1. Personal Expressive

What makes you feel powerful? Write a personal narrative about an event in your life when you defied what was expected of you. Guide your reader step by step through the story by creating specific images of the event. What made this event significant? What did you learn? Did you change the way in which you viewed yourself or the world around you?

2. Literary

How does Theo and Louise’s relationship change through the course of the play? Write a scene setting the couple in their apartment one year from the end of The Underpants. How do they interact? What has happened over the course of the year? Challenge yourself to include a conflict and resolution.

3. Transactive

After seeing The Underpants, write a theatrical critique of the production. Pretend you are writing for a local newspaper. Describe three elements that stood out to you (maybe an actor’s performance, the set, the costumes, etc.). Why should or shouldn’t someone go see this production?

Need more help?

Check out our Young Critics Workshops! Have an Actors Theatre teaching artist visit your classroom to give your students the inside scoop on how to write a theatrical critique.

Students who have written a critique on an Actors Theatre production may submit their work to be posted on our website! To submit online, please send all critiques as email attachments to jjung@actorstheatre.org with the subject heading ‘Young Critics Contest.’ Please be sure to include your name, school, teacher, grade, and contact information.

About the Play Guide

This play guide is a standards-based resource designed to enhance your theatre experience. Its goal is twofold: to nurture the teaching and learning of theatre arts and to encourage essential questions that lead to enduring understandings of the play’s meaning and relevance. Inside you will find history/contextual information, vocabulary and worksheets that lay the groundwork of the story and build anticipation for the performance. Oral discussion and writing prompts encourage your students to reflect upon their impressions and to analyze and relate key ideas to their personal experiences and the world around them. These can easily be adapted to fit most writing objectives. The Bridgework connects theatre elements with ideas for drama activities in the classroom as well as integrated curriculum. We encourage you to adapt and extend the material in any way to better meet the needs of your community of learners. Please feel free to make copies of this guide, or you may download it from our website: www.actorstheatre.org. We hope this material, combined with our pre-show workshops, will give you the tools to make your time at Actors Theatre a valuable learning experience.

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If you have any questions or suggestions regarding our play guides, please feel free to contact Katie Blackerby Weible, Director of Education, at (502) 584-1265 or kblackerby@actorstheatre.org.

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About the Play

The Underpants

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THE UNDERPANTS

Synopsis

The Underpants takes place in Dusseldorf in 1910. Theo and his wife Louise have a vacant room in their apartment. One unfortunate morning, while Louise attends a parade to try to catch a glimpse of the king, her underpants fall to her ankles. Theo is humiliated: “I can’t believe this happened to me!” Suddenly the couple has not one, but two renters: Versati and Cohen. Having witnessed the panty scandal, both men secretly confess their love to Louise and begin to battle for her favor. Louise’s nosy upstairs neighbor Gertrude advises Louise to welcome an affair. As Versati and Cohen squabble over who is the better man, forty-two, and a busybody. Gertrude Deuter: Very pretty, mid-twenties, Theo’s wife. Louise Maske: Theo’s wife. Cohen keeps insisting that his name is spelled with a “K.” Why? Do you think Cohen is victimized in the story or is race? Research historical and cultural events of Germany in the early twentieth century that led to the rise of anti-semitism. Then analyze the following conversation, which is the most serious comment in this comedic story. What statement is each man making?

Cast of Characters

(Theo

THEO: You stirred things up around here in a most unpleasant way. But it was still lively and I like you for it. Which proves one thing.

COHEN: What is that?

THEO: The individual is not indicative of the group.

COHEN: In your case, Herr Maske, the individual is indicative of the group.

Science

The Underpants is a dated play in its references to specific scientific discoveries. Research the infamous legend of the Loch Ness Monster, Einstein’s theory of relativity, and Freud’s controversial ideas.

Language Arts

DO WE NEED ART?

VERSATI: I could change your mind. I could open your heart to the arts.

Have you ever wondered what life would be like without art? Think of everything in your world that is important to our culture (or unimportant, if that is your opinion). We will discuss the group.

Playwriting

Create an adaptation of an adaptation! The Underpants (2002) is Steve Martin’s adaptation of German playwright Carl Sternheim’s play (1911). Below is a scene from Martin’s adaptation between Theo and Versati that deals with gender roles and responsibilities. Translate the scene into contemporary culture. Choose characters and language specific to an environment (ex. – the streets of an urban city, small southern town, etc.) Does it have any relevance in contemporary American society? Are there still ideas of gender inequities in our modern culture? After writing your script, cast the scene and perform for the class.

