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# From the Education Manager

Dear Educators and Students,

Welcome to the very first production of our newly merged organization, **Union Arts Center**! We are thrilled to share this milestone with you, and there's no better play to mark the occasion than Amy Herzog's *An Enemy of the People*.

This story—first written by Henrik Ibsen in 1882 and newly adapted for today—asks big questions about what it means to stand up for your truth, even when it's unpopular or inconvenient. It challenges us to think about community, responsibility, and courage.

As Union Arts Center, we believe in the power of theatre to spark conversation, ignite imagination, and invite us all to engage with the most pressing questions of our time. This guide is here to help you and your students dig deeper into the play, with background information, discussion questions, and activities to carry the experience from the stage into the classroom.

Thank you for being here at the beginning of this new chapter with us.

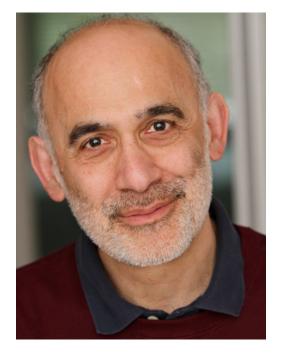
With gratitude,

Anna Klein, Education Manager

# Notes from *An Enemy of the People*Director Victor Pappas

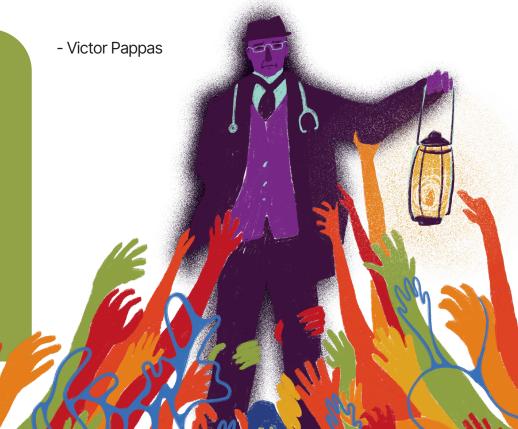
A true classic is a play that speaks both to its own time and to the generations that follow. Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* certainly does that. Amy Herzog's adaptation of Ibsen's play is a powerful fusion of the classical and the contemporary. Herzog has streamlined the action of Ibsen's play and brought its language up to date, while maintaining the urgency and force of its story. It's a play that speaks volumes to our times and challenges us to consider what we might do in Thomas Stockmann's place: would we stand up for our principles, no matter the opposition we might face? Could we resist the temptations that make self-interest so easy to give in to? Would we stand up for the truth above all else? Is there a difference between what we say we would do and what we would actually do?

I am grateful to have had the experience of working on this play at this moment in the history of our country. I give my heartfelt thanks to the actors, designers, production team, administrators and staff with whom I have been privileged to collaborate. I



have had the pleasure of directing numerous productions for ACT Contemporary Theatre and Seattle Shakespeare Company over the course of my career, so it is a particular honor for me to direct the opening show of Union Arts Center's first full season. These two companies, now merged, have given Seattle many years of worthy productions, and I have no doubt this new collaborative venture will lead to many more.

"Is there a difference between what we say we would do and what we would actually do?"



# **Show Synopsis**

The play opens in a small Norwegian town that has recently invested in building public baths, expected to bring in visitors, money, and prestige. Dr. Thomas Stockmann, the town's physician, has been one of the project's strongest advocates, believing the baths will be a source of health and prosperity. He lives with his children—Petra, a local schoolteacher, and Ejlif—and is often visited by his brother, Peter Stockmann, the mayor. During a lively gathering at Thomas's home, friends and neighbors chat over drinks, celebrating the promise of the town's future.

The celebration is interrupted when Petra presents her father with troubling lab results. Thomas is shocked to discover that the town's Municipal Baths—the very project he championed—are dangerously contaminated. His first instinct is to make the findings public, and at first, his friends support him. Hovstad, the editor of the local newspaper, Billing, a radical journalist, and Aslaksen, a printer who represents the small property owners, hail him as a hero and promise to publish his report.



But enthusiasm fades once the consequences become clear. Repairing the baths would mean closing them for years and spending a fortune the town cannot afford. Peter, the mayor, insists the report must be suppressed; discrediting the baths would bankrupt the community. Slowly, Thomas's allies begin to abandon him. Fearful of lost jobs, rising taxes, and damaged reputations, the townspeople retreat from supporting the truth.

