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THE MILWAUKEE
REPERTORY THEATER
PRESENTS

THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD

A STUDY GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS

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This study guide is researched and designed by the Education Department at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater and is intended to prepare you for your visit. It contains information that will deepen your understanding of, and appreciation for, the production. We've also included questions and activities for you to explore before and after our performance of

THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD

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The Rep
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*** WARNING * THIS SHOW CONTAINS PROFANITY AND ADULT SITUATIONS.**

SYNOPSIS

Rhonda Russel is a typical housewife. After being married for over 17 years her daily routine consists of juggling the needs of her son, avoiding getting parking tickets, and picking up dry cleaning and de-worming pills for the cat. However, this routine is thrown off course when her husband calls from work and tells her that he's moved out of the house. Two months later, Rhonda is still coping with this news when she receives more news from her best friend Lynette. Lynette sees Rhonda's husband outside the local McDonald's with a young blonde. Rhonda rushes to the mall to confront the other woman, which results in a crime of passion that forever changes her life and the lives of everyone around her.

"If you had asked me to define naïve beforehand, I would have pointed to a small child. I would have never thought of turning the finger and aiming it at myself."
- Rhonda

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Hewitt started out as an actor and later became a playwright. He graduated from Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia and then joined the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1972. Hewitt extensively worked in theater, film, television, and radio for the remainder of that decade before he switched to writing. In 1980, his first play JUST... ONE LAST DANCE premiered at the Mercury Theatre in Auckland, New Zealand. His second play, GULLS, was produced in 1983 by the Melbourne Theatre Company. This play received the Green Room Award for Best Play and has been produced all over the world including Australia, the United States, England, South Africa, and Japan. THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD opened in Sydney in 2004 and toured Australia for three years to much acclaim. Other shows that Hewitt has written are THE ADMAN, WAKING EVE, the cabaret TAUGHT BY EXPERTS and the one act SHOWDAY.

WHO'S WHO IN THE SHOW

THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD is a one woman show with seven characters and eight different monologues. Since only one actor plays all these roles, look for ways the actor changes the character. Below are the characters, in order of their appearance that the actor will play.



Rhonda Russell, Housewife over forty, the redhead

Dr. Alex Doucette, Therapist

Lynette Anderson, Rhonda's next door neighbor, the brunette

Matthew McKinnon, Four and a half, Dr. Doucette's son

Graham Russell, Rhonda's husband

Joan Carlisle, Dr. Doucette's neighbor

Tanya Moisevitch, 38, Owner of Donovan's Discount Jewelry, the blonde

Rhonda Russell, at 53

DISCUSSION: *We all have to play various roles in our lives such as sibling, student, soccer player, actor, singer. List all the roles you play. How do you change from role to role? Are there specific things you say or do depending on what role you're in? Discuss your list and answers with your classmates.*

THE MONODRAMA

The monologue has become a very important piece of writing in the theater world. Solo performance is a basic idea that finds its roots in storytelling. A monodrama, a play acted by one person, is well on its way to becoming very established style in theater. We will see this in THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD. In the past fifty years, the monodrama has become increasingly popular and continues to grow in popularity every day. It gives the audience an exciting opportunity as they watch a character morph into another in front of their eyes.

We can see solo performing as early as the late 1800's. Many famous literary figures such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and Edgar Allen Poe would travel around performing public readings of their literature. Audiences would watch these authors portray all the characters in their works, sometimes numbering over 20 different people. The first actor and playwright to make this performance style popular was Ruth Draper. Often times she created several characters through monologues and portrayed them in a single show. Draper's work was the first of its kind and become accepted very quickly. The audience was astounded by her ability and talent to portray an old woman and then a young girl or a rich heiress and then an immigrant worker. She performed this style of theater until her death in 1956.

What makes this style of theater so difficult is that the playwright must create multiple stories within the one performance. Each monologue needs to have certain characteristics in order for it to fit in with the others. Each individual story must have a beginning, middle, and end. The playwright must consider who the speaker is, where the entire story takes place, and what's going on in this particular moment. It requires multi-tasking and much attention to detail.

Monodramas have become much more modernized and we are able to see it performed not only on stage, but also in stand-up comedy, television, and film. Actors such as Eddie Murphy, Tracy Ullman, and Whoopie Goldberg have all found success with the multi-character solo performance.



RUTH DRAPER PORTRAYING TWO DIFFERENT CHARACTERS FOR ONE OF HER SHOWS.



