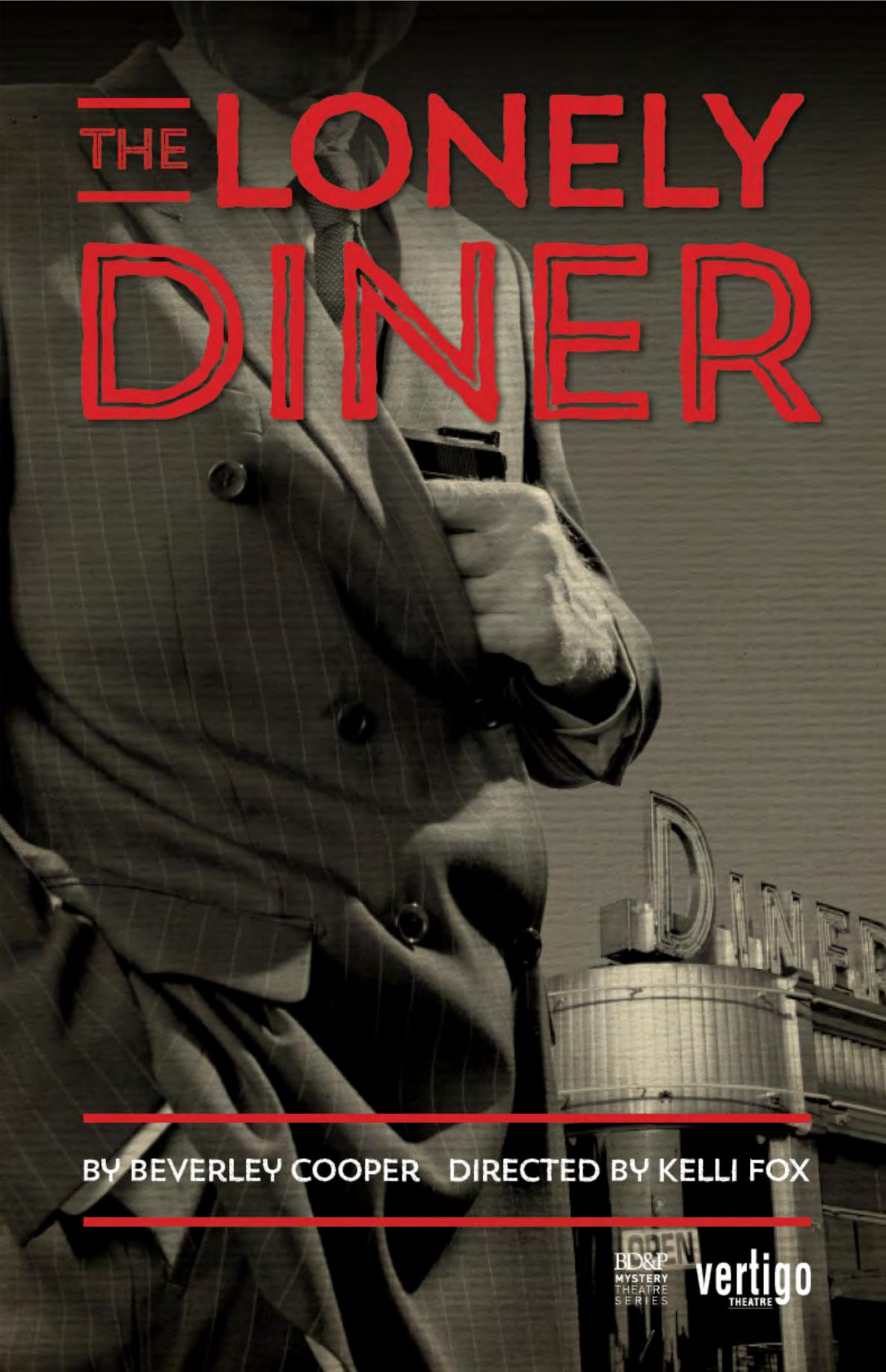


STUDY GUIDE



THE LONELY DINER

BY BEVERLEY COOPER DIRECTED BY KELLI FOX

BD&P
MYSTERY
THEATRE
SERIES

vertigo
THEATRE

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Vertigo Theatre is committed to creating a welcoming atmosphere for schools and to assist teachers and parent chaperones with that process. It is our wish to foster and develop our relationship with our student audience members. It is our intention to create positive theatre experiences for young people by providing study guides and post-show “talk backs” with our actors and theatre personnel, in order to enrich students’ appreciation of theatre as an art form and enhance their enjoyment of our plays.