Determined to be heard, Thomas arranges a public meeting. What he expects to be a triumph becomes a disaster: citizens shout him down, twisting his insistence on truth into arrogance, selfishness, and betrayal. As his anger rises, Thomas denounces the town for its corruption and cowardice. The people, once his allies, turn against him completely. He is branded "an enemy of the people," and his words spark uproar and threats.

By the end of the play, the Stockmann family is left isolated and vulnerable. Stones are thrown at their home, Petra loses her teaching job, and Ejlif is attacked at school. Yet Thomas refuses to surrender. Stripped of allies and resources, he declares that the strongest person is the one who stands most alone.

Amy Herzog's adaptation sharpens Ibsen's classic into a brisk, contemporary confrontation with questions that feel urgent today: What do we owe to truth? What do we owe community? And what price are we willing to pay when the two collide?

## Who's Who

#### Dr. Thomas Stockmann — Aaron Blakely ★

The town doctor is the central figure of the play. Honest, passionate, and uncompromising, Thomas discovers that the public baths are dangerously polluted. His determination to tell the truth—even against overwhelming opposition—drives the conflict.

#### Actor Bio:

Aaron is thrilled to return to Union Arts Center. On stage, he was most recently seen in the world premiere of Rubicon, written by Seattle's own Kirsten Potter at Denver Center Theatre Company. Previously at ACT, his credits include Wolf Play, Oslo, Other Desert Cities, and Middletown. Other Seattle productions: I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Photograph 51, Clybourne Park, and How to Write a New Book for the Bible at Seattle Rep, as well as Sense and Sensibility at Book-It Repertory Theatre. Regionally, Aaron has appeared at Berkeley Rep, South Coast Rep, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, A Noise Within, Idaho Rep, and Southern Rep. His film credits include Marcies, Outside In, We Need to Talk About Kevin, and We Go Way Back. On television: "Countdown" (Amazon Studios), "CSI: Vegas" (CBS), "Z Nation" (Syfy), "Grimm" (NBC), "The Librarians" (TNT), "Leverage" (TNT), and he recurred for three seasons in "The Man in the High Castle" (Amazon Studios). Aaron received his MFA in Acting from the University of Washington.



**Pictured:** Mayor Peter Stockmann (left, Bradford Farwell) argues with his brother, Doctor Thomas Stockmann (right, Aaron Blakely). Photo by Giao Nguyen

#### Petra Stockmann — Alanah Pascual

Thomas's daughter, a schoolteacher who shares her father's spirit and strong moral sense. Petra is outspoken, principled, and supportive, though she suffers consequences for standing by her family.

#### Actor Bio:

Alanah Pascual is a multi-hyphenate Filipina Latina actor from San Diego, CA. She is so excited to return to Union Arts Center! Alanah was previously seen at ACT in A Christmas Carol, at Seattle Public Theatre (Unrivaled), Seattle Shakespeare Company (The Merry Wives of Windsor), Book-It Rep (The Bonesetter's Daughter), Strawberry Theatre Workshop (Gloria: A Life) and more. She recently starred in her first feature film, Wild Ragerz. Along with acting, Alanah has directed with Shattered Glass Project (Machismo), Movement Directed with Dacha Theatre (Twelfth Night), was the Associate Director at Seattle Shakespeare (Merry



**Pictured:** Hovstad, editor of the local newspaper (seated left, Ricky Spaulding), prepares to make an advance toward Petra (right, Alanah Pascual), a teacher and Dr. Stockmann's daughter, who is a strong supporter of her father's cause. Photo by Giao Nguyen.

Wives of Windsor), and Assistant Directed with ACT and Pork Filled Productions. Alanah is also a producer, teacher, and writer. Her original play, *Call My Mom*, premiered in 2022 at the Strawberry Jam Director's Festival. Big love to her family, chosen family, and Hesham. @alanah\_del\_ray.

#### Peter Stockmann — Bradford Farwell ★

Thomas's brother, and mayor of the town. Peter is pragmatic, authoritative, and deeply concerned with the town's finances and reputation.

