in Major Petkoff’s own house. Meanwhile in secret, Sergius has been flirting with Louka. Unexpectedly, Captain Bluntschli shows up to return an overcoat that Raina had lent him for his escape, and she panics when her father invites him to stay for lunch.

While Bluntschli is helping the men plan for the transport of troops, Raina is worried that her father will find the photo she had secretly left in the coat pocket for her “Chocolate Cream Soldier.” When Sergius discovers the bond between Raina and Bluntschli, he challenges Bluntschli to a duel, but Raina interrupts and expresses her real feelings for Bluntschli. Louka succeeds in securing Sergius for herself and Major Petkoff and his wife give consent to Bluntschli to marry Raina.

**Petkoff Household**

- **Major Paul Petkoff**
  The wealthiest man in a small Bulgarian town, the father of Raina and husband of Catherine.

- **Catherine Petkoff**
  The mother of Raina and wife of Major Petkoff.

- **Raina Petkoff**
  The daughter of Catherine and Major Petkoff, engaged to Sergius.

- **Louka**
  A domestic servant in the Petkoff household, engaged to Nicola.

- **Nicola**
  A domestic servant in the Petkoff household, engaged to Louka.

**Others**

- **Captain Bluntschli**
  A Swiss mercenary soldier in the Serbian army.

- **Major Sergius Saranoff**
  A celebrated hero in the Bulgarian army, engaged to Raina.

- **Russian Soldier**

*Courtesy of The Classic Theatre of San Antonio*
Biography of George Bernard Shaw

This staging of *Arms and the Man* makes George Bernard Shaw Seattle Shakespeare Company’s second most produced playwright — after *Shakespeare*. During his industrious, long life (1856–1950), Shaw wrote over 60 plays as well as novels, essays, and reviews. He actively participated in the churn of mass media discourse and had a keen instinct for celebrity, which he used to champion social issues dear to his heart.

It was a desire to influence societal change that brought Shaw to playwriting: “There never was an author who showed less predilection for a specific medium by which to accomplish his results. He recognized, early in his days, many things awry in the world and he assumed the task of mundane reformation with a confident spirit. It seems such a small job at twenty to set the times aright. He began as an Essayist, but who reads essays now-a-days?—he then turned novelist with no better success, for no one would read such preposterous stuff as he chose to emit. [. . .] As a last resort, he turned to the stage.”* Shaw used theatre to challenge social conventions and to sharply criticize economic, gender, and racial inequality.

Shaw moved from Dublin to London when he was 20 and lived there with his mother until he married at 41. During his twenties, he divided his time between stints of employment and unemployment, writing, attending lectures, and increasing participation in new social and economic movements — most notably the socialist Fabian Society. In his thirties Shaw established himself as a successful music, art, and theatre critic, influential voice within the Fabian Society, and published novelist.

*Arms and the Man* marked Shaw’s first financial success as a playwright, allowing him to retire from work as a critic. He married in 1898 and in 1906, at 50, relocated to a house in the countryside, “Shaw’s Corner.” While his faith in the Fabian Society dwindled in the early 1900s, his success and celebrity as a playwright blossomed. Shaw’s plays during this time were overwhelmingly well received by audiences, even when debuts were set back by censorship for their subversive content.

In 1925, Shaw received the Nobel Prize in Literature. By this time he had become pessimistic about his earlier beliefs that “socialism can be brought about in a perfectly constitutional manner by democratic institutions.” His hopes for societal reform turned instead to the dictatorships of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin — to the dismay of friends and followers — praising their ability to get things done. On trips to Italy and Russia, he was shown carefully curated utopias and, though he disavowed the anti-semitism of the Nazis, he admired Hitler’s leadership. These admirations found their way into Shaw’s plays of the late 1920s and 1930s, which were not well received.

Toward the end of Shaw’s life, his early plays were widely restaged and celebrated. He continued to write, including a 10-minute puppet play *Shakes versus Shav*, and tend his garden at Shaw’s Corner until his death at 94.

