



# Mother Courage and Her Children

by Bertolt Brecht  
in a new version by Peter Hinton

a National Arts Centre English Theatre Company /  
Manitoba Theatre Centre (Winnipeg) coproduction

## Study Guide

**THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE  
PROGRAMME FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES  
2009-2010 SEASON**

**Peter Hinton**  
**Artistic Director, English Theatre**



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This Study Guide was written and researched by **Jim McNabb** for the National Arts Centre, English Theatre, November, 2009. It may be used solely for educational purposes.

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## About This Guide

**This Study Guide contains a large amount of varied resource material to accommodate different classes and levels. Teachers need not use all the material found here but should choose appropriate activities from pages 22-24, then select the corresponding support material.** Topics may be used separately or in any combination that works for your situation.

Table of Contents	page(s)
Who Helped Put the Production Together? .....	1
About the Play: Background, Characters, Plot, Themes.....	2 - 6
Scene Excerpt from <i>Mother Courage and Her Children</i> .....	7 – 8
Selected Production Designs .....	9 - 10
An Interview with Director Peter Hinton .....	11 – 12
Things to Watch for in the Production .....	12
The Life of Bertolt Brecht.....	13
Other Plays by Bertolt Brecht.....	14
Some Quotations from <i>Mother Courage and Her Children</i> Explained .....	15 - 16
Epic Theatre .....	17 - 18
The Thirty Years' War, World War II, and Today.....	19 - 20
Suggested Websites, Movies and Books.....	21
Activities Before and After Seeing the Play.....	22 - 24
Theatre Etiquette .....	25
Acknowledgements .....	26

## **Who Helped Put the Production Together?**

(see Activity #13)

### **Cast**

TANJA JACOBS as Mother Courage

**with the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary English Theatre Acting Company:**

NISHA AHUJA, MICHAEL BLAKE, RICHARD DONAT, RANDI HELMERS,  
GEORDIE JOHNSON, KRIS JOSEPH, RON KENNEL, JOHN KOENSGEN, JANI LAUZON,  
JULIE TAMIKO MANNING, ALEX MCCOOEYE, NIAL PATRICK McNEIL, MATT MIWA,  
JEREMIAH SPARKS, WANETA STORMS, MATTHEW TAPSCOTT

### **Creative Team**

Written by: BERTOLT BRECHT

New version written by: PETER HINTON

Songs written by: BERTOLT BRECHT, PAUL DESSAU  
and KURT WEILL

New arrangements by: ALLEN COLE

Directed by: PETER HINTON

Assistant director: STEPHEN OUIMETTE

Music Direction by: ALLEN COLE

Dramaturgy by: PAULA DANCKERT

Set and Costume Design by: TERESA PRZYBYLSKI

Lighting Design by: JOCK MUNRO

Sound Design by: TROY SLOCUM

Company Historian: DAVID DEAN

### **Stage Management**

Stage Manager: MICHAEL HART

Assistant Stage Managers: JANE VANSTONE OSBORN, STÉFANIE SÉGUIN, SAMIRA ROSE

## About the Play (see Activities #1 and #11)

### Background

Playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote *Mother Courage and Her Children* in direct response to Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939. Because of his leftist leanings, Brecht had fled Nazi Germany and gone into self-imposed exile in Scandinavia in 1933. *Mother Courage* was first produced in 1941 in Switzerland and then with Brecht himself directing it in Berlin in 1949 with his second wife, Helene Weigel, playing the title role. Since then it has been seen around the world in numerous productions and film versions. It is considered by some as the greatest play of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and perhaps the greatest anti-war play of all time. The action of the play takes place over the course of 12 years (1624 to 1636), represented in 12 scenes. The scenes give a sense of Courage's career but without developing sentimental feelings and empathizing with any of the characters. Mother Courage is not depicted as a noble character. Brecht's style of "epic theatre" contrasts with the ancient Greek tragedies in which the heroes are far above the normal person. With the alienating effect of Brecht's style, the ending of his play does not inspire us to imitate the main character, Mother Courage, but rather reflect on her folly. Actors who have portrayed Mother Courage include Judi Dench and Meryl Streep.



Helene Weigel in the 1949 production

### The Characters

**Radio Announcer** and other **Voices** – They introduce the play *Mother Courage and Her Children* and announce each scene and its contents.

**Mother Courage** –The protagonist is an entrepreneur who follows armies with her canteen wagon of food and goods and whose real name is Anna Fierling. She earned her nickname of Mother Courage when she ran through a bombardment in order to sell her loaves of bread before they went moldy. She has three children - by different lovers - named Eilif, Swiss Cheese and Kattrin. Although her passion seems to be to protect and take care of them, she loses them throughout the play, each time while pursuing her own self-interested goals. Drawn as a deeply unsympathetic character, we see at the end of the play that war has ruined her but failed to teach her anything.

**Eilif** – Mother Courage's eldest and favourite son is something of a thug. His thirst for violence in slaughtering peasants and stealing livestock is praised in wartime but gets him executed during a temporary peace.

**Swiss Cheese** – The younger son is rather stupid but completely honest. When he becomes paymaster for a Finnish division, he tries to save the cashbox from the invading army but is executed for his trouble.

**Kattrin** – She is Mother Courage's teenage mute daughter who hopes to be married and have her own children, but dies trying to warn villagers of an impending attack.

**Recruiting Officer** and **Sergeant** – The Officer recruits Eilif into the army with promises of beer and women while the Sergeant distracts Mother Courage with the possibility of a sale.

## About the Play

### **The Characters** (continued)

**Cook** – He prepares the food for the Swedish general but quickly leaves when the food runs out. He is very cynical and out for what he can get from the war. He later offers Mother Courage a chance to settle down and operate an inn.

**Commander** – He is the General of the Swedish Regiment in which Eilif is fighting. He praises Eilif for killing the peasants because they had attempted to hide their cattle from the army.

**Chaplain** – He is the religious leader for the army but personifies Brecht's view that religion is of no use when it comes to war. He is a total coward and hypocrite who switches allegiances freely yet complains that no one appreciates him.

**Armourer** – He sells Mother Courage the Protestant army's bullets so he can buy brandy.

**Yvette Pottier** – She is a prostitute who follows the army. She ends up marrying a rich colonel's brother and is rewarded with wealth but loses her looks. She is the only character that gains from the war in some way.

**The Man with the Eye Patch, a Captain and a Sergeant** – These three roles comprise a spy and two members of the Catholic army who arrest Swiss Cheese for hiding the Protestant army's cashbox and later execute him.

**Old Colonel** – This is a ridiculous, elderly commander whom Yvette "picks up" and who acts as her "financial advisor" for favours.

**Scrivener** – The clerk in charge of recording the complaints made to his Captain advises Mother Courage not to complain about how her wagon has been damaged.

**Young Soldier** – He complains to the scrivener about the injustice of an officer who kept reward money owed to him. An **Old Soldier** attempts to restrain him because complaining is pointless.

