



Teacher's Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Medina Apartment Hotels in association with PowerArts present

SPRING AWAKENING

A NEW MUSICAL



Book and lyrics by **Steven Sater**

Music by **Duncan Sheik**

Based on the original play by

Frank Wedekind

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SPRING AWAKENING

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2010

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SYNOPSIS

Spring Awakening takes its inspiration from one of literature's most controversial masterpieces – a work so daring in its depiction of teenage self-discovery, it was banned from the stage and not performed in its complete form in English for nearly 100 years.

It's Germany, 1891. A world where the grown-ups hold all the cards. The beautiful young Wendla explores the mysteries of her body, and wonders aloud where babies come from, till Mama tells her to shut it, and put on a proper dress.

Elsewhere, the brilliant and fearless young Melchior interrupts a mind-numbing Latin drill to defend his buddy Moritz – a boy so traumatised by puberty he can't concentrate on anything. Not that the Headmaster cares. He strikes them both and tells them to turn in their lesson.

One afternoon – in a private place in the woods – Melchior and Wendla meet by accident, and soon find within themselves a desire unlike anything they've ever felt.

As they fumble their way into one another's arms, Moritz flounders and soon falls out of school. When even his one adult friend, Melchior's mother, ignores his plea for help, he is left so distraught he can't hear the promise of life offered by his outcast friend Ilse.

(http://www.springawakening.com/spring_awakening_on_broadway.php)

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Geordie Brookman

Musical Director – Robert Gavin

Choreographer – Kate Champion

Set Designer – Anna Tregloan

Costume Designer – Tess Schofield

Sound Designer – Steve Francis

Lighting Designer – Niklas Pajanti

Associate Musical Director – Eric Rasmussen



THEMES

- Sexual awakening
- Adolescence
- Teen pregnancy
- Youth suicide
- Abuse
- Religion
- Generations

CAST

Akos Armont, Clare Bowen, Ali Calder, Olivia Charalambous, Thomas Conroy, Helen Dallimore, Edward Grey, Andrew Hazzard, Nicholas Kong, Erica Lovell, Scott Morris, Berynn Schwerdt, Angela Scundi, Rebecca Lee Slade, Christy Sullivan, Jamie Ward, Alex Woodward.

SPRING AWAKENING

Sydney Theatre Company Production Education Resources 2010

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

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BERYNN SCHWERDT ON PLAYING ALL OF THE ADULT MALE CHARACTERS

Notes on a discussion with Elizabeth Surbey

A note from Elizabeth: though most of what you read below is not verbatim, I thought this discussion might allow a further insight into the production.

Berynn Schwerdt plays all the 'adult' male characters in the production. These include the Headmaster, teacher, various fathers, and a doctor.

The OTHERS, Berynn notes, are representative of the social forces that are oppressing the young saplings or indeed seedlings are pressing up against the earth. There will be differences to play, differences of oppression or suppression, and allowing the performer to manipulate different styles in these various authority figures. It will be challenging to make them distinct...although there can be a bit of sameness about them.

Why has the production gone with describing these figures as representative through one player (one each for the adult male and the adult female)?

Of course at this point we may consider budgetary constraints (as is so often the case in the theatre), however Berynn declares it was a great decision allowing one actor to play so many roles and have fun pulling it off! We discuss the difficulty in his challenge to find momentum with such quick changes and brief visits on the stage expected to reveal much, but he loves the variety of what he has to play on stage.

There may be something in the adults being representative of or distorted by how the young people see them, allowing for a much larger than life portrayal (for example, the Headmaster and his offsider). Such stylisation to the characters can also be seen in the original Vedekind stage play. The production may well benefit from the comic relief this allows the audience amongst the more serious content of the story, preventing *Spring Awakening* from becoming too heavy, too maudlin, and too tragic a story.

A great point to these characters is that they allow the audience to see how the adult world has let the young people down in so many ways. Mother says she will tell Wendla everything yet the audience knows she doesn't do a good job of this.

However, the relationship between the adults and youths isn't black and white. Melchior knows more than he allows for, but he is still only sixteen. Does age allow something in its attempt to just 'be'? He has the intellectual age, but he doesn't have the wisdom – for that we can forgive him.

The play ends with a song entitled 'Purple Summer'. Purple is wounds, purple is autumn, purple is sexuality. This final song helps us to acknowledge that when these young people come through the spring of their lives to enter their summer or adulthood, they do not come through without bruising. As in all life, with every new life and growth there is the shadow of mortality. Musicals often conclude with a song that allows for some reconciliation, which is perhaps a point of difference with stage drama. So to recognise the final song's suggestion that the characters have not survived unscathed reflects the play that lies as the foundation of the musical.

