

ESL Plays at the Educational Theater of New York: Follow-Up Activities

Educational Theater of NY offers three plays for ESL learners: Benefit Performance and Idiots First, adapted from Bernard Malamud's short stories, by Barbara Bregstein.

Follow-up Activities for all Levels

“Discover a Writer in Yourself”:

1. Draw a map of characters and situations.
2. Write about one of the plays.
Look at each character and describe their feelings. What character did you like best and least?
3. **Share Your Impressions. Pair work followed by group discussion.** Some suggested questions:
 - a. Based on *Benefit Performance*: What do you think will happen with *Sophie*, *Ephraim* and the father, *Maurice*, in the future? How does *Maurice* define life? Can each of them find happiness? What are the sources of joy in their lives today? Will they be happier if they change their lifestyle, ideals or values? Can mature or older people change significantly their views on life or behavior?
 - b. Based on *Idiots First*: What do you think will happen to *Isaac* and *Mendel*? Who is *Ginzburg*? Why do you think *Ginzburg* lets *Isaac* take the train? Are *Mr. Fishbein*, the Rabbi's wife and the Rabbi generous? What do you think of the *Pawnbroker*?
 - c. Based on both plays: Can you draw parallels or see contrast between the two plays? In which ways are the characters in the first play similar to (or different from) the characters in the second play? What did the writer want the audience to feel and think about?

Advanced students

“Discover a Writer in Yourself”:

- 1. Be a Critic! Group Assignment. Task:** Write a review article for *The New York Times* “Arts and Leisure” section. More advanced students assume the role of literary critics. They must come up with a short critical article for a newspaper that defines the theme of one of the two plays, speaks about the quality of the actors’ performance, and ranks the performance. Low proficiency students have a similar, but less challenging task. They write a letter to a newspaper describing their impressions about the play and either recommending it to the other readers or not.
- 2. Be a Playwright! (Pair Assignment.) Task:** Write a dialogue, learn, practice, and present it in class. The students can use the plays only as the starting point and invent the continuation of the story. Encourage students to feel free to change the perspective of the play to comic, or absurd, or to remain true to what they felt the approach of the real playwright was, to be as sarcastic, serious, sentimental, pessimistic, witty, didactic, as they wanted to.

Possible Topics:

- 3. Find the bridge between art and life! Individual essay assignment. Task:** Identify and discuss one of the prominent themes brought up in the plays, and give examples from real life that illustrate your interpretation of the theme. The students can write about issues of loneliness, betrayal and faithfulness, cultural differences in communication style, sincerity and self-sufficiency versus dependence on others.