**Peasant Man and Woman** – They are victims of an attack on their farm. He has lost an arm and she warns that her baby is still in the collapsing house. Katrin rushes in to save the baby against Mother Courage's warnings.

**Old Woman and her Son** – They are trying to sell bedding to Mother Courage when news comes that peace has finally been declared.

**Various voices** – They tell us of passing time, invite Mother Courage to come inside the parsonage for soup, and sing of the joys of a comfortable home.

## About the Play

### The Characters (continued)

**An Old Peasant, his Wife and Son** – They are forced by Catholic soldiers to help in their attack on the protestant village of Halle. Katrin is killed when she climbs onto a roof to warn the villagers of the attack.

**Assorted Soldiers** of different armies.

### Plot Summary

The play is set in Europe, specifically Sweden, Poland and Germany, during the Thirty Years' War that was waged from 1618 to 1648. Mother Courage, a canteen woman, pulls her cart along with her three children following the Protestant army, trading with the soldiers and attempting to make profit from the war. The play is divided into 12 scenes:

1. We are first introduced to a Recruiting Officer and a Sergeant, who complain about the difficulty of recruiting soldiers for the war. Mother Courage's cart is pulled on and, distracting her with the promise of a transaction, the Recruiting Officer leads the eldest son Eilif off. One of her children is now gone.
2. Two years later, we find Mother Courage haggling with the General's Cook over a fat chicken. On the other side of the stage, Eilif is praised by the General for heroically slaughtering some peasants and stealing their cattle. Eilif sings "The Song of the Girl and the Soldier," and his mother joins in. She then scolds him for risking his life so stupidly.
- 3.a Three years later, Swiss Cheese, her second son has taken a job as the regiment's paymaster. Yvette Pottier, the camp prostitute, sings "The Song of Fraternization" to warn Katrin about the horrors of a relationship with a soldier. The Cook and the Chaplain arrive to greet Mother Courage with a message from Eilif, and there is suddenly a Catholic attack. The Chaplain discards his robes, and Swiss Cheese hides the regiment's paybox.
- 3.b Three days later, Swiss Cheese has still not been able to return the paybox. Spies from the Catholic army who have tracked Swiss Cheese, capture him when he attempts to return the paybox to his General.
- 3.c Mother Courage mortgages her cart to Yvette and uses the money to bargain with the soldiers for Swiss Cheese's release, but bargains for too long and Swiss Cheese is shot. When Mother Courage denies that it is his body that is brought to her for identification, it is thrown into a pit.
4. The next scene finds Mother Courage waiting to complain outside the Captain's tent. She sings the "Song of the Great Capitulation" to a young soldier who also has come to complain to the Captain. The song, which has the moral "everyone gives in sooner or later," leads to the soldier storming out, and Courage herself deciding that she doesn't want to complain.
5. Two years later Mother Courage is still with the army. To her distress she loses several of her shirts when they are needed for bandages for the wounded soldiers and Katrin saves a baby from a collapsing house.
6. On the day of the funeral of General Tilly, the Swedish Commander, Mother Courage undertakes a stock check, and she talks at length with the Chaplain about whether or not the war will continue. He convinces her that it will, so she decides to invest in more stock for her cart. The Chaplain suggests that Mother Courage could marry him, but is rejected. Katrin returns from town severely disfigured, having collected some merchandise. Mother Courage curses the war.

## About the Play

### Plot Summary (continued)

7. In this brief scene, Courage sings a song which praises the war as a good provider. Business is good for now.
8. Two peasants wake up Mother Courage trying to sell her some bedding. News comes, however, that peace has been declared. The Cook returns, unpaid by the regiment, and starts an argument between Mother Courage and the Chaplain. Yvette makes her second appearance, now a rich widow, much older and fatter, and reveals that the Cook was once her lover. Mother Courage leaves for town, and Eilif is dragged along by soldiers. He has again slaughtered peasants and stolen their cattle but, as it is now peacetime, he is executed, though his mother never finds out. She returns with the news that the war is back on again, and resumes her business with the Cook in tow.
9. The 17<sup>th</sup> year of the war finds the world in a bleak condition, with nothing to trade and nothing to eat. The Cook inherits an inn in Utrecht and invites Mother Courage to run it with him, but he refuses to take Katrin. Mother Courage is forced to turn him down, so the two go their separate ways.
10. Pulling the wagon by themselves, Mother Courage and Katrin hear an anonymous voice singing about the pleasure of having plenty.
11. The Catholics are planning to besiege the Protestant town of Halle, and Mother Courage has gone there to trade. Sleeping outside a peasant family's house, Katrin is wakened by the Catholic search party, which takes one of the peasants along as guide. The peasant couple prays for the safety of the townspeople and their children, but Katrin gets a drum from the cart and climbs onto a rooftop. She beats the drum to awaken the townspeople before the attack. The soldiers return and shoot her, but not before she has succeeded.
12. The next morning, Mother Courage sings a lullaby over her daughter's corpse, pays the peasants to bury her, and harnesses herself, alone, to her cart. The cart rolls back into action, but it is easier to pull now, since there is so little left in it to sell.

### Major Themes

1. **Capitalism in war** - War, as the play portrays it, is a capitalist system designed to make profit for just a few, and is perpetuated for that purpose. Therefore, despite the fact that she is constantly trying to make a profit, Mother Courage is destined to lose by trading during the war; only the fat cats at the top have a real chance of benefitting from the system. People in this play are always looking to get their cut, large or small. In the original German text the verb *kriegen* is often repeated; it means both "to wage war" and "to get".
2. **Lower classes lose in war** – The play focuses on the "little people", from the nameless Sergeant and Recruiting Officer freezing in a field at the start the play, to the peasants burying Mother Courage's daughter at the end. Important figures such as General Tilly or the Kaiser are only mentioned. The war brings pain, poverty, hunger and destruction to everyone. Mother Courage profits temporarily when the war is at its fiercest but has lost everything by the end. Yvette, the army whore, is the only one whose life has improved financially by marrying into the upper class, but she has lost her humanity.

## About the Play

### Major Themes (continued)

3. **Virtue in wartime** – War makes human virtues fatal to their possessors. Early in the play, Mother Courage tells her children their fortunes and in so doing, realizes they will all die because of their respective virtues: Eilif for his bravery, Swiss Cheese for his honesty, and Katrin for her kindness. Later, the Cook sings the “Song of Solomon” in which four Great Souls of the Earth die because of their virtues: Solomon for his wisdom, Julius Caesar for his bravery, Socrates for his honesty, and St. Martin for his kindness. These four souls could be compared to Mother Courage and her three children respectively. The qualities that save you in time of war are cowardice, stupidity, dishonesty and cruelty, Brecht seems to say.

4. **Religion** – Religion is of little help during a war. Religion is portrayed in the play by the sniveling, hypocritical, lecherous Chaplain who changes his allegiances at the drop of a hat. When peace is declared he dusts off his vestments and is prepared to go back to work, but soon changes his mind when war breaks out again. At the end of the play when the Catholic army is preparing to attack a sleeping town, the peasants begin to pray fervently for God to intervene. However, it is through the efforts of Katrin when she climbs onto the rooftop to sound the alarm by beating her drum that the townspeople are saved.