DISCUSSION: *The monodrama is very popular in today's world. Think about where we see the act of solo performing. Where do you see this happening? With your class, list various examples from theater, stand-up, television, or film. What do you think is the most difficult part of solo-performing? How do you think someone would train in order to become better at this? Name some techniques an actor might find useful in making each character stand out from the others.*

ACTIVITY: *Get into small groups with your classmates. Recall a story that is familiar with all the students in the group. This story should have multiple people in it. After deciding a story, make sure that everyone knows the specifics of the story. Each person should pick one character and write a monologue from that person's perspective. The group will then have created, in essence, a monodrama. Perform the monologues for the rest of the class.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH STAPLES, ACTOR

THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD requires you to play seven different characters. Has it been hard to get into each character? What has gone well and what difficulties have you had in the process of creating these seven characters?

Playing seven characters is a real challenge. And fun. I want them to be well-rounded, believable people that happen to be very different from each other. When I read each one, my imagination tells me what they sound like, what they move like, what they love and hate, and how they look at the world. It leads me to a full picture of them. The next step is where I succeed or struggle. That is in finding that person in me so that I can embody that image I have of them. Some of them have come very easily. Three of the women who are close to me in age and of a society with which I am very accustomed and the old woman who is perhaps me in fifty years - these came easily. Then the challenges set in. The four and 1/2 year old boy's psychology came easily to me, but the voice came out of my body sounding like a little girl's. I got it to go to a boy's but now it's too loud, strong, and even though I've chosen not to pronounce my "R's" the rest of my pronunciation is too clean (too much actor training, learning how to use my voice "properly"). The middle aged man came fairly easily as long as he was from New Jersey. We didn't want to place him there, but taking away that dialect robbed my imagination of how I could embody him. The director, Joe Hanreddy, has been coaching me on finding him, his masculine ways of using language and his relationship to his guy friends that he's talking to. And lastly the female, British doctor. I simply had a different idea in my head, and Joe has helped me re-imagine her because of how it could set her apart from the other women. For these last three it is a slow process, one step at a time - requiring patience and faith that we will get there if we just do the work.



What is it like to be part of the Resident Acting Company for the Milwaukee Repertory Theater? How long have you been here? What has your experience been like?

This is my 13th year as a Resident Actor at the Rep. I have loved working with the resident company, and equally important to me has been watching them work. Witnessing artists' personal and artistic evolution over time teaches me that my own limitations are only in my head. When I see other people break through what I know or expect, I know I can do it too. We also have a ready resource, in each other, for knowledge, empathy and encouragement. Our responsibilities and workloads are greater than if this was just a job, but the rewards are much greater too.

“When I see other people break through what I know or expect, I know I can do it too.”

The process of rehearsing a show can be long. What is your favorite part of putting up a show? Does it vary depending on the play?

One of my favorite parts of doing a show is in rehearsal, after everyone knows their lines and blocking (where you move & what you're doing) when we can really start experimenting with each other. Letting something someone did or said a certain way really affect me differently. Or having an idea or impulse to do something different that the other person can then react to. It's also very exciting to move into the theatre and add all the sound, lights and costumes. Suddenly your world and reality in the play becomes infinitely deep. And following that comes the last character to be added to the play - the audience. Then you find out what you're really doing and what you have - the audience teaches us so much. I also love the waves of discoveries I get during the run of a play. Things you can only learn with time and experience.

How do you prepare for a play? What process do you personally go through?

To prepare for a play I read it a lot. That is the big one that is the same for every play. From there it's analyzing the scenes, studying the characters and their relationships, doing research on anything in the play that I don't know about that my character does, doing some creative writing on what my character's life has been like and what their history is with people they talk about or interact with, thinking about what they look, sound and move like - and anything else that seem appropriate. It can be quite different depending on the play.

“We are all so much more tied to each other than we think.”

Have you been able to make connections between the play and your own life? What connections might the audience be able to take away?

I think the carryover between this play and my life is the interconnectedness of everything. Anything I do or say can have consequences - intended or not, for good or bad, now or years down the line. Even strangers that brush the outer edges of your life can have a profound impact on you. We are all so much more tied to each other than we think.

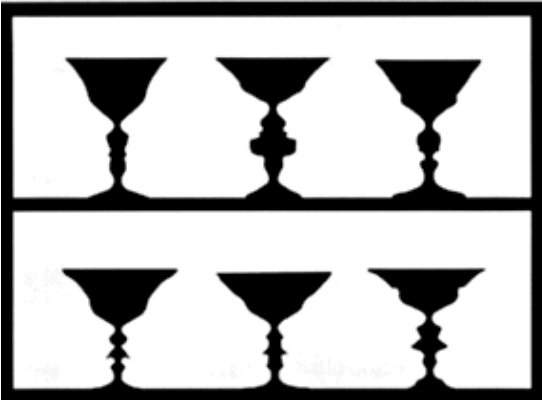
Deborah Staples has been in over 40 shows here at The Rep. Some of her credits include:

STATE OF THE UNION	ARMADALE
ENCHANTED APRIL	TARTUFFE
FROZEN	BORN YESTERDAY
A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY	A DOLL'S HOUSE
PROOF	

Deborah Staples in STATE OF THE UNION with Rep Company Members Lee Ernst and James Pickering



THEMES IN THE SHOW



WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK AT THIS PICTURE? DEPENDING ON YOUR PERSPECTIVE, YOU'LL SEE DIFFERENT THINGS.

