

DEEP DIVE



INDECENT

by **Paula Vogel**

directed by

**Josh Hecht**





## BOOKS

The God of Vengeance  
by Donald Margulies  
and Sholem Asch

Funny, It Doesn't  
Sound Jewish  
by Jack Gottlieb

Stardust Lost  
by Stefan Kanfer

Tipping the Velvet  
by Sarah Waters

Beyond the Pale  
by Elana Dykewomon

In the Garden of  
Beasts  
by Erik Larson

Broadway and the  
Blacklist  
by K. Kevyne Baar

Red, White, and Royal  
Blue  
by Casey McQuiston

## MOVIES

Yentl

The Sum of Us

American Beauty

Philadelphia

Sarah's Key

Elisa & Marcela

Shéhérazade

The Player

A Midsummer  
Nights' Dream

## MUSIC

Ani DiFranco

Simon and Garfunkel

Indigo Girls

Stan Getz

Louis Armstrong

Richard A. Whiting

The California  
Ramblers

Arcade Fire

Neutral Milk Hotel

## TV

Scandal

Law & Order: SVU

Peaky Blinders

Will & Grace

Queer as Folk

The L Word

The Marvelous  
Mrs. Maisel

The Jeffersons

# GET INTO THE GET WORLD OF INDECENT

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**FEB 19 - MAR 8 at PSU: Lincoln Hall**

*An Artists Rep co-production with Profile Theatre in association with Portland State University*

**ARTISTS  
REP** —ART—  
ON TOUR

**PROFILE  
THEATRE**

 **Portland State  
UNIVERSITY**

Joshua J. Weinstin & Gavin Hoffman  
Photo by: Kathleen Kelly

# ABOUT ARTISTS REP



**Artists Repertory Theatre's mission** is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists and audiences of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).

Artists Rep has become a significant presence in American regional theatre with a legacy of world, national, and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. The organization is committed to local artists and features a company of Resident Artists, professionals of varied theatre disciplines, who are a driving force behind Artists Rep's creative output and identity.

# A LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Dear Educators,

We are looking forward to seeing you at our production of *Indecent* by Paula Vogel.

This study guide is provided to enhance your students' theatre experience. There is material for your students to utilize before and after the performance. Our goal is to increase theatre exposure and understanding, as well as to encourage meaningful conversation and provoke thoughtful discussion about the play you will attend. Within this guide there is information about the play's themes, setting, characters, pertinent articles, basic theatre etiquette and more. We hope this information will enhance your class's theatre experience.

Artists Rep provides many opportunities for young people to get involved! Students can shadow professional theatre artists in a variety of disciplines, observe tech rehearsals, and become members of our Student Ambassador Program. Please feel free to contact us or give your students our contact information.

Enjoy the show!

Karen Rathje  
Education Director  
Artists Repertory Theatre  
krathje@artistsrep.org

# THE

# PLAYWRIGHT



Paula Vogel

## ABOUT PAULA VOGEL

Paula Vogel is a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright whose plays include *Indecent* (Tony Award for Best Play), *How I Learned To Drive* (Broadway production set for spring 2020; Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Lortel Prize, OBIE Award, Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle and New York Drama Critics Awards for Best Play), *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, *The Mineola Twins*, *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Hot'n'throbbing*, *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, *The Oldest Profession* and *A Civil War Christmas*.

Honors include induction in the American Theatre Hall of Fame, the Dramatists Guild Lifetime Achievement Award, the Lily Award, the Thornton Wilder Prize, the Obie Award for Lifetime Achievement, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the William Inge Award, the Elliott Norton Award, a Susan Smith Blackburn Award, the PEN/Laura Pels Award, a TCG Residency Award, a Guggenheim, a Pew Charitable Trust Award, and fellowships and residencies at Sundance Theatre Lab, Hedgebrook, The Rockefeller Center's Bellagio Center, Yaddo, MacDowell Colony, and the Bunting.

