

Rutherford and Son

a drama by Githa Sowerby
produced by The Shaw Festival (Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON)

Study Guide

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE
PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES
2004-2005 SEASON

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About this Study Guide

This Study Guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages. They may be used separately or in any combination that works for your classes. The colour page is intended for classroom display, but may also be photocopied for students. Here is an outline of the contents of each page with suggestions as to its use.

Page(s)		May Be Used To
2	About The Play - plot synopsis, character descriptions	Aid students in appreciating the script and performance
3	Who Helped Put this Production Together? List of cast members, director, designers; critics' comments	Aid students in writing a review and help them relate to the production
4	Director's Biography and Notes	Provide students' enrichment
5	Biography of the Author	Provide students' enrichment
6	Biographies of Selected Cast Members and Designers	Help students relate to the production
7-9	Commentaries on the Play - labour strife, class struggle, feminism	Provide enrichment and basis for activities
10	The Glass Making Industry	Provide enrichment
11-12	Activities Before and After Viewing	Foster students' active appreciation of the play and its issues
13	The Shaw Festival	Provide reference material for an activity
14	Ideas on Designing a Set	Provide material for discussion
15	Curriculum Connections	Justify a trip to the theatre
16	Theatre Etiquette	Prepare the class for the theatre experience
17	Colour Photo of Set Design	Display in the classroom
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About the Play

Plot Synopsis

The play takes place in an industrial town in the north of England, a few years before the First World War. Mr. Rutherford is a widower, but his house is far from empty: also living there are his spinster sister and his three grown children – Janet, John and Richard – along with John's wife and their new baby. Rutherford owns a glass factory which was founded by his father, and which is one of the largest businesses in the town. The house has an oppressive atmosphere to it, partly because of the winter settling in, but more because of the fear that Rutherford inspires in his family. The business has gone through tough times recently – he has had to take out a large loan from the bank and therefore submit to the humiliation of answering to a Board of Governors - and only someone with Rutherford's single-minded determination could have persevered as he has.

In the face of the dominance that Rutherford wields over his family (no less than his factory), Janet has turned sullen and the two sons have become passive and ineffectual. But all three have hopes for the future. At 36 Janet has a new secret suitor, while Richard, a minister in a small nearby church, has been offered a new position in another town. While these two are keeping their plans to themselves for the present, John Jr. talks tirelessly of the invention he is developing: an alloy which he thinks will make the glass production more economical and bring new prosperity to the factory, new riches to himself, and a new life to his young family – one that doesn't include the Rutherford family business, which he hates. But he wants proper compensation from his father, even though the value of his invention has yet to be proven.

Rutherford Sr. is greatly disturbed when it is found that one of his workers has been stealing from the office and has to be let go. When he finds that his son is possibly planning to sell his invention to a competitor he places his faithful foreman, Martin, in a compromising position by demanding that he give him John Jr.'s secret recipe. The play comes to a climax when he is confronted by a family mutiny which threatens to destroy the family as well as the factory.

Characters

John Rutherford – domineering head of the Rutherford family and owner of the glass factory.

Ann Rutherford – his elderly spinster sister, conservative and fatalistic.

Janet – his 36 year old unmarried daughter, sullen and bitter.

John Jr. – his lazy college educated son who has recently returned home.

Mary (Molly) – John Jr.'s young wife and mother of their baby son, Tony.

Richard – his defeated youngest son, pastor at a local church.

Martin – the foreman at the glass factory.

Mrs. Henderson – the mother of a dismissed factory worker.

Who Helped Put this Production Together?

Rutherford and Son is a production mounted by the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. It opened in the Court House Theatre on June 19, 2004 to high critical acclaim.

Behind the Scenes

Author: Githa Sowerby, early twentieth century British writer
Director: Jackie Maxwell, Artistic Director of the Shaw Festival
Costume and Set Designer: William Schmuck
Lighting Designer: Louise Guinand
Stage Manager: Joanna Jurychuk

The Cast

Michael Ball – *John Rutherford*
Donna Belleville – *Mrs. Henderson*
Kelli Fox – *Janet*
Mary Haney – *Ann*
Peter Krantz – *Martin*
Mike Shara – *Richard*
Dylan Trowbridge – *John Jr.*
Nicole Underhay – *Mary (Molly)*

What the Critics Have Said

Jamie Portman, Ottawa Citizen

“Githa Sowerby’s seething domestic drama is undeniably a period piece in what it has to say about the class system, the tensions between capitalism and labour, and – perhaps most provocatively – the place of women in society. But the reason it continues to intrigue us is that it is first and foremost a study in character, an examination of how patriarchal despotism and the prevailing culture of the day can ensnare human beings.”