One of the main themes in *THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD* is perception, or the way something is viewed. While the story-line is based off of one incident, the characters re-tell the story in their own words. Each character has a different perception of the events that happened because of who they are and their own values and beliefs. In essence, the audience only has each character's interpretation of the event to try to piece together the whole story. While we can choose what we want to believe the whole story can never be found.

ACTIVITY: *Think of a time when you had an argument with someone. What was the argument about? Write down what you thought and felt during this argument. Now, think about the other person. Write down what you think they*

thought and felt during the argument. Are there any similarities or differences? Why do you think there are these differences?

Another theme in the play is self-deception. Self-deception can stem from various things. Usually the person has a skewed view of the world and of themselves. Rhonda believes that she has a good marriage and that her husband loves her very much. However, she realizes that this is untrue when her husband leaves her. Even after this, she still can't believe what has happened. Rhonda tries to convince herself that all the past errors she, her husband, and best friend have had, that it was all for the best. She wants to believe that everything is still perfect and that her life will be normal again.

ACTIVITY: *By yourself, remember a time when you made yourself believe something in order to make a time in your life seem better. How did you feel? Why did you want to make this time better? Write down the event and your thoughts on why you thought self-deception was better than reality. Get in a small group and talk about what you wrote down. Create a list of reasons why we think self-deception is often the better choice.*

Forgiveness is very important in the play. There are many types of forgiveness and it can happen quickly or it can take a long time. In the play, many of the characters end up forgiving one another, even after everything that has happened. While their lives have been turned upside down and people have been devastated, they move on. There is also forgiveness of self. Rhonda knows that what she has done is very wrong, but knows that she needs to forgive herself and live with what she has done. It is with this realization that Rhonda is able to accept her decisions and the decisions of others.

DISCUSSION: *Remember a time when you needed to forgive someone. What was the situation? Was it hard to forgive them? How did everything turn out eventually? Now, remember a time you had to forgive yourself. What happened? Was it harder to forgive yourself than somebody else? Jot down your ideas and in small groups discuss what you have.*

THE WHOLE TRUTH

The monologues in the play contradict each other. This experience in which observers of an event can produce different, but plausible, accounts of the event is known as the Rashomon Effect. The Rashomon Effect received its name from the film *Rashomon* in which four characters see a murder and tell their accounts of the event. The truth is impossible to get because we only see each character's account of the incident, not the incident itself. We can choose what to believe and what not to believe, but the truth is really a matter of interpretation. This is definitely evident in *THE BLONDE, THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD*. We are only told the re-telling of the event by the characters, not the actual event. The audience never really knows what is true and what is false, only an interpretation of the truth. It is up to the audience to decide for themselves what they want to believe and to try to piece together the information to get the real story.

DISCUSSION: *By yourself, think of an event where there were multiple people involved. How could or did each person's take on the event differ? Why are there these differences? Were there any similarities? What do you think is the real truth to the event? Discuss your answers and ideas with the class.*

ACTIVITY: *Sometimes it's hard to tell what's the truth and what's false. Get into small groups and pick someone to be "it". This person should turn away while the rest of the group is going to decide who will "lie" about themselves. After this is decided, the person who is "it" will listen to the rest of the group tell one thing about themselves, with one person saying a false statement. The person who is "it" needs to guess who is telling the lie.*

Switch roles until everyone is "it". Discuss how this activity went. Was it easy to guess who was telling the lie? Did you decide to make your guess on previous knowledge or information? To make this more difficult, have larger groups and have more than one person tell a lie.



RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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*“The theatre is so endlessly fascinating
because it's so accidental.
It's so much like life.”*

Arthur Miller

Our lives are greatly enhanced with theatre. Studying and viewing it teaches us about other cultures and times, collaboration, work ethic, and imagination. We become more aware of the world around us with these concepts, and in addition to this, more alert to and responsive of human nature. With this improved understanding of what theatre can provide for us we are able to gain a better appreciation not only for theatre, but for life as well.

VISITING THE REP

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our box office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater, and the Intercontinental Hotel. If you walk into the center of this area, you'll see a staircase on your left. You will take this staircase to the Powerhouse Theater lobby.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains, and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) in the coat check room, and enjoy them outside the theater during intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full “running time” of the play.

**For more information on our education programs and our productions,
please visit our website at www.milwaukeeep.com**