*Quote from W. J. McCormack’s introduction to *Arms and the Man*.\*
**Chocolate Soldiers**

Raina’s pet name for Captain Bluntschli has inspired slang for soldiers who are unwilling to fight or otherwise “soft” in the militaries of Australia (as ‘choco’) and Israel (as “hayal shel shokolad”).

**A Ghastly Failure?**

Meaning to have written an “anti-romantic comedy,” Shaw was so disquieted by the abundant laughter Arms and the Man received on its opening night that, writing to a friend half a year later, he recounted “going before the curtain to tremendous applause, the only person in the theatre who knew that the whole affair was a ghastly failure.”

**Boss-Muse**

Arms and the Man was commissioned by the formidable Florence Farr. A prominent muse of the age, Farr embodied the Victorian “New Woman” Shaw so admired. At the time of commissioning Arms and the Man they were in the midst of a short affair. Shaw failed to complete the script by opening night and another play had to be substituted. Arms and the Man was staged the following month with Farr playing Louka, and was the last of their artistic collaborations.

**An “Off” Location**

For as smart as he was, geography wasn’t Shaw’s strong suit. He wanted to set the play during a recent war, and the choice of Bulgaria happened when the script “was nearly finished.” He asked friends if they knew of any wars and they suggested Servo-Bulgarian conflict. “I looked up Bulgaria and [Serbia] in an atlas, made all of the characters end in ‘off’, and the play was complete.”

**“This handsome figure of mine”**

In the summer of 1953 Marlon Brando played Sergius Saranoff in a one-week production of Arms and the Man. It was the last time Brando, who “hated it,” acted in a live theatre production.

**Orwell’s Favorite Shaw**

George Orwell considered Arms and the Man to be “probably the Wittiest play [Shaw] ever wrote, the most flawless technically, and in spite of being a very light comedy, the most telling.”

**Alps and Balkans**

Shaw scrapped his original title, Alps and Balkans, in favor of an ironic reference to the opening line of the Roman poet Virgil’s war-glorifying Aeneid, “Of arms and the man I sing . . .”

**Late Start, Late Finish**

Arms and the Man marked Shaw’s first commercial success at the age of 37. Shaw continued to write until he was 94 years old, when he died.
Our Production

*Arms and the Man* takes place at home of the Petkoffs, a wealthy Bulgarian family, near the mountains bordering Serbia just after the Battle of Slivnitsa.

Set designer, Julia Hayes Welch, places the location of each act in front of the grand, unchanging backdrop of the Balkan mountain range. In the Petkoff household, the vibrant colors of Bulgaria’s traditional aesthetic bump up against the family’s aspirations to embody modern fashions and fineries they have admired in Vienna.

These themes are echoed in the costumes, designed by Jocelyne Fowler. The domestic servants Louka and Nicola wear traditional Bulgarian folk costume. Raina and Catherine emulate the fashions of Vienna, in which we can recognize classic Victorian styles. Major Petkoff and Sergius return from the war in ostentatiously decorated military uniforms that prop up the glorification of war.
**Pre-Show Reflection**

These questions will help students to think about some of the big ideas behind the play before watching it.

*Arms and the Man* is set during wartime. Different characters have varying opinions on what war is like. What is your impression of war? Is it an opportunity for glory or a more practical and logistical problem?

In the play, characters withhold information and lie to their family and romantic partners. Is it ever okay to lie to family members, or significant others? Do honourable motives ever excuse immoral acts?

The Petkoff family prides themselves in their possessions and habits; owning a library, going to the opera in Vienna, their bathing habits, etc. Status is important to these characters. What are the status symbols you see in school today? Do these status symbols affect what clothes or brands you purchase?

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**Post-Show Discussion**

The following questions are to help lead a discussion with your class after seeing the play. For all of these, there are many possible answers and student responses will vary. Some possible responses are provided.