#### Actor Bio:

Previously at Union Arts Center: The Lehman Trilogy, A Christmas Carol, Daisy, Worse than Tigers, Seven Ways to Get There, Mary Stuart, Jekyll and Hyde (ACT); The Rivals, Measure for Measure, Cymbeline, Julius Ceasar (Seattle Shakespeare Company). Broadway: Much Ado About Nothing, The Miser. Seattle: Seattle Rep (Indecent, Charles III, Photograph 51, You Can't Take it With You, The Imaginary Invalid, Twelfth Night, Noises Off, The Great Gatsby); Intiman (John Baxter, All My Sons, Grapes of Wrath, Richard III, A Thousand Clowns); Strawberry Theatre Workshop (Breaking the Code); Nebraska Shakespeare (Hamlet, Othello, Cymbeline); American Player's Theatre (She Stoops, Henry V, The Misanthrope)

New Century Theatre Company (Festen, My Name is Asher Lev); The 5th Avenue Theatre (Guys and Dolls). Bradford was a company member at The Stratford Festival in Canada for three years. TV: Grimm and Leverage. Training: Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Arts, London. Thanks to my angel Hazel and my incredible kids Willa and Poppy.

#### Hovstad — Ricky Spaulding ★

Editor of the local newspaper. At first, he supports Thomas's discovery and champions him as a hero, but when the economic risks become clear, Hovstad retreats, siding with the majority.

Actor Bio:

Ricky is so excited to be making his Union Arts Center debut. His recent credits include: Melchior, Spring Awakening (The 5th Avenue Theatre), Willis, The Bed Trick (Seattle Shakespeare Company), Will, Born with Teeth (ArtsWest), Robin Hood, Sherwood (Village Theatre), Lydia and the Troll (Seattle Rep), Champagne + Sodomy (The Williams Project), and Arlington (Washington Ensemble Theatre). He has also appeared on Hulu and in a number of local independent films. Ricky trained at the University of Washington and the Atlantic Acting School in New York City.



Pictured: The company of An Enemy of the People at Union Arts Center. Top row (left to right): Bradford Farwell (Peter Stockmann), Lee Ann Hittenberger, Jace Tucker, Bjorn Anders (Townspeople), Josh Kenji Langager (Billing), Shawn Belyea (Morten Kiil), Tommy Beale, and Daniel Hanlon (Townspeople). Bottom row: Aaron Blakely (Thomas Stockmann), Ricky Spaulding (Hovstad), Alanah Pascual (Petra Stockmann), Nehemiah Hooks (Captain Horster), and Robert Shampain (Aslaksen). Photo by Giao Nguyen.

#### Billing — Josh Kenji Langager

A radical journalist at the newspaper. Ambitious and opportunistic, Billing initially stands with Thomas, but like Hovstad, quickly shifts when public opinion changes.

Actor Bio:

Josh Kenji Langager is a Seattle actor and artist drawn to stories that reveal what's vibrant, overlooked, and uncomfortably human in us all. Forged by his Japanese and Norwegian-American cultural upbringing (and raised on a steady diet of mochi and lefse), he carries the restless friction between inheritance and self-definition, fueling his belief that theatre should be a joyful space for truth-telling, belonging, and just the right amount of trouble. He is a graduate of the University of Washington in Drama, Musical Theatre, and Voice Performance, and has performed with local theaters including Seattle Rep, ACT, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Sound Theatre, Strawberry Theatre Workshop, Village Theatre, Freehold Engaged Theatre, and more. joshkenji.com. "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." - Finley Peter Dunne

#### Aslaksen — Robert Shampain ★

A printer and leader of the small property owners. He presents himself as moderate and cautious, always emphasizing "the voice of the people." His loyalty ultimately lies with the projective.

Actor Bio:

lies with the majority.

Robert Shampain has been acting in Seattle for over 25 years, with an 11-year gap while living in LA. Between his first ACT show (Bob Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*) to recent shows at Village Theatre (*Fantasticks* and *Jersey Boys*), he has done shows at Seattle Rep, Intiman, Seattle Children's Theatre, and Seattle Shakespeare Company, among others. In LA: lots of film and TV, and theater at The Geffen Playhouse, LA Opera, Tim Robbin's The Actor's Gang (company member), and Pacific Resident Theater (company member). New York, regional, and UK stage credits include: *A Light in The Piazza* (Bart Sher, dir.); *Traps* by Caryl Churchill (NY premiere); *Inman* (Sir Jonathan Miller, dir.), *The Odyssey* (Mary Zimmerman, dir.), *Temple* (Gabriel Barre, dir.); California Shakespeare Festival; Portland Center Stage; Snoopy in UK revival of *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*; Arena Stage, Theatre Clwyd (Wales). He was a recurring quest star on the local series *Z-Nation*.

