

MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

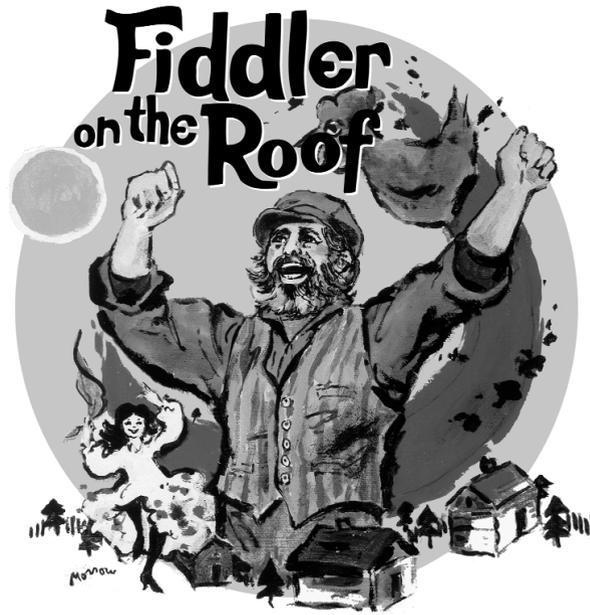
MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL is one of the world's major dramatic licensing agencies, specializing in Broadway, Off-Broadway and West End musicals. Since its founding in 1952, MTI has been responsible for supplying scripts and musical materials to theatres worldwide and for protecting the rights and legacy of the authors whom it represents. It has been a driving force in cultivating new work and in extending the production life of some of the classics: *Guys and Dolls*, *West Side Story*, *Fiddler On The Roof*, *Les Misérables*, *Annie*, *Of Thee I Sing*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Damn Yankees*, *The Music Man*, *Evita*, and the complete musical theatre works of composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim, among others. Apart from the major Broadway and Off-Broadway shows, MTI is proud to represent youth shows, revues and musicals which began life in regional theatres and have since become worthy additions to the musical theatre canon. MTI shows have been performed by 30,000 amateur and professional theatrical organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada, and in over 60 countries around the world. Whether it's at a high school in Kansas, by an all-female troupe in Japan or the first production of *West Side Story* ever staged in Estonia, productions of MTI musicals involve over 10 million people each year.

Although we value all our clients, the twelve thousand high schools who perform our shows are of particular importance, for it is at these schools that music and drama educators work to keep theatre alive in their community. MTI shares with these educators the goal of raising the next generation of theatre artists and audiences. To help these educators, it has taken a leading role in theatre education by creating MTI THEATRICAL RESOURCES, a "theatrical tool box" designed to help not only ensure the success of each musical production, but also to establish the study of musical theatre as a permanent part of the school curriculum. These resources include: STUDY GUIDES designed to bring the study of specific shows into the classroom; MTI REHEARSCORES® which provide unlimited rehearsal accompaniment via an easy-to-use, fully interactive computer program on disk; professional TV SPOTS allowing companies to affordably advertise on television in local markets; LOGO PACKS to aide in poster and program design; TRANSPOSITIONS-ON-DEMAND to allow flexibility in casting and musical key changes; and VIDEO CONVERSATIONPIECES™ featuring video seminars with artists such as Martin Charnin, Stephen Sondheim and Scott Ellis discussing the creation of their shows from inception to production.

MTI is also a leader in providing materials to meet the increasing demand for symphonic arrangements of popular theatre music. The MTI CONCERT LIBRARY offers arrangements of selected songs, as well as full scores from Broadway shows.

Musicals are America's premiere contribution to the theatre and MTI is firmly committed to supporting and nurturing a musical theatre that will continue to develop and flourish into the next century.





Based on Sholem Aleichem stories by special permission of Arnold Perl

Book by
JOSEPH STEIN

Music by
JERRY BOCK

Lyrics by
SHELDON HARNICK

Original New York Stage Production Directed & Choreographed
by JEROME ROBBINS

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Introduction

The qualities which have made *Fiddler on the Roof* one of the most beloved American musicals and drawn audiences around the world into the magical circle formed by the villagers of Anatevka, also make it an important and stimulating work for students everywhere to study and observe. In addition to exploring the problems of oppressed minorities, it is a play with an up-beat message about the importance of beliefs, customs, community, family, and love.

About *Fiddler on the Roof*

“Teveye’s Daughters”, a collection of stories by the great Yiddish author, Sholem Aleichem, inspired the composer, Jerry Bock; the lyricist, Sheldon Harnick; and the librettist, Joseph Stein to create the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. In association with director-choreographer Jerome Robbins and producer Harold Prince, they transformed the Teveye stories into one of the most successful, long-running musicals on Broadway and throughout the world.