5. **Silence and dumbness**: Real virtue and goodness are silenced during war. Katrin’s dumbness is highly symbolic in the play. She is psychologically mute because soldiers abused her when she was small. There are several other significant silences in the play: Mother Courage’s refusal to complain after the “Song of the Great Capitulation”, the Chaplain’s denial of his own faith when the Catholic army arrives, and Mother Courage’s denial of her own son when his body is brought to her for identification. On the other hand, Katrin becomes the most eloquent character in the end by creating the noise to wake the townspeople, her goodness overcoming the impending massacre of the children. Her reward is to be shot, and then buried anonymously while her mother trudges on.

6. **Motherhood** – There is a clear conflict between Mother Courage’s role of “mother” and her professional role of “canteen woman”. Although she claims she is working to support her children, her neglect causes their deaths. In each case, she is involved in business transactions when her children are lost to her. She has had multiple sexual partners, the children being byproducts of those encounters, but never seems to have loved anyone. By contrast, we watch Katrin’s sexual awakening and desire for a husband and children. These desires are thwarted by her handicap and disfigurement, and her mother’s actions. Her maternal instincts are strong however, as she risks her life to save a baby from a collapsing house, and gives her life to save the endangered children of the town.

7. **War’s hunger is insatiable** – Hunger is a recurring theme in the play. The Cook tries to “feed the war” but there is never enough food, and he must escape when food runs out altogether. Soldiers pillage peasant farms, killing the owners in the process, to feed the marauding armies. The play opens with a conversation about how difficult it is to recruit enough soldiers to fill the quota – the war’s appetite for men exceeds the supply. The Cook and the whole army feed society’s appetite for war. By the end, starvation has left a bleak landscape over the county side and Mother Courage’s wagon is empty.



## Scene Excerpt from *Mother Courage and Her Children*

(see Activity #6)

### SCENE TWO

*Gunfire fades to music with a voice over of Simon Schama.*

SCHAMA            In the years 1625 and 1626, Mother Courage journeys across Livonia in the baggage train of the Swedish Army. In the second scene before the fortress of Wallhof, she meets her son again, and celebrates the successful sale of a capon.

TRANSLATOR    Capon. A male chicken or rooster.

SOLDIER            Scene two!

*Livonia, before the fortress of Wallhof. Summer 1626. The stage is divided in two like a diptych. Stage Right: the Swedish Commander's tent. Stage Left: the kitchen. In the kitchen, the cook is chopping carrots and arguing with Mother Courage, who tries to sell him a chicken.*

COOK                Sixty hellers for that pathetic looking thing?

COURAGE          This is the fattest capon, you'll find these days. The Commander likes chicken, don't he? Now if you can't provide him with a decent supper...

COOK                I can get a dozen better'n that for ten hellers down the street.

COURAGE          Are you nuts? With a siege going on and people hungry everywhere you look. Maybe you'll find a rat, you should be so lucky. I'll let you have it for forty - (She advertizes) Mother Courage's Siege Time Prices.

COOK                But we're not "under siege", it's the other side. We're the ones doing the besieging for chrissakes.

COURAGE          "Sieging", "besieging" - what difference does it make? You've got no meat to cook.

COOK                From what I hear, the Poles stocked up before our troops went in. I hear they're living like royalty -

COURAGE          Oh come on, look at them - they've nothing.

## Scene Excerpt from *Mother Courage and Her Children*

COOK            They're just hiding it from the army.

COURAGE        They got nothing, Charlie! It doesn't matter whose winning or losing, these days, people are ruined. I saw this guy, so hungry, he was eating dirt. I saw a family boiling old boots and drinking the broth. I bring you a fine juicy capon and practically give it away for fifty hellers.

COOK            Forty - you said forty.

COURAGE        Look, this capon was no ordinary bird. It had what you might call - "talent." Rumour has it that it would eat only to music. What's more, this capon could poach its own eggs as they popped out. Scrambled, runny or fried - depending on the weather.

COOK            (Sarcastically) That is a talent - a capon laying eggs.

COURAGE        Miraculous isn't it? Did you know, it was what they call a counting chicken? Yes, the chicken could count, it was that smart. And you won't pay fifty hellers!

*The cook takes a piece of meat from a barrel and stabs it with his knife.*

COOK            Look, I've already got this bit of beef, which I plan to cook - and serve the Commander. So, as I've told ya before - I'm not interested in your miserable but talented bird.

COURAGE        Eh, cook your lousy bit of rotting meat. It's probably at least a year old.

COOK            This here was walking around and mooing yesterday, with the bell around its neck. I saw it with my own eyes, alive and kicking.

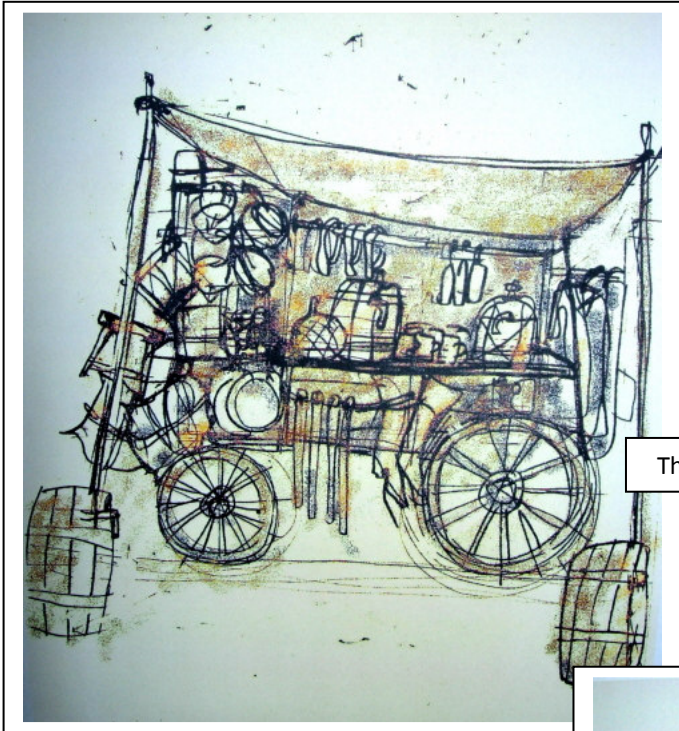
COURAGE        Alive and stinking more like.

COOK            Give me a stew pot, some garlic, some carrots, then let's see if he can notice the smell.

COURAGE        Yeah, well - I'd use a lot of pepper if I were you.

