The Guide

A theatergoer’s resource edited by the Education & Community Programs department at Portland Center Stage

Fiddler on the Roof
Based on Sholem Aleichem Stories; Book by Joseph Stein; Music by Jerry Bock; Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

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The Musical

Plot Synopsis

In the first decade of the 20th century, sweeping changes come to Anatevka, a tiny Jewish village in pre-revolutionary Russia. Tevye, the village milkman, is the principal upholder of the traditions that have shaped his people’s lives for centuries. But Tevye’s profound reverence for the old ways comes into conflict with his love for his daughters Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava when each in turn breaks with tradition by choosing her own husband, rather than allowing the local matchmaker, Yente, to arrange a suitable marriage in accordance with the wishes of the girls’ mother, Golde. Gradually, Tevye comes to accept that change is inevitable in even the most conservative society – but he does not realize that other, tragic upheavals are on their way for him and his community. The persecution of Russian Jews by the Cossacks reaches even Anatevka, whose inhabitants are forcibly evicted from their homes. Sorrowfully, the villagers pack their belongings and depart to begin new lives in Poland, the Holy Land and the United States.

Setting and Period

The story takes place in the Jewish village of Anatevka in the Ukraine, just prior to the Russian uprising of 1905. Our production is set in that period.

About the Musical

A Tony Award-winning musical drama, Fiddler on the Roof tells the story of Tevye, a milkman in a Russian-Jewish village, and the conflicts that arise within him when his daughters want to defy tradition and marry for love. The story unfolds against a background of racial and religious discrimination by Russians against Jews.

Based on the short-story collection Tevye and His Daughters by Russian-born writer Sholem Aleichem, Fiddler on the Roof was one of the first Broadway musicals to weave tragic elements – in this case the persecution and displacement of a people – into a story of romantic love.
Characters

**Tevye** Narrator of the play and father to five young women, Tevye struggles to maintain his traditional Jewish values. He is married to Golde and works as a milkman. His daughters are Tzeitel, Hodel, Chava, Shprintze, and Bielke.

**Golde** Tevye's wife, Golde, is the one who keeps the household running. She hopes her daughters have good lives and marry well.

**Yente** Yente is the matchmaker of the town and often knows the news of the town.

**Lazar Wolf** As the wealthiest citizen in town, he would like to marry Tevye's daughter, even though he is the same age or older than Tevye.

**Tzeitel** Tzeitel is the eldest daughter of Tevye and Golde. She is the first to challenge the traditional marriage customs and resists Lazar Wolf's attempts to marry her. Her true love is Motel.

**Motel** Motel is a poor tailor who intends to marry Tzeitel.

**Hodel** Hodel is the second eldest daughter of Golde and Tevye. She falls in love with Perchik, a student who is not from Anatevka.

**Perchik** An outsider to the community, Perchik is a student, and brings with him radical ideas that challenge tradition. He is in love with Hodel.

**Chava** The third eldest daughter of Golde and Tevye, she runs off to marry Fyedka.

**Fyedka** Fyedka is a Russian soldier who falls in love with Chava.

**Shprintze and Bielke** The two youngest daughters of Golde and Tevye.

**The Constable** A Russian military official stationed near Anatevka.

**Rabbi** A Rabbi is Anatevka's Jewish spiritual leader.

**Mendel** Mendel is the Rabbi's son.

**Mordcha** Mordcha is the innkeeper who runs the bar in town.

**Avram** Avram is the bookseller in town.

**Grandma Tzeitel** Grandma appears as a ghost during a dream sequence.

**Fruma Sarah** Fruma Sarah is Lazar's Wolf's departed wife. She appears as a ghost in Tevye's dream and is angry that Lazar Wolf wants to marry Tzeitel.