Kamal Al-Solaylee, The Globe and Mail

“Engaging and splendid... works magic... as a family drama.”

Richard Ouzounian, Toronto Star

“An amazing script ... If I could pick one scene from my recent theatre-going to revisit at will, it would be this shattering confrontation [between Kelli Fox and Michael Ball]. Rutherford and Son is well worth an investment of your time and money.”

Director's Biography and Notes



Jackie Maxwell was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1956 and studied at Manchester University in England. Following the retirement of Christopher Newton as Artistic Director of Shaw Festival, she took over the position at the end of the 2002 season.

Among the companies where she has worked are the Charlottetown Festival (director of new play development), Factory Theatre (artistic director), National Theatre School, CanStage, Tarragon Theatre, and Theatre Calgary. While artistic director at Factory Theatre, Ms. Maxwell created, developed, and produced works by some of Canada's most respected and vital playwrights such as George F. Walker, Michel Marc Bouchard, Sharon Pollock, Anne-Marie MacDonald, and Michel Garneau. She has two children and lives in Toronto with her husband, actor Benedict Campbell.

Director's Notes for the Shaw Festival production of *Rutherford and Son*.

Rutherford and Son was hailed by audiences and critics alike as a brave and perceptive study of class and gender politics when both were at a combustible point in their history. For the tyrant John Rutherford, neither his family nor his business seem to respond to his "old ways" of paternalistic rule. Change is afoot, and what begin as small cracks in his world become cavernous fissures by the end of the play.

In rehearsing the piece, it is these small cracks that must be explored – quickly revealing a family full of needs, desires and resentments, none of which have been given any kind of voice. Unlike many of the plays we work on here at The Shaw, where the characters' feelings are aired articulately and passionately – where the very act of conversation is embraced with relish – this play presents a habitat where conversation is not the natural mode of communication. Indeed, it seems almost alien. It costs to talk in *Rutherford and Son*. Attempts to engage Rutherford himself in conversation result in either sneering dismissal or a frontal attack, while John Jr.'s young wife Mary knows that to tackle her husband about their current very unsatisfactory situation will only start an argument. Dick and Janet try to absent themselves emotionally from all potentially threatening situations, but even they can't escape the family dynamic.

As we worked on the play, we realized how much is conveyed by what is not said – that we needed to explore the silences that are such a feature of this household. Slowly we explored this landscape where silence and gesture become as potent and informative as the words that punctuate them. For actors used to reveling in fluent, musical articulation, it has been an amazing exercise in rethinking how a character communicates, and for me as a director it has made the details of all the actions in the play vitally important. How Janet lays the dinner table, how Ann cuts the bread, how Mary sews a baby's bonnet, how Rutherford opens a letter: all these seemingly unconscious tasks become rich with emotion-packed information. As the play progresses, some members of the family do get to have their say, but only because the pressure has built to such a pitch that – like the rumbling furnaces in Rutherford's glassworks – sparks, steam, and ultimately fire must push its way out. It is only by carefully building every moment leading up to this that we can really understand the deep pain and need behind their outbursts – the truth that lies behind every glance, each fold of a tablecloth, each hesitation on a stair.

Biography of the Author

Githa Sowerby (1876-1970) was born at Gateshead, Northumberland, a city just across the river from Newcastle-on-Tyne in the north east part of England. Her father ran Sowerby and Co., a glass factory that he had inherited from his father and grandfather. In 1896, after a series of financial crises and disagreements with the Board of Directors, Sowerby left the firm and moved with his family, including Githa and her five siblings, to a town near London. Githa began her own literary career by publishing stories in magazines and writing verses and stories for children's books that were illustrated by her sister Millicent. Her first efforts at playwriting were also for children, collected in a book entitled *Little Plays for School and Home* (1910).

