Dear Educators,

Welcome to our winter production of Measure for Measure. This play is one that I find quite compelling, because although the play itself is one that is performed infrequently, its themes resonate throughout our culture, our philosophy, and our morals. Measure for Measure is classified as a comedy, but has few moments of levity and is not known as a crowd-pleaser. It deals with issues of prostitution, extra-marital sex, and complex power dynamics. It asks modern audiences to view the play with the mindset of Elizabethan morals, and to be appropriately shocked or sympathetic.

And yet, its message rings through in all sorts of ways in our modern world. Moral dilemmas are some of the most popular discussion starters. There is a board game called “Scruples” that turns moral dilemmas into a party game. There are numerous online quizzes around moral dilemmas. There is even a whole field in psychology of “moral development,” pioneered by Lawrence Kohlberg.

One of my favorite modern parallels however is a computer game from the 1980’s. In this game (titled Ultima V for those interested), the main character is living in a land that was previously ruled by a kind and just Lord (a parallel of the Duke), but he has disappeared and been replaced by a tyrant Lord (a parallel of Angelo). This tyrant then enforces the virtues of the land in a harsh and rigid way — for example, “Thou shalt not lie, or thou shalt lose thy tongue,” in the same way that Angelo enforces his strict laws on Claudio. The basic premise of Measure for Measure and questions of moral absolutism are so universal that there is even a computer game that resembles it!

Our production is designed to feel rather contemporary, but also somewhat timeless with its combination of cathedral-like architecture and modern clothing. I hope that, as you watch Measure for Measure, you find that the questions raised in the play are relatable enough to feel contemporary, but also important enough to be timeless in their appeal.

Best,
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CONTENTS

Plot Synopsis and Characters .............................. 1

Sources ....................................................... 1
A background of the source material used by Shakespeare to write Measure for Measure.

The Problem Play ............................................. 2
What is a “problem play” and what made this a new kind of story for Shakespeare’s audiences?

Placing the Production ...................................... 3–4
Take a look inside the director’s inspiration and thoughts for the production.

Reflection and Discussion Questions ..................... 5
Students consider themes in pre-show reflection questions, and think about the production in post-show discussion questions.

Justice and Mercy ............................................. 6
A look at how justice and mercy manifest in Measure for Measure.

ACTIVITIES

Decision Alley ................................................ 6
Students come up with arguments on both sides of several big decisions in the play.

Meet the Press ............................................... 7
Students examine various events in the play and the different perspectives that each character might have on these events by taking on the role of a reporter.
SYNOPSIS

In Vienna, the Duke, who is named Vicentio, lets it be known that he is departing the city for a time due to a diplomatic mission. He leaves care of the city to Angelo, a strict judge. Angelo's first decree is to enforce a rule that sex outside of marriage is punishable by death. A nobleman, Claudio, is thus arrested for impregnating his girlfriend, Juliet, to whom he is not married. Despite the fact that the relationship is consensual, Angelo intends to use Claudio as an example and sentences him to die.

Lucio, Claudio's friend, tells Claudio's sister, Isabella, the news. Isabella, who is a novice nun, goes to Angelo to plead for his life. Angelo becomes consumed with lust for her and says he will release her brother on the condition that she has sex with him. Shocked, Isabella refuses. She goes to her brother to share what's happened and tells him to be resigned to his fate. Though he is shocked at first, Claudio pleads with her to change her mind. She refuses and leaves her brother in prison.

Isabella then meets a Friar Lodwick. This is, in fact, the Duke in disguise who wanted to keep an eye on Angelo. He befriends Isabella and presents a plan to help her. He proposes that Isabella gives in to Angelo's demand, but another woman should go in her place. The Duke proposes that Marianna, who was once betrothed to Angelo, assume Isabella's place on the night the rendezvous.