**Nachum** The town beggar.

**Yussel** The town hatter.

**Shaindel** The mother of Motel.

**Sasha** Fyedka's Russian friend and soldier.

**Priest** A Christian spiritual leader.

David Studwell in Portland Center Stage’s production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Photography by Patrick Weishampel.
Sholem Aleichem

**WRITER**

Sholem (or “Sholom”) Aleichem was the pseudonym used by Solomon Rabinovitz, who was born in Kiev, Russia, in 1859. The pseudonym literally means “Peace be unto you” or, more colloquially, “How do you do?” He lived most of his life in Kiev, where he was the owner and editor of a Ukrainian newspaper. He moved to the United States in 1906, following other refugees of the Kishinoff pogroms. He died in New York in 1916. Sholem Aleichem remains one of the greatest and most beloved of all writers in Yiddish. His works include *The Adventures of Menahem-Mendl, Adventures of Mottel, The Cantor’s Son, Tevye the Dairyman, Hamikah Money, Inside Kasrilevka* and *The Nightingale.*

Jerry Bock

**MUSIC**

Jerrold Lewis Bock was born in 1928 in New Haven, Connecticut. He first began to write songs while in high school. After studying at the University of Wisconsin School of Music, he moved to New York in 1940, where he began his career as a songwriter for television, revues and Broadway musicals. He wrote Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca’s television shows and for summer camp revues. In 1955, he collaborated with lyricist Larry Holofcener on several songs for the Broadway revue *Catch a Star,* and in 1956 he wrote the score for Sammy Davis Jr.’s *Mr. Wonderful.* He collaborated with Sheldon Harnick on *The Body Beautiful* (1956); the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fiorello!; Tenderloin* (1960); *She Loves Me* (1963) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964). In 1966, Bock and Harnick wrote songs for *The Apple Tree* (which was based on *The Diary of Adam and Eve,* by Mark Twain). Directed by Mike Nichols, it played at the Shubert Theatre in New York for 463 performances. Bock and Harnick also collaborated on *The Rothschilds* in 1970.
Sheldon Harnick
LYRICS


Joseph Stein
BOOK

Born in New York in 1912, Joseph Stein was educated at the City College of New York. He contributed sketches to various revues in New York in 1948. He wrote for radio and television. Later he wrote (alone or with collaborators) the books for such musicals as *Plain and Fancy* (1955), *Mr. Wonderful* (1956), *Take Me Along* (1959) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964). In 1963 he dramatized Carl Reiner’s novel *Enter Laughing*. He also wrote the books for such musicals as *Zorba*, *So Long 174th Street*, *The Body Beautiful*, *The Baker’s Wife* and *Rags*. 
The Pale of Settlement was established in 1791 by Czar Catherine II as a territory for Russian Jews to live in. This was created in order to rid Moscow of Jewish business competition and the effects of growing anti-Semitism in Russia. Russian Jews were forced to live in the poor conditions of the Pale. They suffered discrimination: they paid double taxes and were forbidden to lease land, run taverns or receive higher education. In addition, thousands of Jews fell victim to devastating pogroms in the 1870s and 1880s. The pogroms and other anti-Semitic acts led to mass immigration to the United States (two million between 1881 and 1914). The Pale of Settlement was abolished after the overthrow of the Czarist regime in 1917.

For further details see
www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/pale.html
Fiddler on the Roof is the story of life in a small Russian shtetl in 1905, when Russia was still an empire, ruled by Tsar Nicholas II, head of the dictatorial Romanov dynasty. While much of Western Europe was becoming more free and democratic, Russia was still rooted in traditional ideas of absolute monarchy. Nicholas was determined to hold on to, in his words, “absolute autocracy.” This, coupled with his seeming lack of common sense as his country stumbled through crisis after crisis, would eventually lead to the downfall and destruction of the Romanovs.

Along with other abuses of human rights, Nicholas’ administration was instrumental in releasing a great deal of anti-Jewish propaganda. This propaganda incited fear and hatred of Jews among many non-Jewish citizens, and often led to violence. The three-year period from 1903 to 1906 was a particularly terrifying time for Russian Jews, as one pogrom after another raged in Western Russia. (A pogrom is defined as the “organized killing of a minority.” Some dictionaries actually include a reference to tsarist Russia in their definition.)

There had been many pogroms in Russia in the second half of the 19th century, including 166 in the year 1881 alone. In 1905, the year in which Fiddler on the Roof begins, there were at least six pogroms in Imperial Russia, occurring in such major cities as Kishinev (capital of present-day Moldova), Odessa (in present-day Ukraine and the site of a catastrophically huge massacre of Jews in WWII), and Minsk (capital of present-day Belarus). In all, these pogroms claimed the lives of no less than 1,500 Jewish citizens, a total of four for each day of that year.