Told with wit and humor, *Fiddler on the Roof* is a powerful statement about the evils of prejudice and the importance of maintaining a warm, caring communal and family life in the midst of severe oppression. Although the story of Teveye the Dairyman and his family is concerned specifically with the lives of impoverished Jews in Czarist Russia, it is built around universal themes which audiences of any age, ethnic and cultural background can understand

The world on stage reveals what life was like in Anatevka, an Eastern European *shtetl* at the turn of the century. The *shtetl* was an area where a minority group, Jews, were forced to live and from which they could be evicted at any time. Since many of Anatevka’s inhabitants were poor and their futures were uncertain, life often seemed bleak. However, because they were people of tradition, hope and spirit, there were moments of tenderness and joy.

While the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe and their populations were largely destroyed by Hitler during World War II, their contemporary equivalents exist around the world and in America today. The plight of the *shtetl* dwellers lives on wherever prejudice pits one group against another, and wherever minority communities are economically and politically isolated in ghettos, barrios, on reservations, and in pockets of poverty.

The Characters in *Fiddler on the Roof*

TEVYE—the Dairyman.

GOLDE—his wife.

TZEITEL	}	Tevye and Golde's daughters
HODEL		
CHAVA		
SHPRINTZE		
BIELKE		

YENTE—the Matchmaker.

MOTEL—the Tailor (who becomes Tzeitel's husband).

PERCHIK—the Student (who become Hodel's husband).

LAZAR WOLFE—the Butcher (the man Yente suggests for Tzeitel).

MORDCHA—the Innkeeper.

RABBI

MENDEL—the Rabbi's son.

AVRAHM—the Bookseller.

NACHUM—the Beggar.

GRANDMA TZEITEL—Golde's dead grandmother who returns in spirit form.

FRUMA-SARAH—Lazar Wolf's dead wife who returns in spirit form.

CONSTABLE—a local Russian authority.

FYEDKA—a non-Jewish Russian who becomes Chava's husband.

SHANDEL—Motel the Tailor's mother.

THE FIDDLER

VILLAGERS

Plot Synopsis

Prologue

Fiddler on the Roof is set in the small Jewish village of Anatevka, Russia, in 1905 and is concerned primarily with the efforts of Tevye, a dairyman, his wife, Golde, and their five daughters to cope with their harsh existence under Tsarist rule.

During the Prologue ("Tradition"), Tevye explains the role of God's law in providing balance in the villagers' lives. He describes the inner circle of the community and the larger circle which includes the constable, the priest, and countless other authority figures. He explains, "We don't bother them and so far, they don't bother us." He ends by insisting that without their traditions, he and the other villagers would find their lives "as shaky as a fiddler on the roof."

Act I, Scene 1

Tevye's daughters wonder if the matchmaker will ever find them the men of their dreams ("Matchmaker"). The matchmaker, Yente, tells Golde that she has selected the butcher Lazar Wolfe as a match for Tzeitel.

Scene 2

Tevye reflects on how much he wishes he had a small fortune ("If I Were a Rich Man"). A group of villagers, including an outsider, Perchik, approach him with news of a violent *pogrom* in a nearby village. Tevye invites Perchik, a young revolutionary student, to come to his home for Sabbath dinner and arranges for him to instruct his daughters.

Scene 3

Motel, the tailor attempts to ask Tevye for Tzeitel's hand, but gets tongue-tied. The family and their guests welcome the Sabbath ("Sabbath Prayer").

Scene 4

Tevye goes to meet Lazar Wolfe, the butcher, and agrees to the match with Tzeitel. A boisterous celebration ensues involving the villagers and the Russians who also congregate in the tavern ("L'Chaim").

Scene 5

As Tevye staggers home, he meets the Constable, who warns him that a demonstration is going to be planned against the Jews of Anatevka. In his inebriation, Tevye conjures The Fiddler, who plays his violin as Tevye dances his way home.

Scene 6

Tevye appears and tells Tzeitel about her engagement to Lazar Wolfe. Golde rejoices, but after she leaves, Motel tells Tevye that he and Tzeitel gave each other a pledge to marry. After a struggle with himself, Tevye agrees to their marriage. He leaves and Motel and Tzeitel rejoice (“Miracle of Miracles”).

Scene 7

Tevye decides to manufacture a wild nightmare (“The Dream”) to convince Golde that the match with Lazar will result in Tzeitel’s death at the hands of the butcher’s first wife, Fruma-Sarah. Golde is so horrified that she insists on a marriage between Tzeitel and Motel.

Scene 8

The villagers are gossiping in the street about the mix-up in Tzeitel’s wedding plans. As Chava enters Motel’s tailor shop, a group of Russians on the street taunt her. Fyedka, a Russian youth, insists that they stop. After they leave, Fyedka follows Chava into the shop. He tries to speak with her, but leaves quickly when Motel enters. Motel places his wedding hat on his head.

Scene 9

The musicians lead us to the wedding. The company sings (“Sunrise, Sunset”) as the traditional Jewish ceremony takes place. To the villagers’ dismay, Perchik asks Hodel to dance with him and she accepts, performing the forbidden act of dancing with a man. Everyone else follows suit. As the dance reaches a wild high point, the Constable and his men enter. They destroy everything in sight. Perchik grapples with a Russian and is hit with a club. The constable bows to Tevye and says “I am genuinely sorry. You understand?” Tevye replies with mock courtesy, “Of course.” The family begins to clean up after the destruction.