Paula Vogel was playwright in residence at The Signature Theatre (2004-05 season), and Theatre Communications Group publishes six volumes of her work. She continues her playwriting intensives with community organizations, students, theater companies, subscribers and writers across the globe. She is the 2019 inaugural UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television Hearst Theater Lab Initiative Distinguished Playwright-in-Residence and has recently taught at Sewanee, Shanghai Theatre Academy and Nanjing University, University of Texas at Austin, and the Playwrights Center in Minneapolis. From 1984 to 2008, Paula Vogel founded and ran the playwriting program at Brown University; during that time, she started a theatre workshop for women in Maximum Security at the Adults Correction Institute in Cranston, Rhode Island. It continues to this day, sponsored by the Pembroke Center for Women at Brown University. From 2008-2012, she was the O'Neill Chair at Yale School of Drama.

# TIME AND PLACES

Warsaw, Poland, 1906; Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1950s; and everywhere in between.

## SETTING

A space that will be filled with planks and suitcases. All props come from the suitcases.

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES ON THE MUSIC

"The music composed and arranged by Lisa Gutkin and Aaron Halva is not just a score. It's an exquisite heartbeat of the show, so transportive, so much a spirit that it is indeed a member of the cast. I cannot imagine the play without this music that has haunted me from the start in our first New Haven rehearsal at Yale. It grows, it changes, as all great scene partners do, according to the ensemble, the audience, the company. It will continue to transport us throughout the companies and the years, I know, as it did in our first rehearsal hall. The music allows us to dance, to celebrate, and to yearn. I am grateful."

## SYNOPSIS

*Indecent* recounts the controversy surrounding the play *God of Vengeance* by Polish-Jewish playwright Sholem Asch. *God of Vengeance* was written in 1906 and was widely produced in Europe, but when it was produced on Broadway in 1923, the entire cast of the play was arrested on the charges of indecency after the first performance.

The play is about a lesbian relationship between a prostitute, Manke, and the daughter of a pious brothel-owner, Rifkele. Asch shows the play to his wife, Madje, who loves it. He then presents it at a salon, where it is largely dismissed due to the lesbian relationship and the throwing of a Torah<sup>1</sup>. A young tailor named Lemml, who has never seen a play, loves it, and Asch hires him to be his stage manager. Famous Polish actor Rudolph Schlidkraut joins the cast and the play tours Europe to much success, ultimately leading to a run in New York, where it is performed in its original Yiddish<sup>2</sup>.

The producers then want to bring *God of Vengeance* to a larger audience, so an English translation is made. The actress playing Rifkele is replaced by an American, which drives a wedge between her and her longtime scene partner who plays Manke. In making the translation, the American producer removes the main romantic moment -- the "Rain Scene" -- between Rifkele and Manke,

which infuriates the actors, who insist that it is vital to the integrity of the play. Asch, who does not understand English well, signs off on the changes.

In 1923, the play premieres on Broadway. The entire cast is arrested on obscenity charges<sup>3</sup>. After the frenzy, they are bailed out and the actresses playing Rifkele and Manke reconcile. Lemml, now going by the more American name, "Lou," talks to famous American playwright Eugene O'Neill, author of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, in a bar, who gives his support to the production and play. Lemml goes to Asch's home and berates him for not standing up for the troupe in the trial. He then leaves, taking the original Yiddish script with him, and goes home to Poland.

Years pass, and letters from all around Europe come to Asch about the various performances of *God of Vengeance*. Lemml is still staging productions during the Holocaust, including one in a Polish Ghetto. As the Rain Scene happens, they are discovered by the Nazi Gestapo and taken away.

Asch is left depressed and cynical, burned out from all the advocacy he has done over the years. As he and Madje begin to move out of their home, Asch sees the ghosts of his old troupe perform the Rain Scene in Yiddish.

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<sup>1</sup> The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (the same first five books of the Christian Bible).