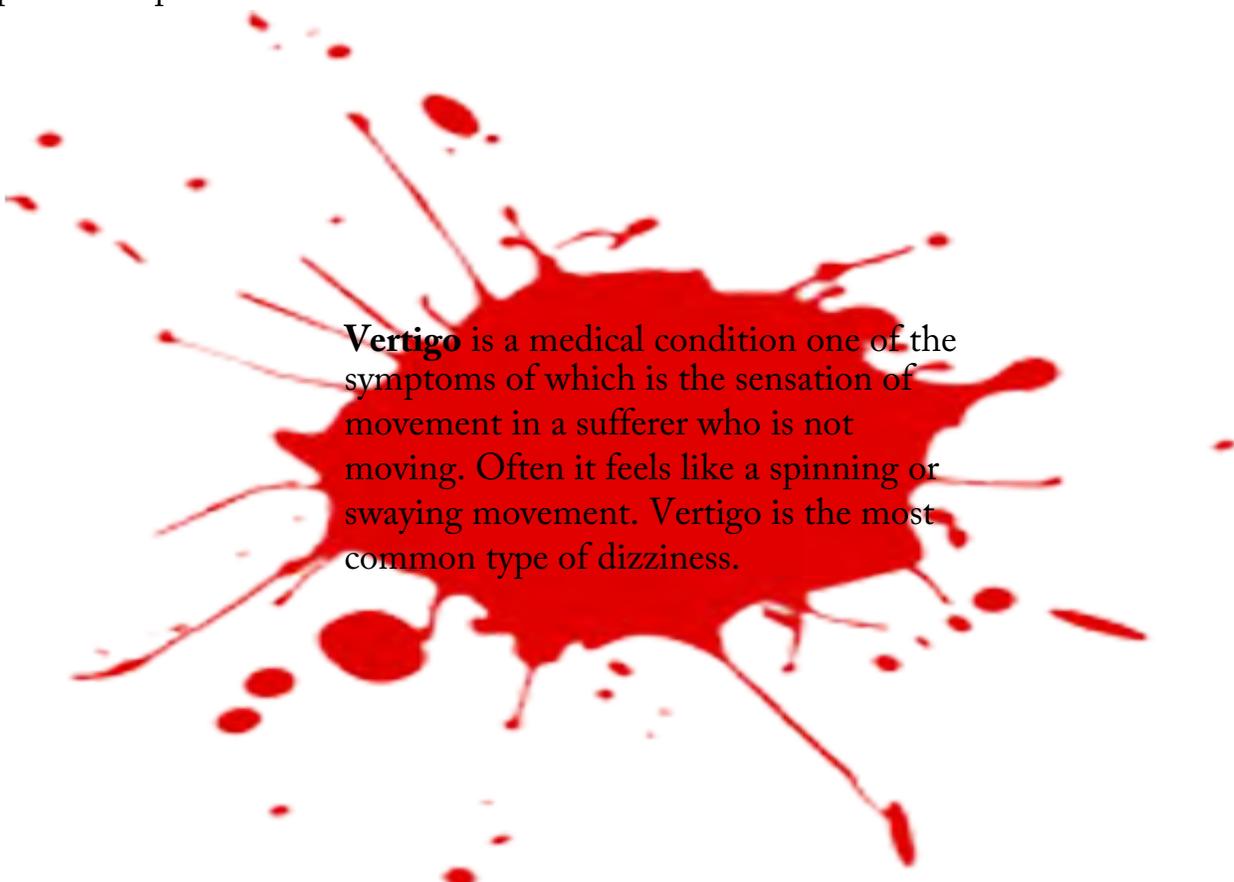
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the study guide for Vertigo Theatre's production of THE LONELY DINER by Beverley Cooper.