Prologue

During the Prologue, Tevye chats with God about recent events.

Act II, Scene 1

Perchik tells Hodel that he is leaving to work for justice in Kiev. He proposes to her and she accepts (“Now I Have Everything”). He promises to send for her as soon as he can. Tevye approves in spite of his misgivings. After they leave, he asks Golde if she thinks their own arranged marriage has somehow also turned into a romance (“Do You Love Me?”).

Scene 2

On a village street, Yente tells Tzeitel she has seen Chava with Fyedka. The news Yente has gleaned from a letter from Perchik becomes gossip for the villagers, who turn it into a song that totally distorts the truth (“The Rumor”).

Scene 3

Tevye takes Hodel to the railroad station. She is going to Siberia where Perchik has been sent after his arrest (“Far From the Home I Love”).

Scene 4

The villagers are once again gossiping about a new arrival at Motel and Tzeitel’s.

Scene 5

At Motel’s shop, we learn that the new arrival is a sewing machine. Fyedka and Chava speak outside the shop. She promises to speak to Tevye about their love for each other. Tevye appears and Chava tries to talk to him about Fyedka. Tevye refuses to listen to her and forbids her to ever to speak to him about Fyedka again.

Scene 6

Tevye returns home to learn from Golde that Chava and Fydeka have been married by the priest. Tevye says that Chava is dead to them. He sings of his love for Chava ("Little Bird"). When Chava appears to ask his acceptance, he cannot allow himself to answer her plea. Chava exits as unseen voices sing ("Tradition").

Scene 7

Yente is trying to fix up Tevye's remaining daughters with two boys as future husbands. The Constable brings the news that everyone in the town has to sell their houses and household goods and leave Anatevka in three days. As the villagers think of their future, they sing fondly of the village they are leaving ("Anatevka").

Scene 8

The family is packing the wagon to leave. Tzeitel and Motel are staying in Warsaw until they have enough money to go to America. Hodel and Perchik are still in Siberia. Chava appears with Fydeka. Tevye refuses to acknowledge her. Chava explains that they are also leaving because they cannot stay among people who can do such things to others. They are going to Cracow. Tzeitel says goodbye to them and Tevye prompts Tzeitel to add, "God be with you!" Chava promises Golde she will write to her in America. Chava and Fydeka leave. Final goodbyes are said and Tevye begins pulling the wagon. Other villagers join the circle, including The Fiddler. Tevye beckons to the The Fiddler to follow him. The Fiddler tucks his fiddle under his arm and follows the group upstage as the curtain falls.

Themes and Topics to Explore

Questions and Assignments

Our study guide includes a wide-ranging list of themes and topics which are suggested by issues raised in *Fiddler on the Roof*..

Avenues for exploring each theme and topic are suggested in the form of:

QUESTIONS : Designed to prompt in-class discussions before and after viewing or reading the shows.

ASSIGNMENTS : Designed to be researched and written out of class.

Internal and External Forces that Threaten Tevye's World

Two forces are at work to alter the lives of Tevye, his family, and fellow villagers.

1. Internal forces within their own society which threaten their traditional lifestyle.
2. External forces in the form of the Russian authorities, prejudice, and economic changes.

Internal Forces: Tradition

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What is tradition? What is the role of tradition in keeping societies (groups of individuals living in communities) together?
- Do you think tradition has a place in contemporary society? Why?
- Trace the significance of tradition through the plot of *Fiddler on the Roof*. What happens to the characters and their world as traditions unravel?
- Why did the theme of tradition in *Fiddler on the Roof* create an emotional response from audiences all over the world? Why does it have meaning everywhere?
- When Tevye says, "If I bend too far, I will break," what does he mean?
- Tevye's society is shocked at the idea of men and women dancing together. What jolt to tradition would shock you and your friends in a similar way today? Why?
- Can education be an enemy of tradition? Does this happen to Tevye and his family? Can education drive a wedge between parents and children? Has this happened to you? How? Can you imagine a situation like this between you and your children as the world continues to change?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Investigate a highly traditional society other than your own. How are the traditions of this society changing? How does this change the nature of life in the society?
- What traditions are important to groups to which you belong? (Ethnic groups, family groups, religious groups, etc.) What personal value do you attach to your family's traditions?
- Trace the importance of tradition through your life? How has tradition shaped who you are?