*Stage Right, the Swedish commander comes into the tent with Eilif and an army chaplain.*

# Selected Production Designs: Props by Teresa Przybylski



The Canteen Wagon - Scene 6



The Canteen Wagon – Scene 11

## Selected Production Designs: Costumes by Teresa Przybylski



Mother Courage



Cook



Yvette – Act 2

## An Interview with Director Peter Hinton

(see Activity #4)



**Peter Hinton**

Artistic Director of the NAC  
English Theatre

### **Why did you choose *Mother Courage and Her Children* for this season of plays?**

*Mother Courage and Her Children* is one of the great plays of the last hundred years. It marks the first play of Brecht's crown of plays which includes *Good Woman of Szechwan*, *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Galileo*. It affects people so strongly because it creates so many contentions and controversies. Brecht wrote it when he was living in exile in 1938 as a cautionary play to forewarn of the advancing Second World War. It took on its real meaning after the war, pointing out that people fail to learn. One of the controversies is that *Mother Courage* strives to protect her children from the war but loses them to it, and in what way is she responsible for that? She's not a pacifist, she's actively willing to participate and profit. She's called *Mother Courage*, but is she brave or is she a coward? It's about the have's and have-not's, those who make the decisions and those that have to carry them out. It's a very sad statement that was timely in 1938, and again in 1948 when it became part of the Berliner Ensemble's repertoire, timely in 1984 when John Wood last directed it at the NAC, and here we are in 2009 and it's still timely. Who profits from war? We experienced that quite recently. What were the "weapons of mass destruction" about in Iraq? If there were not the rich oil fields would the West be as involved in the war? Many people profit in keeping the war machine going.

### **Why did you devise your own version of the script for this production?**

*Mother Courage* is a very difficult play to translate from German into English. I don't speak German and I didn't really have a burning desire to do my own version of the play. There are some wonderful translations available – David Hare's, and others. The problem is how British playwrights solve the language; they make *Mother Courage* a cockney. So there I was: we're going to do *Mother Courage* at the National Arts Centre of Canada with Canadian actors playing German characters but using cockney accents? I wanted a Canadian approach which was true to Brecht but with a Canadian idiom for it. That's difficult because it uses big language, it's common language, not heightened, elevated verse. But it has a rhythm, it has a compression, a Brechtian construction. For instance, as the war goes on, the words get tighter and more compacted. In peace they say, "I think it's time to go;" in pressure of war they say, "time to go;" and when war's really bad, "time!". The language gets more

## An Interview with Director Peter Hinton

compact. There are entire scenes in German where the only two-syllable words are *mutter* (mother) and *kindern* (children), all the rest are monosyllables. The rhythm is audacious and muscular and odd. You hear it differently. A lot of people just translate Brecht into a working class vernacular which loses the emotional impact.

My version began with a workshop with a German speaking individual who read through the text aloud, letting me hear the sounds and rhythms, commenting on the meaning of each line and how a word could mean this or that. Using the copious notes from that consultation and then working with 17 existing translations of *Mother Courage* I developed this script. It ended up being an incredibly satisfying way of preparing to direct it because I had pondered every single word and thought. It's made me focus on the language which is where I want the audience to focus.

### Things to Watch for in the Production (see Activity #9)

**the lighting** – open, white light like a boxing match;

**the music** – adding music of the cabaret, of the popular world, alive and visceral, not cruel and detached but right in your face;

**the pianos** – used literally as instruments of music but also as the pillage of war, the barricades, a train, destroyed buildings;

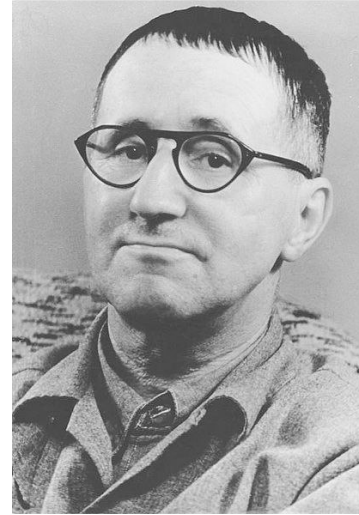
**colour** – instead of the traditional muted, earth tones, the beige and khaki colours that Brecht is normally done in, watch for the vibrant colours, such as in the enormous red backdrop;

**contradictory actions** – when Mother Courage gives money to the peasants to bury her daughter, she then takes some of it back; is she sentimental or crass or practical?

## The Life of Bertolt Brecht (see Activity #2)

### Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956), things to remember:

- He is considered one of the most highly influential playwrights and theatre directors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Born in Augsburg, Germany into a middle-class family, he had a life-long battle with heart disease.
- He had a firm classical education and received deep instruction on the Bible from his Protestant, “self-denying” mother, an iconic figure who appears in a number of his plays.
- From an early age he had a strong sexual appetite, experiencing two marriages and countless mistresses and sexual encounters, male and female.
- He began writing for newspapers while in his teens and became a life-long Marxist, a political philosophy which permeates all of his writing.
- His views on theatrical style were chiefly influenced by comic actors Karl Valentin and Charlie Chaplin and German playwright Karl Büchner who prompted him to move away from sentimentality in order to teach the audience the true themes of a play.
- His first three short plays written in his early 20s, *Baal*, *Drums in the Night* and *In the Jungle* won him great acclaim as well as a highly prestigious award. The citation noted: “[Brecht's] language is vivid without being deliberately poetic, symbolical without being over literary. Brecht is a dramatist because his language is felt physically and in the round.”
- He developed the idea of “epic theatre” (see section on Epic Theatre, p. 17-18) while collaborating with various other theatre artists in Berlin in his mid 20s. Collective collaboration with actors, designers and other playwrights continued throughout his life.
- Because his leftist leanings were in direct opposition to the thoughts of the Nazi party, he fled to Denmark when the Nazis came into power in Germany in 1933. To escape the war he then moved to Sweden, Finland and finally the USA.
- During the war years, Brecht expressed his opposition to the National Socialist and Fascist movements in his most famous plays: *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, and many others.
- During the Cold War, Brecht was called before the House of Un-American Activities Committee in September, 1947 because of his suspected communist affiliations. He left America the day after testifying, never to return.
- After a brief period writing in Switzerland he made East Berlin his home in 1949 where he founded his theatre company called The Berliner Ensemble.
- He spent the next years directing plays and developing the talents of the next generation of theatre artists.
- He died at age 58 of a heart attack.



## Other Plays by Bertolt Brecht (see Activity #2)

***The Caucasian Chalk Circle*** – Derived from the 14<sup>th</sup> century play *The Circle of Chalk* by Li Xingdao, the play is a parable about a peasant girl who is a better mother to a baby than its own parents. Brecht’s play is set within the context of a dispute over land claims in the Soviet Union. The parable is presented as a play within a play to celebrate resolution of the dispute. In it there is a struggle between two women over the custody of a child. The conflict between the governor's wife, who abandoned the child, and the young servant who saved and cared for him is settled by an eccentric judge who places the child in a chalk circle and declares that whichever woman can pull him from the circle will be granted custody. When the servant, not wanting to harm the child, lets the governor's wife have him, she is awarded the child, having demonstrated greater love than the natural mother.