Everything goes according to the Duke's plan. Mariana goes disguised in Isabella's place and has sex with Angelo. However, Angelo goes back on his word and demands to see Claudio's head. The Duke quickly works to find a prisoner to sacrifice to Claudio and manages to learn of a pirate who has died in prison. The pirate's head is cut off and sent to Angelo. However, the Duke does not tell Isabella that her brother is alive.

The Duke "returns" to Vienna and holds court. Both Isabella and Mariana accuse Angelo his crimes and Angelo denies everything. It becomes very obvious as the truth is slowly revealed that the "Friar" is going to be held responsible for everything. The Duke leaves Angelo to judge the case and returns in his friar disguise. Eventually, he reveals his true identity, condemning Angelo as a liar and sentencing him to death. Angelo accepts this and does not ask for mercy. Marianna pleads for Angelo's life, even asking Isabella for help. The Duke eventually lifts the death sentence on Angelo, providing he marry Marianna. He then reveals that Claudio is still alive.

The Duke now deals with Claudio's friend, Lucio, who has been insulting the Duke to the Friar during the course of the story. Like Angelo, he is sentenced to an unwanted to marriage. The play ends as the Duke proposes marriage to Isabella.

CHARACTERS

DUKE, of Vienna (later disguised as FATHER LODWICK)
ANGELO, the Deputy
ESCALUS, advisor to the Duke
CLAUDIO, a young street punk
ISABELLA, a novice nun, sister to Claudio
LUCIO, the local eccentric
MISTRESS OVERDONE, proprietress of a brothel
POMPEY, a procurer working for Mistress Overdone
PROVOST, who runs the prison
PETER, a friar
BAILIFF
ELBOW, a simple constable
FROTH, a foolish gentleman
ABHORSON, an executioner
BARNARDINE, a dissolute prisoner
MARIANNA, betrothed to Angelo
JULIET, beloved of Claudio
FRANCISCA, a nun
VARIOUS SEX WORKERS, JOHNS, OFFICERS, CIVIL SERVANTS, and other CITIZENS OF VIENNA

SOURCES

Shakespeare drew from two sources for the play. First was The Story of Etitia by the Italian writer, Cinthio. Shakespeare drew the main plot of the play from this which was a flat out tragedy where Angelo's counterpart forced Isabella's counterpart to have sex with him and her brother is still killed. The second source is a play called Promos and Cassandra by George Whetsone. Also based on Cinthio's story, it introduced some of the more comic elements and the head and bed tricks.
Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure is referred to as one of Shakespeare’s “problem plays.” This term refers to three plays that Shakespeare wrote around the turn of the seventeenth century — Measure for Measure (1603), All’s Well That Ends Well (1601), and Troilus and Cressida (1600, approx.) — that seem to be stylistically distinct from comedies, tragedies, and histories. These plays represent a transition in Shakespeare’s style, generally accepted to have been between his golden age of comedies (As You Like It, Much Ado about Nothing, and Twelfth Night) and his period of high tragedy (Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth). His so-called “problem plays” are some of his least-known works, and some of his most difficult to classify.

The term “problem plays” was coined in 1896 by F. S. Boas in his book, Shakespeare and his Predecessors. Rather than implying that these plays are themselves problematic, the term “problem play,” according to Boas, refers to plays that

...introduce us into highly artificial societies, whose civilization is ripe unto rottenness. Amidst such media abnormal conditions of brain and of emotion are generated, and intricate cases of conscience demand a solution by unprecedented methods. Thus throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome (p. 345).

Because these plays can neither be neatly classified as comedies or tragedies, Boas borrowed a term from the theater of his time and classified them as “problem-plays.”

Shakespeare’s audience would not have been accustomed to this blending of genres into tragicomedy. Comedies were plays that ended happily, usually in a marriage, in which a young couple must overcome obstacles to be together, clowns and servants banter and entertain the audience, and there is often some element of mistaken identity or deception. In the end, all is revealed and everyone ends happily. Tragedies were plays that ended in death and usually conformed to Aristotle’s concept of tragedy and the tragic hero, who was admirable but had a fatal flaw that led to his downfall. Elizabethan history plays were a relatively new form, dramatizing actual historical events that occurred years earlier. Most of Shakespeare’s tragedies focused on the story of the Tudor family, and how their ancestors came to power in England. “Problem-plays” fit into none of these categories, and are more similar to modern drama and “tragicomediess” than to the usual Elizabethan theater fare.

