

The Guide

A Theatergoer's Resource

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Sense & Sensibility

By Kate Hamill

Based on the novel by Jane Austen

Cast and Creative Team

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The Adaptation

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The World of the Play

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Further Resources

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Plot Summary

Bursting with humor and bold theatricality, this charming and wildly inventive staging of Jane Austen's classic romance follows the adventures of the Dashwood sisters — and a whirlwind of snippy town gossips — after their sudden loss of fortune. Playwright Kate Hamill and director Eric Tucker of New York's acclaimed theater company Bedlam revive their celebrated production in Portland after taking audiences by storm in New York and Boston.



THE ARMORY

Theater Etiquette

Please share the following points with your group of students. Encourage the students to practice these points throughout the workshop. Going to see a play is very different from going to the movies. During live theatre, the audience is as important a part of the experience as the actors.

- **Live response is good!** If you're telling a story to a friend, and they really respond or listen, it makes you want to tell the story better—to keep telling the story. So, the better that an audience listens, laughs and responds, the more the actors want to tell the story. In this way, the audience (as well as the actors) can make a performance great.
- **The actors can hear you talking.** If an audience member is not paying attention, the actors know it. Have you ever had a conversation with someone and felt that they'd rather be someplace else? This is the EXACT feeling actors get when people in the audience are talking

- **The actors can see you.** Even though actors are pretending to be other characters, it is their job to “check in” with the audience in order to tell the story better. This is another way in which theatre greatly differs from the movies. Film actors can do a take over and over to try to get it right. Theatre actors have one chance with an audience and want to make sure they are communicating clearly. Imagine trying to tell a group of fellow students something only to see them slouching, pretending to be bored, or sitting with their eyes closed in attempt to seem disinterested and “too cool” for what you had to say. Think about it...

- **Cell phones, beepers, candy wrappers, loud gum smacking.** Please turn off all cell phones and do not eat or chew gum inside the theater. These things disturb the people around you as well as the actors. As much as you might be tempted to text a friend how cool the play you're watching is, please wait until after it is over to send any texts.

Thank you to Montana Shakespeare in the Parks for these excellent etiquette suggestions.

Education Programs: Stage Door

Portland Center Stage's Stage Door Program seeks to provide all young people with opportunities to experience and directly participate in the art of high-quality, professional theater in a context that supports their education. The following pages contain activities to help students explore themes found in our production of Major Barbara. We encourage you to choose the most appropriate activities for your group and adapt as needed.

GOALS:

- To encourage personal connections between the students and the major themes of the play.
- To excite students about the story and introduce the theatrical elements of the production.
- To engage students using the actors' tools (body, voice, imagination).

KEY CONCEPTS:

- The Duality of Reason
- Staging and Movement as Character Enhancement
- Collaborative Decision-Making

Warm-up:

Sense OR Sensibility?

The goal of this activity is to entice the participants to think critically about how they make most decisions. Weighing and valuing options is a good method for certain situations, but some moments call for instinctive response.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Simple crowd-sourcing of responses; any form of “voting” will work (e.g. raising hands, standing as a group).
- Given the values of “Think it Through” and “Go With Your Gut,” offer locations, events and scenarios for students to respond to, e.g. Camping, Family Birthday Party, First Date
- More familiar decisions can be offered as well, e.g. Winter Coat, Party Dress, What to eat before a date?

Activity #1: Group Start/Stop

Spatial/Energetic activity; everyone can participate. Working silently to communicate through synchronized movement. Relational distance between members will be viewed as a means of communication.

- Define a space in which to work (a large rectangle is best)
- The whole group will mill/seed, walking briskly between each other, filling the space without collisions.
- Silently and without signal, the group will slow to a stop, and then resume just as silently.
- The aim is to allow the slightest perception of a slow-down, become an immediate trigger to stop moving – the tableaux should freeze as if paused.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

When do we see speed shifts naturally occurring in our daily life? When do we automatically slow down or speed up our actions? What moments do we choose to see in time-lapse? Which in Slo-mo?

Right: Jamie Smithson in Bedlam's *Sense & Sensibility*
Photo by Patrick Weishampel/blankeye.tv

Activity #2: Caption This

Participants continue to explore the effects of movement and distance on scene-work. After constructing and deconstructing tableaux, the participants improvise a description of the relationship seen onstage.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Standing in two lines facing one another, with an acting space in the middle, each student will be facing the “stage.”
- Starting with two participants, have them stand any distance apart, and strike a pose or mime and activity.
- After evaluating the “scene,” ask the students to Caption This, and describe what story is being told with just the two actors.
- Change the distance and re-Caption
- Add one or more people, create a crowd scene, put one person in motion, etc.
- Speed up and slow down the moments, allowing two people to be still

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

How were the relationships enhanced or diminished by the presence of others? What changes did you sense about the tone of the scene as the distance changed between actors? How did the speed of the side activity affect the primary two actors' moment?



Activity #3: Growing and Shrinking

The focus of this activity is improvisation, memory work, and collaboration. Actors will have to listen keenly, and make clear, impactful dialogue.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Starting with just one actor – allow them to improvise any one-person scene based on a suggestion.
- Add a second actor – When the second actor adds to the stage, it is as if the channel has been changed and we are seeing a completely new scene, with characters unrelated to the previous scene.
- Add a third actor, then a fourth, and finally a fifth actor to the stage – each time a different scene (channel).

- One by one, the actors improvise reasons to exit, and the group works its way back down the channels to revisit each scene. Scenes should have jumped in time while we were seeing other “channels.”
- The game is over when the last person onstage, is the first person onstage, revisiting their one-person scene/context a final time.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

What were the elements of the scenes which stood out? Why do those moments stick in the memory? What was the responsibility of the person entering each scene? How did the dynamics in the relationships change as more people added to the group?