***The Threepenny Opera*** – This ground-breaking jazz musical based on an 18<sup>th</sup> century English opera by John Gay, *The Beggar’s Opera*, premiered in 1928. It was a collaboration between Brecht and composer Kurt Weill and offers a Marxist critique of the capitalist world. Through the love story of Polly Peachum and “Mack the Knife” Macheath, the play satirizes the bourgeois of the Weimar Republic, revealing a society at the height of decadence and on the verge of chaos. The song “Mack the Knife” became one of the most popular and widely recorded songs of the twentieth century. Watch a series of clips from a British production with Cyndi Lauper and Alan Cumming at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pnb2bXpcJs>.

***The Good Person of Szechwan*** (sometimes known as *The Good Woman of Szechwan*) - When three gods come to earth in search of a thoroughly good person, they encounter Shen Teh, a goodhearted but penniless prostitute, who offers them shelter. Rewarded with enough money to open a tobacco shop, “Angel of the Slums” Shen Teh soon becomes so overwhelmed by the demands of people seeking assistance that she invents a male alter ego, “Tobacco King” Shui Ta, to deal ruthlessly with the business of living in an evil world. The play contrasts altruistic generosity with the capitalist mind-set of exploitation and shines a light on human nature and social mores. It implies that economic systems determine a society’s morality.

***Galileo*** (also known as *The Life of Galileo*) – The plot of the play deals with the latter part of the life of Galileo Galilei, the great Italian astronomer, mathematician and philosopher whose work set the stage for the Scientific Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When Galileo is persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church for spreading ideas engendered by his scientific discoveries, he must choose between his life and his life’s work. The conflict is between the dogmatic teachings of the Church and the evidence of Galileo’s observations of the heavens and other experiments. However, Brecht presents Galileo as a flawed human being and the representative of the Church as eloquent and passionate.



East German stamp honouring Brecht’s play *Galileo*



## **Some Quotations from *Mother Courage and Her Children Explained* (see Activity #8)**

**COURAGE:**     *(Sung)* **A long time ago when I was young, / I thought I was above it all. / I'd order waiters to serve me right / And threaten them that heads would fall. / Then from the roof top a starling sang; / Give it just a year or two, / And I promise it won't be long, / You'll learn to follow other's rules. / Listen to my song. / Man proposes: God disposes, / Then tell me right from wrong.**  
*(Spoken)* You've got to get along with people. One hand washes the other. No good banging your head against a brick wall.  
*(Sung)* **And from the roof top a starling sang, / Your time is up and now you know, / You've got to follow and obey./ That I've learned is the only song; Man proposes, God disposes, / Surrender right for wrong.**

Described by Brecht as being at her most depraved point in the play, Mother Courage sings the "Song of the Great Surrender" to a young soldier who is waiting to complain about an injustice performed by his captain. She's also waiting in line to lodge a complaint against the army. Intended to deflate the young soldier's rage, the song tells of a proud person who gives in and submits and conforms to conventional society and the rule of government. It ends in kneeling to a higher force, an image that anticipates the capitulation of the peasants in Scene 11. Here Courage learns by teaching, her cynical realism convincing both the soldier and herself that discretion is the better part of valour. Keep your head down and don't rock the boat. To succeed, this scene must distance the audience from the situation or else they will miss the irony.

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**COOK:**         *(Sung)* **You saw sagacious Solomon, / You know what came of him. / To him complexities seemed plain, / He cursed the hour that gave birth to him, / And saw that everything was vain. / How great and wise was Solomon. / But think about his case, alas. / A useful lesson can be won, / It's wisdom that had brought him to this pass. / How fortunate the man with none.**  
*(Spoken)* Virtue is dangerous today, you're better off if you simply put some food on the table – like maybe a bowl of good hot soup!

This excerpt is from "The Song of Solomon", a song that delivers another of Brecht's thematic pronouncements—that during war virtues become fatal to those who possess them. This song tells of four great figures, Solomon, Julius Caesar, Socrates, and Saint Martin, who meet their dark fates due to their respective virtues: wisdom, bravery, honesty, and kindness. Thus, a man is fortunate who has none. This refrain is ironic as the Cook sings the song for food. In other words, a man might do without virtues but not bread.

This song is also an allegory for Mother Courage and her children. Eilif is Caesar, Swiss Cheese is Socrates, and Katrin is Saint Martin. Similarly, Courage's wisdom only brings about her ruin. Note the obvious discrepancies in this allegory, however. Swiss Cheese's intellect, for example, does not match that of Socrates, nor does Eilif's heroism match that of Caesar. The irony in the comparisons help Brecht make his point.

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## Some Quotations from *Mother Courage Explained*

COURAGE: I won't let you anybody spoil my war for me! Kills the weak, they say, but the weak are also killed in Peace time. War feeds people!

Courage delivers these forceful lines at her moment of greatest prosperity. Immediately before in the scene previous, she had cursed the war for its disfigurement of her daughter. Now she celebrates it, anticipating her ultimate failure to learn from the horrors of war. As noted by a Sergeant in Scene One, war is her breadwinner. In Scene Six, the Chaplain similarly notes cynically that war, though degrading, provides for all the people's needs. Brecht poses war as Courage's good provider to insist that it is not an interruption of "business as usual" but the continuation of business by other means.

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PEASANT WIFE: So, there's nothing ta do. (*To Kattrin*) Pray, girl, can you pray? There's gonna be bloodshed, and even if ya can't talk, the least you can do is pray. He'll hear ya, even if no-one else does.

This excerpt comes from Scene Eleven, the scene of Kattrin's murder. Here, upon discovering a Catholic regiment readying for a surprise attack on the town of Halle, the peasants with whom Mother Courage has left her wagon immediately capitulate. They are certain that there is nothing they can do and support each other in their belief. Ultimately, the only "action" possible for them is an appeal to God. Their reaction recalls the "Song of the Great Capitulation" sung by Mother Courage earlier. In the *Mother Courage Model Book*, Brecht's detailed notes on directing the play, Brecht underlines the stark ritual nature of their surrender. Years of war have frozen them into attitudes of lamentation. The *Model Book* identifies this stylized capitulation as the alienating element of this rather dramatic scene, a scene that could easily draw the audience into feeling pathos. By ritualizing their capitulation or surrender, the play encourages the spectator to view the peasants with critical eyes. Though silent, Kattrin will intervene where they fail, saving the children of Halle. She does not address her voice silently to God but to the town's defenses.

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COURAGE: Hope I can pull this wagon by myself. Gotta manage. Not much in it, now. Gotta get back in business.

Leaving her daughter's corpse for the local peasants to bury in the final scene, Mother Courage resolves to continue her trade, indicating for Brecht, as he notes in the *Mother Courage Model Book*, that she has learned nothing. Once again she has lost a child while engaging in business. She understands nothing of what has come to pass, however, barely reacting to the peasants' accusation that she is to blame for the death of her child. Wearily, Courage presses on doing business as usual, the business that serves as her material and psychological support. As with much of *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the brilliance of this final scene lies in its staging. With the taking up of the wagon, Brecht envisions Courage crossing an empty space that recalls Scene one, showing her treading a full circle like a damned soul. The soldiers sing her trademark song, calling all to continue in the service of a war that continues across the generations.