External Forces: The Roots of Prejudice

This theme, which motivated Sholem Aleichem to write his Tevye stories in the early 1900s, remains relevant to our world today and reaches far beyond anti-Semitism

(prejudice against Jews). The refusal to accept “otherness” as a source of conflict within a population can be seen in the struggles of the Catholics and the Protestants in Ireland; between the Iraqis and the Kurds; in India between the Sikhs and the Hindus; and throughout the Middle East. In America, there continue to be conflicts between racial, ethnic, and religious groups, as well as differences between regions.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What causes the members of one group to dislike and distrust one another? What happens when these attitudes are officially sanctioned? Can you think of examples of this in world or American history?
- Where are there struggles going on around the world today that have their roots in prejudice? (i.e. Palestine, South Africa, Ireland).
- What is stereotyping? Why is it dangerous? Divide into two groups, male and female. Compose a list of what you like about the other group in terms of behavior, characteristics, attitudes and expectations. Compose a second list of what you dislike about the other group. Each list should contain examples. After 15 minutes the groups should read their lists to each and give their examples. After both groups have spoken, discuss the lists and examples. Be aware of how easy it is to stereotype others. What kinds of feelings did the invitation and the “sanction” to comment on the traits of the other group produce?
- Is “obeying orders” a legitimate excuse for any violent action? Where do you draw the line?
- The Russians and Jews who live in Anatevka appear to be co-existing in peace through much of the first act. What happens to change this?
- The constable is a complex character. How can he seem to be Tevye’s friend and still lead the attack against him? Why does the constable say he does this?
- Who are the “constables” in contemporary life? How can they be changed?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Select a contemporary conflict that has its roots in religious prejudice in America or abroad (i.e. Crown Heights or Northern Ireland). Explain the nature of this conflict from both points of view.
- Examine the contemporary “right wing” forces in Europe today who are trying to expel foreign workers.
- What has happened to the Jews in Russia between 1905 and the present?
- What is a *pogrom*? When and where did *pogroms* begin?
- Investigate what happened to the Jews who lived in the communities of Eastern Europe during World War II. What might have been the fate of Tevye’s family if they had stayed in Anatevka?

Language Barriers

Language differences contributed to problems of “otherness” for the residents of *shtetls* like Anatevka.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- In America, English is the primary language. What problems does this create for those American citizens who do not speak English?
- Why do individuals struggle to hold onto their own language? What does a language represent?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Research the idea of a universal language. Report on possible universal language systems such as Esperanto. Do you think such a universal language will ever exist? Why or why not?
- Research contemporary struggles over language in America today (i.e. the issue of language used in schools in Hispanic communities in the Southwest).
- Research contemporary struggles over language in other countries today (i.e. the French-English dispute in Quebec, Canada).

Assimilation

Tevye and the Jews of Anatevka are not entirely trusted or understood by the larger community because they attempt to hold on to their own way of life.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What problems face the members of a distinct culture who live within a larger social group while trying to maintain their cultural identity? Have you and your family or friends ever experienced such problems?
- Discuss how successfully minorities in America have been able to maintain their uniqueness while living in the larger community. Does anyone try to force minorities to surrender their unique identities by law? How does societal pressure operate to alter such identities?

Superstition

Superstition plays a significant role in the everyday life of the characters in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What is superstition?

- Why do people need superstitions? How does superstition help us deal with the irrational?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Make a list of superstitions that are still widely believed today. Try to discover the sources of these superstitions.
- Think of a way that superstition has effected your life or the life of someone you know. Describe the incident or circumstances in detail.

The Concepts of Romantic Love and Intermarriage

One of Tevye's struggles is related to the issue of arranged marriage versus romantic love. He learns to accept the concept of marrying for love, but the marriage of his daughter Chava to the non-Jewish Fyedka proves too much for him to tolerate.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What is the purpose of arranged marriage? What are its benefits and drawbacks? Would you want to participate in an arranged marriage? Why or why not?
- Do you think the fact that romantic love rather than arranged marriages dominates in our society is a factor in the current rate of divorce? Why or why not?
- Why is intermarriage a matter of such significance to religious and ethnic groups?
- What is the attitude of our society towards various types of intermarriages? How do you feel about them?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Research a society that believed in arranged marriages in the past and/or believes in them today. Describe the customs surrounding these arranged marriages.

Societal Roles of Women

The women of the *shtetl* were expected to play a subordinate role in the community, as are women in many traditional societies.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What are some of ways in which women were supposed to play a subordinate role to men in Anatevka? How did the characters in the show break out of this subordinate role? How did they remain in it?

- Do you think American women of your generation would allow themselves to be placed in such a role?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Research the role of women living in different societies (i.e. Saudi Arabia) today.

Attitudes Towards God and Death

Tevye and his peers have personal, ongoing relationships with the dead and with God.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What is the attitude of the society in which you live towards the dead?
- What do we learn about Tevye through his conversations with God?
- What is accomplished by talking to the dead in *Fiddler on the Roof*?

Festivals

Festivals play a major role in the life cycle of the residents of Anatevka.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- What is the meaning of festivals for a society and for individuals?
- What festivals, celebrations, parades, and special days are important to you and your family? Why?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Investigate the origins of a festival you and your family celebrate.
- Explore the origins of a festival you do not celebrate.

