

# You Never Can Tell

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**by**  
George Bernard Shaw

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# You Never Can Tell Pdf

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**George Bernard Shaw**



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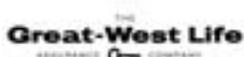
# You Never Can Tell

By

Bernard Shaw



Education Partner



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PRESENTS

# You Never Can Tell

By  
Bernard Shaw

This study guide for *You Never Can Tell* contains background information for the play, suggested themes and topics for discussion, and curriculum-based lessons that are designed by educators and theatre professionals.

The lessons and themes for discussion are organized in modules that can be used independently or interdependently according to your class's level and time availability.

THIS GUIDE WAS WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY DENIS JOHNSTON, DEBRA McLAUHLAN AND BARBARA WORTHY. ADDITIONAL MATERIALS WERE PROVIDED BY RONALD BRYDEN AND JACKIE MAXWELL.

COVER PHOTO OF ANDREW KUSHNIR AND TRISH LINDSTROM BY SHIN SUGINO

**You Never Can Tell**  
**Running time: 2hrs. 45 mins approx.**  
**including one intermission**

Previews April 24  
Opens May 5  
Closes November 26  
For a calendar of performances check  
[www.shawfest.com](http://www.shawfest.com)

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# The Players

Cook.....	Mark Adriaans
Finch M'Comas.....	Guy Bannerman
Crampton.....	Norman Browning
Gloria.....	Fiona Byrne
Jo.....	Martin Happer
Philip.....	Harry Judge
Parlourmaid.....	Jessica Lowry
William.....	David Schurmann
Mrs Clandon.....	Goldie Semple
Valentine.....	Mike Shara
Bohun.....	Graeme Somerville
Dolly.....	Nicole Underhay

**Directed by Morris Panych**  
**Set Designer: Ken MacDonald**  
**Costume Designer: Nancy Bryant**  
**Lighting Designer: Paul Mathieson**  
**Stage Manager: Meredith Macdonald**  
**Assistant Stage Manager: Amy Jewell**  
**Technical Director: Jeff Scollon**

# The Story

One of Bernard Shaw's most light-hearted plays whose characters charm and delight, while, of course, never neglecting to brilliantly articulate their diverse points of view. A seaside resort in England plays host to a set of anarchic twins, their stunning sister and their highly unusual feminist mother. When the play begins, the Clandons have just returned to England after having spent 18 years in Portugal. Now that they're back, the children have decided to insist that their mother tell them who their father is, or was. At first Mrs Clandon puts up some resistance, but eventually she has her solicitor admit that the guilty party is a bad-tempered, wealthy landlord, Mr Crampton. What follows is a classic comedy with chance encounters, mutual recognition and a reunion of a long-separated family - but not without a wrinkle or two. Together with a fledgling dentist and a curmudgeonly businessman, they are helped through the shenanigans by a worldly-wise waiter, William. Is it the sea air that allows wrongs to be righted and transformation to occur? Whatever it may be, all the proceedings are bathed in a delicious feeling of whimsy, magic and sheer joyfulness.



*Trish Lindström and Andrew Kushnir*  
*Photo by Shin Sugino*

# The Author

## George Bernard Shaw 1856 - 1950

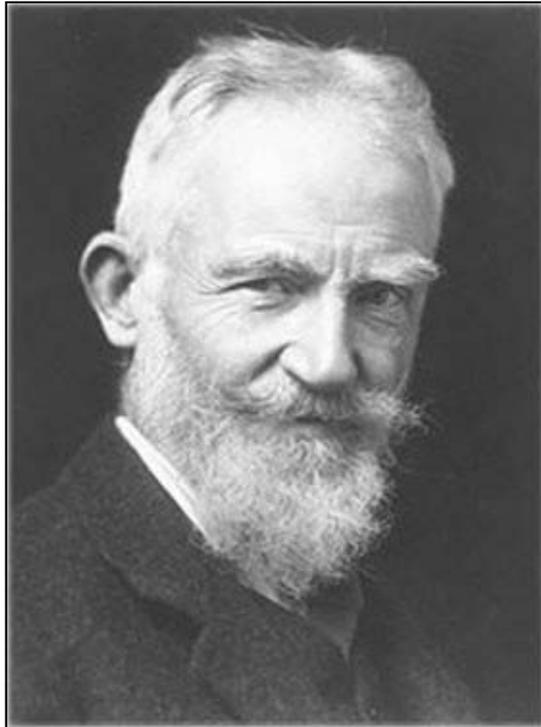
George Bernard Shaw, born in Dublin in 1856, began his writing career as a novelist and journalist, but gained his great fame as a playwright. Most people consider Shaw the second-greatest playwright in the English language, after only Shakespeare.