<sup>2</sup> The historic language of Central and Eastern Jews before the Holocaust.

<sup>3</sup> Sixteen people were arrested. All of them were convicted by a jury. The producer, director and Schlidkraut were fined \$200; the others were given suspended sentences. The convictions were reversed on appeal.

## Actors at the First Read of the *INDECENT*





# CHARACTER BREAKDOWN



**Michael Mendelson**  
Lemml



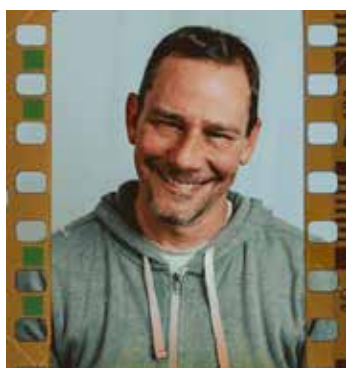
**Miriam Schwartz**  
Chana



**Joshua J. Weinstein**  
Avram



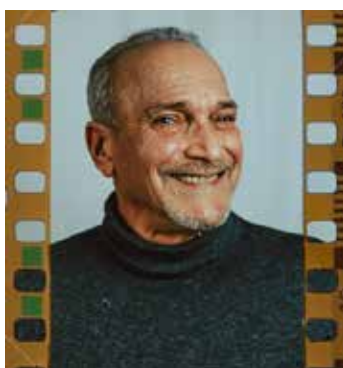
**Jamie M. Rea**  
Halina



**Gavin Hoffman**  
Mendel



**Linda Alper**  
Vera



**David Meyers**  
Otto



**Andrew Alikhanov**  
Mayer Balsam (Clarinet)



**Michelle Alany**  
Nelly Friedman (Violin)



**Christina Crowder**  
Moriz Godowsky (Accordion)

# DETAILED NARRATIVE

There are no acts or scenes specified in the play. Instead, there are Titles. The Titles are projected in both English and Yiddish.

**Title: Indecent, the true story of a little Jewish play**

**Title: from ashes they rise**

**Title: Lemml Introduces the Troupe**

Lemml, who also goes by the name Lou, introduces himself as the stage manager of the troupe and the troupe members. They will perform a play that changed his life.

**Title: 1906/Warsaw**

Sholem Asch, a twenty-three-year-old playwright, and his wife, Madje, are in bed. She is reading his play, *The God of Vengeance*. She tells him it is wonderful and that he makes her "feel the desire between the two women is the purest, most chaste, most spiritual --." Asch is looking forward to reading it the next night in the home of Mr. Peretz.

**Title: A Salon at the Peretz Home**

The people present take parts in reading the play. Asch asks Mr. Peretz to read the part of Yekel, the owner of the brothel. Lazar reads the part of Rifkele, his daughter, who is seventeen. Isacc reads the part of Rifkele's mother, Sarah, who is an ex-prostitute. Nakhmen reads the part of Manke, a prostitute, who is in her twenties. Asch reads the stage directions.

**Title: a blink in time**

**Title: in the midst of act one**

Peretz, as Yekel, warns his wife that he "better not catch Rifkele in Manke's company again!"

**Title: a blink in time**

**Title: Act Two: the first rain scene**

Manke enters, nuzzling Rifkele. Their nightgowns are soaked from the rain. Manke's line is: "Are you shivering, Rifkele? Warm yourself - rub up against me, that feels - . . ."

Nakhmen (as Manke) objects to saying that Rifkele should warm her face against her breasts.

Asch asks Lemml, a tailor who has never seen a play, to take over the part of Rifkele from Nakhmen. As the scene becomes more erotic, Asch has to take over the part of Manke.

**Title: a blink in time**

**Title: the last moments of the play**

As the play ends, Peretz (as Yekel) orders Rifkele and Sarah down into the whorehouse and hurls down the Torah, saying he does not need the Holy Scroll anymore.