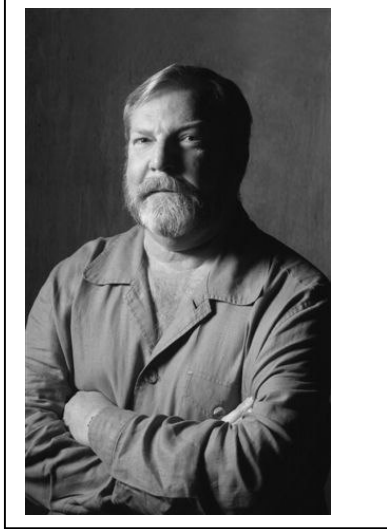
Githa Sowerby moved to London around 1905, where she joined the Fabian Society, a group of intellectuals committed to social reform through discussion and political activism. Her first produced play, *Rutherford and Son*, created a sensation when it first appeared in London in 1912. Although the play is feminist only by implication, it effectively attacks the dehumanizing effects of a paternalistic society. A 1912 review of the production in *The Vote* (the journal of the Women's Freedom League) proclaimed: "*No play has ever been written that in the truest, strongest sense was so really a 'Suffrage' play, although the word is never uttered and the thought never enters the minds of the people portrayed.*"



The following year Sowerby married another writer, John Kendall, an army veteran who wrote articles and verse for *Punch* magazine under the pseudonym Dum-dum. Little else is known about Githa Sowerby's life. A few of her other plays were produced in London—*Before Breakfast* (1912), *A Man and Some Women* (1914), *Sheila* (1917) and *The Stepmother* (1924)—but only the one-act comedy *Before Breakfast* reached publication.

From an interview with Githa Sowerby in *The Queen*, 1912:
"*How did I write Rutherford? Oh, by fits and starts. I was busy with other work at the time – principally books for children – and rarely had the opportunity to work on it continuously for any length of time. I finished it last June in a boat on the river. The story, of course, is imaginary. But I know the life of hard-working Northerners, and I like writing about things I know. As for technique, well, it's rather alarming, isn't it? I imagined the Rutherfords in a room, not on the stage, by the way. Originally I called the play The Master, but found at the last moment that the title had already been used. So I settled on one of the oldest and best known names in the North – Rutherford. ... No – I don't mean to 'teach' anything. My play is a story, nothing more.*"

Biographies of Selected Cast Members and Designers



Michael Ball – John Rutherford In contrast to the character he portrays in *Rutherford and Son*, Michael Ball is a generous, well-liked actor adept at comedy as well as drama. He was born in 1943 and graduated from the National Theatre School in 1968. Since then he has enjoyed a wide and varied career in television and theatre all across Canada. He is a favourite at the Shaw Festival, this being his 25th season in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He has played in more than 40 productions there since 1976, including *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, *Pygmalion*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Arms and the Man*. He has also performed at the Centaur Theatre (Montreal), Citadel Theatre (Edmonton), Belfry Theatre (Victoria) and Neptune Theatre (Halifax). His best known film appearance was in *Titanic*. His most recent appearance at the NAC was in Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* (2002/03 season).

Kelli Fox – Janet Kelli Fox was born in Edmonton, Alberta where she lived for a short time before moving to Vancouver with her parents and four siblings, one of whom was Michel (who later changed his name to Michael J. Fox and went on to Hollywood fame). A very strong actor, she has played at Shaw Festival for 10 seasons in such productions as *Major Barbara*, *Candida*, and *The Children's Hour*. Elsewhere, she has appeared in many productions in Toronto, Vancouver, and Ottawa. Her touring one-woman show about novelist Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, played at the NAC (2001/02 season), and she also appeared in the NAC production of Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* (2002/03 season). She will be staying on in Ottawa after *Rutherford and Son* to begin rehearsals for the NAC production of *Love's Labour's Lost* playing in January 2005.



William Schmuck – Set and Costume Designer

William Schmuck has been the Design Director at the Shaw Festival since 1996 and has been responsible for over 25 shows in that period. This season, as well as *Rutherford and Son*, he has designed three other productions – *Pal Joey*, *Waiting for the Parade*, and *Floyd Collins*. He has designed for many other theatre and opera companies across Canada and throughout the United States.

