Dear Educators,

Welcome to our production of The Government Inspector! When I first read this script, I found myself laughing out loud every couple of pages. It’s a hilarious read of a farcical play, and I was really excited to watch it. Director Allison Narver mentioned that all of the characters are horrible people, and the protagonist of this show is comedy. Normally, I don’t love watching shows full of horrible people, but this one is so darn funny that I can spend the whole show rooting for the main character — comedy!

After thinking about the play for a few weeks, and keeping up with the news cycle, I’ve been thinking more about themes in The Government Inspector. This production will simultaneously be quite relevant to our contemporary era of government corruption, and will be an escape to a world where that corruption is lampooned and all the officials get taken advantage of. This play can spark political discussions, but it can also just leave you laughing at the absurdity of it. It’s all in there.

We hope you enjoy the show!

Best,
Michelle Burce
Education Director

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PLOT SYNOPSIS

In a small Russian town, the Mayor and officials are terrified to learn that an inspector will be arriving in secret to investigate them. The scramble to cover up their corruption is interrupted by the news that a stranger from St. Petersburg has been staying at the local inn for the past week. Due to the fact this stranger, who is named Khlestekov, has been taking notes on what he sees, the Mayor and his cronies become convinced that he is the inspector. Khlestekov is, in fact, simply a civil servant who has an extravagant imagination and a taste for drink. When he first meets with the Mayor and officials, he has no idea he has been mistaken for someone else. He soon realizes what is going on and decides to go along pretending to be the inspector. For a time, he enjoys that the officials of the town are giving him bribes. He even goes so far as to move into the Mayor’s house and starts flirting with his wife and daughter.

The local merchants, who have grown sick of the Mayor’s demands, visit Khlestekov, pleading with him to have the Mayor dismissed. Khlestekov, shocked by the mayor’s corruption, promises to have him sent to Siberia, but still takes more bribes from the merchants as payment. The mayor, fearful that he has been discovered, begs Khlestekov not to arrest him, but discovers that the “inspector” has become engaged to his daughter. At the advice of his servant Osip, Khlestekov says that he is returning to St. Petersburg, but will come back to claim his bride and promote the Mayor to a higher government office.

The Mayor, convinced he is safe, summons the merchants to his house. He brags of his daughter’s engagement and swears he will get every last penny from the merchants. Suddenly, the Postmaster arrives with a letter that Khlestekov wrote to a friend in St. Petersburg. In it, he details the truth about his situation, as well as his true feelings about everyone in the town. The Mayor, humiliated, points fingers at everyone except himself. As the mayor and his confederates argue, a message arrives from the real Government Inspector, demanding to see the Mayor.

CHARACTER LIST

Ivan Alexandreyevich Khlestekov, a low-level government clerk who has lost all of his money living extravagantly and gambling.

Osip, his servant

The Mayor’s Household

Anton Antonovich, the corrupt mayor of the town
Anna Andreyevna, his vain and flirtatious wife
Marya Antonovna, their daughter
Grusha, their maid

Town Officials

The Judge
The School Principal
The Hospital Director
The Doctor

The People of the Town

Dobchinsky, a landowner in town who looks remarkably like Bobchinsky
Bobchinsky, a landowner in town who looks remarkably like Dobchinsky

The Inn Keeper’s Wife
The Waitress
Svetsunov, the Police Chief
Abdullin, a merchant
Penetelaeyev, a merchant
Chernaeyev, a merchant

The Corporal’s Widow
The Locksmith’s Wife
An Imperial Messenger
NIKOLAI GOGOL

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol was born on March 31, 1809 in northeastern Ukraine.

Nikolai’s parents married when his mother, Maria, was 14 and his father, Vasyl, was 28. Maria’s dowry included an estate that came with 268 serfs (resident laborers bound to the service of landowners), and Vasyl retired immediately to take up writing and acting in comedic musicals produced in the home theatre of a wealthy cousin. Nikolai participated in his father’s theatre projects from a young age and took an interest in writing. Like his father, Nikolai was both highly intelligent and suffered from sudden and severe episodes of melancholy.

While attending school, Nikolai continued to write and participate in theatre. In 1828, he headed for St. Petersburg, where he was employed in academia while pursuing a fledging career as a writer. The first self-published piece that he submitted to magazines received no interest, but Nikolai was ambitious and committed. Within only a few years he was a member of Russia’s literary social circles and, by his mid-twenties, had earned critical and popular success as a published author.