Most of these pogroms occurred within an area referred to as the Pale of Settlement, the area of Russia in which Jews could legally settle. Shtetls such as Anatevka, the fictitious village in Fiddler on the Roof, began to disappear as discriminatory laws against Jewish citizens forbade them from living in rural areas, or in towns of less than 10,000 people. Indeed, as Fiddler begins, the people of Anatevka have just received word of the Tsar’s edict, which will shortly evict them from their homes. By the musical’s end, the people of Anatevka are packed up, some moving to America, many others to Krakow (in modern-day Poland), for what they hope will be a new and better life.

More than a century later, we know what became of those who immigrated to America, and to those who immigrated to Poland. This knowledge only adds to the sadness and poignancy of this tremendous musical, which is steeped in so much true and tragic history.

Diverse social, ethnic and political groups demonstrated their discontent with Czar Nicholas II and the Russian form of autocracy, calling for a constitutional monarchy. There were strikes, student riots and terrorist assassinations. This culminated on what is now referred to as “Bloody Sunday” with the massacre of peaceful demonstrators in St. Petersburg in the Winter Palace square on January 9, 1905. This led to further strikes and riots by students, factory workers, lawyers, doctors and other middle-class workers, all in an effort to bring about reform and better conditions for the majority of the people. Czar Nicholas, in his weakened position, published the “October Manifesto,” which created a Duma (parliament). The Duma made certain demands, among them the release of political prisoners, trade union rights and land reform. However, once the czar regained his power, he rejected their proposals and dissolved the Duma. This growing unrest would eventually lead to the downfall of Czarist Russia as very radical changes were brought about by the Russian Revolution of 1917, which established a Bolshevik (Communist) government.
Glossary of Terms

**Arranged marriages:** According to Judaism, people cannot be forced to marry against their will. There are, however, many today among the Haredi communities (very conservative orthodox Jews) who use the services of a professional matchmaker or “shadchan,” who starts the introductions.

*The local matchmaker, Yente, is asked by Golde to find suitable prospective husbands for her daughters.*

**Dowry:** The money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage.

*Tevye is a poor milkman and therefore cannot provide much of a dowry for his daughters.*

**Edict:** An official order or proclamation issued by a person in authority.

*Towards the end of the musical an edict is issued from Petrograd forcibly evicting the Russian Jews from their homes in Anatevka and elsewhere.*

**Kopek:** Russian and Ukrainian currency.

*The lack of money is a constant concern for Tevye.*

**Kosher:** It describes foods that are allowed by Jewish dietary laws. There are three basic elements of keeping kosher: avoid eating non-kosher animals; avoid eating meat and dairy together; and only eat meat slaughtered in a certain way and drained of blood.

*When Tevye talks and sings about, “Tradition” he says, “...we have traditions for everything...how we eat,...”*

**L’chaim:** A Hebrew expression meaning “to life.” Cheers.

*At the inn, Tevye announces that his daughter Tzeitel will marry Lazar Wolf and everybody sings, “To Life.”*

**Mazel tov:** A Hebrew expression of congratulations and best wishes.

*This expression is heard at the inn when Tevye announces his daughter Tzeitel's engagement to Lazar Wolf.*

**Nazdrovia:** Cheers (in Russian).

*Some of the Russian townsmen join in congratulating Tevye on Tzeitel's engagement to Lazar Wolf and offer blessings and good cheer in the song “To Life.”*

**Prayer shawl:** Many Jewish men wear the “tzitzit,” a white garment worn under the shirt with fringes on the four corners. These fringes can be seen coming out from under the clothes. During formal prayers men also wear the “tallit,” a white shawl with fringes on the four corners and sometimes with blue or black stripes on the ends. The tallit is worn over the clothing.

*Many of the Jewish men in Anatevka wear the tzitzit and as Tevye says, “This shows our constant devotion to God.”*

**Pogrom:** A Russian word for an attack (e.g. destruction, looting of property, murder, etc.) carried out by one sector of the population against another. The term is particularly used for the attacks carried out by the Christian population against the Jews between 1881 and 1921 while the Russian military and government authorities either remained neutral or secretly supported these attacks.

*At Tzeitel and Motel's wedding, the Russian Constable disrupts the festivities, saying he has orders to start destroying Jewish property.*

**Rabbi:** A person qualified by academic studies of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud who acts as a spiritual leader and religious teacher of a Jewish community.