Lemml calls the play "wonderful." Peretz and Nakhmen both object to the play. Peretz tells Asch he is, "pouring petrol on the flames of anti-Semitism." Nakhmen calls it a "play written by a Jew who hates Jews!"

**Title: 1907/Berlin/A Cabaret**

The troupe dances.

**Title: 1907/Berlin/The Deutsches Theatre**

Two actors, Elsa and Freida, are discussing playing lesbians in the play. Lemml, who has been given the job of assistant to the stage manager, tells them the play will be done all over the world.

**Title: Rudolph Schildkraut Makes an Entrance**

Schildkraut tells the cast how much he looks forward to being in the play and introduces Asch as the playwright of the brilliant play.

**Title: 1907/Berlin Opening Night - the last minutes of the play**

As the play ends, Yekel orders Rifkele and Sarah down into the whorehouse and tells them he does not need the Holly Scroll anymore. He raises the scroll but does not throw the Torah. Riotous applause.

**Title: 1911/St. Petersburg**

Yekel raises the scroll but does not throw the Torah.

**Title: 1914/Constantinople**

Yekel raises the scroll but does not throw the Torah.

**Title: 1918/Bratislava**

Yekel raises the scroll but does not throw the Torah.

**Title: 1920/Ellis Island**

**Title: an impossibly long line**

**Title: a blink in time**

Asch has arranged for Lemml to get through the immigration line. Asch tells Lemml, "You were my first advocate."

**Title: Sholem Asch Shows Lemml America**

The troupe has just gotten through the hazing process of Ellis Island. They sing.

**Title: 1921/New York City/The Bowery Theatre**

Thunderous applause.

**Title: 1922/New York City - Rehearsal for the English Transfer**

Dorothee and Reina are rehearsing the English translation of the play. Reina tells Dorothee she must call her Ruth in the play. Schildkraut tells Reina that she is wonderful for her part when the play when it is done in Yiddish, but Americans want to see "their own American daughter." Lemml tells her he will see her on the Yiddish stage. Reina says, "This will be the only role in my lifetime where I could tell someone I love that I love her onstage."

**Title: Virginia McFadden Replaces Reina Popeska**

Dorothee and Virginia are rehearsing the rain scene. Virginia tells Dorothee it is her first show and she is hoping it shocks her parents.

**Title: Opening Night at the Provincetown Playhouse**

As the curtain falls on Act One, Virginia carries on the kiss. As Virginia exits, she tells Lou, "I don't ever want to stop acting."

**Title: Full Company Meeting/The Provincetown Playhouse**

Producer Harry Weinberger announces that The God of Vengeance will open in two weeks at the Apollo Theatre on Broadway. Dorothee objects to acting in the play because they have cut the rain scene. She says, "Now instead of us falling in love in this obscenity of a world, instead of me trying to rescue you - the new script has me entrapping you into a life of white slavery! I've been promoted to Head Pimp!" Weinberger replies, "this production cannot be seen to celebrate two women in love!" Esther says, "Among the intelligentsia lesbians sell tickets. Uptown ... prostitutes in a brothel is all the excitement they can take."

**Title: 1923/A Doctor, A Diagnosis**

Asch has returned from a trip to Europe investigating pogroms <sup>4</sup>. He is unable to sleep.

**Title: The God of Vengeance - The First Kiss Between Two Women on Broadway**

**Title: 1923/Opening Night on Broadway/Intermission**

Asch feels sick to his stomach seeing the changes that have been made to the play in translating it from Yiddish to English. The police watch the play. Rifkele clings to Manke and then Manke lets Rifkele go. Officer Bailie tells Lou he is with the vice squad and they have warrants for the actors.

**Title: Cast and Producer Arrested for Obscenity**

<sup>4</sup> A Russian term that describes violent attacks on Jews in the Russian Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Rabbi Joseph Silverman prays that when he reads the paper, no one who has been arrested is Jewish.