Commentaries on the Play (page 1 of 3)

“A Great Unrest” (abridged from a commentary by Linda Fitzsimmons for the Shaw Festival).

Rutherford and Son is a play about class, capitalism, and gender. All three intersect as Githa Sowerby uses the Rutherford family as a model of politics in Britain in 1912.

In Act I we learn that John Rutherford has recently had to relinquish sole control of the failing family business, a glass factory. Five years earlier, he had been forced to take out a bank loan, which resulted in his being responsible to a board of management. His autocratic manner, at home as at work, is ill suited to this accountable style of working. He is shown as a patriarch who likes his own way, and is used to getting it. The back-story of the bank loan and its outcome presages the play's action, as he comes to lose power and control in the family as well. The business is failing because of competition and the need for technological innovation, which his son John Jr. might be able to offer. In Britain, the lack of investment in technological advance since the mid-19th century had resulted in its industry being overtaken by European and North American competitors. John's claim that he has invented a new process – one that will increase productivity while reducing costs – comes as potentially a magical solution to Rutherford's microcosmic version of this crisis. That Rutherford will not negotiate with his son is consistent with his management style at “the works,” and comments too on the wider industrial context. The period between 1910 and 1914 in Britain is known as “the great unrest”. Membership of trade unions grew by more than 50%, and the country experienced four times as much strike activity as in the previous decade. The “unrest” was in a time of low unemployment, a failure of wages to keep pace with rising prices, and an accumulation of grievances over hours and conditions. The major areas of national industrial action – transportation and coal-mining – would certainly have had an impact on the profits of an industry such as Rutherford's: his glass factory would have been dependent on the mines for its supplies of coal, and on rail transport and the docks for importing raw materials and exporting finished goods. Any audience of 1912 would have been fully aware of the wider context of industrial strife and the workers' demands for fairer treatment. In this context, John Rutherford Sr. appears as an anachronism, seeing himself as the paternalistic leader – firm but fair – whom his workers follow because of the force of his personality. His bullying attitudes – local families must not let their sons leave the town to seek work elsewhere, as he needs them for [his factory] – are exposed for what they are.

Class struggle informs all the action of the play. Rutherford's *nouveau riche* status sits uneasily on him. He is a man socially, though not economically, between classes. He sent his son to Harrow for one year (but only one year, perhaps because of the prohibitive cost); he has excluded his daughter Janet from all possibility of social life by forbidding her to take paid employment or to associate with the workers; and initially he rejects his daughter-in-law Mary because she is of a lower class, as indicated by her having been an office worker. At the same

Commentaries on the Play (page 2 of 3)

time, however, Rutherford has resisted his late wife's attempts to educate John, and he seems to have only one friend in the world, his working-class foreman Martin. Neither this friendship nor his conviction of the superiority of the Rutherford family, though, is allowed to take precedence over his commitment to the business. He appears to be in a double-bind: his greatest desire, the one that drives all of his actions, is to maintain the business as a profitable enterprise, so that it can stay in the family. Ironically, these actions destroy that very family, as one by one his three children are rejected by their father and – in their turn, in their own ways, - reject him, his home, his business, and his patriarchal control.

Feminism is the parallel political context for the play. The years 1910-1914 saw the most extensive and acrimonious of the engagements in the struggle for female enfranchisement. The campaign for the vote was part of a much wider struggle for feminist demands, fought by women of all classes. Mary embodies two aspects of this struggle and the tension between them: work and motherhood. In Act I we learn that she used to be an office worker in London, both before her marriage to John and, unconventionally, for a while afterwards. It was the birth of her son Tony that brought her to leave paid employment and to persuade her husband to return north to the grim family home.

Mary's description of the drudgery of office work echoes other contemporary evidence. The number of women working in offices increased enormously in the preceding half-century. It was work undertaken mostly by lower-middle-class women – it was claimed that women's hands were particularly well suited to keyboards – as a respectable alternative to retail work in shops. While there was a much publicized campaign to enable women to enter the professions, working- and lower-middle-class women, of course, had always worked, either in or outside of the home. The normal expectation was that, upon marriage, a woman would cease paid employment and become economically dependent on her husband. Indeed, in most workplaces married women were barred from working. Mary's continuing to support herself and John after they married is a sure sign of his fecklessness: that he "couldn't" get work firmly indicates that he wouldn't.