In this guide you will find information about the time period the play is set in, the creative team and performers, as well as a variety of activities to do with your class before and after the show. There are activities suitable for class discussion, individual writing projects, as well as games and exercises that get students moving around and learning on their feet.

For this production, you'll find activities that will get students thinking about how historical facts can be a springboard into exciting fiction, as well as exercises that will get your class creating the world of a 1920's diner. We are also featuring an interview with actor Curt McKinstry, who talks about playing an historical figure, his process in rehearsal, as well as some great gangster film and TV recommendations.

Sometimes your students might read an unusual word or term and feel some “**vertigo**”, so we've got handy-dandy blood splatters that provide definitions or point to topics of interest. Like this:



Vertigo is a medical condition one of the symptoms of which is the sensation of movement in a sufferer who is not moving. Often it feels like a spinning or swaying movement. Vertigo is the most common type of dizziness.

TOP 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GOING TO THE THEATRE

Because some of you may be first-time theatre attendees (and some of you more experienced theatregoers may need a little reminder), we've compiled a Top 10 list of some of [New York Show Tickets Do's and Don'ts of Broadway Theatre Etiquette](#) as well as a few of our own:

1. **Power Down**

Turn off your cell phone, people. Turn. It. Off. And, no, putting your cell phone on vibrate isn't good enough - the people next to you can hear that weird buzzing sound, too. Besides which, the use of cameras and recording devices in the theatre is strictly prohibited.

2. **Don't Send Text Messages During the Show**

You may think you're being all incognito, but in a darkened theatre, the light from your cell phone screen is incredibly distracting to those around you. And why do you still have your phone on anyway? We just told you to turn it off!

3. **Eat Your Lunch Before the Show, NOT during it**

This isn't the movies. Eating, drinking or chewing gum is not permitted in the theatre. There is a water fountain out in the lobby for your use during the intermission.

4. **Unwrap Cough Drops and Candies in Advance**

If you anticipate any coughing fits during the show, be sure to unwrap your lozenges before the performance starts and have them at the ready. That crinkling sound is like nails on a chalkboard during a quiet play. And, no, unwrapping it S-L-O-W-L-Y does not help the situation ... it's much, much worse.

5. **Pre-Show**

When the houselights go down at the beginning of the play, this lets you know that we're starting. It is at this moment that the actors and technical staff do their final preparation for the opening moment, so please let them do their work by being quiet and respectful.

6. **Don't Be A Disruptive Miss Manners**

Sure, it's irritating when someone's cell phone goes off, but what's even worse is when it's followed by a series of annoyed "Tsks," "Hmphs," hisses, snarls, and shouts of "Turn it off!" can be just as distracting as the original disruption.

7. **Zip Those Lips**

A quick whisper to your neighbour, or an audible reaction to something interesting that happens on stage is fine (this is live theatre, not the morgue), but keep conversations to intermission and after the show.

8. **Stay put, watch and enjoy the play.**

If you absolutely must use the washroom during the performance, please exit the theatre quickly and quietly. You will be readmitted to the theatre at the discretion of the House Manager.

9. **You're not in your Living Room**

Please do not stand up, walk around or put your feet on the seat or stage in front of you. Everyone around you, including the actors, will appreciate it.

10. **Enjoy Yourself!**

Come to the theatre to get swept away into another world. Be sure to thank all of the artists for their hard work by applauding during the curtain call.

CAST AND CREW CREDITS

THE CAST

SHAWNA BURNETT	Lucy
DECLAN O'REILLY	Ron
LARA SCHMITZ	Sylvia
STAFFORD PERRY	Mr. Mascarpone
CURT MCKINSTRY	Snorky

CREATIVE TEAM

KELLI FOX	Director
PAUL WELCH	Assistant Director
SCOTT REID	Set Designer
HANNE LOOSEN	Costume Designer
ALISON YANOTA	Lighting Designer
TIM WILLIAMS	Composer
JONATHAN LEWIS	Sound Designer
AILSAS BIRNIE	Stage Manager
JUSTIN BORN	Assistant Stage Manager
CHANDLER ONTKEAN	Apprentice Stage Manager
KEVIN COREY	Head of Props

TIME AND PLACE

A diner on the main floor of an old farmhouse.
August 1928, Southwestern Ontario.