## Epic Theatre (see Activity #3)

Brecht had a strong reaction to the generally apolitical nature of the theatre around which he grew up, particularly the realistic drama of Konstantin Stanislavski. Both Brecht and Stanislavski were reacting to the shallow spectacle, manipulative plots and exaggerated emotions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's melodramas. The two theatre practitioners, however, went in opposite directions. When Brecht began working as a writer and a director, the Second World War was a large threat, and he believed that theatre should engage more directly with the political climate of its day. Whereas Stanislavski hoped to so immerse the audience in the world of his plays that they too experienced what the characters experienced, Brecht took a didactic approach hoping to jar his audience into learning his message.

"Epic Theatre" was Brecht's term for the form of theatre he hoped would achieve this goal. Its basic aim was to educate its audience by forcing them to view the action of the play critically, from a detached, "alienated", point of view, rather than allowing them to become emotionally involved. The famous "willing suspension of disbelief", where the audience switched off its critical faculties in order to believe in the world of the play, was the polar opposite to Brecht's epic theatre. Whereas realistic theatre or a "good movie" make us forget we are in a theatre, Brecht reminds his audience constantly that what is before them is artificial and presentational. Brecht in his book *Brecht on Theatre* says: "It is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from [epic theatre]: the engendering of illusion."

Brecht saw Stanislavski's method of absorbing the audience completely into the fiction of the play as escapism. Brecht's social and political focus departed also from other theatre movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as surrealism and the Theatre of Cruelty as developed in the writings and dramaturgy of Antonin Artaud, who sought to affect audiences psychologically, physically, and irrationally. Epic theatre also differed from Theatre of the Absurd, whose principal exponents were Beckett, Ionesco and Genet. These authors did not set out to present a thesis or tell a story but to present images of a disintegrating world that has lost its meaning or purpose. They place audiences in a dramatic situation in which man's fears, shames, obsessions, and hopes are acted out in an atmosphere like a dream, carnival or altered mental state.

Brecht rejected the standard Aristotelian dramatic construction for a play and its adherence to the plot pyramid – exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution – for one in which each element or scene of the play could be considered independent of the rest, much like a music hall act which can stand on its own. His plays would not be considered comedies or tragedies but dialectical comments on society.

Brecht devised an acting technique for his epic theatre which he called *gestus* involving physical gestures or attitudes. The physicality shown to the audience reveals the intent or the personality of the character. Two quick exercises to illustrate this practice and that of Stanislavsky can be found at:

[http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/drama/posters/2/activities/brechtian\\_exercise\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/drama/posters/2/activities/brechtian_exercise_e.php)

[http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/drama/posters/2/activities/stanislavski\\_exercise\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/drama/posters/2/activities/stanislavski_exercise_e.php).

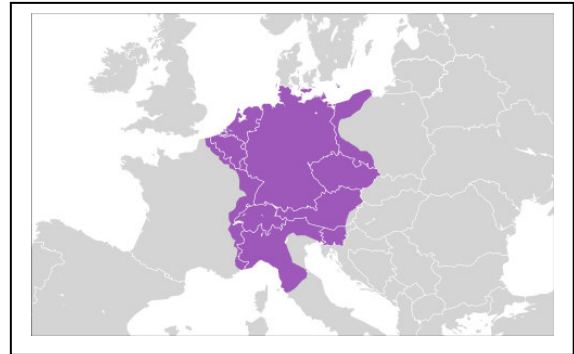
Another activity suggested by Brecht to his actors was that at an early rehearsal the actor should: first, change the dialogue from first to third person; second, change the dialogue from present to past tense; and third, read all stage directions aloud. In later rehearsals, the actor should keep these feelings of detachment as he or she begins to use the lines as written in the script. Brecht wanted the actor to observe the character, demonstrate the character's actions, but not identify with the role.

## Epic Theatre

	Realistic Theatre	Epic Theatre
Script	Scenes follow chronologically, standard progression of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action; audience meant to get involved or immersed in the story	Scenes episodic and could be independent of each other, order of scenes may be changed, use of songs, dances or external commentary to interrupt action; scenes create a fragmented montage of contrast and contradictions; audience not allowed to get into the story but to analyze and comment upon the action.
Acting	Characters believable, actor works from inside out, internal motivation and feelings; audience made to empathize with characters.	Actor remains outside of character and comments on it objectively, may be hidden by mask or elaborate makeup, artificial gestures, frequent breaking of "fourth wall" to speak directly to the audience; use of puppets; actors may play more than one character, change in front of the audience; audience encouraged to analyze and criticize characters.
Set	Realistic box set, specific details, much atmosphere in the way of set decoration and realistic props to draw audience into belief in time and place.	Sparse setting, use of indicative set pieces, ability to change scene location rapidly and simply; unusual materials, unrealistic or symbolic elements, scaffolding or platforms with obvious construction elements shown; projection screens, TV monitors, use of placards and signs to give summary of scenes; parts of actual stage and its equipment revealed.
Lighting	Coloured light to give mood and atmosphere, realistic and subtle touches in intensity to augment feelings; source of light hidden.	White light usually quite intense, no mood lighting, stage lighting equipment in full view.
Sound	Realistic sound effects and logical musical effects (i.e. band playing in distance), soothing/suspense effects.	Sound effects and music created onstage, jarring effects.
Costumes	Realistic to period and character to aid in belief in character.	Suggested costume pieces, changes made in view of the audience.

## The Thirty Years' War, World War II, and Today (see Activity #7)

The **Thirty Years' War** which raged around Europe between 1618 and 1648 was one of the most destructive conflicts in European history. The war was fought primarily in what is now Germany and at various times involved most of the countries of Europe. Naval warfare between combatant countries carried the fight overseas to South America, Africa and Asia and shaped the colonial formation of future nations. The origins of the conflict and goals of the participants were complex and no single cause can accurately be described as the main reason for the fighting. The war started largely as a civil war between Protestants and Catholics in the Holy Roman Empire, which was a union of semi-independent states each governed by its own king, baron, prince, etc., but overall administered by the elected Holy Roman Emperor or Kaiser. Disputes over the internal politics and balance of power within the Empire also played a significant part in igniting the hostilities. Gradually the war developed into a more general conflict involving most of the European powers including Denmark, Sweden, France, Poland, Spain and Italy. As time wore on, it became less about religion and more about rivalries between the rulers of the different states throughout Europe jostling for power.



The Holy Roman Empire of 1600 imposed on the modern map of Europe.



Victory of the Protestant and Swedish forces at the Battle of Breitenfeld in 1631.