There is some speculation as to whether there was an event in Shakespeare’s life that precipitated this change in his writing from comedies into problem plays, and eventually into tragedies. Shakespeare’s father dies in 1601, but this could not have been more painful than the death of his only son Hamnet in 1596, several years earlier. Another theory is that Shakespeare was distraught over the failure of the conspiracy of Essex, after which the Earl of Essex was beheaded and Shakespeare’s friend Southampton was imprisoned.

Measure for Measure itself might have been inspired by the ascendance of James I to the English throne after the death of Queen Elizabeth I. The 1604 Canons enacted by James I put harsh restrictions on those who wished to get divorced, pronouncing that no one could remarry if their spouse was still living. This statute was meant to end the “epidemic” of disorderly marriages and annulments and divorces. There are clear parallels between this statute and the harsh law enacted by Angelo at the beginning of the play, also intended to clean up the morals of Vienna. In fact, Shakespeare has never been to Vienna, and the city in Measure for Measure is more likely a fictionalized version of London at his time, teeming with brothels and drunks. By setting the play in fictionalized Vienna, Shakespeare could present it to James I in London without fear of retaliation.

Whatever the reason, Shakespeare made a stylistic shift in his writing around the turn of the century, changing his primary tone from festive comedy to tragicomic “problem play,” to tragedy. The modern tone and feel of Measure for Measure itself is likely caused in part by its relatively new tragicomic genre, its ambiguity of tone, and its focus on contemporary social issues.

Sources:
PLACING THE PRODUCTION

When talking about *Measure for Measure*, Director Desdemona Chiang describes it:

In *Measure for Measure*, the City of Vienna survives and thrives on sex work. When its morals degrade and citizens fail to keep the peace, how do things get cleaned up? Is it possible for a new government order to eradicate the world’s oldest profession? And ultimately, which reigns higher — the law of morality or the law of economics? This play deals not with the problems of one individual, but with a group of people: attractive, full of desire, vessels of the seed-bearing powers of nature, but bound by the tyranny of circumstance. It is Shakespeare’s most urban and global play, in a multifaceted civic setting — streets and alleys, brothels, courthouses, prisons, shelters, and churches — and in it, we recognize our own cities and communities, imperfect as they are.

To bring this vision to the Seattle Shakespeare Company stage, she wanted to explore two specific dichotomies in her design. The first is the tension that exists between the ever-present, slow-moving institution of the Church and the fast-paced dynamic of modern life. In order to do this, the major scenic elements of the play are designed to look like historic, neo-classical architecture, like one might find in a cathedral. However the props in this world are contemporary, and bring the audience into the modern world. Chiang describes it as the feeling of seeing, “A Starbucks in a cathedral.”

A second dichotomy is that of the economics of sex work versus its morality. This play is set in a modern-feeling city where poverty is a problem and education is a problem, and therefore the economy of the city relies on the sex trade. At the same time, the Church is a powerful force of both morality and service in the community. This duality is reflected in the costumes, which are inspired by Trevor Appleson’s work focusing on real people on the streets of real cities. The costumes reflect the poverty of some characters, the power of the police, and the piety of the religious characters. In particular, the male characters are shown as powerful and in charge, while the female characters are forced to choose between the brothel and the convent.

This show is urban, gritty, and full of bustle. Between the set, costumes, and sound design, Chiang’s goal is to transport the audience into a global city that is rooted in the past but living in the present, and to make connections between this city of “Vienna,” wherever it may be, and our own modern and global world.
PLACING THE PRODUCTION

Costumes and costume renderings by Christine Tschirgi, set design by Phillip Lienau, and photos by John Ulman.
PRE-SHOW REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Before watching the show, have students reflect on the following questions, either in a large group, small group, or individually in a journal.