PROHIBITION, BOOTLEGGING AND GANGSTERS

PROHIBITION

THE LONELY DINER is set in rural Ontario in 1928, eight years into the United States' Prohibition period. Under the 18th amendment, the production, transport, and sale of alcohol became illegal, though the consumption of it or private possession was not.

In Canada, a temporary national prohibition on alcohol was put in place from 1918-1920 to aid the war effort, but after 1920, alcohol prohibition was regulated on a provincial level. The Ontario Temperance Act of 1916 prohibited the sale of alcohol, though it could be manufactured for export.



The 1927 Liquor Control Act ended the temperance period and instituted the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO), which still regulates alcohol distribution today. That change in 1927 opened the doors to the ever-expanding bootlegging industry that was underway in the United States.

BOOTLEGGING



The play takes place in Euphemia Township, Ontario (which is known today as Dawn-Euphemia Township), a town near the US border only 120km from Detroit, Michigan. "Bootlegging" or "Rum-Running" became a thriving industry in the area, due to the many options for smuggling alcohol across the border.

It could be hidden in vehicles, boats, planes, and even driven across frozen rivers in the winter.

The Canadian and U.S. governments fought to squash the industry, but the high demand and ingenuity of the people involved in smuggling made this increasingly difficult. Especially when the people running the operations were some of the most famous gangsters in history.

GANGSTERS



Though there were numerous gangs involved in operations throughout the United States, the gangster who was the most successful and notorious was Al Capone. By the mid-1920s Capone was running the mafia in Chicago. He used whatever means necessary to get what he wanted including bribery and violence. This was dangerous practice, as it put him in the cross hairs of the law, however, it netted him \$60 million dollars annually, which was profitable enough to take some big risks. There are numerous stories of Capone appearances in Canada during the 1920's, and particularly along the Ontario border. These stories inspired playwright Beverley Cooper to write *THE LONELY DINER*.

SYNOPSIS & CHARACTERS

The year is 1928. Prohibition has just been lifted in Ontario but still holds firm in Chicago. For those who want a drink, the morality is shaky.

In a quiet little diner close to the U.S. border, Lucy yearns for excitement and glamour. She longs for the glamorous life she feels everyone is having but her. (Glamour built on the sale and consumption of illegal liquor.) Her husband, Ron and daughter, Sylvia, like the quiet life, but Lucy is stifled by it.

However, when a couple of well-dressed American gangsters make an after hours visit, Lucy changes her tune as the stakes get higher...

CHARACTERS

LUCY	39, a waitress and co-owner of a diner.
RON	Lucy's husband, co-owner of the diner
SYLVIA	Sweet bespectacled girl of 17, Lucy and Ron's daughter
MR. MASCARPONE	Italian American, from Chicago
SNORKY	Italian American, Brooklyn accent
BUSTER	Good guard dog, but loveable

INSIDE VERTIGO THEATRE



We talk to actor Curt McKinstry about playing a character from history, the challenges of rehearsal and gangsters.

What excites you about working on *The Lonely Diner*?

I'm excited to work with such a talented group of artists on this show. I love that it is a Canadian playwright that is using non-fictional characters to tell a unique and clever story. But above all, who doesn't want the opportunity to play a famous gangster?!

What is your favourite part of rehearsal and what part do you find the most challenging?

I think my favourite part of rehearsal is the first few days around the table, digging into who these characters are and what makes them tick. I also like when we move into the theatre and start work on the technical aspects of the show. It's when all the stage magic starts to happen. I think my least favourite part would be about a week before we move into the theatre space from the rehearsal hall. For some reason, this is the time in my process when I start to question all the choices I've made with the character. I'm aware that it is just something I go through now, but early on in my career it was a tough thing to wrap my head around.