**Title: Rabbi Silverman - A Sermon/Temple Emanu-El**

Rabbi Silverman tells his congregation that he was responsible for having the play closed down by the vice squad and all cast members arrested for obscenity.

**Title: After A Night in Jail**

Reina is at the jail when Dorothee gets out on bail. Dorothee and Reina talk about going home, taking off their clothes and seeing what happens.

**Title: Eugene O'Neill at the "Hell Hole," A West Village Bar**

O'Neill tells Lou he was going to be a defense witness, but the court barred the defense witnesses from testifying because the play is not on trial for obscenity, the production is. O'Neill saw the play at the Provincetown Players, but the script had been changed from when he saw it. He says Asch has to come and explain some basic things: "that when we trade our souls for money, it's a long and lonely life without love." He adds, "Give my admiration to Mr. Asch. He's crafted a play that shrouds us in a deep, deep fog of human depravity: then like a lighthouse, those two girls. That's a beacon I will remember."

**Title: Staten Island/Sholem and Madje Asch's Home**

Asch tells his wife he cannot go testify in the trial. He will write a letter instead. He says he has to change the way gentiles see us, "that make them see that we are one people with one common root . . ."

**Title: 1923/The Verdict/People of the State of New York vs. The God of Vengeance**

The defendants are found guilty of presenting an indecent, obscene and immoral play.

**Title: Lemml Watches the Sun Rise Over Staten Island**

Lemml tells Asch that cutting the love between those two girls left only the sex. Asch says he never checked the cuts. Lemml says he is returning to Poland and taking the manuscript in Yiddish with him.

**Title: 1938/Staten Island/Sholem Asch in His Study**

As Lemml returns home, Asch is writing furiously.

**Title: 1939-1941/Letters from Poland**

The God of Vengeance is still being performed in basements, cafes and other places in Poland, but the authorities have forbidden them to perform plays. They continue to perform with the few people left in the cast.

**Title: 1943/ Łódź Ghetto, Poland/An Attic Turned into A Stage <sup>5</sup>**

Lemml is introducing Act Two to the audience. It is raining.

**Title: the rain scene**

Manke and Rifkele are standing in the rain talking.

**Title: they feel the rain**

They kiss

**Title: a blink in time**

They hear the sound of boots running up the stairs. The troupe knows the time has come.

They are transported to Auschwitz.

**Title: 1952/Bridgeport, Connecticut/Sholem and Madje Asch's House/Moving Day**

John Rosen tells Asch he wants to produce The God of Vengeance in Connecticut just as Asch wrote. Asch tells him that six million people have left his theater and he will not let the play be produced. "No More," he says. "I wrote it in a different time. The time has changed on me."

<sup>5</sup> Łódź Ghetto was a Nazi ghetto established by the German authorities for Polish Jews following the German invasion of Poland in 1939.

# THEMES OF INDECENT

**Violence Against Women** - the reality of violence against women

**Homophobia** - culturally produced fear or prejudice against homosexuals, lesbians and other LGBT groups

**Jewish Culture** - the complex phenomenon of the total way of life for the Jewish people

**Artistic Freedom** - the freedom to imagine, create and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of censorship

## ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

### PLOT

The sequence of events in a play revealed through the action and/or dialogue

### tone

The manner the play is written (e.g., casual, comic, serious, somber, etc.)

### THEME

The central topic the play investigates

### OBJECTIVE

The goal a character has within a play

### CONFLICT

The clash between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates tension

### STAGING

Patterns of movement in a play, including entrances, exits, and movement on the stage

### THE FOURTH WALL

The conceptual barrier between actors onstage and the audience

[When the actors directly interact with the audience, it is referred to as "breaking the fourth wall"]

### TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Elements such as sets, costumes, lights, music, props, and makeup used to create a unified and meaningful design for a theatrical production

# DISCUSSION TOPICS

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The Common Core Standards for English, Social Studies and Theatre are set forth verbatim at the end of this study guide. The following possible discussion topics are relevant to the following Standards:

### *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

**English (9-10.RL.9):** Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

**Social Studies (9-10.RH.5):** Analyze how a text uses a structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

**Theatre (9.RE3.HS1):** Examine a drama/theatre work using supporting evidence and criteria, while considering art forms, history, culture, and other disciplines.