Raina agrees to hide an enemy soldier in her room, and lies to the Russian officers that he’s not there, to spare him from death or torture. Does she choose to save him out of fear for herself, or to protect him? Was she being disloyal to her family and country?

Raina and Sergius have an over-the-top romantic relationship with no depth or substance. Thinking of other famous literary or film couples, which do you feel are sincere, or fall into this fake-love category?

Catherine attempts to hide the truth around Petkoff’s coat, and Catherine insists she has never met Bluntschli. Is she choosing loyalty to her daughter over loyalty to her husband in these circumstances? Do you think it is ever okay to lie to a spouse?

How would the play have ended if Bluntschli didn’t have his inheritance? Do you think Raina would have married him? Would her father have allowed her to marry him if he didn’t have the wealth and property?

The play is set during the Serbo-Bulgarian conflict of 1885, but it is said that Shaw didn’t know much (or care) about this war in particular, he just needed any war to set as a background to the show. How might this play be different if it was set during a different war?

Raina’s servant tries to tell Sergius about Raina’s secret; hiding a soldier in her room. Sergius interrupts: “You will please remember that a gentleman does not discuss the conduct of the lady he is engaged to with her maid.” Should you tell someone’s significant other if you suspect lying or cheating? At this point in the play, do you think Sergius truly suspects Raina of being unfaithful?
Writing a Review of the Production

Professional theatre critics write reviews of plays as a way to discuss the effectiveness of the artistic choices in telling the story, and to help potential audience members decide whether or not they want to go see the production. In this activity, students will write their own review of Seattle Shakespeare Company’s production of *Arms and the Man*.

**Instructions**

After watching the play, students should work in pairs to write a review of *Arms and the Man*. A review is not simply a retelling of the story. Use the following prompts to guide your thinking as you write your review.

- **Theme:** What — in your opinion — was the theme of the play? What message is this production trying to get across to the audience?
- **Acting:** How well did the actors tell the story and embody their characters? Can you think of one or two actors who were particularly effective in communicating the motives and attitudes of their characters?
- **Design Elements:** How effective were the various design elements in supporting the actors? How would you describe the overall design of the show — minimalist / realistic / impressionistic / etc.? How did the design of the production contribute to your understanding and enjoyment of the story?
- **Target Audience:** What sorts of people might enjoy this play? Examples might include: people who are looking for a fun evening out; people who are interested in historical plays; people who like witty banter. What should the audience expect to see as they sit down in the theater?
- **Importance in 2018:** Why do you think this play is being produced in 2018? What relevance does its story have for modern audiences? How important is this play today?

**Activity extension**

Look on the internet for a review of Seattle Shakespeare Company’s 2018 production of *Arms and the Man*. Do you see any similarities between your impressions of the show and the reviewers’ impressions? Do you agree with their thoughts on the production? Did the reviewers have any insights that surprised you?

Characters Who are Performing

In *Arms and the Man*, Raina and Sergius have a romantic view of how people in a relationship should act, and they “perform” these roles when they interact with each other. In this activity, students will compare a Raina/Sergius scene and the language used in that scene with a Louka/Sergius scene that happens immediately afterward.

**Instructions**

1. Hand out copies of the two scenes (next page) to students. Ask students to pair up and read the Raina/Sergius scene with their partner, and underline or highlight pieces of the scene that seem to be classically romantic. Examples might be the use of words like “My king” and “My queen,” or the likening of Sergius to a knight in a tournament.

2. Then have students read the Louka/Sergius scene with their partner. Have them mark any words or phrases that are more practical or non-romantic. Examples might include “common sense,” “worthless,” or Louka mentioning that she needs to get back to work.

3. Students should then read each scene again, emphasizing the pieces they have marked. Once students have had time to practice both scenes, have groups perform the scenes in the front of the class.