Growing up in Dublin, Shaw developed a wide knowledge of music, art and literature under the influence of his mother, a singer and vocal music teacher. At age 20 he moved to London, where he spent his afternoons in the British Museum and his evenings pursuing his informal education by attending lectures and debates. He declared himself a socialist in 1882 and joined the new "Fabian Society" in 1884. Soon he distinguished himself as an effective public speaker, and an incisive and irreverent critic of music, art and drama.

As a critic, he grew weary of the fashionable but intellectually barren melodramas of the 19th century. His admiration for the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (about whom he wrote influential essays) encouraged Shaw to reshape the English stage with sophisticated comedies that presented what he considered important social issues.

Shaw's first play, *Widowers' Houses*, was produced at a private theatre club in 1892. It was followed by *The Philanderer* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*. These three plays were published as *Plays Unpleasant* (1898). More palatable, though still rich with challenges to conventional middle-class values, were his *Plays Pleasant* published the same year: this volume included the

plays *Arms and The Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny* and *You Never Can Tell*. In 1897 Shaw attained his first commercial success with the American premiere of *The Devil's Disciple*, the income from which enabled him to quit his job as a drama critic and to make his living solely as a playwright.



In 1898 he married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress whom he had met through his Fabian friends Beatrice and Sidney Webb.

Although Shaw's plays were not popular initially, in the period 1904-07 he began to reach a larger audience through an influential series of productions at London's Royal Court Theatre. His plays became known for their brilliant arguments, their wit, and their unrelenting challenges to the conventional morality of his time. His best-known play, *Pygmalion*, was first performed in 1913. Two generations later, it attained even greater fame as the musical *My Fair Lady*.

During World War I, Shaw's anti-war speeches and a controversial pamphlet entitled *Common Sense About the War* made him very unpopular as a public figure. In *Heartbreak House* (performed 1920) Shaw exposed, in a country-house setting, the spiritual bankruptcy of the generation responsible for the carnage. Next came *Back to Methuselah* (1922) and *Saint Joan* (1923), acclaim for which led to his receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1925.

Shaw continued to write plays and essays until his death in 1950 at the age of 94.

# Production History

Rehearsals began in April 1897 for the West End premiere of *You Never Can Tell*, but this production never reached the stage. The play received a single private performance from the Stage Society, London, on November 26, 1899. In May 1900 it was given six matinee performances at the Strand Theatre, and in 1905 it began the first of several runs produced by the famous Vedrenne-Barker management at the Royal Court Theatre.



Costume Design for Philip Clandon by Nancy

*You Never Can Tell* received its Canadian premiere from the University of Toronto Players Club (with settings by Lawren Harris) at Hart House Theatre, December 7, 1920. The Canadian professional premiere was at the Regent Theatre, Toronto, on October 1, 1923. This is the Shaw Festival's sixth production. Previous productions were in 1963, 1973, 1979, 1988 and 1995.

# Background to the Play

The play begins on a fine summer's morning in 1896, at a seaside resort in southern England. A teenage girl sits in a dentist's chair, holding a glass of water, and the young dentist standing beside her proudly proclaims, "that was my first tooth." As she recovers from the shock - well, two shocks really, as the dentist didn't use any anaesthetic - the girl begins peppering him with questions of a rather personal nature. When her twin brother arrives, the two teenagers explain that if their behaviour lacks English reserve, it's because they have only just arrived here from their home in Madeira. The twins' mother is the celebrated Mrs Lanfrey Clandon, author of dozens of popular self-help books known generally as *Twentieth Century Treatises*. We learn that Mrs Clandon has returned to England, after an absence of 18 years, to seek advice from an old family friend and solicitor about a delicate family matter: she has never told her three children (the twins and their older sister Gloria) anything about their father - indeed, the children are forbidden even to raise the subject - and they have been growing more insistent on their right to know about him. But two things quickly occur to complicate the situation: the children accidentally meet their long-lost father, and the dentist Valentine falls hopelessly in love with Gloria!