VERSATI: Herr Maske, a man is only what he contributes to the human race. The heroes are the thinkers, poets, painters, and musicians. And the layperson is only important to the degree that he knows them.

THEO: But what about a woman?

VERSATI: I am a man.

THEO: But no, you’re not.

VERSATI: How can you say that?

THEO: Because I know what a man is. There is an essential act of manhood, and you don’t do it.

VERSATI: Oh, there is?

THEO: Yes, there is.

VERSATI: And what is the essential act of manhood?

THEO: A man, a real man, takes care of someone.

VERSATI: I take care of someone.

THEO: Yourself doesn’t count.

VERSATI: Herr Maske, let me ask you a philosophical question.

THEO: I enjoy a good philosophical question as much as the next fellow.

VERSATI: Can you think of any circumstances where it would be all right for a married woman to have an affair?

THEO: Of course not.

VERSATI: Why?

THEO: Because only men should have affairs.

VERSATI: And what makes you say that?

THEO: Look, my boss’s wife was having an affair. He found out about it, but decided to let her. He told everyone he didn’t want to infringe on her individual uniqueness. That’s where modern thought leads us.

VERSATI: The man’s a hero. His wife can look up to him.

THEO: It can’t be allowed. It destroys the family. Only men can handle it.

VERSATI: I can’t believe that you believe what you believe.

THEO: I can’t change my mind. I’d have nothing to think.

Cast of Characters

(Theo

This is each man making?

An old man.

Theo Maske: A burly, muscular fireplug with a buzz cut.

Louise Maske: Very pretty, mid-twenties, Theo’s wife.

Gertrude Deuter: Forty-two, and a busybody.

Frank Versati: An elegant gentleman.

Benjamin Cohen: Sickly, thin, asthmatic.

Klingelhoff: An elderly man.

"Sternheim’s play is ribald, self-referential, and quirky. I hope I have retained those elements and assured my place in heaven— I mean, served the playwright’s intentions,"

— Steve Martin

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Social Studies

THE POWER OF FASHION

No matter where we live, the design of our clothing reflects our culture. It indicates the time and place in which we live, as well as the kind of people we are. In our production of The Underpants, the costume design suggests the time period and culture of 1910 German bourgeois society. How did each character’s specific style and color reflect his/her personality? In our contemporary culture, what is fashionable? What do the styles suggest about the people who wear them?

JUDAISM IN GERMANY

In the play, Cohen keeps insisting that his name is spelled with a “K.” Why? Do you think Cohen is victimized in the story based on race? Research historical and cultural events of Germany in the early twentieth century that led to the rise of anti-semitism. Then analyze the following conversation, which is the most serious comment in this comedic story. What statement is each man making?
**AT YOUR DESK Activities**

**Journal Entry**
Create a journal entry based on one or both of the follow- ing lines from The Underpants:

Theo says, “The unexplainable makes me nervous” in response to reports of the Loch Ness Monster. What are things that make you nervous and why?

Klinghoffer says, “I’d rather be dead than interesting.” What do you think he means by “interesting”? Do you agree? What makes you interesting (both positive and negative traits)?

**Create a Costume Design**
The technical elements of costumes helps describe a character, create mood and places us in a specific time and place. Assume the role of costume designer for your own contemporary production of THE UNDERPANTS. Draw a costume rendering for each character. What would the underpants look like? Would each character’s costume tell us something about that character?

**Words, Words, Words**
Read the following lines of dialogue. Notice who said them and to whom they are spoken. Discuss with your class and write a short essay about each, stating whether you agree or disagree with the thought. Give reasons to support your position, citing examples from both your own experience and observation. Your essays could serve as a start for a personal narrative or persuasive paper.

**COHEN:** If I found out what was wrong with me, I’d just get sicker worrying about it. So of what use is the truth?

**THEO:** Good God, man, what good are lies?

**COHEN:** Everything around us is lies.

**THEO:** ...that monster in the Loch Ness. Tent cities with thousands of people have sprung up around the lake. VERSATI: The imagination is beautiful.

**THEO:** The imagination rots reality.

**VERSATI:** (to Louise) It was God who gave me my passion; it is the devil who prevents it from being spent.

**THEO:** (to Gertrude) Desire adjusts morality.

**ON YOUR FEET Activities**

**Warm-up**

**That's Comedy**
Explore comedy in your classroom. Give each student a simple line from a text and an emotion. Then ask each to make a big facial and gestural choice. Lead them (as a group) as they speak their lines in the given emotion on a scale from 1 to 10 example: “This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me,” sad at a 9). Have students observe others. Play with emotions that both match and contradist the given lines. When finished, discuss the activity as a group. What did you find funny? What choices worked? When did exaggeration (10) work? When did underplaying (1) work?