For Mary, the problem with her office work was not only the low pay and poor conditions. More significantly, she felt that her work weakened her son when he was born. In this, her views are consistent with those of most feminists of her day. While they fought for the rights of women to work and earn their living, many feminists still proclaimed that a woman's prime duty was to be a "good mother". Most saw women as needing to choose between paid employment and motherhood.

The play's ending, while surprising in many ways, is consonant with the political demands of most feminist and trade-union leaders of the time. In what many saw as a betrayal of the rank-and-file workers, both male and female, these leaders argued that, rather than overturn capitalism, it should simply be better managed for the benefit of more people. The solution for the next generation, it was claimed, lay not in changing the ownership of the means of production, but rather in the owner behaving in a more humane manner. Rutherford represents the old way, but must negotiate the transition to a new way. Tony, who will inherit the kingdom, has the last word, in his off-stage cry. The patrimony is thus secured to a male heir, albeit one who will be female-influenced.



Sylvia Pankhurst 1882-1960
ardent social feminist and
suffragette

Commentaries on the Play (page 3 of 3)

Commentary by Emma Goldman, eminent American feminist and essayist.

[*Rutherford and Son*] is a picture of the paralyzing effect of tradition and John Rutherford, the owner of the firm “Rutherford and Son”, is possessed by the phantom of the past – the thing handed down to him by his father and which he must pass on to his son with undiminished luster; the thing that has turned his soul to iron and his heart to stone; the thing for the sake of which he has never known joy and because of which no one else must know joy,- “Rutherford and Son.”

The crushing weight of this inexorable monster on Rutherford and his children is significantly summed up by young John [in one of the scenes]:

John. *Have you ever heard of Moloch? No. . . . Well, Moloch was a sort of God . . . some time ago, you know, before Dick and his kind came along. They built his image with an ugly head ten times the size of a real head, with great wheels instead of legs, and set him up in the middle of a great dirty town. And they thought him a very important person indeed, and made sacrifices to him . . . human sacrifices . . . to keep him going, you know. Out of every family they set aside one child to be an offering to him when it was big enough, and at last it became a sort of honor to be dedicated in this way, so much so, that the victims came themselves gladly to be crushed out of life under the great wheels. That was Moloch.*

Janet. *Dedicated – we are dedicated – all of us – to Rutherfords. Not only the Rutherford children, their withered Aunt Ann, and old Rutherford himself, but even Martin, the faithful servant in the employ of the Rutherfords for twenty-five years, is “dedicated,” and when he ceases to be of use to their Moloch, he is turned into a thief and then cast off, even as John and Janet.*

To read the full essay by Emma Goldman go to:

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/goldman/socsig/sowerby.html

The Glass Making Industry

No one knows exactly when or where glass was first made, but pieces of well made glass date from the third millennium BCE in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). In ancient times glass was much less common than it is today – in Biblical times it was as precious as gold.

Glass was produced from a mixture of sand (silica), seaweed (soda ash), brushwood (potash) and lime, colored with the copper ore malachite or other metals, and fused at a high temperature of nearly 2000°C. The Egyptians used molten glass to cover clay-fired beads and molded objects in a technique called faience. They later developed a method called core-forming to make small perfume bottles and ornaments. A shaped core was made of clay and dung, then molten glass was wrapped around it and shaped by rolling it on a smooth surface. It was very much later, around the end of the 1st century BCE, that a new method, glass blowing, would revolutionize glass production. By blowing through a hollow tube, the experienced glassblower could quickly produce intricate and symmetrical shapes out of the “gather” of molten glass at the end of his tube (rod).



Alternatively, he could blow the molten glass into a mould. It could even be spun out into a flat disk to make flat window glass called crown glass because of the raised knob or crown in the centre of the plate. The glass blowing innovation, along with the backing of the powerful Roman Empire, made glass products more accessible to the common people. As the Roman Empire expanded, the art of glass making spread across Europe and North Africa. The golden age of coloured glass windows came in the Middle Ages. Stories of the Christian faith were gloriously illustrated in the windows of the soaring Gothic cathedrals of Europe. In the Renaissance, enamel painted glass became more fashionable with the increased ability to portray fine details in the glass composition. Artisans in the glass industry continued to experiment with numerous recipes of additives and techniques to create endless grades of colour, texture and brilliance in the glass for artistic endeavors.

