



## ***THE BOOKSHOP***

### **STUDY GUIDE**

A Théâtre du Gros Mécano (Quebec) production  
in coproduction with  
the NAC English Theatre

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE  
PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES  
2006-2007 SEASON

Peter Hinton  
Artistic Director, English Theatre



CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE  
CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS DU CANADA

Written by Marie-Josée Bastien Translated by Maureen Labonté

Directed by Frédéric Dubois

**The Bookshop** website (French only):  
<http://www.theatredugrosmecano.qc.ca/Librairie/librairie.asp>



**Message from the artistic director: Carol Cassistat**

Do you remember your first love? Did you dare to express it, or were you too shy to say anything? Ah, that lump in your throat . . . those butterflies in your stomach . . . that feeling of carrying an unbelievably heavy burden. . .

A bookshop. Books, books and more books—faithful friends that relax, inspire, inform, move, nourish and challenge us, in whose company time passes in a most agreeable manner. Like first love, those feelings never change.

Creating ***The Bookshop*** was a fantastic adventure for the whole artistic team. Now it's your turn to enjoy this breath of fresh air, this wonderful theatre experience.

We hope you enjoy the show!

**Message from the playwright: Marie-Josée Bastien**

When the Théâtre du Gros Mécano asked me a few years ago to write a play for them, I was filled with childish delight—and just as well!

I spent hours and hours reconnecting with my childhood imagination, recalling the things that used to make me happiest. It was great fun to revisit those memories. Writing is a way to express things you need to hear, things you'd like to have heard. When you write your own play, you can talk about the things you really want to say and share the things you really love.

I wanted to talk about and share my love of books, those marvellous things that contain all the stories in the world, from picture books to universal encyclopaedias. I wanted to talk about the irresistible urge to take a book and devour every word, gulp down every syllable; to dive into a book, get lost in a book. Every book is unique and speaks directly to our heart. It's a passport to a whole world of imagination.

I had more dreams than you can count, and I fiercely wanted to fulfil some of them. My own personal bookshop is full of lovely things that have always been dear to me: besides books, the shelves are lined with knowledge, the desire to learn, the graceful steps of a slow waltz, and chocolate, chocolate and chocolate!

I believe the theatre is one of the few remaining places we can go to hear about human beings and the relationships between them. For young people, going to see a play is a rich, even precious human experience: it introduces them to new creative forms, it offers them a peek into the mysterious and magical world of theatre, and—most important—it encourages them to dream.

**About Marie-Josée Bastien**

Marie-Josée Bastien is a writer, actor, director and designer. She teaches at the Conservatoire d'art dramatique du Québec and co-founded Quebec City's Théâtre Les Enfants terribles. Since graduating from the Conservatoire de Québec, Ms. Bastien has won several awards and has been widely acclaimed for her important contribution to Quebec theatre. ***The Bookshop*** is her first play for young audiences.

### **Message from the director: Frédéric Dubois**

When I was your age I used to put on plays with the other kids on my street.

Sometimes some of them laughed at me.

“Look at that guy, always organizing everything, bla bla bla...”

That made me sad, but I was absolutely sure I was doing the right thing.

Because I loved it.

With all my heart.

And so when I read *The Bookshop*, I shed a tear...

Because as I turned the pages I realized that I was still putting on plays for the people around me.

And that I still loved it.

With all my heart.

I had some dreams, some stuff I wanted to do, and I'm doing it. I'm fulfilling my dreams. I'm fulfilling myself. Every day of my life. I even turned it into a career.

Just like Jeanne, who loves books, and Samuel, who loves chocolate.

But there's another challenge ahead of them: telling each other they love each other, right out loud.

And that's not easy. Look at Victor and Petra: they didn't do it, and they still regret it.

It's one of the things I need to learn to do in my life . . . I don't say it often enough . . .

And that makes me shed another tear. A sadder one this time.

It's not that opportunities are lacking; it's just that sometimes the simplest things in life are the most difficult.

You'll find all that in our bookshop: all the little actions that make life so complicated because they're too simple.

And I love that.

With all my heart.

And so I invite you to step inside, with great delight and lots of love.