#### Captain Horster — Nehemiah Hooks ★

A captain and friend to the Stockmann family. He provides space for Thomas to address the townspeople, and looks after the family when the majority become aggressive, standing in solidarity when others turn away.

Actor Bio:

Nehemiah is thankful to be back with Union Arts Center after being a part of ACT's Choir Boy, A Case for the Existence of God and The Lehman Trilogy. Other credits include: Jersey Boys, Beautiful: The Carole King Musical, Hello Dolly!, Miss Step (Village Theatre), After Midnight, The WIZ, Disney's Mary Poppins, Disney's The Little Mermaid, Disney's Beauty and The Beast (The 5th Ave Theatre), Shout, Sister, Shout! (Seattle Repertory Theatre) and many shows on Norwegian Cruise Lines. Love and Gratitude to his family, friends and community for their continued support.

#### Morton Kiil — Shawn Belyea ★

Thomas's father-in-law. Wealthy and stubborn, Morton tries to manipulate the situation for his own financial advantage, pressuring Thomas with both family ties and money.

Actor Bio:

Shawn is thrilled to return to Union Arts Center having recently appeared as Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* (Seattle Shakespeare Company), Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol*, and as Stan in *Sweat* (ACT). He serves as Producing Director for The 14/48 Projects (2008 Seattle Mayor's Arts Award) creators of 14/48: The World's Quickest Theater Festival and Theater Anonymous. A proud Seattle theater artist, Shawn's favorite roles include Rick in *Dry Powder* and Alan in *Opus* (Seattle Repertory Theatre), Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* and Claudius in *Hamlet* (Freehold's Engaged Theater), and Dad/Babe Ruth in *Jackie and Me* (Seattle Children's Theatre). Locally he has directed many productions including *August: Osage County* (2013 Gregory's for Outstanding Director and Outstanding Production). Shawn is honored to be a Tukwila Arts Commissioner and a board member for Theatre Puget Sound. Shawn resides in Tukwila, WA with his amazing wife, local actor Megan Ahiers.

#### Townspeople — Bjorn Anders, Lee Ann Hittenberger, Tommy Beale, Jace Tucnker, Daniel Hanlon

Represent the voice of the wider community. Their shifting loyalties—from initial support of Thomas to condemning him as "an enemy of the people"—reflect the pressure of public opinion and collective fear.

Actor Bios:

**Bjorn Anders** is thrilled to be making his Union Arts Center debut in *An Enemy of the People*. As an actor and stage combatant, he has been seen on numerous stages throughout Western Washington. Past acting roles include Thomas Chapman in *Miss Holmes* (Latitude Theatre), Owen Musser in *The Foreigner* (Woodinville Repertory Theatre), and Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakespeare Northwest). Up next, he can be seen as marll' in *A Klingon Christmas Carol* (Latitude Theatre) this December. As a stage combatant, Bjorn's work was most recently seen as the fight choreographer for *Space Princess Wars* at the University of Washington. He would like to thank his friends and his partner, Jaime, for all of the endless encouragement and support.

**Tommy Beale** is a Seattle-based actor and stunt performer who is stoked to be a part of this production! Past favorites include *Oliver!* (Reboot Theatre), *Ride the Cyclone* (SecondStory Rep), and Lakeside's *Mission: Possible Stunt Show*. He thanks his family, his friends, Geoff Alm, and Potatas for their support. You can see what he's up to (A.K.A. how he's currently giving his mom a heart attack) on Instagram @tomebale. Cheers!

This is **Daniel Hanlon**'s first performance on a Union Arts Center stage and is very excited for the opportunity. Typically they can be found North preforming anywhere from Edmonds, to Woodinville, even up to Marysville. Some past credits include Marco in *A View from the Bridge* (Red Curtain Foundation), Ravanche in *Ken Ludwig's The Three Musketeers* (Icicle Creek Preforming Arts), and True in *Act a Lady* (Woodinville Rep). When not performing Dan can be found working as a gardener or playing Dungeons and Dragons with their friends and family. Danny would like to give a huge thank you to Geoffrey Alm for teaching them what they know of stage combat, another thank you to their friends who always deal with their odd schedule, and most importantly to their partner, Maddie, for always dealing with all their crazy antics and odd hours. They love Maddie with all their friever and always.