'Purple Summer' is also a song initiated by the character Ilse, who has maintained a presence throughout before we see her actually brought onto the stage and into plot. She is ever present in the girls' chorus as a shadow or echo of the young characters, but we only learn of her actual importance in the final scenes of the play. She is a survivor and perhaps a link between the young people and their stumble into adulthood. Yet she too has been bruised.

Spring Awakening

Forget Chicago – These kids are going to tear up the stage

Whereas most musical theatre in Australia is imported from London and New York with strict and comprehensive instructions about reproducing the original production, Sydney Theatre Company has obtained permission to rework the aesthetic of Tony Award-winning Broadway blockbuster musical *Spring Awakening*, for their 2010 season. Within the Australian music theatre industry, non-replica productions are almost unheard of.

Taking the reigns are director Geordie Brookman (*Baghdad Wedding*) and choreographer Kate Champion (*The Age I'm In*), who have given their own flavour to the explosive story of twelve teens on a collision course with adulthood. Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater's Broadway musical, was adapted from Frank Wedekind's seminal 19th century play, which (with its frank depiction of sex and suicide, lust, repression and rape) was banned as pornography when it opened in New York in 1917.

The spirit of Wedekind's play, if distilled, would be a frank treatment of youth - who Wedekind refused to judge or idealise; rather he saw youth for the serious experience it too often is – while also recognizing that it is often silly, brutal and senseless. The trick for any re-production would be to capture the "truth" of that experience, without reducing it to the clichés that dominate the media.

Champion saw *Spring Awakening* by chance while she was in New York with her production of *Dirty Dancing*. It immediately stood out amidst the razzle-dazzle of Broadway. "A lot of the musicals were either Disney or had that Disney flavour, more polished and classic, clichéd Broadway - whereas *Spring Awakening* had grown from a development process that started on off-off-Broadway; even though I saw it well into its run, it still had a really different quality and aesthetic to any other musical I had seen on Broadway."

Champion, whose passion is dance theatre rather than straight dance, collaborated closely with Brookman on the work. "[Geordie] knows how I work with my company (Force Majeure) – I don't go into a studio and make up lots of moves on my own body and then teach them; and I'm also not interested in that sort-of clichéd musical theatre language:'

Champion's creative process is task based - 'you encourage [the performers] to invent moves of their own, then you sculpt them and shape them and edit them into the musical score, she explains. This was an important approach for a work where authenticity was key. Another factor was the cast, who were selected through a series of open calls and auditions, and drew on people with no dance experience.

"I gave them improvisation [tasks] that I then filmed and worked with, to get the actual material from the cast, says the choreographer. "[I think] a lot of music video language has strayed into musical theatre - and I was trying not to repeat that; I was trying to find a rawness that comes from being 17 or 18 - a raw energy, a frustration, an awkwardness"

It calls to mind another STC production, last year - *Once and For All We're Gonna Tell You Who We Are, So Shut up and Listen*. That production also focussed on achieving the rawness of youth, by putting its young performers in the driving seat, and using improvisations to devise the work. But whereas *Once and For All* showed attractive, apparently well-adjusted teens experimenting with sexuality, relationships and self-expression, *Spring Awakening*

puts its characters in extreme situations - its got everything:' Champion agrees -"teenage suicide, abortion, incest - the list just goes on:'

Despite all that, Champion says its a fun - wild - ride. "Its such a bittersweet [experience]. I think it's affirming, in that life goes on - no one can avoid those harder lessons in life, and it's all part and parcel of that age. [This production] affirms that struggle is a necessary part of life!"

Dee Jefferson, The Brag, 1 Feb 2010

THE EVOLUTION OF SPRING AWAKENING: FROM OFF OFF-BROADWAY TO SYDNEY

Writer Steven Sater first began collaborating with composer Duncan Sheik on *Spring Awakening* in 1999. Over the next seven years they laboured to turn Frank Wedekind's controversial play about teen yearning and adult repression in a small German town into a musical. The end result would be a Tony Award-winning Broadway hit, sold-out houses, critical praise and a cult of devoted teenage fans. The journey to get to that point was a different story all together.

The creation of *Spring Awakening* went through many varied stages in its development process. The idea was partially born out of the Columbine school shootings, was stalled by 11 September and was re-invigorated by George Bush's abstinence campaign. It involved numerous workshops, concerts and rewrites over what would eventually add up to be a seven year process of development from original concept to off-Broadway staging. Lea Michele, who originated the role of Wendla during its development and eventually played the role on Broadway, was only 14 years of age when workshops for creating the show began.

Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik had been working together on various projects for a number of years. Sheik was best known as a pop singer and songwriter and was somewhat surprised when Steven Sater approached him to work on writing a musical adaptation of *Spring Awakening*. Duncan Sheik had composed an arrangement of song demos for the original concept of *Spring Awakening* in which the plot followed more closely that of the original play's. However, Sheik had always had a problem with musicals that left him wondering why someone was singing something they could just as easily speak. So when the idea of using the songs in the show as inner

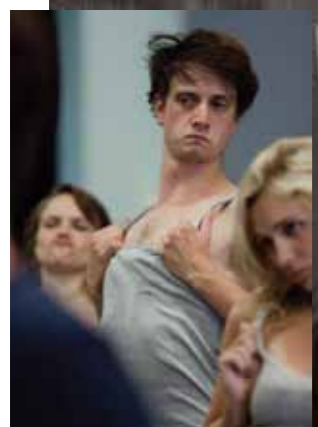
monologues came to fruition, the concept began to flow more freely.

The continuing process of development was similar to the creation of most Broadway shows in that it involved constantly changing scripts, song lists and lyrics. It had producer-enforced exclusions and director-enforced inclusions. The young cast of workshop performers and dedicated team of creatives continued to push the show forward. *Spring Awakening* premiered Off-Broadway at the Atlantic Theatre Company on May 19, 2006 and ran through until August 17, 2006. The show then opened on Broadway at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre on December 10, 2006 and received rave reviews.

Spring Awakening would go on to receive eleven 2007 Tony Award nominations, winning eight, including for Best Musical, Direction, Book, Score and Feature Actor. The show also won four Drama Desk Awards, including Outstanding Musical. The original production was directed by Michael Mayer and choreographed by Bill T. Jones.

Spring Awakening has continued to be successful on the international scene. As well as being staged in London's West End, replica productions of *Spring Awakening* have been staged in countries such as Sweden, South Korea, Austria and Japan. The only non-replica production to be staged thus far was a non-English translation in Hungary. It premiered on 7 February 2009 in Budapest at Budapest Operetta and Musical Theatre. It is often praised for its use of eccentric interpretive dance and disco cubes.

Sydney Theatre Company's production of *Spring Awakening*, directed by Geordie Brookman and choreographed by Kate Champion with musical direction by Robert Gavin, will be the first non-replica English speaking





production of the show. The process for creating the Australian production began in early 2009 when it was slated to be one of the first shows in the Company's 2010 Main Stage Season. Once the creative team was in place, the task of auditioning to find the young and talented cast got under way.

The casting for the show revolved around almost two months of open calls with people coming from all over the country, and internationally, to audition. During the open calls the team auditioned more than 1200 people. They arrived early and lined up along The Wharf for the first two days of open calls. A mass of young, hopeful and talented 16-24 years olds gathered for their chance to be in the Australian premiere production of *Spring Awakening*. The expectations were high and the talent level even higher. It soon became apparent that narrowing down a short list would be the most difficult part of casting the show. Open calls continued in Melbourne a few weeks later and soon after that a short list of call backs was created.

The final round of callbacks saw an exciting group of more than 40 young hopefuls vying for only 15 roles. They included classically trained opera singers, professional actors, lead singers of rock bands and a 17 year old who had auditioned whilst still in their school uniform. The group was brought together for a final call back in hopes of finding the right combination of "kids". After extensive scene work, singing workshops and movement calls the difficult process of selecting what would be the final cast began.

Armed with memories and video tape of auditions, headshots, resumes and a strong gut feeling, the audition panel were somewhat spoilt for choice when they sat down to select the best group of young performers to tell this story. And this is the group you see on stage before you. A cast of incredibly dedicated and passionate young performers, willing to put themselves out there and to give absolutely everything, every day, to create an unforgettable piece of theatre.

Rehearsals for *Spring Awakening* began on December 21, 2009. The creative team and the cast have worked tirelessly to create a production that resonates with both young audiences and everyone who remembers the pain and passion of their teenage years. The cast have been intricately involved in the creation of this production in almost every way possible. They have their fingerprints on everything from character to choreography, costumes to haircuts. It was an essential and appropriate part of the creative process for a show such as this and is testament to what young talent can create when given an opportunity to do so.

MARK GRENTELL



Performing Arts



Spring Awakening
March 2010
Best Award Winner

Theatre, dance, opera and more. Edited by Nick Dent

Sex, lies and rock 'n' roll

The hit Broadway musical **Spring Awakening** is here to sweep Sydney up in a hormonal rush

Elvis may be the king of rock 'n' roll, and Jack White his heir apparent, but their royal lineage dates back at least as far as 1891, to a play by a Munich bon vivant called Frank Wedekind. *Spring Awakening: A Children's Tragedy* explosively portrayed the stirrings of pubescent desire and the dangers of keeping the young in the dark on matters of sex. Tackling incestuous, masturbation, homosexuality, child abuse and abortion, it has been consistently banned ever since.