Perceiving Danger

When danger comes to a society, some members see it and try to fight back. Others try to ignore it. Others don't see it.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- How do the villagers of Anatevka react to the growing danger they face?
- How does Perchik, as a revolutionary, react to the danger he observes? What happens to him as a result?
- How have students reacted in a similar fashion in recent years around the world?

- Why do different people react differently to the same threat?
- How do you think you would react in such a situation?

Happiness vs. Misery

The events of *Fiddler on the Roof* mirror the expression “Happiness comes, misery follows.”

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- Trace the events of the plot following this pattern: “happiness comes, misery follows.” How does Tevye use humor to fight adversity?
- How do we use humor to temper grief in our society? Can you think of a time when you have done this in your own life?

Inter-Family Relationships: Tevye’s Daughters

Tevye and Golde have raised five very different children, who respond in widely varied ways to the circumstances that confront them.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- Is it best to be the youngest or oldest child in the family?
- Trace the actions of Hodel, Tzeitel, and Chava. What traits do each of these daughters share? How do they differ?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- We know very little about Tevye’s two youngest daughters. They will grow up in America. Imagine them when they are Hodel and Chava’s age. What will they be like? How will life in America change them?
- Read the original Sholem Aleichem stories about Tevye and his daughters. What do you learn about the daughters that is not included in the show?

Emigration

Tevye and his family are forced out of their home to become refugees and to emigrate from their homeland. Today millions of immigrants are leaving their homelands in areas including Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, trying to escape poverty, civil unrest and repression to find work and a safe haven. This refugee flood is the inevitable consequence of changing political and economic situations that motivate the deprived to move towards a more prosperous environment.

Questions and Discussion Ideas

- Imagine yourself in a situation similar to Tevye’s today. Imagine being told you have to leave your home. Where would you go? Imagine being told to leave America? Where would you go?
- Tevye and Golde must leave many members of the family behind. Why? Discuss what might have happened to these split families.
- What did Tevye and Golde lose by their move to America? What did they gain?
- Many immigrants expressed a longing for home after they arrived in America. Would Tevye and Golde have done this? Do you think it is possible to truly “go back”?

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Trace the many waves of immigration that shaped the population of America. When did your family first come to America? From what countries did they emigrate? Ask members of your family to help you trace the journey of those who first settled here. Why did they leave their homeland? What happened when they first arrived here?
- Investigate the nature of the immigrant experience in America during the first decade of the 1900s.
- Write a story describing what you think could have happened to Tevye’s family based on what you learn.
- Learn about Ellis Island and the nature of entering America through its gates.
- Look at current magazines and newspapers to discover refugee situations parallel to the situation faced by Tevye and his family. Write about events and issues related to Immigration/Emigration in the world today. Areas to explore include:

Afghanistan	Ethiopia	Namibia	Tanzania
Albania	Ghana	Nicaragua	Tibet
Angola	Haiti	Pakistan	Uganda
Bangladesh	Hong Kong	Panama	Vietnam
Bulgaria	Hungary	People’s Republic of China	
Burma	India	Poland	
Cambodia	Iran	Rumania	
Chile	Iraq	Russia	
Czech Republic	Israel	Somalia	
Dominican Republic	Lebanon	South Africa	
Germany	Liberia	Sri Lanka	
El Salvador	Mauritania	Sudan	
	Mozambique		

Songs

Songs are an important part of the story-telling technique in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Select one of the following songs:

"Tradition"
"Matchmaker, Matchmaker"
"If I Were A Rich Man"
"Sabbath Prayer"
"To Life"
"Miracle of Miracles"
"Sunrise, Sunset"
"Now I Have Everything"
"Do You Love Me?"
"Far From The Home I Love"
"Anatevka"

1. Summarize the contents of the song. Discuss:
 - a. What do we learn about the world of Anatevka from the song?
 - b. What do we learn about the character or characters who sing the song and their feelings about other characters?
 - c. What do we learn about the larger themes of the show from the song?
- Can you think of another place in the show where a song might fit? What would a title for the song be? Who would sing it? What would it be about? Try to write a few lines of the song lyric.

Free Adaptation

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Using the story of *Fiddler on the Roof* as a "jumping-off place," outline your own adaptation of this subject matter. Create a new family who belongs to any group of your choosing. Set your story in the present or in any other time in history. Set your musical in America or anywhere in the world of your choosing. Make the "enemy" anyone you wish. Reverse the genders of some of the characters if you wish. Would Tevye be a woman in your "new" world because it is a matriarchal society? What kind of music would your characters sing as a result of your choices? How would their

music be influenced by your new cultural setting? Would it sound contemporary? How would they dance? What festivals would you depict? What new problems would they face because of your new setting? Tell a story that *you* need to tell *now* that is in the spirit of the story of Tevye and his family in Anatevka. If you wish, write some dialogue for your characters to explore how they would sound. Try to write one of the songs.