*You Never Can Tell* was Bernard Shaw's seventh play, written between 1895 and 1897. In it we meet the first of his

characters who are clearly in the grip of the "Life Force" - a Shavian concept that encompasses sexual attraction, social evolution, human aspiration, and even artistic ambitions like his own.

Shaw wrote the play with one eye on a potential commercial success. In 1897 the young actor-manager Cyril Maude began a West End production, but it fell apart in rehearsal - a leading lady quit, complaining that her part had "no laughs and no exits," and the actor playing Valentine could not summon up the passion that the role demanded. As rehearsals continued to flounder, Shaw finally withdrew his play, much to the relief of Maude and his business manager. The collapse of this production was one reason why Shaw began to publish his plays instead of continuing to seek productions. In 1898 his first seven plays were published in the anthologies *Plays Unpleasant* and *Plays Pleasant*, and they have remained in print ever since. In the ensuing decade, however, *You Never Can Tell* became a cornerstone of Granville Barker's new repertory experiment at the Royal Court Theatre. The play enjoyed four runs there between 1905 and 1907, totaling almost 150 performances, after which Barker used it to open his next repertory project at the Savoy Theatre. Along with *Major Barbara*, this was one of the plays that made Bernard Shaw a popular playwright in England as he had already become in Germany and the United States.

# Shaw's Heavenly Twins:

## Excerpted from an essay by Ronald Bryden

Ronald Bryden, in his essay "Shaw's Heavenly Twins", quotes Bernard Shaw's own reasons as to why he wrote *You Never Can Tell* in 1898: "to comply with many requests for a play in which the much paragoned "brilliance" of *Arms and The Man* should be tempered by some consideration for the requirements of managers in search of fashionable comedies for West End theatres. I had no difficulty in complying, as I have always cast my plays in the ordinary practical comedy form in use in all the theatres; and far from taking an unsympathetic view of the popular preference for fun, fashionable dresses, a little music, and even an exhibition of eating and drinking by people with an expensive air, attended by an if-possible comic waiter, I was more than willing to shew that the drama can humanize these things as easily as they, in the wrong hands, can dehumanize the drama. But as so often happens, it was easier to do this than to persuade those who had asked for it that they had indeed got it."

That was true; the play that eventually brought Shaw unrivalled success and popularity, began life in a rather haphazard manner. As Bryden tells us, the actor-manager George Alexander wrote to Shaw, somewhat unflatteringly: "When I got to the end, I had no more idea what you meant than a tom-cat." Actors were leaving the play, discontented and disillusioned. And one leading man of the day, Allan Aynesworth, apparently well trained in the style of the period, could barely handle some of the more passionate scenes in the play. "It was not that he did it badly, or tamely, or wrongly," said Shaw. "He simply could not do it at all."

The play did not see an opening night until 1900, and even then the critic Max Beerbohm commented on its erratic nature. "Realism and sheer fantasy are inextricably entangled in the scheme of the play," he wrote. "Serious characters behave ridiculously, ridiculous characters suddenly become serious. Mr Shaw sends all the persons of his play dashing round sharp corners, colliding with one another, picking themselves up, exchanging hats, and dashing off again." And that is the reason why the play is so enduring and captivating of course. But it was not until Granville Barker's inclusion of it as a mainstay in his repertory company at the Royal Court Theatre, that *You Never Can Tell* became a favourite with the public.

Shaw was less amused by his play's miscarriage than he pretended. It was the main reason for his decision, a turning point

in his career, to offer his plays to the public in print, since no one would offer them in performance. But although it took him time to recognize it, the writing of *You Never Can Tell* embodied a decision even more important. Without intending to, he had written a play impossible for the new generation of actors, reared on naturalism and notions of polite understatement. His creation called for the old breed of theatrical mountebanks he had loved in his youth, trained on Shakespeare, melodrama, and that last refuge of the *commedia dell'arte*, the English pantomime. At some level below consciousness, he had made the decision not to be the apostle of Ibsen and naturalism on the British stage.