### **How Does Paula Vogel Use *God of Vengeance* to Create *Indecent*?**

*Indecent* came out of a Yale MFA thesis project by Rebecca Taichman (who would later direct *School Girls*), entitled *The People vs. The God of Vengeance*. She was never satisfied with the work and pitched it many times as her career progressed. When the Artistic Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival gave Taichman the greenlight, Taichman asked Paula Vogel to collaborate on the project. Vogel had seen the performance at Yale and was moved by it, so the two of them set out to create and workshop what would become *Indecent*.

The inspiration for *Indecent* is the play *God of Vengeance*, written in 1906 by Sholem Asch. His play is about a pious man who runs a brothel with his wife out of their basement in a Polish Shtetl <sup>6</sup>. They are well-off, but because of their business, they are unable to find a suitable husband for their daughter. Eventually a suitor is found, and the man decides to shut down his brothel and turn over a new leaf. He puts a Torah scroll <sup>7</sup> over his daughter's bed to protect her, but she begins going downstairs to the brothel and forms a relationship with one of his prostitutes. They run away together, and the man and his wife go on a chase to find her. Once she is back, the man berates her, and throws her into the basement with the rest of the prostitutes. It is a play about hypocrisy, both socially and religiously, and the expectations thrust upon the younger generation. However, it is the staging of the throwing of a Torah and a lesbian kiss that was the cause of its eventual notoriety.

*Indecent* takes the story of the play far beyond 1906 and up to the 1950's. During this time span, Asch became depressed due to the Holocaust and pogroms <sup>8</sup> occurring throughout Europe - starting in his home of Poland in 1919 - and pulled *God of Vengeance* from public performances. He spent the rest of his life writing and advocating for Jews worldwide, and writing romantic works surrounding Judaism, bringing their narratives to the European and American mainstream. He died in 1957 in Tel Aviv.

### **How Does Paula Vogel Use Titles to Structure the Play?**

In her notes to the play, Paula Vogel states, "All titles should be projected in both English and Yiddish except where indicated." The titles advance the chronology of the play and fix the location where action takes place. For example, in one sequence, the titles introduce several quick scenes: 1907/Berlin Opening Night; 1911/St. Petersburg; 1914/Constantinople; 1918/Bratislava; 1920/Ellis Island. Another sequence of titles explains the chronology of the play: a blink in time - in the midst of act one; a blink in time - Act Two: the first rain scene; a

blink in time - the last moments of the play. Some titles also contain information about the scene that a set could not easily convey: an impossibly long line; an attic turned into a stage. Other titles contain information about what is taking place: the very second title reads "from ashes they rise," as the actors come to life, rise and shake off their dust. The title placards move the story along in a manner similar to the way the music moves the story along, setting the time, the place, and the setting, and in some instances explain the action in a manner that is unlike the way plays are normally structured but which is necessary to cover the ground that *Indecent* covers.

### **What Role Does Klezmer Music Play in Bringing The Story To Life?**

The music in the show allows the actors to move across geography and chronology with ease even when the storytelling gets jumbled. It is hard to imagine the play without music. The songs move the play through time as it hurtles forward with various blinks in time: we are in a cabaret in Berlin in 1908-a blink in time; we are in 1923 on Broadway-a blink in time; we are in Lodz 1938-another blink; we are in 1952 Connecticut. Music seems as if it is the best way to feel these shifts in time. The musicians also are as much a part of the performance as the actors make the play feel somewhat like a musical, or, perhaps better, a musical drama. The music is klezmer. Klezmer is a musical tradition of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe. Played by professional musicians called *klezmerim* in ensembles known as *kapelye*, the genre originally consisted largely of dance tunes and instrumental display pieces for weddings and other celebrations. In the United States the genre evolved considerably as Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, who arrived between 1880 and 1924, came into contact with American jazz. Paula Vogel says about the music, "I wanted to select songs that would not forward the plot (which is why it is not a musical) but frame and alienate our story."