Ms. Lee Ann Hittenberger is thrilled to appear onstage at Union Arts Center. She is a Renaissance woman. Her work as an actor, fight/intimacy director, dance choreographer, director, and costume designer have been seen throughout the Pacific Northwest. Favorite roles include Helen (Road to Mecca), Nancy (Oliver), Eleanor (Lion in Winter) and Puck (Midsummer). She holds a degree from Dell Arte International School of Physical Theater, is a teaching artist and is an advanced actor combatant (recommended in 8 weapon styles) with Society of American Fight Directors. Special thanks to Geoffrey Alm for his mentorship.

Jace Tucker is absolutely elated to be making his debut at Union Arts Center! A Seattle-based actor, director, and stage combat artist, Jace is a graduate of Cornish College of the Arts's Original Works program (2023). You may have seen him inhabit the role of Banquo in Seattle Shakespeare Company's educational tour of *Macbeth* or Dacha Theatre's *The Veil* as the Magpie. Jace also recently directed Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* for his new theatre company, "The Bird and The Bug". Jace would like to extend his thanks to Geoffrey Alm for his continued teachings, Union Arts Center for this wonderful opportunity, and his loving partner, Cricket, as well as his pets Banquo, Meriadoc, and Vallah.



**Pictured:** Captain Horster (left, Nehemiah Hooks) defends himself against the angry townspeople after choosing to stand by Dr. Stockmann once he is declared an "enemy of the people." Photo by Giao Nguyen.

★ Indicates member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

## **Themes**

Amy Herzog's adaptation of An Enemy of the People explores big ideas about integrity, community, courage, and isolation. These themes invite audiences to think about the forces that shape our choices and the consequences of standing up for what we believe.

#### **Integrity and Truth**

Thomas Stockmann is an example of honesty and integrity, even though it goes against public opinion. He insists on exposing the truth about the baths, even when it threatens his career, relationships, and safety. The play asks: how far are we willing to go to speak the truth, and what sacrifices does it demand?

#### **Community and Majority Opinion**

The townspeople represent the pressures of conformity and collective opinion. Initially supportive, they turn against Thomas when his revelations conflict with their own interests.

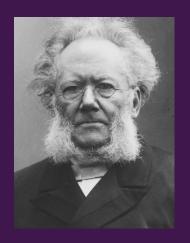
#### **Isolation and Consequences**

Speaking the truth can be isolating. Thomas and his family face threats, attacks, and loss of status. The play explores the emotional and social toll of being "the one who stands most alone" and asks viewers to consider what it means to take a principled stand in their own lives.

#### Relevance Today

Though set in a small 19th-century town, the themes of the play feel contemporary. The tension between truth and popularity, individual conscience versus community pressure, and the price of moral courage are questions we still face today. As you read or watch the play, consider how these themes show up in the characters' choices and how they relate to challenges in your own world.

# Biography of the Playwrights



#### Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Ibsen (March 20, 1828 – May 23, 1906) was one of the world's most influential playwrights, often referred to as the father of modern drama. Born in the small coastal town of Skien, Norway, Ibsen broke with theatrical tradition to explore the lives, choices, and moral struggles of ordinary people. His plays often examine the pressures of society, the conflicts between personal conscience and communal expectation, and the consequences of speaking one's truth.

Ibsen gained international fame during his lifetime, and his works have remained widely produced and studied for more than a century. His major

plays include *Brand* (1865), *Peer Gynt* (1867), *The Pillars of Society* (1877), *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), and *The Wild Duck* (1884). Each play demonstrates his mastery of realistic dialogue, economical storytelling, and incisive social critique.

Although he spent many years living abroad in Italy and Germany, Ibsen returned to Norway in 1891 and continued to write until his death in Oslo (then called Kristiania) in 1906. His enduring influence lies in his ability to provoke self-reflection, challenge societal norms, and explore the human condition in ways that continue to resonate today.



#### **Amy Herzog**

Amy Herzog is an acclaimed American playwright known for her deeply personal and emotionally resonant works. Born and raised in the greater New York area, Herzog draws inspiration from her family history, including politically active relatives and formative experiences that shaped her understanding of human relationships and moral choices.