You're playing a character based on a famous real life gangster [no spoilers ahead!] . How do you go about playing a character from history? Do you prepare for it or approach it any differently than a purely fictional character?

I have to say that this is only the second time, that I can recall, that I've actually played a non-fictional character. The challenge, both then and now, is the sheer amount of information available. It can be a bit overwhelming. I just have to tell myself that I'm not going to know EVERYTHING that there is to know about the character, but I can certainly research as much as I can. It most definitely has different challenges, and benefits, than playing a fictional character. When you are playing a fictional character, you only have the given circumstances that the script provides. With a non-fictional character, all that research plays an important part of uncovering the inner workings of that person.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received about acting?

I think the best piece of advice I've received as an actor was that, "sometimes the actor's problem, is really the character's problem". By that I mean, sometimes when I am struggling with why I, Curt, am struggling with a choice or a feeling or an action, it may be because the character is struggling in the same way. It may not be evident at first, but if I dig a bit deeper it is often the case.

What are your favourite gangster films, TV shows or books?

I think my favourite gangster films would have to be the Godfather series, but other films like Scarface, Miller's Crossing, The Untouchables, and Casino are up there as well. I'm also quite enjoying Peaky Blinders on Netflix, and we can't forget about Romeo and Juliet. One of the first gang related stories of all time.

PRE-SHOW PROJECTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Diners have long inspired artists in a number of disciplines. Films like *When Harry Met Sally*, *Pulp Fiction*, and even *Back to the Future* have important scenes set in diners. Numerous plays have also been set in a diner (*BUS STOP*, *TWO TRAINS RUNNING*), as the setting is perfect for the comings and goings of numerous characters, without the necessity of a scene change.

It has also inspired visual artists and a quick internet search of “paintings” and “diner” will yield thousands of examples. Right at the top of that list is one of the most famous examples, which is Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* (pictured below). Hopper’s paintings are particularly evocative for writers, so much so that crime writer Lawrence Sanders recently edited an anthology of stories by famous writers (*In Sunlight or In Shadow*) that take inspiration from Hopper’s paintings.



Have a go at writing the beginning of a story based on a picture of a diner. It could be a painting or a photograph or even *Nighthawks*. Choose a picture that intrigues you and take a minute to study the details. What do you notice about the diner? Is it old or new? Is it night or day? Is it crowded or nearly empty? And what about the people? What mood do they seem to be in? What relationships might they have to each other? What do you think has just happened in the picture? Or what do you think is about to happen?

IMAGINING HISTORY

Based on a True Story.

THE LONELY DINER takes the history of the prohibition era and records of real events and uses them as jumping off points to create a fictional story. We often think of stories as either true (non-fiction) or false (fiction), but there's a grey area in between. Many of the Hollywood films that show a title card that reads "Based on a True Story" are making use of this territory. Shakespeare did it, as well, with his history plays.

Start by making a list of history that you find interesting. This could be historical periods (eg. the ancient Greeks, the Victorian era, World War II) or events (eg. the first moon walk, Christopher Columbus setting sail, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth). Then imagine what part of that experience you would like to see. Is it a conversation between famous historical figures? Or perhaps the moment before a big event? Or afterwards? Or perhaps, like in *The Lonely Diner*, it's an encounter between an "average" Canadian and a gangster.

You can begin by sketching out the scene (where it takes place, when, who is involved) and then you can try writing some dialogue between characters or description of what is happening.

UNDERSCORING

Plays and films often make use of music and silent action as part of their storytelling. Music has the ability to go straight to our emotions and we can all think of songs that have an emotional impact on us. *THE LONELY DINER* makes use of this to particular effect by using a operatic aria that is bursting with emotion.

Make a list of songs that hit you hard on an emotional level. This could be positive music that pumps you up and brings a smile to your face, or it could be sad music that makes you sigh or calm music that relaxes you. Songs with no words work, but instrumental music often leaves more to the imagination.



Now, imagine a scene without dialogue. No talking, only action. Write down what's happening. Is someone getting ready for school? Or exercising? Or sneaking into a building? It's up to you. Whatever sparks your imagination.