"It's absolutely take-no-prisoners," says Geordie Brookman (Raghdaf Wedding), who's directing the new musical version of *Spring Awakening* for the Sydney Theatre Company. "The way it confronts all the basic issues of adolescence head-on is incredibly brave. Parts of it still shock a contemporary audience, and that's why it's such a *comp de theatre* for [composer] Duncan Sheik, and Steven Sater to have injected rock 'n' roll into it, because at its best rock 'n' roll is the perfect expression of that conflicted place of adolescence."

Spring Awakening, the musical, still locates its action in a pious provincial burg in fin de siècle Germany, but the characters' inner monologues are expressed through contemporary rock ballads. "It's two really dynamic points to work between," says Brookman. He and the STC have been given the green light to stage their own "non-replica" version – a rarity for a multiple Tony-winning Broadway smash. "It's wonderful they feel secure enough in their own material to let other people reinterpret it. The kids can sing in Australian voices, so it can really connect with its audience."

Unlike in typical high school fare, the show's toy jocks, geeks and popular girls have little idea what's happening to them or why. When Wendla (Clare Bowen) asks her mother where babies come from, she's lobbed off with nonsense about the stork, while sensitive Moritz (Akos Armas) is tormented by his erotic dreams. The exception is worldly-wise rebel Melchior (Andrew Hazard), who has studied biology books, but even he is thrown by the rush of emotions that comes with his first fury into sex.

"Melchior's book smart," says Haz-



Why must I be a teenager in love? Melchior (Andrew Hazard) goes in for the push with Wendla (Clare Bowen)

ard, a Sam Worthington-in-writing who appeared in the local stage version of *High School Musical*. "But that's really his downfall – he thinks he knows everything."

"Teenage actors give it to you with absolute truth and immediately"

"Wendla's the polar opposite of Melchior," says Bowen, a radiant stage newcomer who got her break in David Field's film *The Combination*. "She's all sensation and discovering things about her body. She doesn't know what she's feeling, and there's a scene where she and Melchior end up

beating one another for sheer want of sensation."

The production features 15 young performers found via open calls in Sydney and Melbourne, not unlike *Australian Idol*. Ages range from 17 to 24; some went straight from their HSC into rehearsals, and 40 per cent don't have any prior professional credits. "It's a whole different energy that radiates off them," Brookman says. "They give it to you with absolute truth, and they give it to you immediately." All the adult roles, meanwhile, are played by the versatile Helen Dalrymple and Beryn Schwend.

Given that the show's action is driven by ignorance about sex, do the actors recall how they first learned about the birds and the bees?

"I grew up in the country and animals are not really shy," quips Bo-

wen. "But that doesn't immediately translate to people. That's why this is such a good show for school groups to come and see."

"I'm lucky because my mum is a doctor," laughs Hazard. "The first time I said 'where do babies come from' she was like 'I'll tell you!' Not like the experience of these characters at all." "My parents were open and talked me through stuff," says Brookman. "Which didn't stop it from being a hugely embarrassing conversation."

"There's more progressive sex education in schools now but it almost doesn't matter how educated you are about the facts of life, that knowledge and the actual event and the mess of emotions that get churned up is completely different territory."

Spring Awakening Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay, 4–28 Feb

1/Feb/2010

Daring *Spring Awakening*...

When asked recently at a subscriber briefing if *Spring Awakening* was a “family show” my answer, in brief, was all I could do to stop myself short of tearing at my hair and swimming out to sea... indefinitely.

I believe in a kind of theatre that teaches us *why* we grieve, why we love and why we choose to go on living in a world of moribund personal connectedness. I believe in theatre of *passion* and *experience*, where one is not moved to go by a subscription, but where one goes to be *moved*.

In short, yes... *Spring Awakening* is an experience for anyone who has lost or loved and still lives passionately. *Spring Awakening* is an experience that will remind some of us of the fragile beauty of youth as well as its capacity for self-destruction and self-aggrandizement. *Spring Awakening* will confront, surprise, entertain and celebrate the joys and the follies of all life, young *and* old.

We no longer teach our children how to grieve, but to mourn with decorum. We don't teach them how to love, but how to practice love in moderation. We don't teach our young to live with passion, but to exercise excess with discretion.

Culturally, our approach to regulating the academic development of our young people is done so with the best intentions at heart, but regulation cannot account for the needs of the human soul.