**Science vs. Art**
There is a consistent argument throughout The Underpants between the higher value of science or art. Divide students into 2 groups. One team are scientists, the other are artists. Have each team brainstorm a list of values statements about itself (science or art). (i.e. “Science can verify human existence.” “Art tells us about the human condition.”)

In a debate format, have one scientist state his/her thought, then one artist state his/her thought. Continue alternating until all have a turn.

**Improvisation/Tableaux**

Much of Steve Martin’s comedy is derived from silly ideas and physicality. This is obvious in our production of The Underpants. This exercise incorporates these ideas:

1) Divide students into groups. Each group will create a title for a story. This can be done by generating a list of nouns, prepositions and adjectives. Then, choose two nouns, one preposition and one adjective for the title. The pattern is noun/preposition/adj./noun” (ex- The Cat Under the Yellow Boat or The Sweater with the lazy Arm).

2) When title is complete, each group creates a short scenario (story) for the title.

3) Then, the group creates a tableau (frozen picture) to show each part of the story. Try for a beginning, middle and end tableau.

4) One person from each group tells the story as the other group members form the tableaux. Each group performs the stories for each other.

**BRIDGWORK:**
Building Connections between Stage and Classroom

The following exercises combine creative drama, theatre concepts and core content to connect the theatre experience with drama activities in your classroom.

**Core Content Connection - The activities are designed using the Elements of Drama: Literary Elements, Technical Elements and Performance Elements.**

**Building Connections between Stage and Classroom**

**Science vs. Art**

Carl Sternheim was born to a Jewish father and a Lutheran mother in Leipzig, Germany in 1878. Two years later they married and the three lived comfortably. But little Carl had big questions. He struggled with his own religious identity, converting to Protestantism in 1897, but marrying his first wife as a Catholic. Personally, Sternheim yearned for status as a young man. He wanted to be popular among women and admired by men. He placed enormous pressure on himself to impress others, writing without having yet found his true voice. While married to his first wife, Eugenie Hauth, he found his muse in another woman. Thea Lowenstein inspired and encouraged Sternheim, and as an heiress, could afford to support his writing. He left his first wife, with whom he had a son, and married Thea in 1907. Through this marriage he met Franz Blei, with whom he began the journal Hyperion. Thea and Blei also familiarized him with Molière’s French farces, which later influenced his other satires. Through out his playwriting career Sternheim focused on a theme he knew well: the struggle to express and assert oneself within German bourgeois society. He wrote most of his best-known plays between 1911 and 1916.

**The Underpants**

The Underpants (Die Hose), scheduled to open in 1911, was initially banned because its subject matter was too indelicate. Only after the chief of police attended a private viewing where actress Tilla Durieux could persuade him to reconsider did the show go up under the less racy title The Giant. It was Sternheim’s first play in a four-part series about the Maske family titled From the Lives Bourgeois Heroes. Der Snob followed in 1914, 1913 in 1915 and later The Fossil in 1925. Together, the plays follow three generations of the Maske family as they maneuver through society’s chutes and ladders, attempting to do as the Romans (or in this case, the Wilhelmine Germans) do. The Maskes repeatedly contrive ways to benefit socially from the situations in which they find themselves. Just as Theo and Louise profit from multiple boarders as a result of her unfortunate accident, their son Christian rejects his family and past in order to become an aristocrat in Der Snob.

By pushing situations and characterizations toward absurdity, Sternheim’s plays exposed the allures toward absurdity, Sternheim’s plays exposed the allures
Steve Martin

Adoring fans now shouted catch phrases with him: “Excuse me!” and “I am … one wild and crazy guy!”

You probably recognize Steve Martin from reruns of Saturday Night Live or slapstick movie comedies such as The Jerk. But did you know this well-known comedian is also a writer, producer, and playwright?

Steve Martin was born in 1945 in Waco, Texas but spent the majority of his childhood in California. As a teenager Martin worked a concession stand and performed magic tricks at Disneyland, learning useful comic skills such as juggling, tap dancing, and making balloon animals. He studied at UCLA before pursuing a career as a comedy writer. Martin wrote and occasionally performed for popular TV series including The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, earning an Emmy Award in 1969, as well as The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour and The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour. Soon Martin began opening for rock performers. His hippie-style long hair and straggly beard presented an image seen throughout popculture. But when Martin turned the tables by cutting his hair short, donning a suit, and presenting an altogether conservative image, people began to catch on. Adoring fans now shouted catch phrases with him: “Excuse me!” and “I am … one wild and crazy guy!”