Herzog studied English and playwriting at Yale University, where she began exploring themes of political ideology, intergenerational dynamics, and the complexities of family life. Her notable plays include *After the Revolution*, which examines political divisions within a family, and *4,000* 

Miles, a poignant story of intergenerational connection and personal discovery. Her later work, Mary Jane, delves into the challenges of single motherhood and chronic illness, earning critical acclaim for its emotional depth and insight.

In addition to her writing, Herzog supports emerging playwrights through teaching and nonprofit initiatives. Her work, often informed by personal experience, addresses universal questions about family, responsibility, and moral courage, making her one of the most significant voices in contemporary theatre.

# **Enemy of the Timeline**

Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People was first published and performed in 1882 in Norway. The play was a response to a real-life incident in which Ibsen's hometown debated the public disclosure of contaminated water, reflecting his deep interest in societal responsibility, truth, and civic courage.

Translations and productions spread across Europe and the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, cementing Ibsen's reputation as a master of modern drama. Directors and companies have often emphasized different aspects of the play, from its political commentary to its psychological exploration of courage and isolation.

#### 1882 – Christiania Theatre, Oslo, Norway

Premiere: Henrik Ibsen's play debuted in his home country, sparking immediate debate.

Audiences were polarized—some praised the play's moral courage, while others bristled at its critique of authority and the dangers of speaking inconvenient truths.

#### 📄 1893 – Paris, France

Production: The play was staged at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris in November 1893.

This production marked the play's introduction to French audiences and featured innovative staging designed by Édouard Vuillard.

#### 1895 – New York City, USA

Production: An Enemy of the People debuted on Broadway at Abbey's Theatre.

This was the play's first U.S. performance, introducing American audiences to Ibsen's exploration of truth, integrity, and societal pressure. The production resonated with contemporary concerns about civic responsibility and social reform.

#### 1950 – New York, USA (Broadway)

Adaptation: Arthur Miller adapted *An Enemy of the People* for Broadway, opening at the Broadhurst Theatre on December 28, 1950.

Miller's adaptation revived the play for American audiences, highlighting themes of civic responsibility and moral courage.

#### 1978 – Film Adaptation

Production: A film adaptation of Miller's version of the play was released in 1978, starring Steve McQueen. The film adaptation brought the story to a wider audience, emphasizing the play's relevance to contemporary issues.

#### 2000 – Milwaukee, USA

Adaptation: Steven Dietz's adaptation, *Paragon Springs*, premiered at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 2000.

Set in 1926 in the American Midwest, this adaptation reimagined the original play to reflect contemporary issues.

#### 2024 – Broadway, Amy Herzog Adaptation

Director: Sam Gold

Herzog's adaptation translates Ibsen's moral and ethical questions into a fast-paced, contemporary context.

Why the Play Endures: An Enemy of the People remains staged and adapted because its central conflict—truth versus community—is both universal and timeless. Each generation finds new resonance in Thomas Stockmann's moral courage and the challenges of navigating social, political, and ethical pressures.

While rooted in a 19th-century Norwegian town, its dilemmas mirror issues faced by communities and individuals today. Directors and playwrights are drawn to its flexibility, which allows it to be adapted to various settings, historical periods, and social issues. Ultimately, the play endures because it challenges audiences to ask themselves: What would I do if the truth conflicted with the comfort or interests of the majority?

# ACTIVITY: Cross the Line: Truth and Community

#### **Objective:**

Students physically explore the tension between personal integrity and social pressure, reflecting the central conflict in An Enemy of the People.

#### **Materials Needed:**

- · Open space where students can move freely
- Optional: Tape or markers to define a center line

#### Instructions:

#### Set the Scene:

Explain the dilemma in the play: Thomas Stockmann discovers that the town's baths are contaminated. Sharing the truth could save lives, but also endanger the town's economy, reputation, and the safety of his family.

#### Positioning:

Mark a line down the center of the space. Students start standing along it, representing a neutral position.

#### **Read Statements Aloud:**

Read a series of moral, ethical, or personal statements. After each statement, students step to one side of the line if they agree strongly (Truth) or the other side if they disagree or prioritize the community. Students can remain near the center if they feel conflicted.

#### **Sample Statements:**

- "I would always tell the truth, no matter the consequences."
- "Sometimes it is necessary to stay silent to protect others."
- "If my actions could hurt the community, I would think twice before speaking out."
- "Personal integrity is more important than public opinion."
- "Fear of backlash should influence my decisions."