From your list, find a song that you think would work well with your scene and read out the action as the song plays. Ask your listeners what they felt as they imagined the scene. What if you were to keep the same action, but choose a very different piece of music. How does it change their interpretations?

YOUR BURNING QUESTIONS

There will be a question and answer session after the show. What questions do you have about putting on the play? What have you always wanted to know about theatre? What do you want to know about being an actor?



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

DINER PEOPLE

A diner is a wonderful setting for a play because all kinds of interesting characters are passing through or working there. This is an improvisation exercise that will get students creating the atmosphere of a diner, while teaching them something about acting.



BUILDING A WORLD

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create a stage space and have the group sit in the audience facing it.
2. Choose a setting. A diner is a great place to start.
3. Ask everyone sitting in the audience to imagine a diner and to think of a particular kind of character who could be in that diner. It might be an employee, a customer, a person delivering supplies, etc. Get them to really think about this person's life. Where did they come from, how long have they been at the diner that day and where are they going to go next?
4. Ask them to think of a task that the character is doing. It should be something reasonable simple and repeatable and doesn't require talking. (i.e: A bus boy cleaning up the plates, a police officer eating a snack, a truck driver unloading bread into the kitchen.)
5. One by one they go up onstage and create that character and involve themselves in their chosen tasks. Let the performers know that they are not required to make it interesting to the audience. Their focus is on the task and being immersed in it.
6. You can also prompt them to think about why the task is important. (Eg. A bus boy is working his first shift and wants to prove himself, a police officer has had a hard day and is trying to relax, a truck driver is late for another delivery and is trying to catch up, etc.)
7. Let the improvisation play out until about half the group has had a chance to experience life as that character for awhile.
8. You can do the improvisation again with a different setting.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

For the audience:

- Did we believe that the characters were really in that world?
- Were we intrigued by what was going on in their lives? Can we guess why the tasks were important to them?

For the performers:

- Did you feel self-conscious or were you able to immerse yourself in your task? (Usually if we are involved deeply in a task we worry less about the audience.)
- How might it have been different if you were trying to keep the audience interested?
- What did you find challenging in the improvisation?

MYSTERIOUS STRANGERS

Part of the fun of *THE LONELY DINER* is trying to figure out who the mysterious strangers are. The following exercise will put students into a similar situation.



WHO AM I?

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set up a few chairs in the space, but not in such a way that they imply a very specific location.
2. Performer A sits on the chair and waits. Performer B is given a secret character to play by the instructor. This could be a gangster, a doctor, a fireman, etc.
3. Performer B decided in his head who he wants performer A to be. If B is a gangster, he might decide A is an FBI agent. If B is a Doctor, then A might be his patient. If B is a fireman, A might be the fire chief.
4. Performer B initiates the scene by entering and talking to Performer A.
5. Performer A plays the scene as though he knows who B is, even though he does not.
6. The challenge is for A to figure out who each of them are playing, and for B to play the scene without indicating to A who he is. (An example of this would be "Hello, my new patient!", which of course no one actually says in real life.)

7. Encourage the performers to choose physicalities for their characters and different vocal qualities. We learn just as much from how characters move and behave as we do from what they say. (*Note: Doing the previous exercise is a great lead into this one.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Was performer A able to figure out who he and B were playing?
- Did performer B " **indicate**" too much or did he play the scene honestly?
- Were we intrigued by the characters?



Indicating " In acting, to indicate is to show.
I repeat, *show* the audience feeling, emotion,
character through external means, through
gesture, through demonstration, energy, voice,
without really feeling or experiencing the moment.
It's a token, a symbol, the shell of the thing without
internal connection to the actual experience. "
- From *Acting Class: Take a seat* by Milton Katselas.

POST-SHOW PROJECTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about Lucy trying to talk her daughter out of her crush on the "freckly farm boy"? Is she looking out for her daughter's interests by trying to persuade her to look beyond her life in the town or is she controlling her?
2. Were Ron and Lucy justified in being a party to illegal activities considering their need and the simplicity of what they were asked to do? Or are there clear boundaries of right and wrong?
3. How has Lucy's perspective of her life changed at the end of the play?
4. Did you find the gangsters sympathetic in the story? Were they played as you might expect a gangster to be played or did anything surprise you?
5. Do you see any hope for Ron and Lucy at the end of the play? Do you think they will be able to reconcile, or is this the end of their relationship?