*The Rabbi in Anatevka is revered and called upon to give his blessings, wisdom and advice.*
Reb: A Yiddish term for “mister.”

The Jewish men in Anatevka address each other in this manner, so for instance, “Tevye” is often addressed as “Reb Tevye.”

Sabbath: A Jewish day of rest from sundown on Friday until nightfall Saturday.

When Tevye first meets Perchik, he invites him to stay with his family for the Sabbath.

Synagogue: A Jewish house of prayer also used for religious instruction.

When Tevye sings, “If I Were a Rich Man” he longs to be rich enough to sit and pray in the synagogue and discuss the holy books with learned men all day.

Yeshiva: An Orthodox Jewish college or seminary; an Orthodox Jewish elementary school teaching both religious and secular subjects.

Yente brings two yeshiva boys for Golde to consider as possible suitors for her two youngest daughters, Shprintze and Bielke.

For Discussion

1. What traditions do you celebrate? If you were to suggest changing some of these traditions, how would that be viewed and received by other members of your family.

2. If you were suddenly to become very rich, what would you do with your new-found wealth and how would you spend your days?

3. What is the significance of the fiddler on the roof?

4. What parallels can you find in today’s world to these themes?
   a. social uprisings and political unrest
   b. harsh socioeconomic conditions
   c. Anti-Semitism

5. How important are faith and allegiance to social identity?

6. Should bringing pride to your family take priority over pursuing your own happiness?
Local Connections

**Oregon Jewish Museum**

If Tevye and his family got you interested in Jewish culture and history, then you can explore the Oregon Jewish Museum to discover more about it.

1953 NW Kearney Street  
Portland, Oregon 97209  
503-226-3600  
ojm.org

**Everything Jewish (Bookstore and Gift Shop)**

Looking for some Jewish food, gifts, or books? Everything Jewish has whatever you may need, including an onsite Rabbi to answer questions and discuss Jewish perspectives.

6684 SW Capitol Highway  
Portland, Oregon 97219  
503-246-5437  
everythingjewish.biz

**Congregation Beth Israel**

If you are more interested in the Jewish religion, then you can visit Congregation Beth Israel to gain some insight on traditional Jewish values.

1972 NW Flanders Street  
Portland, Oregon 97209  
503-222-1069  
bethisrael-pdx.org

**David Kerr Violin Shop**

Inspired to start playing the fiddle for yourself? Check out the David Kerr Violin Shop! They offer a wide range of stringed instruments to choose from, as well as a rental program.

4451 SE 28th Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97202  
503-238-4515  
kerrviolins.com

**J-Date.com**

Looking for your own matchmaker? Visit jdate.com for your own Jewish romance!

jdate.com

**European Master Tailor**

Looking for a great tailor like Motel Kamzoil? Then look no further than the European Master Tailor! The shop has a 20-year history of top-quality craftsmanship.

515 SW Broadway  
Portland, Oregon 97205  
503-223-1400  
europeanmastertailor.com
Activity I

Warm-up: Tradition!

The goal of this activity is to loosen up the group utilizing the actors’ tools, and to begin to brainstorm traditions held by group members.

How It Works

Begin in a circle. The workshop instructor leads the group in a few rounds of the chorus from *Tradition*, until the class is comfortable with mimicking the first three repetitions of the word. (Note: If students are uncomfortable singing, this exercise can also be done in the same manner using spoken word.)

• One student assumes the position of Tevye at the center of the circle.

• Tevye states a tradition that they or their family hold. This can be anything from a holiday ritual to a way of life or behavior that is expected of them in their community.

• After each tradition is stated, the whole group responds by singing, “Tradition! Tradition! Tradition!”

• The student in the center chooses someone on the outside to replace them, and the cycle is repeated as needed.

Tips: Keep the activity moving by instructing the Tevyes to quickly choose their replacement. Encourage the students in the center to use gesture/voice to tell a story about their tradition.
Activity II

Stand up If...

This activity delves further into customs within the group, and students are encouraged to take note of which traditions are shared between classmates.

How It Works

The instructor chooses from the list of sentences below and asks the students to “Stand up if...”. Students return to neutral between each sentence.

Stand Up If...