And so my plea to you is this; instead of retreating to familiar idioms and wary skepticism, let us take our young people by the hand, show them to their seats and teach them to live with the passions, through theatre and through the arts... not irrespective of our individual family values, though not irrespective of the individuals who define that bond either.

-Akos Armont

(Moritz Stiefel)



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“

MORITZ: You start to cave,
you start to cry. You try to
run, nowhere to hide.

You want to crumble up,
and close that door. ”

Act One, Scene Ten.
Spring Awakening.

It can be difficult to discuss the themes brought up in *Spring Awakening* in a teaching environment, so we suggest you facilitate discussion between the students themselves, rather than engaging with the whole class.

Please mention:

Lifeline – **13 11 14** or www.lifeline.org.au

Kids Helpline – **1800 55 1800** or www.kidshelp.com.au
as well as any counselling services at your school or in your region.



AIM: discover how this play, which has origins over 100 years ago, remains relevant to teenagers and families today.



DECODING EMOTIONS

Stand in a line or a circle (note, these exercises are often even more effective if some students stand as outside observers).

Person A begins by showing the group a simple gesture or subtle, barely evident facial expression.

Person A then turns to the Person B, standing next to them, showing the expression unchanged.

Person B takes on the exact expression and then turns to face the group, adding the next layer of subtle emotion to extend the expression.

Continue through the group, extending the emotional expression whilst facing the audience and delivering the new version to the next person and so on.

By the end of the line (or circle) the ‘look’ can be quite extreme – or perhaps go even further and the distortion can be a way of creating an emotional caricature.



Play with physical gestures or vocal sounds.

Get students to create simple but non-literal gestures with their hands that would 'say' something. eg: Open hands with your palms out, thumbs up, punch fist out and pull back, link fingers and rip them apart.

Discuss:

1. How much do we rely on body language to interpret what people say?
2. Do you agree that there is a parallel between the use of body language as a way of expressing feelings externally, and the use of the 'inner monologue' songs within *Spring Awakening*?
3. Is body language always conscious?
4. In *Spring Awakening*, the boys and girls form a united chorus, both vocally and physically. Do you think body language is a shared language, common to all people?



Write a declaration for the Independence of Thought for teenagers.

Present your declaration to your class.

Discuss:

1. What would be your liberating ideas for how teenagers could feel less stifled by society?
2. What ideas do you have to create a nurturing, stimulating, legal yet unburdened environment for yourselves?
3. Are there lyrics in *Spring Awakening* that express the same goals or ideals you have written?
4. What would be the limitations or restrictions on any of your suggestions being implemented in your home or school environment?
5. Do you think your declaration can apply to every teenager in Australia?
6. Do you think every teenager shares a similar experience?
7. How do we teach others to celebrate the teenage experience rather than dismiss it as 'just a stage they're going through'?

“

MORITZ: Well, I see, and hear,
and feel, quite clearly.

And yet, everything seems so
strange.

”

Act One, Scene Four.
Spring Awakening.



WISHING WALL

Write a wish on a post-it note.

Keep them general and non-specific for anonymity.



Stick the post-its anonymously on a wall for everyone to see and reflect upon.

Discuss:

1. What links can be found amongst the topics revealed?
2. Are there any wishes that reflect some of the themes in *Spring Awakening*?
3. Are there any unexpected or surprising wishes?



Create a wall of fear.

Discuss as above, including mentioning the services listed above.



POSTCARDS

Walk freely about the space.

When prompted, create a still image that would feature on a postcard.

For example, five people at the beach, or two people having a romantic dinner.



TABLEAUX/MACHINES

Walk freely about the space.

When prompted, create a machine or a tableau.

Trigger titles: generation gap, school, forbidden love, failure, spring, winter, hope, fear, etc.

Discuss:

1. What were the differences between creating a machine and a tableau?
2. Which was easier? Why?
3. What common themes/issues emerged?
4. Were there any unexpected or unusual machines or tableaux?

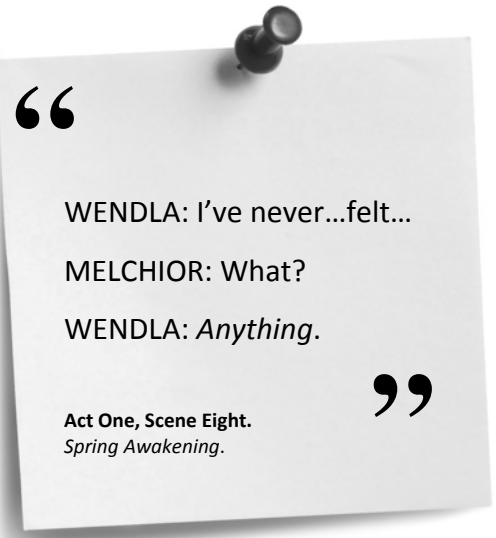


Repeat tableau/machine but present each machine or tableau using a specific musical genre.