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<sup>6</sup>A small town with a large Jewish population which existed in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.

<sup>7</sup>The holiest book within Judaism made up of the five books of Moses.

<sup>8</sup>A Russian term that describes violent attacks on Jews in the Russian Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries.

## **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

**Debate:** In 1957, Elvis Presley's performance on the Ed Sullivan show was filmed from the waist up because his dancing was deemed "indecent." Debate the following resolution: Performances should be censored when they contain material that is deemed to be obscene or indecent.

**Yiddish Words:** Many Yiddish words appear in our common usage of language. You may have heard some of them, recognize some of them, and use some of them. Here is a list of commonly used Yiddish words. See if you can think of others:

**Schlep:** To go a far distance out of your way; "I have to schlep all the way to Evanston this afternoon."

**Meshuganeh:** Crazy; "You're meshuganeh!"

**Chutzpah:** Nerve, guts; "He's got some serious chutzpah."

**Write the definitions for these Yiddish words if you know them, or look them up:**

**Schmutz:**

**Kvell:**

**Kvetch:**

**Mensch:**

**Nosh:**

**Oy Vey:**

**Schmooze:**

**Essay 1:** The play suggests several reasons why the District Attorney arrested the producer, director and fourteen actors of *God of Vengeance* for indecency:

Rabbi Silverman, concerned that the play would cast negative aspersions on Jewish people, particularly at a time of increasing anti-Semitism, persuaded the District Attorney to shut down the play;

In translating the play from Yiddish to English to present the play on a Broadway stage, the producer took out the part of the love scene between the two women so that the scene appeared to be only about sex;

An upscale Broadway audience who was buying expensive tickets to see a play had no interest in seeing two women kissing on the stage;

Eugene O'Neill opines that they closed the play "because the play shows that every religion - even Jews - sell God for a price."

Write an essay defending any of these reasons for prosecuting the sixteen members of the troupe or any other reason for doing so.

**Essay 2:** Imagine you write an advice blog. You receive a message from a teenager whose parents are pushing them toward a career, college, or relationship that doesn't align with their own goals. Answer their request for help by providing a suggestion for how they can approach their parents to discuss their dreams.

**Art:** Design your own cover for the playbill for *Indecent*.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS?

Why was *God of Vengeance* accepted in Europe but not accepted on Broadway in America?

In the play, Asch says two things: "I try to write something for the Jewish people. I am not ashamed because I want our stories to be on every stage in every language." And, "How do we as artists question our sins in front of a greater audience? How do we as Jews show ourselves as flawed and complex human beings?" Do you think that Asch accomplished what he wanted to accomplish?

Can you think of other plays that were intended to show their characters as "flawed and complex human beings"?

Why did Rabbi Silverman denounce the play?

Who owns a play? The playwright, as Asch argues, or the people who labor in it and the audience who put aside the time to be there in person, as Lemml argues?

How does the doubling of characters in *Indecent* and the resulting ghosting impact the play's effect?

In what ways does *Indecent* reflect the current political climate? Consider: censorship, immigration, identity (both in regard to sexuality and in regard to ethnicity), assimilation, etc.

How do the play's various production elements influence the viewing experience? Consider: projections, use of music/presence of musicians onstage, dance, tableaux, use of Yiddish, dust/ashes, etc.)

What is the effect of making a protagonist out of a play that is not fully manifested onstage? How does only showing us brief portions of Asch's play influence the audience's experience of this history as it's being told?