And I hope you'll keep going to the theatre all your life.

Happy reading, enjoy the show . . .

Thanks for coming . . .

P.S. With your permission, I'd like to dedicate this play to Émile, my favourite little redhead.

### **About Frédéric Dubois**

Born in 1977, Frédéric Dubois graduated from the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Québec in 1999. He quickly earned recognition for his boldly original productions, many of which have won awards, most recently for Best Direction (Prix d'excellence des arts et de la culture de Québec, 2005). Audiences have applauded his work with the Théâtre du Trident (*HA ha!* by Réjean Ducharme), the Théâtre de la Bordée (*Macbeth*, *Ubu Roi*, *Les feluettes*), and the Théâtre des Fonds de Tiroirs, where he is the artistic director. All of Frédéric Dubois' stagings bear the stamp of his meticulous yet playful approach and his clear love of his craft.

### **The Creative Team**

Written by:	Marie-Josée Bastien	Translated by:	Maureen Labonté
Directed by:	Frédéric Dubois	Artistic director:	Carol Cassistat
Set design:	Élise Dubé	Costume design:	Isabelle Saint-Louis
Lighting design:	Félix Bernier Guimond	Music:	Pascal Robitaille
Ukrainian language coach:	Ioulia Kokliaguina		

### **The Cast**

#### *Quebec cast*

Jeanne:	Marie-France Desranleau
Victor:	Stéphan Allard or Olivier Normand-Laplante
Petra:	Marie-Claude Giroux, Valérie Laroche or Catherine Laroche
Samuel:	Nicolas Létourneau or Jean-Olivier St-Louis

#### *English cast*

Jeanne:	Eleanor Noble
Victor:	Marcel Jeannin
Petra:	Sarah McVie
Samuel:	Pierre Simpson

### **The Production Team**

Production director:	Marc St-Jacques
Assistant production director:	Maude Bêty
Set construction:	Les Ateliers DND
Costume construction:	Nicole Fortin, Charles Licha, Christine Neuss and Tiffany Oschmann
Stage management:	Lucien Deschênes, Benoît Paquin

### **The 2006 Study Guide Team**

Carol Cassistat	Artistic Director, Théâtre du Gros Mécano
Jean Pelletier	Teacher, L'Alizé School, Lévis, Quebec
Hélène Basque	Director of Communications, Finance and Marketing
Francine Chabot	Graphic design and layout

### **Note to Teachers**

This study guide is specially designed to help you prepare your students to attend a performance of the play. We invite you to try the pre-show activities contained in the guide—without giving anything away: we don't want to kill the suspense that's essential to the enjoyment of the play!

This guide also contains suggestions for post-show activities you can integrate into your regular curriculum to help your students further explore the play's themes and content, express themselves, and develop their critical faculties.

If this is the first time your class has attended a live theatre performance, please take a few minutes to "set the scene" and prepare them for the experience. They are going to the theatre, a special place where professional actors perform live on stage. After a short welcome message, the house lights will go down: this sets the mood for the magic that is about to begin. Each actor plays a different character, and they interact and talk with each other to tell the story the playwright has written. Their performance is enhanced with sets, costumes, props, music, and lighting. Explain to your students that it's important to stay focused and to pay attention in order not to miss any of the action on stage and to respect the performers and the other audience members; on the other hand, it's perfectly OK to react to what they see on stage—for example, to laugh at the funny parts or to show their appreciation by applauding at the end of the show.

## Synopsis

### **A world inhabited by books, love, and... a mysterious old gentleman**

The day of the grand opening has finally arrived! Jeanne, a confirmed bookworm, has officially taken over as owner of the old neighbourhood bookshop! While she is happily setting up her new domain, she can't help noticing Samuel, the owner of the chocolate shop next door. It's love at first sight, but she mustn't let it show! She resolves to keep her feelings hidden... Meanwhile, in the middle of the night, a strange character returns from the past, searching for a book he mislaid more than 70 years ago.

In her first play for young audiences, playwright Marie-Josée Bastien shares her love of books in a funny, tender story that journeys between the present and the past, between fantasy and reality. This uniquely charming tale was inspired by Ms. Bastien's visit to a very special real-life bookshop, Shakespeare & Co. in Paris.