#### **Group Reflection:**

#### After each statement:

- Ask students to explain why they chose that side.
- Encourage them to notice how their position may shift when peers move differently.
- Discuss how this mirrors the townspeople's reactions in the play.

#### **Debrief Questions:**

- How did it feel to be alone on one side?
- Did peer pressure influence your decisions?
- How does this exercise connect to Thomas Stockmann's experience?
- Can you think of modern examples where people face similar dilemmas?

#### Goals:

- Engage students physically and emotionally with the play's central conflict.
- Foster discussion about ethics, courage, and social influence.
- Help students connect the play's themes to contemporary real-world scenarios.

### **ACTIVITY: Letters from the Town**

#### **Objective:**

Explore character perspectives and reactions to the events in *An Enemy of the People*. Write a short letter reflecting your character's thoughts, feelings, and priorities.

#### **Step 1: Choose Your Perspective:**

Pick or are assigned one of the following:

- Thomas Stockmann town physician, wants to reveal the truth
- Peter Stockmann mayor, wants to protect the town's reputation
- Petra Stockmann Thomas's daughter, balancing family loyalty and community concerns
- Local Business Owner worried about economic impact
- Journalist weighing public interest vs. backlash
- Concerned Townsperson torn between safety and community stability

#### Step 2: Choose a Letter Recipient

- To the town explaining your opinion on revealing the baths' contamination
- To a friend or family member sharing your feelings about the situation
- To Thomas or Peter trying to persuade them to act differently

#### **Step 3: Guiding Questions:** Use these to help shape your letter:

- 1. What is your character's main concern?
- 2. How do they feel about the events happening in the town?
- 3. What action would your character like to see taken?
- 4. How does your character justify their position?
- 5. What fears or hopes are motivating them?

#### **Step 4: Write Your Letter**

Aim for ½ page (roughly 5–8 sentences).

Write in your character's voice and perspective.

Include at least one reference to the events of the play.

#### Step 5: Share & Discuss (Optional)

Volunteers can read their letters aloud.

#### **Discuss:**

- How do perspectives differ?
- How do priorities like truth, community, and personal loyalty create tension?
- Which letters were persuasive or compelling, and why?

### enemies of who? by Tess Berger

In 68 CE, ending a reign of conspiracy, cruelty, and indecision, the Roman Emperor Nero was labeled by the Senate as hostis publicus – an enemy of the people. The narrator of *Beowulf* describes Grendel as an enemy of the people. Grendel is often depicted as a demon or monster, but many scholars have since analyzed the poem through the lens of Grendel as an ostracized outsider (in some translations, described as a "border-crosser"). In the 1790s, during France's Reign of Terror, tens of thousands of ennemis du people were executed with a minimal and biased trial. The definition of these "enemies" was fluid, consisting of anyone from former monarchs, aristocrats, and clergy, to counter-revolutionaries, journalists, and ordinary citizens who opposed the new government.

A year before lbsen wrote *An Enemy of the People*, his play *Ghosts* opened to public outcry. It was, at the time, his most scandalous (among other things, venereal disease was a present metaphor for the dangers of traditional ideology). Thus came *An Enemy of the People* – a thinly-veiled illustration of the public reception to Ghosts meant to highlight how a singular outsider is often more correct, factually and morally, than a herd group. While the play is almost 150 years old, it's not difficult to see how its themes have remained relevant throughout its lifetime.

Amy Herzog's adaptation resculpts lbsen's classic work for a modern audience. Herzog cuts out almost half of the original text, distilling the language of the play to center her message. She also cuts the character of Katherine Stockmann, Dr. Stockmann's wife, placing the doctor in a state of familial grief rather than hindrance, and intensifying the basis for him to start to go off the rails. This loss of foundation for Dr. Stockmann becomes the crux of Herzog's adaptation – instead of the story of one person fighting for truth a corrupt world, it highlights the way a commitment to a fight can overshadow the commitment to truth; or, as *The New York Times* describes it, "the way political and civil discourse gets corroded by tribalistic rancor" (Alexandra Alter).

So what about now? Even as the origin of the "tribalistic rancor" remains a point of contention, one of the few mutually agreed-upon sentiments in our world is that political and civil discourse getting corroded by it is, at this point and eternally, part of our societal hemoglobin. There are majority groups who hold social, and often political, power, and those who challenge hegemony – usually pegged as "enemies of the people."