THE ART OF THE THEATRE REVIEW

Now that you've seen the production, it's time to write a review. But how do you do it? Where do you start? The Guardian Theatre critic Lyn Gardner *suggests*:

A traditional theatre review often begins by giving the reader some background about a production, a brief outline of plot and themes, a sense of what the staging looks (and sounds) like; it offers an evaluation of the writing, the production and the performances and concludes with a summing up.

But, most importantly, she says that:

The first rule is that there are no rules – you're writing a review to express your thoughts and feelings about a theatre show, not taking an exam. There are as many ways to write a review as there are personal responses to any production. There is no right or wrong. Allow yourself to develop your own distinctive voice, and be honest about what you really think about a production: convey your enthusiasm for it or explain why you disliked it. Don't worry about going out on a limb. A timid theatre review is often a dull read. The hardest reviews to write are not about the shows you passionately loved or hated, but about ones that were just so-so.

To begin, jot down what stuck with you in the production.

- What do you remember the most?
- Which performances did you love and why?
- What did you think of the costumes, the set, the lighting, the sound?
- Did you like the story?
- Did the production make you feel something?

This last question is perhaps the most important. Kenneth Tynan, one of the most celebrated critics of all time said the following about that very topic:

If a play does anything—either tragically or comically, satirically or farcically—to explain to me why I am alive, it is a good play. If it seems unaware that such questions exist, I tend to suspect that it's a bad one.

By “explain to me why I am alive”, Tynan is suggesting that a play should speak to you about some aspect of your life. Some other questions you could address are:

- If you lost interest, where did the production go wrong?
- Was there a part of the story that you had difficulty accepting? A performance you didn't believe? A twist in the story that didn't make sense?
- Would you recommend this play to others? Was it worth your time?

Bonus Activity!

Can you summarize your review in the length of a tweet? You get 140 characters. This includes spaces!

If you're on [Twitter](#), tag Vertigo with [@vertigotheatre](#), so we can know what you thought!

ABOUT VERTIGO THEATRE

We are a professional, not-for-profit charitable organization with a dual artistic mandate.

Our mission is to thrill, entertain and challenge by creating theatre that ignites the curiosity of our community. We are dedicated to the revitalization of the Mystery Theatre genre and to inspiring and mentoring the next generation of arts leaders.

Our vision is to be a premiere cultural institution in Calgary. Vertigo Theatre occupies a unique place in Calgary's cultural landscape as:

- The only professional theatre in Canada producing a series of professional plays based in the mystery genre
- Providing a performance home for other arts and arts education organizations
- Committed to mentorship and training in all areas – artistic, production and administration

Vertigo Theatre is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and engages under the terms of The Canadian Theatre Agreement professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actor's Equity Association.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH PROGRAM STUDENT MATINEES

BD&P Mystery Theatre Series

Vertigo is the only professional theatre company in Canada that produces a full season of plays based in the mystery genre, encompassing classical and contemporary work that stimulates, entertains and engages the audience.

ACCESS FOR YOUNG

AUDIENCES (AYA) PROGRAM

Theatre for young audiences is an exceptional art form that, over and over again, has proven to be a significant contributing factor in the development of children. Studies have shown that sustained exposure to the performing arts at an early age develops an appreciation of music, dance and theatre that lasts a lifetime.

The Access for Young Audiences program offers a much-needed resource to schools and community groups that represent children and teens who are considered 'high needs' by providing low-cost or free tickets to productions in our BD&P Mystery Theatre Series. The AYA program levels socio-economic backgrounds and allows kids to be kids, and teens to relate to each other on a deeper, more meaningful level. Children and teens are exposed to positively positioned real-life issues (bullying, drug-addiction or racism), and the concept and impact of empathy for others. Most importantly, the AYA program is a tool to incubate the next generation of artists and arts supporters.