For example, opera, Broadway, rap, country western, Gilbert & Sullivan, etc.

Discuss:

1. Did a musical genre make the game harder or easier?
2. What differences did a musical genre make to your machines/tableaux?





Choose a song you know where the lyrics reveal the thoughts of the performer.

Write a song or poem with a repeat chorus on themes of forbidden love, generational conflict, wish fulfillment, or another of the themes in *Spring Awakening*.



Note, these need only be the poetry behind song lyrics, unless you would like to write the music as well.

Discuss:

1. What do the lyrics of your chosen song reveal?
2. Do you think these 'song soliloquies' are an effective theatrical tool in promoting greater empathy for the characters in *Spring Awakening*?
3. Do you think songs have a capacity to express emotions that one cannot say?
4. Are these emotions expressed literally, or through the use of metaphors for the human condition?
5. Are there similar themes expressed in your chosen song and a song in *Spring Awakening*?
6. Do you agree with the theory that what cannot be said must be sung? **Research your response.

“

If a composer could say
what he had to say in words,
he would not bother trying
to say it in music.

”

Gustav Mahler, Composer.

“

THEA: But how will we know what to do if our parents don't tell us?

”

Act One, Scene Seven.
Spring Awakening.

The youths in *Spring Awakening* face a series of difficult choices as they discover more about life, the human condition, and themselves. These choices are influenced by their peers, their families, the adults in the play, and the information and support available to them.

Please mention:

Lifeline – **13 11 14** or www.lifeline.org.au

Kids Helpline – **1800 55 1800** or www.kidshelp.com.au

as well as any counselling services at your school or in your region.



AIM: To explore options and perspectives for a character experiencing major life decisions and to gain an understanding of the influences on, and consequences of, our decisions.



Write a declaration for the Independence of Thought for teenagers.

Present your declaration to your class.

Discuss:

1. What would be your liberating ideas for how teenagers could feel less stifled by society?
2. What ideas do you have to create a nurturing, stimulating, legal yet unburdened environment for yourselves?
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6. Do you think all teenagers share similar experiences?
7. How do we teach others to celebrate the teenage experience rather than dismiss it as 'just a stage they're going through'?

“

Thus our society has passed from a period which was ignorant of adolescence to a period in which adolescence is the favourite age.

”

Philippe Aries, French Historian.
Cited in the *Spring Awakening* program.



Create a list of behaviour etiquette for the 1890s, either for general life, or specifically in relation to the workplace, school, social dinners, transport etiquette, going to the theatre, buying or selling real estate etc.

Keep it amusing by putting in brackets things that relate to 2010 as a comparison.

For example: The man always introduces himself first (and should always have pants on).

When passing people you should touch the brim of your hat with your left hand in acknowledgement (and hold your crotch Michael Jackson style with the other).

It is good to be able to quote classical literature (as in, “Gag me with a spoon, dude! Where’s my car?” from *Dude, where’s my car?*)



View comparative texts with similar themes to *Spring Awakening*: generation gap, dangerous love, teen pregnancy, youth suicide:

Romeo & Juliet, Shakespeare’s text and *Romeo + Juliet*, the adaptation directed by Baz Luhrmann, 1996.



West Side Story, directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, an adaptation of the Broadway musical: book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, United States, 1961.

Somersault, written and directed by Cate Shortland, Australia, 2004.

Juno, directed by Jason Reitman and written by Diablo Cody, United States, 2007.

Dead Poets Society, directed by Peter Weir and written by Tom Schulman, United States, 1989.



OPTION ALLEY

Split the class into two parallel lines, facing each other to create an alley.

Choose Person A to stand at one end and ask a closed question about a major life decision. For example, Should I leave school? Should I go to university?

One side of the alley is ‘for’ the option, the other side is ‘against.’

As Person A walks down the alley past each person, they take it in turns to give their argument as to why they should or shouldn’t make the choice.

Note, no argument can be repeated.

Person A gets to the end of the alley and, based on the strength of arguments, makes a decision and tells it to the class.

Repeat the exercise with different players, each faced with a dilemma in *Spring Awakening* – suicide, losing their virginity, leaving school etc.


+ **Take** the ideas and arguments generated by the alley and create an scene in which a character is facing their dilemma, and is meet by ghosts of his/her life that influence his decision.