- You always open one present on Christmas Eve
- You go to your grandmother’s for Thanksgiving every year
- You carve a pumpkin every fall
- You set off fireworks on July 4
- Your family eats dinner at the table every Sunday
- Your family sends a newsletter to friends and family every holiday season
- Your family doesn’t eat bread during Passover

Sample Follow-Up Questions

What is the difference between a tradition and a ritual?
Can one person carry on a tradition, or do you need a group?
What’s an example of a tradition that someone in your family holds dear?
Can you think of a tradition you would rather leave behind?

Connections

In Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye struggles between clinging to the traditions his family has always lived by and opening up to the rampant changes that are coming to Anatevka.
Activity III

Yearbook Photo

Students will create stage pictures representing different periods of their high school experience to explore how a group/community can change over time.

How it Works

Students split into groups of 4 or 5. One person is selected as the Narrator. Going around the room one group at a time, each team creates 3 distinct stage pictures as described by the Narrator. The group can take 5 minutes to discuss who their group is and what distinguishes them from the others. After that point, the stage pictures are improvised as a reaction to the Narrator.

Each group shares their SLIDE 1 in succession with the Narrators calling out when the picture should change. After all SLIDE 1s have been shared the Narrators transition into SLIDE 2.

SLIDE 1: We are the <name of group> known for our <quality describing the group>.

Ex: We are the Unicorn Squad, known for our mystical powers.

SLIDE 2: Here we are on this day, <describe the event/tradition being experience>.

Ex: Here we are celebrating our victory over the Oompa Loompas. We celebrate by having a barbecue.

SLIDE 3: Here we are at <describe an event that changes the group or leads them to something new>.

Ex: Here we are at Unicorn graduation. After today we have to split up and go out on our own.

Tips: Make strong and specific physical choices. Students’ slides should show the emotions the characters are feeling and give us clues to what makes their group unique.

Connections and Follow-Up Questions

What changes have you or your groups of friends gone through in recent years?
What was it like transitioning into (middle school/high school)?
Are you looking forward to graduation?
If you plan on leaving Portland, what will you miss about your town?
Activity IV

The Matchmaker

Appropriate for all ages and all sizes of groups. This exercise focuses on the differences in contemporary and traditional marriages and matchmaking. Pairing and marrying for romantic love is a modern concept. In the world of Fiddler on the Roof, Tevya’s daughters challenge the traditional matchmaking process by following only their hearts into choosing their mates. In generations past, matches were based on their benefits to both families’ legacies, social standings, and financial stability.

How it Works

Standing in a circle, start by passing a hat full of Matchmaker slips. Each student takes one slip, and on it is their criterion for finding a mate. Each slip will have one Have and one Need. Once each person has a slip, the group is given five minutes to interview each other and find their best match. After each pair is confident that they have matched the information on their slips as best as possible, the pairs should stand together and apart from the rest of the match-seeking pool of students. Students should only rely on the information on their slips, and this may result in some uncomfortable pairings – that only serves to contrast the differences between marriages then and now.

Connections and Follow-Up Questions

How did it feel when couples began pairing off? Did you feel lucky? Anxious?
If there was one person left over, did you envy them or were you glad that you were part of a pair?
Is an uncomfortable match better than no match at all?

Have/Need Pairings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAVE</th>
<th>NEED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A large family farm</td>
<td>A quiet home for aging family-members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A family name respected by everyone</td>
<td>More respect from the business community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience raising younger siblings</td>
<td>Someone to help raise the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plenty of money</td>
<td>To repay many of the family’s debts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large flock of sheep</td>
<td>More livestock for the family farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth, strength, and respect</td>
<td>A chance to rest after years of working hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A well-respected medical practice</td>
<td>Medical attention for my parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A high-powered job</td>
<td>Someone to bring home the paycheck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large fenced-in property</td>
<td>A place to keep my dogsled team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children from a previous marriage</td>
<td>Playmate for my young daughter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity V

Wrap-Up/Discussion: The Musical

As you watch the play, take notice of when a character decides to burst into song. Sometimes the singing and dancing may fit into the framework of the story, and other times it may seem like a character just has to sing to get their point across.

• What’s something in your life that is worth singing about?
• When you feel sad or lonely, do you listen to music? Why is that?
• Tevye uses monologues throughout the play. When you are alone, do you ever talk or sing to yourself? If yes, what inspires you to talk to yourself?