This play deals with many types of love, including family love, benevolent love, Christian love, relationship love, and lust. Isabella must decide what to do when she is asked to prioritize one over the other. When these come into conflict with each other in your life, what do you do?

In this play, characters' identities – the “Good Duke,” the “Chaste Nun,” and the “Loving Brother” - are called into question. Think about the identity labels you have had. Have you questioned these through your life so far? For example, did getting a bad grade make you question your identity as a “Good student”?

Disguise is used several times in this play. When are disguises used, and are they ethical?

• The Duke disguises himself as a Friar throughout the whole play. It is good that he can keep an eye on Angelo, but other people confide in him thinking he is a Friar. Unsure if it is ethical.
• A Pirate’s head is disguised to stand in for Claudio’s head when Angelo sentences him to death. This is ethical, because the Pirate had already died and Claudio was wrongfully sentenced.
• Mariana disguises herself as Isabella when she goes to Angelo. This is definitely not ethical, but it is in response to an equally bad demand.

Is justice served at the end of this play? Why or why not?

• Yes, because Angelo has to go back to Mariana, whom he wronged.
• Yes, because no one is wrongfully killed, and everyone repents and has some sort of punishment that fits their crime.
• No, because Angelo gets very little punishment.
• No, because Isabella does not want to marry the Duke.

Is this play a comedy? It is a “Problem Play”? Is it something else entirely?

• It is sort of like a comedy, because there are lots of marriages at the end.
• It is sort of like a comedy, because no one dies despite some close calls.
• It is a problem play, because it is neither a comedy nor a tragedy.
• It is a problem play, because the ending is difficult for modern audiences to accept.
JUSTICE AND MERCY

Measure for Measure explores the spectrum from absolute justice to absolute mercy, with different characters representing different points along this spectrum. At the opening of the play, the Duke recognizes that the city has become a haven of sin due to his reluctance to enforce laws and his tendency to opt for mercy instead. He puts Angelo in charge, instructing him to enforce the laws but also to show mercy when needed, according to his humanity. He then goes into disguise to watch what happens.

Angelo subscribes to the idea of enforcing absolute justice. The ban on sex outside of marriage is intended to catch traffickers and sex workers, but instead they can evade the law while Claudio and Juliet — who are engaged to be married — are caught by it. Their sexual conduct is ruled illegal, because they are not married when Juliet becomes pregnant. Angelo decides to make an example of Claudio by enforcing the law.

Isabella, by contrast, represents absolute mercy. She begs for her brother Claudio’s life at the beginning of the play, and later begs the Duke for mercy for Angelo even though she has been wronged by him. She advocates for his life not just out of a sense of forgiveness, but out of a desire for Marianna to be married to him to satisfy Marianna’s desires and love. However despite her strong desire for Claudio to be spared, she will not compromise her principles to save him.

This play raises questions about what is the right balance of justice and mercy, and presents characters advocating for various blends of the two extremes. Shakespeare presents one solution to all of the problems in the play, but it employs a deus ex machina character in the form of the Duke. As the curtain falls, consider if you would have taken a different approach to justice and mercy than Shakespeare did.

ACTIVITY: DECISION ALLEY

OBJECTIVES:
• Supporting an argument with text examples

STUDENT SKILLS:
• Listening, Citing text, Drawing Inferences

TIME: 10–15 minutes

TO PREPARE
Ask students to dress for action and be prepared to sit on the floor. Allow time before and after the activity for moving furniture.