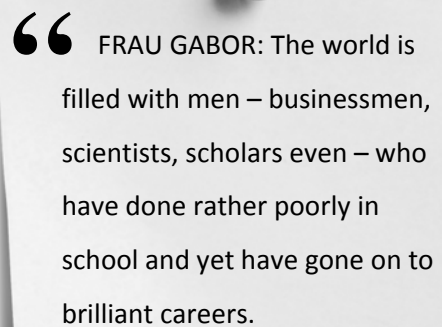
Research a significant person who did not do well at school but has gone on to be successful in their career. For example, Paul McCartney.

Do a comparative study of two people – one who did well and one who didn't do well at school.

Present your findings and observations to the class.

Discuss:

- 
1. What is your reaction to this quote?
 2. Do you feel that your parents and teachers have high expectations of you?
 3. What do you expect of yourself as a student?
 4. What makes a good student?
 5. A good teacher?
 6. A good parent?
 7. Have societal expectations of education changed?



“ FRAU GABOR: The world is filled with men – businessmen, scientists, scholars even – who have done rather poorly in school and yet have gone on to brilliant careers.

Act One, Scene Ten,
Spring Awakening.

”

+ **Watch** the recently released film *An Education* by Nick Hornby, based on a memoir by Lynn Barber.

Write a reponse for the Headmistress to give Jenny when she asks for an explanation of the importance of an education over leaving school to get married.

Discuss:

1. What are the similarities between Jenny's predicament and those experienced by characters in *Spring Awakening*?
2. Do you think that Jenny's parents are somewhat to blame for her decisions?
3. What were the contributing factors in Jenny's decision-making process?
4. Would any of these factors have changed if different information was available?
5. Do you think this situation would occur in 2010?
6. If so, why?
7. If not, what has changed between the 1960s and today?

After watching *Spring Awakening* it is important to pay attention to the language that is used today in our media and literature regarding sexuality. Are the repressions imposed on people in the 1980s different from ones we are dealing with today?



AIM: To discover the liberated and repressed elements of the Australian culture regarding sexuality.



Read these two articles on a recent comment made by

Tony Abbot about women and virginity as the ultimate “gift” one can give another.

‘Abbot confirms women’s worst fears’, *The Australian*, www.theaustralian.com.au/news/abbott-confirms-lwomens-worst-fears/story-e6frg6n6-1225823774571

‘Making a gift of yourself’, *The Australian*, www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/making-a-gift-of-yourself/story-e6frg6zo-1225824116457

Discuss:

1. Does religion still define our ideas of innocence, virginity and whether sexuality is morally acceptable as it did in *Spring Awakening*?
2. If so, how?
3. Should politicians be allowed to talk about their personal opinions on such sensitive matters, particularly when they are commenting more about the opposite sex?
4. Is our media responsible for the language and ideas of our culture and our views towards sexuality, including homosexuality?
5. What are all the old wives’ tales about virginity and what it represents?
6. Is there any truth in any of these?
7. Is there a gender bias in Australia?
8. Would you classify the language we use to describe women as chauvinistic, adoring, or neutral?
9. How does it compare to the language and behaviour towards women in *Spring Awakening*?

“

FRAU BERGMAN: For a woman to bear a child, she must... in her own personal way, she must... love her husband. ”

Act One, Scene One.
Spring Awakening.

BroadwayWorld.COM Interviews: SPRING AWAKENING Director Geordie Brookman

Hit musical *Spring Awakening* is making its Australian premiere as part of the Sydney Theatre Company's 2010 Main Stage season. The director, Geordie Brookman, was kind enough to sit down and answer a few questions for BroadwayWorld just weeks out from the show's Sydney opening.

What attracted you to the idea of directing Spring Awakening in Australia?

I've always been a big fan of Wedekind's original play, it's such a brave and direct piece of work. As soon as I heard [Duncan Sheik](#)'s score I knew that he and [Steven Sater](#) were coming from the perfect place in their approach to adapting it. So, ultimately a whole combination of things attracted me to the piece, its thematic concerns, the chance to work with a great young cast and the chance to tell a very powerful story that has real lasting relevance. I've always wanted to create theatre that could make you feel the same way a rock and roll concert does, *Spring Awakening* does just that.

Have you seen other productions of SA around the world?

No. Once I accepted the job directing the production I tried to avoid any material to do with other productions (in particular the American original) so that my creative process wouldn't get compromised.

This production has been billed as a 'non-replica' production. Why did you choose to make this a non-replica production and how have you aimed to bring a 'new aesthetic' to the show? Were you at all influenced by the non-Replica Hungary version?