Meanwhile, advances were made in improving the clarity of colourless glass for commercial use. Plate glass was created by casting the molten glass into a flat mold and then polishing it either by hand or by a steam engine driven machine. By the mid nineteenth century larger plates of glass were made by a machine rolled process which resulted in mass production and a more uniform thickness.

One of the most significant advancements came in the mid-twentieth century with the invention of the float process, in which continuous sheets of glass could be mechanically produced by floating hot glass onto a bed of molten tin. For the first time, large sheets could be made cheaply and efficiently, with precision accuracy, and consequently glass soon became a major building material. Modern buildings now show wide expanses of glass covering a steel skeleton as compared to earlier buildings whose principle appearance was one of stone or brick.

Activities Before and After Viewing (page 1 of 2)

Before Viewing

- 1.** Distribute copies of **Commentaries on the Play** (pages 7-9). The issues of women's rights, class distinctions, boss/worker relationships and duties to parents figure prominently in *Rutherford and Son*. A variety of improvisations could be used to explore these issues, such as: an autocratic boss imposing duties on a worker without consultation; an employer obliging a worker to relinquish personal information (or property, or intellectual property) belonging to another worker (what happens if the information/property meant the business would be improved for all?); the struggle of a person with a poor family background to rise against the prejudices of others; a woman trying to gain the respect of the parent of her boyfriend/husband; the pressure of a parent on a grown child to continue in the family business.
- 2.** Distribute copies of **Biographies of Selected Cast Members and Designers** (page 6). Have the students do an internet research on the other members of the cast or production heads. A wealthy source of information is found in the Encyclopedia of Canadian Theatre, <http://www.canadiantheatre.com/>.
- 3.** Distribute copies of the **Director's Biography** (page 4) and **Biographies of Selected Cast Members and Designers** (page 6). These artists have worked with a large number of theatre companies across Canada. Have students create a research project using information found in the Encyclopedia of Canadian Theatre (<http://www.canadiantheatre.com/>) on one or more of the following companies: Belfry Theatre, Canadian Stage Company (aka CanStage), Centaur Theatre, Charlottetown Festival, Citadel Theatre, Neptune Theatre, Tarragon Theatre, or the National Theatre School. Share with them the page on **The Shaw Festival** (page 13) as a possible example of this project.
- 4. The Glass Making Industry** (page 10) might become a topic of research. Distribute copies of this page and have students augment this material with information on ancient glass, glass making recipes, and uses of glass found in a search through the web.

Activities Before and After Viewing (page 2 of 2)

After Viewing

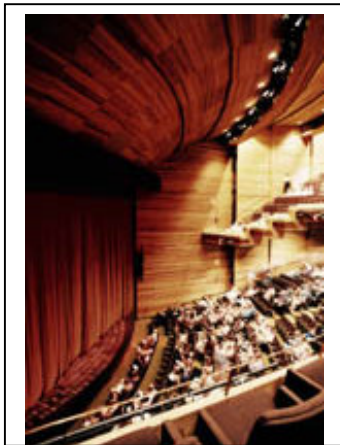
5. While the play is still fresh in their minds, have students write a review of Githa Sowerby's *Rutherford and Son*. Have them read reviews of this play or others in *The Citizen* or *Xpress* to give them an idea of the standard approach to theatrical criticism. A suggested outline for writing a review can also be found online on page 12 of the *The "Vaudevilles" of Chekhov* Study Guide at http://www.nac-cna.ca/en/allaboutthenac/publications/chekhov_guide.pdf. Students may have received programs at the matinée or may refer to page 3 of this Study Guide (**Who Helped Put this Production Together?**) for the information about the production for use in their reviews. The areas the review should cover, in general and more specifically when merited are: all design elements (lighting, sound, set, and costumes), performances of the actors, the direction, the basic narrative and the central theme(s).
6. Discussion of the issues found in the play as mentioned in Activity 1 (page 11) may be held once more. Do you agree with the way Sowerby dealt with these issues? How have the issues changed since the play was written in the early 20th century? Are these conditions still an issue in certain parts of our society or in certain cultures?
7. Distribute copies of **Ideas on Designing a Set** (page 14). Have the students discuss choices made by the director or designers. Discuss use of colours, lines, shapes, or motifs in the set design as well as in styles of costumes.
8. This production was originally mounted in Shaw Festival's Court House Theatre which has a thrust stage (a stage which extends into the audience so that patrons are observing the action from three sides). Was it wise to use the thrust stage at the National Arts Centre or do you think it should have been re-designed and re-blocked? Visit the NAC's *ArtsAlive* website for more design and production ideas and for pictures of the Theatre configured for a Thrust Stage or a Proscenium Stage (www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/index.html).