While his writing flourished, Nikolai’s serial employment as an underqualified history professor resembled the bureaucratic incompetency that he so deftly satirized in his literary works. After The Government Inspector debuted in 1836, Nikolai left Russia to live abroad in Europe, where he moved among artistic and literary circles. Spending much of his time in Rome, he continued to write. In 1841, he returned to Russia for the publication of his masterpiece, Dead Souls.

In the last years of his life, Nikolai experienced increasing moral and religious anxiety. Under the influence of a fanatical priest, who fostered a growing fear of damnation and guilt over past sins, he adopted an ascetic regime that undermined his health. In early 1852, Nikolai burned his transcript for the second volume of Dead Souls (which had been planned as a trilogy inspired by Dante’s Inferno) and fell into a major depression, refusing all food and dying nine days later.

A beloved and significant cultural figure, monuments to Gogol stand across Ukraine and Russia, including Kiev, Odessa, Moscow, and St. Petersburg.

Pictured (from top): A portrait of Nikolai Gogol by F. Moller (1841). Nikolai’s family estate in Ukraine. Nikolai’s grave in Moscow.
“For the people in the town, this is serious business.” said director Allison Narver to the cast at first rehearsal. “You guys don’t know you’re living in a comedy and that is one of the most important things we have to do.”

The desperate and earnest motivations of characters in The Government Inspector are pushed to comedic extremes by placing them within a blatantly unrealistic world.

Our Production

The Set
Scenic designer Julia Welch has created an intentionally flexible space that actors can manipulate to amplify the comic antics of the story. Set in a black and white world with gold accents, everything on stage moves. Panels can drift on and off, and doors are on wheels allowing the scenery to participate in the on-stage action.

The Costumes
Costume designer Pete Rush has freed costumes from the constraints of a unified time period to make individual characterization paramount, playing up iconic archetypes. “Julia has created a really beautiful black and white world, and now it’s my job to bring hyper color onto it.”

Although there are separate looks for the characters, they are all unified by a unique approach to how their garments have been constructed. Upper class characters wear black smocks painted with two-dimensional representations of distinct costumes, taking inspiration from black velvet paintings. Lower class characters — peasants, merchants, waitresses — are dressed in burlap that is also painted with distinct costume pieces.

The Lighting
“This play is kind of like a great road trip,” said lighting designer Andrew D. Smith, speaking at first rehearsal. “It’s like a road trip with Hunter S. Thompson with Buster Keaton in the back seat.” Working on a sense of scale and portion, some lighting elements will join the mobility of the set with rolling booms that actors can move onstage for comically dramatic effect. Moments of high farce will be further exaggerated with garish qualities echoing the paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec, with lighting pulling extra drama out of the high-contrast set and painted costumes.
PLACING THE PRODUCTION

The Government Inspector
Seattle Shakespeare Company, 2017
Director: Allison Narver | Designer: Pete Rush

Painted Clothing Research
**TIDBITS AND TRIVIA**

**A Royal Opening**
Tsar Nicolas I, after reading a copy of *The Government Inspector*, liked it so much that he requested the first theatrical production...even though it lampooned much of what was wrong under his rule.

**Just Between Friends**
The original idea for *The Government Inspector* came from Gogol’s friend Alexander Pushkin, the great Russian writer and poet. Legend has it that Pushkin relayed experiencing a similar situation while visiting a remote town.

**Inspiration Strikes**
*The Government Inspector* was one of the inspirations for the beloved comedy *Inspecting Carol* created at Seattle Repertory Theatre in 1991. A true genre mash-up, the story centers around a small theatre trying to stage *A Christmas Carol* when news arrives that an inspector is coming to assess whether the struggling organization will receive an important grant. It’s a play that continues to be a favorite for theatre companies across the country.

But wait, there's more... R. Hamilton Wright plays Khlestakov in our production of *The Government Inspector*, who inspired the character of Wayne in *Inspecting Carol*, a part originated by Wright at Seattle Repertory Theatre over 25 years ago!

**What Goes Around Comes Around**
In *The Government Inspector* two landowners look remarkably similar. The actors playing Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky, Arjun Pande and Kevin Kelly, are not strangers to playing twins. They played the Dromio twins in our 2015 production of *The Comedy of Errors*.

**Carrying the Russian Mantle**
Nikolai Gogol had a tremendous influence on arts and culture in his country. His novel *Dead Souls* is considered a paramount to 19th Century Russian literature. *The Government Inspector*, one of only three plays he wrote, is considered the greatest comedy Russia has ever produced. And it took only two months to write it!