I think it is a wonderful opportunity to give the show a strong Australian stamp. I also think it speaks to how confident Steven and Duncan are in the piece they've created that they were open to the idea of non replica. My experience is predominantly in text based theatre where I suppose almost all productions would be considered non replica. To be perfectly honest I probably wouldn't have been that interested in the project if all I was doing was recreating someone else's work. In regards to creating the aesthetic for the production I've approached it as I would any other musical or play, I haven't consciously tried to make it new or different, just to find the best and most powerful way to present the material.

In terms of the Hungarian production, I haven't heard much about it except that they used disco cubes. We aren't using disco cubes.

SA has attracted a devoted fan base across the world, particularly the Broadway production. Is the Australian response to the show living up to your expectations?

There has been an amazing response, both from fans who know the show through the Broadway cast recording and through people who know of the original play. Most positively they seem genuinely excited about the prospect of it being a brand new production.

Do you plan to tour the show?

We certainly hope to, I think it's a show that would find a big audience in any part of Australia and we have a great company behind it in Sydney Theatre Company and passionate investors in the form of Power Arts.

SA touches on a lot of controversial topics including rape, abortion, masturbation, suicide and child abuse. As a director did you have any issues in how to portray these on stage and/or fears of the audience reaction? What are some of the challenges you've had to overcome to bring this work to the stage?

I can't say I that I did have any issues with any of the content. It's a very honest view of life and in particular a period of life that every single one of us go through. I think that one of theatre's jobs is to discuss difficult issues on the stage. When it comes to portraying some of this stuff on stage I just try to be as truthful and direct as possible. Luckily I have a very brave company of performers.

In regards to audience reaction, I think that every single member of the audience will have some connection to the material in the play through personal or social experience so I would hope that despite the fact that we are exploring dark or difficult issues they will engage in them with us.

Teenagers account for a very large percentage of the US production's fanbase. Is that your target audience here as well and if so, what message do you have for parents who might be wary of their children being exposed to such themes?"

As a director I can't say I work with a 'target audience' in mind. But it is certainly a work that I think holds massive relevance for teenagers. I think part of good parenting is to explore and discuss these sorts of issues with your children (at the appropriate age of course) and seeing them explored onstage can be an extension of that.

Do you see Spring Awakening as portraying a message or as having a key theme/meaning?

I suppose there are a couple of key themes for me within the piece, one relates to the idea that suppression and oppression in any form is a destructive thing. The other is that sadness and melancholy are important parts of life and are not things to be afraid of.

If you were to have your audience come away from Spring Awakening feeling one thing, how would it be?

I hope they come away deeply moved, I hope the show helps to illuminate a couple of tricky parts of life and I hope they go home with any one of the fantastic songs stuck in their head!

The cast is made up predominantly of young 'unknowns', was this your deliberate intention?

The only intention going into the auditions was to find the best group we possibly could. I wasn't making judgements on experience or lack of it. We did hold to a pretty strict age range though.

How did you find the open-audition process?

I think it was important for this show in particular. To find the number of performers we needed with the skill base that the show demands we needed to look beyond traditional sources. It was eye opening in terms of realising how much amazing young talent is out there in Australia.

You do have the very experienced [Helen Dallimore](#) in the cast, how do you find working with her? Has she taken on a somewhat mentor role with the young cast?

Helen's a dream. Incredibly funny and just a great presence in the rehearsal room. It's been great for the younger members of the cast to work with both her and Berryn Schwerdt (who is playing all the adult males). They are wonderful sources of knowledge and support.

Any tips for [BroadwayWorld.com](#) readers for stars to look out for in the future?

I'd say watch out for everyone of the 15 of them! They surprise me each and every day.

Whilst at the moment I imagine that your focus is largely on SA, do you have any dream shows you would love to direct in the future? How about an actor who you would love the opportunity to work with?

I have a dream list of plays longer than my arm! Some of the writers on the list include [Martin Crimp](#), Chekhov, Dea Loher and anything written by my wife, Nicki Bloom. In terms of people I'd like to work with, I'd love to just go and sit in rehearsals and watch Christoph Marthaler create a work.

Any other comments you wish to add?

Come and have a music theatre experience unlike any other at Spring Awakening!

Wednesday, January 20, 2010; Posted: 11:29 AM - by [Emma Cambey](#)

Book and lyrics by [Steven Sater](#). Music by [Duncan Sheik](#). Based on the original play by [Frank Wedekind](#). Directed by Geordie Brookman (Metro Street, Baghdad Wedding) with choreography by [Kate Champion](#) (The Age I'm In, Same Same But Different, Dirty Dancing)

For further information about this production of *Spring Awakening* visit www.SpringAwakeningInAustralia.com and follow www.twitter.com/SpringAustralia