Martin’s popularity went national in the 1970s when he became a frequent guest on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson and Saturday Night Live. He also released several comedy albums, the most notorious being A Wild and Crazy Guy which featured the top-forty hit “King Tut.”

Film also intensified Martin’s fame. He wrote and starred in The Jerk in 1979, which began a series of collaborations with film director Carl Reiner. He added film producer to his resume in 1987 when he co-wrote, produced, and starred in Roxanne, an interpretation of Cyrano De Bergerac. This earned Martin a Best Actor Award from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association as well as Best Screenplay from the Writers Guild of America. Martin tried his hand at playwriting in 1993 with Picasso at the Lapin Agile, in which Pablo Picasso and Albert Einstein meeting at a bar in Paris. The play debuted at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago before moving on to audiences in Boston, Los Angeles, and New York. He adapted Carl Sternheim’s Die Hose, retitling the play The Underpants for the Classic Stage Company in New York, where it premiered in 2002. Martin’s popularity went national in the 1970s when he became a frequent guest on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson and Saturday Night Live. He also

THEMES IN The Underpants

Decline of Bourgeois Society
Scandal
Fame
Lust
Gender Roles
Feminism
Issues of Propriety

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

1) Before you enter the theatre, try to picture the world of The Underpants. Think about the Sternheim’s story and Steve Martin’s comedic style. What kind of set do you expect to see? What style and colors? What do you think the costumes will look like? What elements of drama do you think will set the mood? How?

2) How is seeing a play different from seeing a movie? As an audience member, what types of things do you need to keep in mind when going to see a live performance?

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

1) What do you think Louise learns at the end of the play?

2) Do you think the characters will live “happily ever after?” Why or why not?

3) What do you think were Sternheim’s original intentions in writing this play? What might he be trying to say about family? About men and women? About relationships? About society? About fame?

4) What is the neighbor Gertrude’s role in the play? How are she and Louise different? How are they the same?

5) In his life, Sternheim was very concerned with being well-received as a writer, yet he also used his plays to criticize the bourgeois society to which he belonged. When do you believe it is appropriate, personally or professionally, to conform to society’s expectations? When should you disregard what others think? In addition to writing, in what other ways can people hold up a mirror to society and examine how it functions?
THE HISTORY OF UNDERPANTS

Though a Roman mosaic suggests the first bra and briefs were worn by ancient athletes, women did not generally wear underpants until the middle of the nineteenth century. Seriously, for centuries most women in Western fashion went commando! Sure, under their dresses, petticoats and corsets they wore a long, lightweight undershirt called a smock or chemise. But men, boys, and girls all wore underpants before the garment was upheld as a part of women’s fashion.

Early 1800s — Drawers were worn for the first time by women, to the dismay of many. Wearing trouser-like undergarments was exclusively male and considered immodest for women. Some women wore pantalettes, a more feminine form of underpants that came below the knee and had lace trim. Yet these went out of style along with the shorter, slimmer dresses of the early 1800s.

1830s — Drawers became a bit of a status symbol among middle and upper class women in Europe. Made of cotton or lawn (another fine material), they consisted of two open, overlapping legs sewn onto one waistband that tied in the back.

1841 — The Handbook of the Toilet suggested that women adopt the French practice of wearing drawers to avoid “many of the disorders and indispositions to which British females are subject.” It advised that drawers “should reach as far down the leg as possible without their being seen.”

1851 — Dress reformer Amelia Bloomer introduced her baggy trousers for ladies. Originally outerwear, “bloomers” became the term for knee-length underpants around 1910.

1877 — The chemise was combined with drawers for a smoother, more streamlined effect.

1879 — Knickerbockers, or closed drawers with inseams, were made for the first time. Nicknamed knickers, they gathered at the knee and were trimmed with a frill of lace.

1905 — Pants or panties (short for pantaloons) had slimmer and shorter legs than knickers.

1916 — Camiknickers emerged as delicate combination underwear that women stepped into, then slid over their shoulders and buttoned at the crotch.

1930s — The introduction of elastic yarn made keeping panties in place much easier than tying ribbons or using buttons.