## Suggested Activities

### Before Seeing the Play

#### 1. Synopsis

- Read the play synopsis.

#### 2. The theme of the play: Books and the love of books

a. The word "book" is a general term: there are many different kinds of books, defined by their style and content. One of the characters in the play lists some of them:

**Victor:** *Yes. But the word "book" designates a generality.*

*This object can also be:*

*A collection of poems*

*A manuscript*

*An atlas*

*A directory*

*A register*

*A notebook*

*A journal*

*A handbook*

*A novel*

*A dictionary*

*A pamphlet*

*An encyclopaedia*

The list could also include: an album, a fairy tale, a fable, a comic book. There are also many different kinds of novel:\* romantic, adventure, horror, detective, historical, epic.

- Bring examples of different kinds of books to class. Explain the characteristics of each type.\* This activity will help your students become familiar with book-related terms and recognize them during the performance. (You can also have your students do the research and the presentation themselves.)

## Suggested Activities Before Seeing the Play (continued)

- Ask your students to talk about their favourite kind of book.

\* Jocelyne Giasson, *Les textes littéraires à l'école* (Montreal: Gaëtan Morin, 2000).

b. What's the difference between a library and a bookshop?

Help your students distinguish between the two by pointing out their similarities and differences. Next, ask your students to create a drawing or a model of the old bookshop where the action of the play takes place. Point out that the set they will see on stage will probably be quite different from what they have imagined. After the show, compare their drawings and models with the actual stage set.

### 3. Theatre terms and techniques

Theatre has its own vocabulary of terms and techniques. Following are some definitions and suggested activities to help familiarize students with the terms and techniques used in *The Bookshop*.

Ask your students to notice these terms and techniques during the performance so that you can discuss them after the show.

#### - Flashbacks

Flashbacks are used to show events and actions that take place in the past.

#### - Costumes

In *The Bookshop*, different costume elements can indicate that the action is taking place at a different time in history or at a different time of day.

#### - Lighting

Notice how the stage lighting changes with the time of day the action is taking place (daytime, evening) and when Jeanne is dreaming.

#### - Theatre professions

Introduce your students to the various theatre professions by consulting Appendix 1 (Theatre Professions) on page 9 of this study guide. Alternatively, you can ask them to conduct their own research after the show.

### 4. *The Bookshop* and the Théâtre du Gros Mécano

A whole team of creators and designers worked on *The Bookshop*. To find out about them, see the list on page 4 and the information in Appendix 1 (Theatre Professions). You can also talk to your students about the *Théâtre du Gros Mécano*. Founded in 1976 and based in Quebec City, the company specializes in creating and performing plays for young people ages 4 to 12. It has toured throughout Quebec and across Canada, the United States and Europe, performing both on formal stages and in schools as a way to introduce young people to the world of theatre and offer them direct contact with theatre artists.

Weblink: <http://www.theatredugrosmecano.qc.ca>

## After Seeing the Play

### 1. Post-show discussion questions

The following questions will help students formulate their opinion, develop their critical faculties, and share their assessment of the play. As well, the questions will reintroduce the various terms and techniques used in theatre.

- What did you think of the play? Which part did you like best, and why?
- What clues told you that the action was taking place at a different time? (*flashbacks, costumes, lighting*)
- In the play, you met Jeanne as a young girl and Jeanne as an adult. How could you tell them apart?
- Which character did you most identify with? Why? How are you like that character physically? emotionally?
- As the play ends, the phantom lovers go off together. Where do you think they are going?
- What do you think happens next to the characters in the play? Make up the next part of the story (by drawing it, telling it, writing it or acting it out).

After this discussion, ask your students to draw or write down how they felt about the play. Their observations, comments and opinions can be shared in various forms: class journal, scrapbook, visual display, website, student radio, etc.

We welcome feedback from students and teachers, and we'd be delighted to receive your comments about *The Bookshop*. Please send them to the *Théâtre du Gros Mécano* (see contact information on page 13).