4. After watching a couple of groups perform each scene, discuss the following questions as a class:
   - Which scene seems more honest and realistic? Why?
   - Which couple seems most in love? Why?
   - How did the groups perform these scenes differently? What actions, attitudes, or gestures were inspired by the words used in each scene?
   - Why do you think Shaw wrote these two scenes so differently? What was he trying to get across?
Scene 1: Raina & Sergius

RAINA (Placing her hands on his shoulder as she looks up at him with admiration and worship.) My hero! My king.

SERGIUS My queen! (He kisses her on the forehead with holy awe.)

RAINA How I have envied you, Sergius! You have been out in the world, on the field of battle, able to prove yourself there worthy of any woman in the world; whilst I have had to sit at home inactive,—dreaming—useless—doing nothing that could give me the right to call myself worthy of any man.

SERGIUS Dearest, all my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking on at him!

RAINA And you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment. (Very solemnly.) Sergius: I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought.

SERGIUS My lady, and my saint! (Clasping her reverently.)

RAINA (Returning his embrace.) My lord and my g—

SERGIUS Sh—sh! Let me be the worshipper, dear. You little know how unworthy even the best man is of a girl’s pure passion!

RAINA I trust you. I love you. You will never disappoint me, Sergius.

Scene 2: Louka & Sergius

LOUKA Let me go, sir. I shall be disgraced. (She struggles: he holds her inexorably.) Oh, will you let go?

SERGIUS (Looking straight into her eyes.) No.

LOUKA Then stand back where we can’t be seen. Have you no common sense?

SERGIUS Ah, that’s reasonable. (He takes her into the stableyard gateway, where they are hidden from the house.)

LOUKA (Complaining.) I may have been seen from the windows: Miss Raina is sure to be spying about after you.

SERGIUS (Stung—letting her go.) Take care, Louka. I may be worthless enough to betray the higher love; but do not you insult it.

LOUKA (Demurely.) Not for the world, sir, I’m sure. May I go on with my work please, now?

SERGIUS (Again putting his arm round her.) You are a provoking little witch, Louka. If you were in love with me, would you spy out of windows on me?

LOUKA Well, you see, sir, since you say you are half a dozen different gentlemen all at once, I should have a great deal to look after.

SERGIUS (Charmed.) Witty as well as pretty. (He tries to kiss her.)

LOUKA (Avoiding him.) No, I don’t want your kisses. Gentlefolk are all alike — you making love to me behind Miss Raina’s back, and she doing the same behind yours.
Mission Statement

With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

About Us

Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region's year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company's growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the time-tested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works.

Our combined programs — which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs — reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

Education Programs

In-School Residencies, Matinees, and Workshops

• In-School Residencies bring active, customized curriculum into schools across Washington State. Professional teaching artists plan with teachers to tailor each residency to fit the needs and objectives of the classroom. Seattle Shakespeare Company residencies inject vibrant, active exercises into lessons that unlock the text, themes, and actions of a Shakespeare play.

• Student Matinees bring over 3,000 students annually to our mainstage productions in the Seattle Center. Teachers are provided free study guides, and student groups are invited to stay after the show for a free Q&A session with the cast.

• Pre-show and post-show workshops can be booked to accompany mainstage matinees. These workshops include an introduction to the play itself, student activities, and insights into direction and design choices of our specific production.

Touring Productions

• Fresh and accessible 90-minute productions tour across Washington State each Spring, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These nimble productions perform as easily in school gymnasiums as professional theatre facilities. Teachers are provided free study guides and students enjoy free post-show Q&A sessions with the cast.

• Schools have the opportunity to book accompanying in-school residencies with touring productions, led by members of the touring cast and additional teaching artists.

Camps and Classes

• Our summer “Camp Bill” series in Seattle and Edmonds offers young actors a variety of camps to choose from or combine. Camps range from a One-Week Introduction to a Three-Week Production Intensive, with many options in between.

• In our Fall and Spring after-school “Short Shakes” programs, young actors develop their skills and gain hands-on performance and production experience.

• Seattle Shakespeare Company occasionally offers adult classes and workshops to our community featuring guest artists who work on our stage.

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