INSTRUCTIONS
• Have students line up shoulder-to-shoulder in two equal lines facing each other. The gap in between the lines will be known as “Decision Alley,” and should be wide enough for someone to walk comfortably down the alley.
• In turn, have students choose a character from the play facing a big decision. Have them ask their question out loud, and then begin to slowly walk down the alley.
• Assign each side of the alley as “Yes” or “No.” As the decision-maker walks down the alley, those nearest have the opportunity to shout out a reason in favor of or against the decision. Remember — those at the end must wait until the decision-maker is approaching them to speak, so that not everyone is talking at once (but there will be lots of overlap).
• Once the decision-maker gets to the end of the alley, they should make a decision, and join the side that they agreed with. Then a new decision-maker should start over from the beginning with a new question.

Note: The decisions these characters make do not need to be the same as the ones made in the play.

• (optional) Have the decision-maker identify which one or two arguments were most persuasive when they made their decision.

Here are some examples of decisions that characters must make in the play:
• Angelo: Should I arrest Claudio for impregnating his lover before marriage?
• Isabella: Should I sleep with Angelo to save my brother?
• Isabella: Should I tell everyone what Angelo proposed?
• Claudio: Should I beg my sister to save my life?
• Duke: Should I intervene to save Claudio?

Adapted from Cambridge University’s European Theatre Group
ACTIVITY: MEET THE PRESS

OBJECTIVES:
- Write narrative reporting based on the play

STUDENT SKILLS:
- Producing clear writing
- Analyzing a complex set of ideas
- Drawing inferences from the play

TIME: About 20 minutes in class, plus homework

TO PREPARE
Students should read over the synopsis of the play, located in this study guide.

PRE-SHOW
As a class, identify some of the major newsworthy plot points that could be reported on. Then each student should choose an event that especially interests them and write questions that they, as a reporter, might want answered about that event. Be sure that each event identified has multiple reporters assigned to it.

Here is a list of sample events, as well as one or two questions that students could come up with based on the synopsis or their own knowledge of the play. Your list may vary.

• The Duke leaves town, putting Angelo in charge:
  Why did you schedule travel plans when the city needs leadership? Why did you choose Angelo as your stand-in?

• Angelo institutes harsh laws against premarital sex:
  What problems are you hoping to solve? What will you do with all of the offenders you round up?

• Claudio is arrested for impregnating Juliet:
  [To Claudio] What is your relationship to Juliet? [To Angelo] Will Claudio be treated the same way that prostitutes and their customers are?

• Mistress Overdone and Pompey are apprehended:
  Is this sort of law enforcement successfully lowering crime in the city?

• Angelo propositions Isabella to save her brother:
  [To Isabella] Tell us, what are your feelings about Angelo, and are you planning to take him up on his offer?

Once each student has a list, remind them to keep their questions in mind while at the show.

POST-SHOW
Students should refer back to their questions and see which ones were answered directly by the show, and which answers they need to make up based on the information they got during the show. Students should also write additional questions and answers that they think are important, based on what they learned.

Then, students should decide on a format for their newspaper or internet news article and write a report about their event. There are many ways to do this, but here are a few formats with sample headlines to get students thinking:

• Front Page News:
  Angelo’s Rule of Law: How harsh new punishments just might clean up Vienna

• List-Style Reports:
  8 Ways that Vienna is Broken and Angelo Wants to Fix It

• Opinion Column:
  Claudio’s Arrest — Stern Justice or Overreaction?

• Police Blotter:
  Police Apprehend Overdone, Pompey in Brothel Sting

• Gossip Column:
  Juliet’s Baby — Who is the father, and what happened to him?

• Satire Article, in the style of “The Onion”:
  Vienna Prostitutes Overworked from Serving Authorities as well as Pimps.

Once students have written their full articles, perhaps for homework, give students an opportunity to share their headlines with each other, to see the wide range of perspectives and articles that can be written on each topic. If you have time to share, continue with big-group discussion questions.

DISCUSS
- How did your opinions affect the article you wrote?
- What role does media reporting play in your opinion of an event?
- Are there ways to present the same facts but come to a different conclusion about an event?
- How might you read news stories differently after this activity?
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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