A major impact of the Thirty Years' War was the extensive destruction of entire regions, devastated by armies hungry for food and plunder. Never before had there been such loss of civilian life in a war, and its like would not be seen again until World War II. Famine and epidemics significantly decreased the population of the German states, the Low Countries (Belgium and Netherlands) and Italy. It is estimated that certain regions lost up to 75% of their population through death or expulsion. The Swedish armies alone may have destroyed up to 2,000 castles, 18,000 villages and 1,500 towns in Germany, one-third of all German towns. The War resulted in eventually bankrupting most of the combatant powers. The majority of the soldiers in

the various armies were mercenary, with poor discipline and little loyalty to the causes. The problem of discipline was made worse still by the *ad hoc* nature of 17<sup>th</sup> century military financing. Armies were expected to be largely self-funding from loot taken or ransoms extorted from the communities overrun. This encouraged a form of lawlessness that imposed severe hardship on inhabitants of the occupied territory. The War ended with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia which resulted in the complete fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire and its loss in power, the declaration that Protestantism and Catholicism were equal before the law, and the redrawing of the map of Europe with independent sovereign states.

## The Thirty Years' War, World War II, and Today

Brecht's choice of setting his anti-war play in the midst of the Thirty Years' War was made for several reasons. Firstly, the monumental destruction and loss of life was inflicted mostly on the poor civilian populations of Europe. His point was that the little man is the one to lose in wartime; rulers and big business will always win. He hoped that the lesson of the folly of war would be learned by the masses which had everything to lose. Secondly, by placing the drama in a distant time (300 years earlier) people would have fewer tendencies to relate emotionally to it and be more likely to listen objectively to the message. Germany, however, was the setting in which he wrote, and Germany in 1938 was heading inexorably toward war under the leadership of the Nazi party – a war which was to surpass the misery of the Thirty Years War.

**World War II** was a global conflict which involved a majority of the world's nations, including all great powers, organized into two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. The war involved the mobilization of over 100 million military personnel, making it the most widespread war in history. In a state of "total war," the major participants placed their entire economic, industrial, and scientific capabilities at the service of the war effort, erasing the distinction between civilian and military resources. Over 70 million people, the majority civilians, were killed, making it the deadliest conflict in human history.

The war began on September 1, 1939, with the German invasion of Poland and the subsequent declarations of war on Germany by Britain, Canada, most of the countries in the British Commonwealth and France. This was followed by the invasion of Poland from the east side by the Soviet Union to halt the advance of the Germans. Hitler had already allied himself with the Fascist regime in Italy and with Japan. A number of other countries were already at war with each other, such as Ethiopia and Italy and Japan and China. Other countries were drawn into the war by the Japanese invasion of British colonies and attack on the US naval base in Pearl Harbour.

The war ended in 1945 with a victory for the Allies. The Soviet Union and the United States emerged as superpowers, setting the stage for the Cold War which lasted for the next 46 years. The United Nations was formed in the hope of preventing another global conflict. Decolonization movements began in Asia and Africa as a result of the more popular concept of national self-determination. Western Europe began moving toward integration, a movement accelerated by the disintegration of the USSR in 1991.



**Recent Wars** include the Civil War in Lebanon, the Israeli wars with the surrounding Arab states, the Shia-Sunni dispute, the Iraq-Turkey-Kurd dispute, the Iran-Iraq War, the US and USSR's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some have compared the Thirty Years' War with the situation in the Middle East today which likewise has its religious roots and old animosities, and in which the control of great natural resources and the balance of power are at stake.

## Suggested Websites, Movies and Books

(see Activity #3)

### Websites of Interest



<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/brecht.htm> A biography of Brecht and a discussion of his works.

[http://www.theatredatabase.com/20th\\_century/bertolt\\_brecht\\_001.html](http://www.theatredatabase.com/20th_century/bertolt_brecht_001.html) Another useful biography and list of Brecht's plays.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Mz5I1LmLLw> A short clip of Meryl Streep performing in and commenting on a recent New York production.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu\\_iOEAwQ6Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu_iOEAwQ6Q) A short clip with commentary on Brecht and his play *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

### Plays of Interest



*All My Sons* by Arthur Miller. A man profits during the Second World War by selling airplane parts to the military. However, these parts are defective and cause the death of a number of flyers. He is turned in by his daughter when the truth comes out.

### Books



***Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*** by Bertolt Brecht, translated by John Willett. This volume offers a major selection of Bertolt Brecht's groundbreaking critical writing. Here, arranged in chronological order, are essays from 1918 to 1956, in which Brecht explores his definition of the Epic Theatre and his theory of alienation effects in directing, acting, and writing.

***The Theater and Its Double*** by Antonin Artaud, trans. by Mary C. Richard. Published first in 1938, this is Artaud's controversial treatise on his "Theatre of Cruelty". The book is an attack on many of the most treasured beliefs of both theater and Western culture.

***The Theatre of the Absurd*** by Martin Esslin. This very readable and entertaining book thoroughly explains what absurdist theatre is and isn't. It introduces the most famous playwrights of this genre as well as some of the lesser known and explains what they are attempting to do in theatre.

***The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*** by Peter Brook. In this book, the author describes in an easy, conversational style the four kinds of theatre: the Deadly Theatre (conventional, formulaic and unsatisfying), the Holy Theatre (which seeks to rediscover ritual and drama's spiritual dimension), the Rough Theatre (a theatre of the people, against pretension and full of noise and action, best typified by the Elizabethan theatre), and the Immediate Theatre, with which Brook identifies his own career, an attempt to discover a fluid and ever-changing style that emphasizes the joy of the theatrical experience.

## Activities

### Before Seeing the Play

#### 1. A Reading Assignment

Distribute copies of the section on "About the Play" (p. 2-6). Knowing the background as to why Brecht wrote the play as a warning of the impending Second World War will help students appreciate the content more. The plot is not difficult to follow but younger students might find the structure confusing, making a familiarity with the plot useful. Keeping the suggested themes of the play in mind could spark discussion on what the play means to them. Have the class come back to these pages on themes after seeing the play and see if they agree or if other themes come to mind.

#### 2. A Reading Activity

Have the students read the sections "The Life of Bertolt Brecht" (p. 13) and "Other Plays by Bertolt Brecht" (p. 14). Although productions of his plays are relatively infrequent here in Canada, Brecht had a huge influence on modern theatre and theatrical productions. A search online might turn up one of his short plays which could become a class or school production.

#### 3. An Activity on Theatrical Style – Epic Theatre

Read the section on "Epic Theatre (p. 17-18), the theatrical style introduced by Brecht to produce his plays. (Other non-realistic styles developed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be researched on the internet and discussed.) Discuss how this style, which was very radical when Brecht devised it, has become part of our everyday theatre today. Although we may not use all of his devices in each production, various elements are used almost universally now. Have the students recall elements from productions they have seen or scripts they have read which used Brechtian techniques. Have the students try the acting exercises mentioned on page 17. Books on theatre styles and theories that might be useful in the school library would be those mentioned on page 21.