The Shaw Festival

The conception of a summer theatre festival devoted to the works of George Bernard Shaw as a means to reintroduce people to the historic heritage of the charming town of Niagara-on-the-Lake came to Brian Doherty and a group of friends in the winter of 1962. Why Shaw as the core of the theatrical dream? Quite simply, Shaw was the only outstanding playwright writing in English, with the obvious exception of William Shakespeare, who produced a sufficient number of plays to support a festival. (Stratford, Ontario had already made its mark with its festival devoted to Shakespeare's works and become a mecca for theatregoers.) Shaw had written about thirty full length plays and over twenty short ones. His work, as well as that of playwrights who created work at the same time as he lived (1856 – 1950), was to become the material for the festival. As a result of this decision to form the Shaw Festival, this sleepy little town at the mouth of the Niagara River where it empties into Lake Ontario – the first capital of Ontario, the site of historic Fort George meant to defend British North America against its southern neighbour just across the river, overrun and occupied by American forces for seven months during the War of 1812 – has become a centre of quality theatre applauded throughout North America.



The Court House Theatre
photo: David Cooper



Festival Theatre interior
photo: David Cooper

The site chosen for the festival to present its plays was the old mid-Victorian court house on the main street. Its old court room became the space for the first season's productions of *Candida* and the 'Hell Scene' from *Man and Superman*. By 1965 the Festival was receiving its first grant from the Ontario Arts Council.

When Barry Morse took over as Artistic Director in 1966 he began a feverish development of the festival, recruiting well-known cast members, solidifying government backing and establishing aggressive publicity to bring in audiences from surrounding areas on both sides of the border. Although improvements were made to the theatre, its seating capacity of around 200 was plainly inadequate. In its first decade, the Shaw Festival enjoyed explosive audience growth, and the company toured extensively in the United States and Canada. Then on June 20, 1973, the Festival Theatre was officially opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. This beautiful new building enabled the Shaw Festival to mount large-scale productions which drew national and international acclaim. By 1980, the old Brock Movie Theatre down the street from the Court House was renovated to become the Royal George Theatre and this completed the set of three venues for the Festival.

Ideas on Designing a Set

Mood and Atmosphere are hinted at in a set through Line, Mass, and Colour

“mood” refers to the **feelings** created by the design;

“atmosphere” refers to the **information** on the location/time/status/etc. suggested by details in the design.

1. Line

Straight lines:	suggest strength, formality, austerity, rigidness, coldness
Curved lines:	suggest softness, gaiety, gracefulness, sensuousness
Vertical lines:	suggest reverence, nobility, majesty, claustrophobia, power
Horizontal lines:	suggest serenity, stability, oppression, facelessness, weight
Diagonal lines:	suggest force, action, anger, confusion, conflict, insecurity

The shape of lines can also give an impression of an **age** (Elizabethan, Roaring 20s, Hippie) or a **style** (Baroque, Art Deco, Victorian) and, of course, work on the **cultural symbolic** level (Eastern European, Japanese, Scandinavian).

2. Mass is a plane or bulk which is most effective when an audience can see three or more sides of an object.

Bulky mass: gives solidity and weight

Thin mass: gives lightness and airiness

The opposite of mass can be defined as a negative space, which works dynamically with the existing masses and lines.