VOCABULARY

Amore: Italian for love.
Baron: In Britain, the lowest rank of nobleman.
Bourgeois: A person of the middle class.
Bureaucrat: A person who works for a bureaucracy, or an administrative office of the government.
Clydesdale: A breed of large, strong horses, breed in Scotland.
Coquetry: Flirting.
Descartes: A French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist who lived from 1596-1650. Descartes had a great influence on the progression from medieval to modern science.
Diligence: Persistence in finishing a task.
Disavow: To refuse knowledge of, disclaim.
Exacerbate: To intensify or aggravate.
Frau: German term to politely address an older woman.
Hod Carrier: A workers who delivers supplies to bricklayers.
Indicative: Pointing out or signifying. A bad mood might be indicative of a stomach ache.
Inexplicable: Impossible to explain.
Machination: To plot or scheme.
Nietzsche: A German philosopher who lived from 1844-1900. Nietzsche was a moralist whose writings critiqued religion, science, and contemporary culture.
Orate: To speak pompously.
Pentameter: A line of poetry that consists of five measures or feet.
Pretense: Insincere or false showing of something.
Quatrain: A poem with four lines.
Rhapsody: Overly excited expression of one's feelings in speech or writing.
Salacious: Lustful or lascivious.
Shirk: To avoid responsibility.
Domesticity as Vocation

Women’s [lack of] choices at the turn of the 20th century

Carl Sternheim’s 1911 drama The Underpants was a humorous but biting social satire. At the time of its publication, Sternheim sought to point a critical finger at the bourgeoisie, by putting the woes and ways of a typical middle class family on display. In adapting the play for a contemporary audience, the goal Martin set for himself was explicitly to steer clear of the fleeting nature of fame. This difference in aim, coupled with and the drama instead on sexual politics, less political. Opting to adapt the play for a contemporary audience, the goal Martin set for himself was explicitly bitten social satire. At the time of its publication, Sternheim sought to point a critical finger at the bourgeoisie, by putting the woes and ways of a typical middle class family on display. In adapting the play for a contemporary audience, the goal Martin set for himself was explicitly to steer clear of the fleeting nature of fame. This difference in aim, coupled with.

What was expected of a middle class housewife in 1911? What were her options, and her obligations? At the turn of the twentieth century, who was “the perfect woman?”

“a woman should be a dutiful, faithful, and obedient wife, a loving mother — and one hell of a housekeeper.”

“Her Monument Was Her Home.”

Lynmon Abbott’s fantasia on female perfection may have represented the ideal of her era—but if you asked a woman for her opinion on the subject (and if she gave you an honest answer), she’d likely sing a different tune.

In the course of modern history, only in the last century have women had any real measure of control over the trajectory of their lives. In 1911, choices were few for a woman of the middle class. Marriage was the aspiration of a default; housewifery the chief vocation among a very small array of available options. Winds of change were beginning to blow, but much remained to be done. In Germany, women did not win the vote until 1918. Even after that victory, it would be an uphill climb for her who sought the right to build and define her own life.

In the meantime, women of Louise’s era were caught in a particularly strange moment of transition. The term “domesticity” had once encompassed a broad variety of duties. Up until the early nineteenth century, it included not only the physical duties of wifehood and motherhood (the rearing of children, the performance of household chores, and the social duties of hospitality), but also the in-home manufacturer of nearly all the goods the family consumed in order to live. The wife was nurse, dressmaker, tailor, laundress, and cloth manufacturer, to name only a few of her daily occupations. Maintaining a household that could sustain a large family was actually a full time job. But beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, sweeping industrialization allowed the housewife to relinquish the majority of these duties. Instead of at-home manufacture of life’s necessities, finished products were assembled in factories and available for purchase. This meant only trifling household chores remained under a woman’s purview. These often frivolous tasks were not sufficiently labor intensive to employ a significant measure of strength, industry, or intelligence. Nor were they stimulating enough to sustain her interest and attention. They were, however, the only occupations society granted her—an unhappy fact which Gail Hamilton, a 19th-century author and advocate for women’s rights, believed should try the soul of even the most angelic housewife. “A woman who is satisfied with the small economies, the small interests, the constant contemplation of the small things which a household demands,” she wrote, “is a very small sort of woman.”

It was an era in which the advice column in a popular women’s magazine urged its feminine readership to minister faithfully and humbly to their husbands’ comfort, reminding the housewife that “…it was for woman’s sake Eden was forfeited, because Adam loved his wife more than his Creator.” The etiquette expert in another magazine admonished those ladies possessed of wit, when in company, not to make a display of it.

One female writer, in a 1908 article describing the prevailing attitudes toward German women, summed up the situation with precision: “She has been the wise angel and goddess of the poem—the submissive hausfrau of real life.”