### 2. Other Activities

#### - Books and reading

- a. Ask your students to imagine they are visiting Jeanne's bookshop. What kind of book would they ask Jeanne or Victor to find for them, and why?
- b. Arrange a class visit to your local library or bookshop, or ask students to go individually.
- c. Invite a bookseller or a librarian to give a classroom presentation about what they do. (See "Research Activities" on page 9).
- d. Suggest that your students start a book group. For ideas, see Harvey Daniels, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* (Stenhouse Publishers, 1994).

**- Synonyms for the verb “to love”**

What synonyms for “love” does Victor use in the play?

Cherish, adore, appreciate, have a soft spot for, adore, be attached to.

You \_\_\_\_\_ your children.

You \_\_\_\_\_ your parents.

You \_\_\_\_\_ your god.

You \_\_\_\_\_ your neighbours.

You \_\_\_\_\_ a friend who lives far away.

You \_\_\_\_\_ for ballroom dancing.

You \_\_\_\_\_ the person who shares your life.

Answers (*excerpt from the script*):

**Victor:** *Words punctuated the hours as they flew by.*

*Obviously, Petra wasn't always able to understand, but she was blessed with a deeper, more universal understanding of things.*

*I wanted to teach her everything: the precious beauty of words, the precision of language, of meaning and how to savour all these marvellous possibilities.*

(To Petra)

*The verb to love, for example:*

*You adore your children*

*You cherish your parents*

*You worship your god*

*You appreciate your neighbours*

*You are attached to a friend who lives far away but feel deep affection for the friend you see every day*

*You might have a soft spot for ballroom dancing*

*And you are madly in love with the person who shares your life.*

**- “If only...”**

The play’s message is that we should seize every chance, live life to the full, and take advantage of every opportunity—because often it knocks only once. Ask your students what they think of this theme. Have them recall a situation when they said to themselves, “If only I had...” Ask them to share the story by telling it, writing it, drawing it or acting it out. If they had it to do over, what would they do?

**- Set and costume designer for a day**

- Ask your students to design a different set (model or drawing) for the play. Compare the new designs to the ones the students produced before seeing the play. Have them defend their choices.
- Design new costumes for each of the characters.

**- Performer for a day**

In Appendix 2 you’ll find an excerpt from the script of *The Bookshop*. The text includes stage directions, i.e., notes made by the playwright to guide the director and the actors. Discuss how the actors follow the script in performance, and how (and why) they occasionally depart from the script. Discuss the importance of non-verbal communication: body language, movement and gesture, silence, emotion.



### 3. Research Activities

These activities use language-related skills (reading and writing). They also help students improve their research and communication skills, identify and consult different information sources, and use information technology to share the results of their research (which, as with the play reviews and opinions, can be shared in various forms).

#### - Looking for famous writers

Gather information about various famous writers: Molière, Victor Hugo, Balzac, Michel Tremblay, Gabrielle Roy, Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Ann-Marie MacDonald, L.M. Montgomery, Jane Austen, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Henry James, J.K. Rowling, Michael Ondaatje etc.

#### - Careers and professions

In the play, Jeanne is a bookseller and Samuel is a chocolate maker. Ask the students what they know about these professions.

- Have students look up information about these two professions, and about a profession that interests them or that they would like to practise themselves.
- Have students talk about their parents' professions.
- Have students look up information about theatre professions. (See Appendix 1.)

#### - Geography and history

A window on cultural diversity.

1. One of the characters in *The Bookshop* is Ukrainian. Find the Ukraine on a world map. Do some research about that country.
2. Ask students whose parents were not born in Canada to talk about their parents' country of origin. Discuss the similarities and differences between Canada and the Ukraine, and between Canada and the other countries of origin.

#### - More ideas for research projects

- The history of chocolate
- The history of books
- The Théâtre du Gros Mécano (See "Before Seeing the Play" on page 6, number 4; and the company's website at <http://www.theatredugrosmecano.qc.ca>.)

## Appendix 1 • Theatre Professions



**THE PLAYWRIGHT** writes a play based on his or her own idea(s). S/He invents characters who gradually, by speaking (dialogue), reveal the idea or story the playwright wants to tell. A play can take several months or even years to write, correct, workshop and rewrite!