**Sunrise to Sunset**
What a difference a day makes! Everything that happens in *The Government Inspector* occurs during the course of one day. While it may follow the Aristotelian unities of drama, it also helps to pack in a whole lot of antics in a short amount of time.
PRE-SHOW REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

How big of a problem is corruption in the world today? Where do you see corruption besides in politics?

Do you think people are more likely to believe something improbable if it would benefit them to be true? Have you ever done this? Can you think of examples of this in your life?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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. There is no wrong answer, as long as students use examples from the play to back up their opinions. Some possible responses are provided.

Is Khlestekov maliciously deceiving the Mayor and officials? Or is he simply taking advantage of the situation he was put in?

• Khlestekov is desperate, and so it makes sense that he would take advantage of people throwing money at him. He did not ever claim to be the Government Inspector that people thought he was, until the end.
• Khlestekov is deceiving everyone, as his servant claims he always does.

Why do you think is everyone so quick to believe that Khlestekov is the Inspector?

• The Mayor and officials are so worried that the Inspector will see the corruption in the town that they are paranoid, and anyone doing anything suspicious would have seemed like the Inspector.
• The Mayor and his wife dream of being someplace better in their lives, and so their wish that he is the Inspector gets the better of them.
• The townspeople are so fed up with their government that they would have aired their grievances to anyone!

What is Gogol trying to say about corruption of people in power with this play?

• People in power are always corrupt - they’re just looking out for themselves, not for the office or people they represent.
• Corruption is everywhere and is in plain sight, but still no one can admit to it or have anyone else acknowledge it.
• Corruption is something that needs to get cleaned up, but it will get discovered and won’t make you look good.

Have you ever mistaken someone, or been mistaken, for someone else? How long did it take for you to figure out the mistake?

Can you think of something that someone would be ok if all their friends knew, but that they wouldn’t want a college admissions official or potential employer to know about? Why might this be the case?
ACTIVITIES

CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT

“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

Overview

In The Government Inspector, Gogol portrays corrupt government officials in a small town in Russia. However, he is not just pointing his finger at the Russian government. Instead, he points his finger at all governing entities, asking whether it is possible for anyone to work solely for the good of their constituents, without trying to improve their own lot in life.

Instructions

Students will break into small groups to do research and take notes on corruption that has happened in government. Each group should choose 2–4 instances (depending on time) of political corruption to research, each one in a different category:

• Corruption in politics in another country
• Corruption in historical US politics (pre-2000)
• Corruption in contemporary US politics (2000 or later)
• Corruption in local politics at any point in history

For each instance that a group researches, take notes on the following:

• Who are the primary offenders? Who else was involved?
• What happened?
• Why did they do this? What did the offender get out of it?
• How did people find out about this? What was the public reaction?
• What was the aftermath? What happened to those involved?

Then each member of the group should write about their own opinion. What is your reaction to this scandal? Does it seem like a big deal to you? Do you think those involved were punished enough / too much? Compare your thoughts with those in the rest of the group.

THE WHOLE TRUTH

“Enough! We’re all guilty. Only the particulars are different.”

— Mayor, The Government Inspector

Overview

As characters in this show try to justify their actions, they sometimes tell a blatant lie, but sometimes tell a small piece of the truth that makes them look better than they actually are. In this activity, students will work together to create short scenes that show people telling the truth, telling a lie, and telling a small piece of the truth that is misleading.

Instructions

Have students break into small groups of 2–3 people. Each group will come up with a situation in which someone might be tempted to tell a lie. Groups will then come up with two short skits around that situation.

• In the first skit, have students show what it would look like for the person to tell a completely fictional lie about the situation.
• In the second skit, have students show what it would look like for the person to tell a partial truth that misleads the person they are talking to, but makes themselves look better and is not technically a lie.

For example, a group might come up with a situation in which friends were wrestling in the house, and one of them knocked into a table and broke a lamp. In the first skit, the friends might explain to a parent that the dog did it. In the second skit, they might say they bumped into the table accidentally, leaving out that they were wrestling where they shouldn’t have been.

After each group explains their situation and presents their skits, discuss the following questions:

1. Which lie was more believable? The one that was totally made up, or the one that was half of the truth?
2. Does including some truth make the lie any less misleading?
3. What do you think would be the outcome of each of these scenes?
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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