On the banks of the Columbia River, in The Dalles, Oregon, are Google data centers that back the tech giant's many digital services. These data centers run extremely hot, particularly due to the large role of Al now. Because they run at such a high temperature, the centers need to be cooled down by hundreds of millions of gallons of water a year – over a billion in the last 10 years (*The Oregonian*). This is almost 1/3 of the water usage for The Dalles, which has been in a multiyear drought, and enough water to flood the entire city (*WaterWatch*). In 2022, after a huge legal fight with *The Oregonian* newspaper, Google finally agreed to these numbers being shared. The company is notoriously withholding about their water use numbers, and when the paper requested public records of the data in 2021, the city of The Dalles sued them, arguing that the water use was a "trade secret" for Google. Though the city and company both conceded this lawsuit, and the information was finally released to the public, this situation has left residents terrified about the implications of a huge company paying a local government to seal public records. While many residents have had concerns, others have argued that Google is a big provider of economic opportunity for the city, creating hundreds of local jobs in an area where the major agricultural and fish/wildlife industries are increasingly impacted by climate change. A legal and ethical battle of over a year gives that "tribalistic rancor" time to fester, letting those who benefit from withholding information get away with pitting people against each other, all the while stealing all of our resources and hiding behind money and power.

Ibsen's play has asked generations of audiences to look inward and examine how do we define an enemy? Herzog's adaptation calls to mind the need to ask WHO – who defines the enemy? Who are we getting our definitions from? ... and WHY – why are they the ones we're listening to? Why do they benefit from others being the enemy? **Who is the real enemy?** 

### How to Watch a Play

#### ENGAGE, RESPECT, ENJOY, WELCOME BACK TO THE THEATRE

Welcome! Union Arts Center is thrilled to perform for you! Here are some helpful tips to get you acquainted with live theatre and make the most of your experience.

#### LISTEN

Pay attention to the talented actors sharing their story with you today—they're excited for you to hear it! Additionally, please follow the instructions provided by our staff. We're here to ensure everyone has a great experience, and sometimes we'll guide you on seating or movement to help things run smoothly.

#### **PARTICIPATE**

You're part of the experience! Laugh, applaud, and listen closely to make the show even better for everyone. Remember, respect is key. As playwright Dominique Morrisseau reminds us: "This is live theater, and the actors need you to engage with them, not distract or thwart their performance."

#### **PHONES**

Keep them in your backpack or pocket, preferably on airplane mode. Share your experience after the show, and enjoy the performance distraction-free.

#### **CARE**

The actors can see and hear you, so be the kind of audience member you'd enjoy sitting next to. Before you leave, check around to make sure you haven't left anything behind.

#### **THANK YOU**

Thank you for being here with us! Enjoy the show!

### **Discussion & Reflection Questions**

#### **Before the Play**

These questions prompt students to consider themes, context, and personal values before attending the production.

- 1. Have you ever been in a situation where telling the truth might upset a group or community? How did you handle it, or what might you do?
- 2. Why might someone risk their job or reputation to expose wrongdoing?
- 3. What does it mean to "stand up for what's right"? Are there limits to doing the right thing if it conflicts with the majority?
- 4. How do you think communities react when someone challenges those in power? Can challenging authority ever backfire?
- 5. Think of a time when a local or national issue caused public debate or conflict. How do you imagine people reacted?

#### **After the Play**

These questions encourage reflection on the story, characters, and themes.

- 1. Do you agree with Thomas's decision to reveal the truth? Why or why not? What would you have done in his place?
- 2. Why do the townspeople turn against Thomas? How does fear, economic concern, or loyalty influence their behavior?
- 3. Can the "greater good" justify hiding the truth? How does the play challenge the idea of what is right versus what is popular?
- 4. How do family relationships shape the decisions of Thomas, Petra, and Peter Stockmann? How might you balance family loyalty with personal principles?
- 5. How does the play connect to current events involving politics, environmental issues, or public health? Do you see parallels in your own community?
- 6. How do the newspaper editor Hovstad and journalist Billing influence public opinion? How does the media shape truth in society today?
- 7. Why do you think An Enemy of the People has been adapted and performed so many times over 140 years? What makes its themes resonate today?

For more information on Union Arts Center, including our variety of education and engagement programs, visit our website at unionartscenter.org