Critical Analysis

Assignments: Research and Writing Projects

- Write a review of a performance of *Fiddler on the Roof*. You may wish to include any combination of the following elements in your review.
 1. Did *Fiddler on the Roof* hold your interest? Why?
 2. Describe the manner in which the story was presented to the audience? Was there a narrator? What was the dialogue like?
 3. Describe the structure of the story. Was there a single story or were there multiple stories? How did the multiple stories connect? Was anything about the story unexpected? How did it begin and end?
 5. Describe the way music and lyrics worked in the show.
 6. Describe the sets, costumes, lighting, and musical accompaniment. How did these elements add to the meaning of the show?
 7. Discuss the effectiveness of the performers.
 8. Discuss the ideas presented in the show. Analyze their importance today.
 9. Explain why others should make an effort to see the show.

APPENDIX

The following background material on the creative team who wrote *Fiddler on the Roof*; the process of putting the show together; the life and world of Sholem Aleichem; the source material (*Tevye's Daughters*); the historical setting; and a resource list are designed to enrich your exploration of the Themes and Topics.

About the Creators

JOSEPH STEIN (Librettist) started his career in television and was one of a noted group of writers on *Your Show of Shows* and *The Sid Caesar Show*. His first work for the theatre was as co-author of *Plain And Fancy*, the hit musical about the adventures of a pair of sophisticated New Yorkers living among the Amish in Pennsylvania. His next show was *Mr. Wonderful*, starring Sammy Davis, Jr. He created the libretto for the Bock and Harnick musical *The Body Beautiful*. His next librettos were for *Take Me Along*, based on Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness*; and *Juno*, with score by Marc Blitzstein. He then wrote the adaptation for the hit stage comedy *Enter Laughing*. *Fiddler on the Roof* was his next show, for which he won the Tony as well as the Drama Critics' Circle Award. He was also nominated for a Tony for his next show, *Zorba*, with score by Kander and Ebb. His other productions include *King of Hearts*, *Irene*, *Rags* (for which he also was nominated for a Tony), and *The Baker's Wife*, which was produced in London and was nominated for the Laurence Olivier Award. Mr. Stein is also the author of the screenplays for *Enter Laughing* and *Fiddler on the Roof*.

JERRY BOCK (Composer) and SHELDON HARNICK (Lyricist) were the dominant musical theatre writing team of the 1960s. Their thematic material was primarily concerned with ordinary people and the way in which they dealt with misfortune. After being paired by music publisher Tommy Valando, Bock and Harnick wrote their first show together, *The Body Beautiful*, an unsuccessful musical about prize fighters. Their second project was *Fiorello!*, a musical about the life of New York City Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia with a book by George Abbott and Jerome Weidman. Harold Prince produced *Fiorello!*, which received rave reviews and was selected the year's best drama by the Pulitzer Prize committee. It also won a Tony. The same team of Bock, Harnick, Abbott, Weidman, and Prince created *Tenderloin*, which dealt with a crusader, Dr. Parkhurst, who battled the red light district in New York. Harold Prince became the director as well as the producer of *She Loves Me*, Bock and Harnick's next show, an adaptation of the play *Parfumerie*. Bock and Harnick's next show was the multi-Tony Award winning *Fiddler on the Roof*, which was followed by *The Apple Tree*, a unique trilogy of three short stories with love as the unifying theme. After their final collaboration on *The Rothschilds*, the team split up. Jerry Bock has concentrated on writing lyrics as well as

music. Sheldon Harnick has written lyrics for operas and operettas, the Broadway musical *Rex*, with Richard Rodgers, as well as stage adaptations of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* and *It's A Wonderful Life*.

The Process of Creating *Fiddler on the Roof*

Bock, Harnick, and Stein met to discuss the possibility of adapting the Tevye stories in March, 1961. They selected three unconnected monologues in which Tevye relates the romantic adventures of his daughters. Their goal was to use these isolated tales as the basis for a play about the whole community, to tell a larger story which has a dramatic progression from beginning to end, while retaining the rich feeling and tone of the original material. By July, 1961, they had drafted a rough outline and begun the process of negotiating for the stage rights to the stories.

In the fall of 1961, Joseph Stein began work on the first draft of the musical's book. Since none of the dialogue and few of the scenes were in the stories, Mr. Stein had the challenging task of creating a new work in a different medium, in a different language, for a new audience. Most importantly, he had to shape the work to clearly illustrate the theme of the erosion of tradition and the breakup of a community under the buffeting of hostile forces. During the early stages of the musical's development, Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock wrote 19 songs. Only a handful of the songs from this preliminary score ended up in the show.

At this point the collaborators took their first draft to Harold Prince, who had produced three earlier Bock and Harnick shows. On Prince's advice, director-choreographer Jerome Robbins was invited to join the project. Prince believed that Robbins could bring the show the universality it needed.

The title of the show was inspired by a painting by Marc Chagall, a painter who was known for his portrayal of the difficulties and poignancy of Jewish life. This painting, which depicts an oval-eyed violinist seemingly dangling in space over the roofs of a peasant village, also had a great deal of influence over the design of the scenery.