#### 4. Writing Assignment to Learn about Translating a Play for Canadians

Read Peter Hinton's comments about creating a new version of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* for a Canadian audience (p. 11-12). Although it might be difficult to find English versions of Brecht's plays online, a hard copy might be obtained from the school library or the public library. Choose a scene from the play for the class to work on and have them write the dialogue in their own language that matches the Canadian pattern of speech. It is important to be true to Brecht's intent in the speeches as seen in the published translation but also to make the scene sound as if modern Canadians are expressing the ideas in a vernacular way.

#### 5. Enrichment Activity

Visit the NAC's website called ArtsAlive, <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/index.asp> to learn a wealth of information on putting on plays. Students might be interested in finding out about "Design and Production", in particular about "Set and Prop Design" or "Costume Design". Also refer to the selected prop and costume designs by Teresa Przybylski for this production found on p. 9-10.



## Activities

### Before Seeing the Play

#### 6. A Scene Study Activity

Use the scene Excerpt from *Mother Courage and Her Children* (p. 7-8) for a scene study activity. This will require teams of four or five students to play the roles, with perhaps another student to coordinate the team and work as director. After some initial readings of the text, have students give some actions to the characters. Choose a setting, such as a card game, golf game, inclement weather, etc. Remind students that Brecht's idea was to distance the audience from the characters so that the arguments could be analyzed dispassionately. Experiment with several distancing activities such as: use of hand puppets to play the characters, use of neutral or character masks, reversing the genders of the actors, acting the scene behind a sheet with only feet showing, acting behind two sheets with only arms and hands showing. After some rehearsal, have the class present their version of the scene using one of the above distancing techniques.

#### 7. Enrichment Activity

Allow the students to read the pages on "The Thirty Years' War, World War II, and Today" (p. 19-20). Although the Thirty Years' War of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is rarely discussed now, it resulted in the greatest loss of life in wartime until the Second World War. Brecht chose to set *Mother Courage and Her Children* during this war because the huge carnage and destruction of towns affected mostly the civilian population. He foresaw that if Hitler's aggressive policies resulted in a war, there would once again be terrible consequences to the population of Europe. Have the students discuss the similarities and differences between the two wars covered in this section and also the similar features of wars in the recent past. Will mankind learn from history or is it doomed to repeat the same mistake over and over?

#### 8. Another Enrichment Activity

Introduce the students to some quotations taken from the play and their explanations (p. 15-16). Have the students jot down quotations from the play which they find meaningful when they see the production. Why did these fragments stand out and how do they illustrate the themes of the play?

**9. Students should be given** a copy of page 12, "Things to Watch for in the Production". Keeping these events and concepts in mind will help them be drawn into the production.

**10. Any trip to the theatre should also involve the students learning proper theatre etiquette while at the NAC. A handout is available on page 25. Please photocopy and distribute to students.**

## Activities

### After Seeing the Play

**11. Topics for Class Discussion on the Production** (students may want to review the material "About the Play" (p. 2-6).

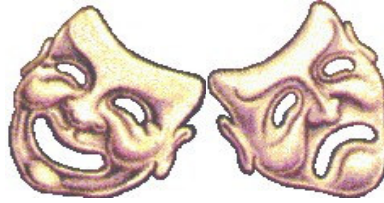
- Style of acting chosen for this play; the use of song, dance and movement.
- Themes explored – what was it about? (Refer to pages 5-6 "About the Play – Major Themes" to spark discussion.)
- Production aspects:-
  - Costumes – How well did they define time period, location, character? Did colour play a role?
  - Set – How well did it define location? What mood did it convey? How well did the actors use the set? How did it change in appearance as the play progressed?
  - Lighting – What did it add besides making the action visible?
  - Sound and Music – How did the music add atmosphere and mood?
- Relevance of this story set hundreds of years ago in Europe to today's Canadian audiences.

### 12. Topics for Class Discussion on Brecht's play

- How good a mother is Mother Courage? How courageous is she? What is her attitude toward her children when there is a conflict of interest?
- "All good Catholics here," says the Protestant Chaplain in Scene 3. What is the role of religion in this play, which is set during a religious war?
- How do we learn about Katrin given that she has no lines? How does she grow? Why do you think Brecht chose to make her dumb?
- In the framework of "epic theatre", discuss the songs in the show and what role they have.
- Considering that Brecht wanted his audience above all to critically analyze the characters and their decisions, and that emotional involvement was secondary, how did this production involve the emotions (laughter, pathos) and did that interfere with the critical analysis?
- Discuss the character of the Cook and how he fits into Brecht's idea of "feeding the war".
- How is *Mother Courage* a timely play for us today? Have we learned the lesson of war?

**13. Write a Play Review.** While the production is still fresh in their minds, have students review *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

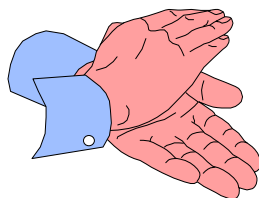
For older students have them refer to play reviews in *The Ottawa Citizen* or *Xpress* to give them an idea of the standard approach to theatrical criticism. You'll find an outline for writing a review on page 12 of the Study Guide for *The 'Vaudevilles' of Chekhov* found in the NAC website <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/activities/>. Theatre Ontario has an excellent guide at [http://theatreontario.org/content/play\\_reviews.htm](http://theatreontario.org/content/play_reviews.htm). Students should refer to their program (if supplied) or "Who Helped Put the Production Together?" (p. 1) for correct production information. A review should cover, in general and more specifically when merited: design elements (lighting, sound, set and costumes), performances, direction, text (basic narrative, dialogue and the central themes).



## ***Theatre Etiquette***

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre to explain what good **Theatre Etiquette** is and why it will enhance the enjoyment of the play by all audience members:

- 1.** *Mother Courage and Her Children* will be performed in the Theatre of the NAC. Matinées at the NAC are for students and the general public. It is important for everyone to be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance so others do not lose their immersion in the “world of the play”. Unlike movies, the actors in live theatre can hear disturbances in the audience and will give their best performances when they feel the positive involvement of the audience members. The appropriate way of showing approval for the actors’ performances is through laughter and applause. For the enjoyment of all, people who disturb others during the show may be asked to leave the Theatre.
- 2.** If you plan to make notes on the play for the purposes of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance, as this can be distracting for the actors. Wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections, please.
- 3.** It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted and others are not disturbed. **Cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps must be turned off. Cameras and all other recording devices are not permitted in the Theatre.**
- 4.** Tickets with assigned seats will be distributed by your teacher and to avoid confusion it is important to sit in the designated seat. In the Theatre all even numbered seats are on the left side and all odd numbered seats are on the right. This means that seats 10 and 12, for example, are actually side by side.
- 5.** Programs may or may not be distributed at this student matinée. Some programs can be made available to teachers if desired with names of the artists. The program may also be used as a teaching aid to show how a program is put together.
- 6.** The running time of the production is currently **estimated** at 2 hours 45 minutes, including one intermission. It is advisable to make a trip to the washroom before the performance starts, as anyone leaving while the play is in progress runs the risk of not being allowed back into the Theatre.





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