**THE DIRECTOR** uses the playwright's script to shape the form and feeling of the staged play. S/He tells the actors when, where and how to move on stage (this is called "blocking"), offers suggestions to help them portray the character they are playing, and coordinates the visual and sound elements of the production. To use an orchestra analogy, you could think of the director as the conductor of the stage production.



**THE ACTORS** have to memorize their parts in the script, find the right tone and body language to convey their character's feelings, and learn the "blocking" of the play (the director's instructions about when, where and how to move on stage). The actors' goal is to make their characters completely believable to the audience. The actors rehearse (practise) for several weeks before the play opens to the public.



**THE SET DESIGNER** creates all the sets for the play, working closely with the director. The set (or sets) must convey the location and the general atmosphere of the story. The set designer selects the best materials to use, draws up the plans required to build the sets, and oversees the construction of the different elements of the set.



**THE COSTUME DESIGNER** creates the clothing the actors will wear on stage. Like the set designer, s/he works closely with the director, who provides comments and suggestions about the costume designs. The designer selects all the fabrics and colours for the costumes, and designs them in such a way that they are comfortable to wear and easy to put on and take off.



**THE LIGHTING DESIGNER** creates lighting effects, colours and variations that enhance the action on stage. S/He turns the lights up or down on the sets, the costumes and the actors according to the director's instructions; s/he also determines the number, type and placement of the lights required for the production.



**THE COMPOSER** uses music to enhance and complement the action on stage, much as the lighting designer uses light. S/He creates the soundscape for the show: it may include original music, sound effects, and special effects (birdsong, squeaky door, running water, etc.).

For more information about theatre professions, visit the National Arts Centre's ArtsAlive website:

<http://www.artsalive.ca/en/thf/faire/metiers.html>

**Appendix 2 • Excerpt from *The Bookshop*  
(dialogue for three characters)**

*Samuel walks back to Jeanne. Victor stands behind her and prompts her.*

**Victor:** Samuel, just one last thing before we part.

**Jeanne:** Samuel, just one last thing before we part.

**Victor:** You can take this any way you want, but I wanted to tell you...

**Jeanne:** You can take this any way you want, but I wanted to tell you...

**Victor:** That I find you absolutely adorable with that little beauty mark of yours,

**Jeanne:** That I find you absolutely adorable with that little beauty mark of yours,

**Victor:** The way you always seem to have your head in the clouds,

**Jeanne:** The way you always seem to have your head in the clouds,

**Victor:** The way you walk and especially the way you dance.

**Jeanne:** The way you walk and especially the way you bump into everything all the time.

*Victor moves quietly away.*

**Victor:** I love your accent when you say the wrong word.

**Jeanne:** I love the way you hum songs that everyone else has forgotten.

**Victor:** I love your silences and your childlike laugh.

**Jeanne:** I love the way you talk about colours and tastes and spices.

**Victor:** The way you summon the stars to go on walks with you.

**Jeanne:** Your love of beautiful things, your attention to detail, your delicate gestures.

*During Jeanne's declaration of love, the shop suddenly starts to come to life. A few books fall off the shelves and the lighting goes back and forth between 1930 and the present. Petra's clock starts to turn madly backwards and the music goes faster.  
Victor takes a last look at his book.*

**Victor:** Jeanne! The last chapter! The last chapter wrote itself.

**Jeanne:** The way you look at the sun, the little frown you get in the middle of your forehead when you think too hard about something, your shyness, your smile, the colour of your eyes, the slowness of your breath, your laugh.  
I like everything about you.

*Pause.*

**Samuel:** I've changed my mind. I don't think I'm going to move any more.

*He takes Jeanne in his arms. The clock stops.*

*The Bookshop* was first performed (in French, as *La librairie*) on November 4, 2003 at the Théâtre des Gros Becs in Quebec City.

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### **Special thanks to the National Arts Centre English Theatre team**

#### **The Théâtre du Gros Mécano team**

Artistic Director..... Carol Cassistat  
Production Director..... Marc St-Jacques  
Director of Communications, Finance and Marketing..... Hélène Basque  
Administrator..... Francine Chabot

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