Another important symbol that greatly effected the visual design of *Fiddler on the Roof* was the circle. Jerome Robbins was inspired to use the circle metaphor because of its constant presence in Jewish folk-dance patterns. It became the basis for the show's design and for the staging of "Tradition," "To Life," the wedding celebration, and the "Bottle Dance." Most importantly, the symbol was restated during the exodus from Anatevka at the end of the show when the circle—the community—breaks up.

Fiddler on the Roof opened at the Imperial Theatre on September 22, 1964, and closed on July 2, 1972, after a run of 3,242 performances. It was revived in New York in 1976, 1981, and 1991.

About Sholem Aleichem and his World

Sholem Aleichem was the pseudonym of Sholem Yakov Rabinowitz. His career as a writer began in the early 1880s when the word *pogrom* was coined to describe the attacks on the Jews of western Russia. The *pogroms* and the restrictive laws that followed caused the emigration of dislocated Jews like Tevye and his family. As this dislocation shattered lives, it also inspired a cultural awakening among the Jews, prompting an attempt to establish a body of literature written in the Yiddish language.

This new body of literature came of age with the coming of age of Sholem Aleichem as a writer. Although his generation saw the center of Jewish life shift from the small towns and villages of the Pale to crowded cities and to America, Sholem Aleichem's power as an artist was forged in the *shtetl*.

From his earliest stories about childhood to the autobiography he wrote shortly before he died, Sholem Aleichem brought those memories to life.

Sholem was born on March 2, 1859 in the Ukrainian town of Persyaslav. His father was a rich man and a leader of the community as well as a religious scholar. When Sholem was 12 years old, his father suffered dire financial reverses and his mother died of cholera.

His father encouraged him to compose poems and stories at an early age and he often sat up late into the night, writing after his chores were done. When his father's fortunes improved, Sholem was able to pursue a secondary education. However, his eligibility for the military draft prevented him from being accepted at a university.

After his release from the Army, he became a rabineer, a government rabbi, for three years. While he originally wrote in Hebrew and in Russian, Sholem Aleichem wrote his first story in Yiddish in 1883. Writing in Yiddish was a controversial choice because it was still considered a jargon language and almost never used for literary expression. Sholem adopted the name Sholem Aleichem for his pen name as he experimented in writing in Yiddish. Sholem Aleichem means "Peace be with you" in Yiddish and the phrase was a conventional greeting familiar to his readers. Between 1883, the year of his marriage, and his death, he published 40 volumes of novels, stories, and plays in Yiddish.

He wrote standing, walking, indoors or out, sitting in railway carriages, swaying wagons, and in restaurants waiting for friends. He carried a small narrow notebook that fitted the palm of his hand. He enjoyed writing at home, standing at a high desk which he had designed himself. He enjoyed the physical act of writing and was deeply attached to his notebooks, his desk, his supply of colored pencils and inks, his scissors, binders, pasting materials, transparent gummed papers, and various sheets of paper of various colors and sizes.

His works were widely translated and he became known as the “Jewish Mark Twain” in America. He was the first author to write in Yiddish for children and adaptations of his work were important in the founding of the Yiddish Art Theatre in New York.

Tevye the Dairyman first appeared in stories in 1894 and continued to appear in Sholem Aleichem’s work for the next twenty years.

By 1903, he was finally able to support himself solely by writing. However, his new freedom was brief. A deadly *pogrom* occurred in Kishniev, near Kiev, in the spring of 1903. Kiev itself was struck in 1905. By 1906 it was impossible for him to live and write in Kiev. He and his family began the journey that a million Russian Jews had already made since 1880. They set out for America, leaving the rest of his family in Geneva. However, he soon discovered that he could not support this divided household on his very low income and had to return to Geneva.

Most of his works had been pirated and many of his readers read his work in publications that produced no royalties for him. He began an exhaustive series of reading tours in Poland and Russia to make money; during these tours he was diagnosed with tuberculosis.

He lived as a semi-invalid between 1909 and 1913, but was able to once again devote himself to writing. His followers, alarmed by his illness, rallied behind him and raised funds to assist the family. When World War I was declared, he found himself with nowhere to turn but America. The family sailed to New York in November of 1914. He had to leave his son Misha, who had tuberculosis, behind.

Sholem spent the last two years of his life in New York City. Many of his later sketches afford penetrating insight into the immigrant generation on American soil. During this period Sholem found himself struggling to survive financially once again and he was absorbed with concerns about his son’s health. Misha died in Copenhagen in the winter of 1915. Sholem Aleichem died in his apartment on Kelly Street in the Bronx on May 13, 1916. He was honored with a massive funeral procession before his burial at Har Ha-Karmel in Brooklyn.

The Tevye Stories

Sholem Aleichem created Tevye the Dairyman (“Tevye der Milchiger” in Yiddish) during his own most difficult years.

Tevye, a lighthearted pauper, who drives his rickety wagon in search of a pittance, but whose thoughts reach up to God, has much in common with Aleichem’s other heroes. As a group, they are rooted in biblical lore and morality; they prize learning more than wealth. They feel the sting of oppression and the pain of existence, but they retain faith in the ultimate victory of justice. Aleichem laughed at the absurdities of ragged, quaint characters like Tevye, but never with malice or bitterness.