# THEATER ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

We are so excited you are here! The audience is one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the play is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make your theatre experience enjoyable for everyone.

## BE PROMPT

Arrive in plenty of time to settle, find your seats, and get situated. Please visit the restrooms before the show begins.

## BE RESPECTFUL

Your behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. The performers can see and hear you, just as the audience can see and hear you.

## TURN OFF CELL PHONES

You may think texting is private, but the light and motion can be seen by actors and audience members and texting is distracting to those around you. Please do not check your phones, text or take photos during the performance.

## HAVE FUN AND PARTICIPATE

Rather than remaining totally silent, please note the difference between appropriate and inappropriate responses.

## APPROPRIATE

- Laughter
- Applause
- Participation (when requested)

## INAPPROPRIATE

- Talking (including whispering)
- Groaning / Booing
- Using Cell Phones / Devices

## STAY WITH US!

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

## SOURCES

Interview with Paula Vogel about *Indecent* in which she says, "I don't think of this as a grim play: I think about it as a love story in terrible times."

<https://www.vineyardtheatre.org/interview-playwright-paula-vogel-indecent/>

*God of Vengeance: Mapping Yiddish New York.* A long article discussing both *God of Vengeance* and *Indecent* in the setting of New York, with a bibliography.

<http://jewishstudiescolumbia.com/myny/uncategorized/god-of-vengeance/>

Dr. Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, Professor of English at Linfield College, pens a long article about the play in *The New Yorker* entitled, "With Her Eerily Timely 'Indecent,' Paula Vogel Unsettles American Theatre Again."

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/with-her-eerily-timely-indecent-paula-vogel-unsettles-american-theatre-again>

### Other study guides for *Indecent*:

<https://victorygardens.vicgorygardenstest.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Indecent-StudyGuide.pdf>

[https://www.guthrietheater.org/globalassets/2-shows--tickets/201718/indecent/indecent\\_playguide.pdf](https://www.guthrietheater.org/globalassets/2-shows--tickets/201718/indecent/indecent_playguide.pdf)

### Actors in the Designer Run of *INDECENT*



# **APPENDIX: OREGON COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS - HIGH SCHOOL**

### **LITERATURE**

#### ***Key Ideas and Details***

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. (9-10.RL.2)

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. (9-10.RL.3)

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed). (11-12.RL.3)

#### ***Craft and Structure***

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g.; parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. (9-10.RL.5)

Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement.) (11-12.RL.6)

#### ***Integration of Knowledge and Ideas***

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare). (9-10.RL.9)

## **SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS - HIGH SCHOOL**

### **READING**

#### ***Key Ideas and Details***

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text. (9-10.RH.2)

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them. (9-10.RH.3)

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain. (11-12.RH.3)

#### ***Craft and Structure***

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No.10). (11-12.RH.4)

Analyze how a text uses a structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis. (9-10.RH.5)

## **THEATRE STANDARDS - HIGH SCHOOL**

### **RESPONDING**

#### ***Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work***

Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices. (TH.7.RE1.HS1)

### ***Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work***

Analyze and compare artistic choices developed from personal experiences in multiple drama/theatre works. (TH.8.RE2.HS1)

Identify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work. (TH.8.RE2.HS1)

Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of drama/theatre work. (TH.8.RE2.HS1)

### ***Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work***

Examine a drama/theatre work using supporting evidence and criteria, while considering art forms, history, culture, and other disciplines. (TH.9.RE3.HS1)

Consider the aesthetics of the production elements in a drama/theatre work. (TH.9.RE3.HS1)

Formulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of drama/theatre work by considering its specific purpose or intended audience. (TH.9.RE3.HS1)

## **CONNECTING**

### ***Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art***

Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work, using theatre research methods. (TH.11.CO2.HS1)

### **Crew getting stage ready for INDECENT**





UP NEXT



# LOOKING FOR TIGER LILY



by **Anthony Hudson**

directed by

**Michael Mendelson**