3. Colours help greatly in creating a mood on a set. Dark colours can suggest seriousness or richness; light colours can suggest comedy or cheerfulness. Blues, greens and purples can achieve a feeling of coolness, while reds, browns, oranges and yellows give warmth to a set. The selection of the colours for a set (the palette) could be those close to each other on the colour wheel or tones and tints of the same hue. This palette might give a feeling of harmony or evenness. Many contrasting colours, on the other hand, might suggest conflict or a more dynamic feeling.

Illusions on Sets

1. Straight walls tend to make the set on a small stage look larger.
2. Jogs in a wall tend to make the set look smaller.
3. Arches and alcoves suggesting other areas off stage will expand a small stage.
4. Flats placed one behind another give the illusion of depth.

Curriculum Connections: The Ontario Curriculum: The Arts

A visit to see a live stage production helps fulfill the following curriculum expectations:-

Drama and Dance, Grade 8

Specific Expectations:-

- demonstrate understanding of the appropriate use of voice, gestures, and the level of language in different dramatic situations.
- write in role in various forms, showing understanding of a dramatic situation and using appropriate vocabulary, tone, and voice for the character portrayed.

Critical Thinking:-

- review drama and dance performances, orally or in writing, critiquing the use of elements and techniques in the particular genre of the piece.

Dramatic Arts, Grade 9

Theory: Overall Expectations:-

- demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of role-playing.
- demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dramatic expression.

Theory: Specific Expectations (Role):-

- identify the skills necessary to remain engaged in role and the drama (e.g. concentration, listening, interpreting, questioning).

Analysis: Specific Expectations (Evaluation):-

- identify the characteristics of a receptive, discriminating audience (e.g. engagement, listening, focus).
- use specialized vocabulary in discussing and writing about drama (e.g. production value, role development, stagecraft, comic relief, satire, irony).
- identify the main aspects of a production (e.g. acting, set design, lighting, costume).

Dramatic Arts, Grade 10

Theory: Specific Expectations (Role):-

- demonstrate an understanding of techniques used to re-create roles (e.g. observation, research, improvisation).

Analysis: Overall Expectations:-

- use the vocabulary of dramatic arts to discuss, critique, and review drama presentations in the school and the community.

Dramatic Arts, Grade 11 (University/College Preparation)

Analysis: Overall Expectations:-

- evaluate dramatic performances presented in the school and the community.
- explain how dramatic arts represent, influence and contribute to culture and society.

Dramatic Arts, Grade 11 (Open)

Theory: Specific Expectations (Role/Character):-

- describe the process of portraying a character in a script through voice, gesture, props, and the character's relationships with other characters.

Dramatic Arts, Grade 12 (Open)

Theory: Specific Expectations (Role/Character):-

- describe how dramatic elements (e.g., costumes, make-up, props, lighting, set design) are used to develop character and theme.

- describe how acting techniques are used to develop characters that are in keeping with the themes in the script.

Dramatic Arts, Grade 12 (University/College Preparation)

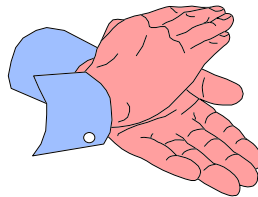
Analysis and Evaluation: Specific Expectation:-

- explain how theatre can reflect issues, societal concerns, and the culture of the community, the country and other countries.

Theatre Etiquette

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre by explaining good **Theatre Etiquette** which will enhance the enjoyment of the play for all audience members:

1. 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 inappropriately during the show may be asked to leave the Theatre.
2. *Rutherford and Son* is set in the early 20th century before phones and pagers. It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted. Cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps must be turned off. Cameras and all other recording devices are also not permitted in the Theatre.
3. Unlike movies, theatre seats are assigned to patrons according to row and number. It is important to find the seat indicated on the ticket rather than moving around and disturbing others. It might be wise for teachers to pass out the tickets before arriving at the Theatre so students can make sure in advance that they are sitting beside the friend of their choice. Remember that in the NAC Theatre, all odd numbered seats are on one side and all even are on the other, so, for example, seats 12 and 14 are actually beside one another.
4. A trip to the washroom before the play starts is a good idea. Anyone leaving during the show will unfortunately not be allowed back into the Theatre. The play has two acts. There will be one 15-minute intermission.





Rutherford and Son designed by William Schmuck (photo by David Cooper)



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