In each of his successive stories about Tevye the Dairyman, Sholem Aleichem invented a worse situation to test the principle, "As long as a Jew can still draw breath and feel the blood beating in his veins, he must never lose hope."

The original stories describe the fate of Tevye's seven daughters, who in varying degrees each contribute to his sorrow. In addition to the stories included in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Aleichem told of Shprintze (Hope) who commits suicide when she is abandoned by a rich young man whose family does not approve his alliance with the child of a dairyman. Daughter Bielke agrees to an arranged marriage with a rich man who also considers Tevye beneath him and urges the dairyman to leave the country. Bielke sides with her husband against her father.

In the final Tevye story, he is obliged by Tsarist decree to remove himself from his rural home as part of the policy that had been squeezing Jews out of the countryside and into towns. Tevye becomes one more Jewish exile.

However, in Sholem Aleichem's story, Tevye sets out for Israel rather than America, but returns to support Tzeitel when Motel dies.

The Historical Setting of *Fiddler on the Roof*

When Jewish refugees poured into Eastern Europe following the Crusades, Polish rulers welcomed them because of their experience in commerce and industry. The Poles granted the Jews privileges and liberties, religious freedom, and community self-government. As a result, Eastern Europe became a center of Jewish culture.

Over many hundreds of years, the *shtetl*, the small-town Jewish community of Eastern Europe, developed a way of life uniquely its own. Socially and legally, the *shtetl* was an entity in itself, isolated from the non-Jewish world. *Shtetl* inhabitants spoke Yiddish, wrote and read Hebrew, and bargained with outsiders in broken Polish or Ukrainian. Despite local variations, the Jews of the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe had one culture with a common language, religion, and set of values.

As a result of the partition of Poland during the reign of Catherine the Great in the late 1700s, Russia, which had traditionally admitted only tiny numbers of Jews, was suddenly faced with a new population of 600,000 people who seemed alien in every way. Under Catherine the Great, the Jews were legally classified as city-dwellers and their presence in the villages or *shtetls* became illegal. The threat of being ordered to move into the towns threatened the livelihood of rural Jews and impoverished those who were driven into the crowded Jewish quarters of the cities.

The Jews had no right of residence in the Russian interior and could only live in the Pale of Permanent Settlement, where they did not have the rights of "natives". Their self-governance was ended; they were subject to a variety of special taxes, could not be officers in the army, and were excluded from state employment.

During the reign of Alexander II, who became Tsar in 1855, the lot of the Jews began to improve slowly. However, Jewish hopes for further reforms were dashed with Alexander's assassination on March 13, 1881. The reign of his thirty-six year old son, Alexander III, from 1881-1894, was marked by a reactionary assault against revolutionaries and reformers. Alexander II's government aggressively set out to "Russify" all non-Russian minorities.

As part of this policy, government bureaucrats supported outbursts of anti-Semitism and many of them had an indirect hand in the bloody anti-Jewish riots, known as *pogroms*. Officials in the Tsar's government found a semblance of intellectual respectability for their own anti-Semitism in the growing anti-Semitism in Germany.

To escape persecution, many Jews emigrated to the United States, the Near East, western Europe, and Canada. Others, seeking to survive, either formed Jewish revolutionary organizations or joined Russian revolutionary forces.

Tsar Nicholas II replaced Alexander III, who died of nephritis, in 1894. Under Nicholas, the flood of official steps harmful to the Jewish population continued.

By 1898, new political and social forces were at work inside and outside Russia which drastically altered its direction and development. These forces converged in 1905 to produce a revolution that was preceded by the assassination of high-ranking government officials. Because the revolutionary movement contained many Jews, Russian authorities directed their fury against them. In April, 1903, there were violent *pogroms* in Kishniev and Bessarabia. The Kishniev *pogrom* was motivated by local anti-Semites who spread false tales of a ritual murder to incite the populace. During the *pogrom*, government officials gave orders to let the rioters have their way for two days before ordering troops and police to stop them.

In the spring and summer of 1904, a wave of *pogroms* swept the country. Worse *pogroms* followed in the fall of 1905 when over 600 Jewish communities were affected and about 1,000 Jews were killed. The *pogrom* in *Fiddler on the Roof* took place during this time.

Although *pogroms* ceased after 1906, as did other major disturbances, the condition of Russian Jewry was not greatly improved by the changes brought about by the Revolution of 1905. By 1906, more than 2 million Jews had emigrated from Russia, primarily to the United States. Among them was Sholem Aleichem.

The wars and revolutions of the twentieth century and Hitler's destruction of 6 million Jews wiped out the *shtetls* that once stretched from the eastern borders of Germany to Russia. While the physical *shtetl* with its way of life and way of thought disappeared, a small part of that world was preserved for us by Sholem Aleichem and made accessible to audiences around the world by the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

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