How had this reversal come about? It looks like the complicated result of Shaw's admiration for the novel which gave him the germ of his play, Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*. After reading it in 1895 he pronounced the work touched with genius. (Indeed, his title for the first draft of *You Never Can Tell* was *The Terrestrial Twins*.) Madame Grand was in actuality an Irishwoman named Frances Bellenden-Clark who, having coined the phrase "the New Woman" in 1894, lived up to it by adopting the style of George Sand. She had ridden the wave of Ibsenite scandal provoked by the London premiere of *Ghosts* by publishing a novel, written some years earlier, in which a wife dies of syphilis caught from a dissolute husband - one of three Victorian heroines (the novel owes much to George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*) whose lives support the judgment of Gloria in *You Never Can Tell* that the conditions of marriage at present are not such as any self-respecting woman can accept.

Grand's novel is so nearly excellent that the itch to try and improve it is irresistible. Shaw's attempt consisted of taking over its materials and giving them more cheerful outcomes. All of Grand's heroines come to sad or saddish ends: one dead through sexual ignorance, one permanently wounded by learning on her wedding day of her groom's promiscuity, the third - the female twin of the title - cast off by the love of her life when he learns that she is the beautiful boy who has won his friendship on midnight visits in her brother's clothes. Though the novel makes quite moving the man's sense of double loss - both of the boy he has loved and the girl he idealized at a distance - Shaw clearly found something perverse in the notion of rewriting *As You Like It* so as to give it an unhappy ending. No, he rejoined in *You Never Can Tell*, the world is not entirely hopeless,

# Heavenly Twins, continued

but benign in its insistence on being peopled. Men may be stupid, but not all of them conspire to make women stupider. And where stupidity flies in the face of Nature, Nature can be counted on to enforce common sense.

To make his comic vision prevail over the bleak feminist accusations of Grand's novel, Shaw conjured up the mighty ghost of Shakespeare. The face of his bust in Stratford parish church presides over *You Never Can Tell* on the shoulders of the old waiter whom Dolly has christened "William" because of this resemblance. Like Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors* or the unnamed capital of Illyria in *Twelfth Night*, Shaw's seaside town is thrown into confusion by the appearance of supernaturally handsome twins from the sea, marvelling at the brave new world unknown to them in their island nursery. Mrs Clandon is a female Prospero who cannot regain her kingdom until she acknowledges that thing of darkness, her furious, wounded husband, as her own. The philosopher Suzanne Langer wrote that tragedy deals with life from the point of view of the individual - all individual lives, one may say, end badly - while comedy perceives it with the eyes of the community or species, recognizing that for every death there is a birth, for every divorce a

wedding for every parting a lover's meeting. Shaw opposes to the severe judgment of minds preoccupied by individual rights the friendlier view - he calls it socialist - of the world of Shakespearian comedy, where spring follows winters, Jack shall have Jill, and all shall be well so long as each generation of society forgets its tragedies in the happiness of its children.

In case the power of Shakespeare is insufficient, the gods of the old Italian comedy take over the stage in the last act. Harlequin, Columbine and Il Dottore drag the older generation out of the melodrama they have made of their lives and into the eternal dance of the seasons and human love. When *You Never Can Tell* finally found its audience in May 1905, during the Vedrenne-Barker seasons at the Court Theatre, the critic Desmond MacCarthy called it a religious farce. He might also have called it the play in which Shaw decided not to be the English Ibsen, but to be Shaw.'

**Excerpts taken from Ronald Bryden's 1995 essay, "Shaw's Heavenly Twins", published in the Shaw Festival house programme for *You Never Can Tell*.**

*Costume Designs for Dolly and Valentine by Nancy Bryant*



# Mrs Laden and the Tastes of Shaw:

## *You Rang, Sir?*

The images of food and beverages abound in *You Never Can Tell*, ably provided by William the Waiter. In Bernard Shaw's own life, the job of catering fell to his wife of 45 years, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, and following her death, to a young widow from Aberdeen, Mrs Alice Laden\*. Catering to Bernard Shaw was no easy task, for his vigilant vegetarianism meant a great deal of planning. Both of these women embodied all of William's efficiencies with their own creativeness, and to the day he died Bernard Shaw enjoyed a diet that was richly appetizing, mostly healthy and always varied. That was what he expected, and demanded - and was given, with a great deal of devotion it would seem.

One can imagine that dealing with "the great man's" dietary requirements was, at best, challenging. Shaw's vegetarianism was both ethical and health based. "Meat is poison to the system," he said. "No one should live on dead things." Meat in any form was not allowed to be used in the cooking of his meals; neither was alcohol. And he believed this to be the reason he stayed extremely fit and mentally alert well into his tenth decade. (He died in 1950, eight months shy of his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday.)

The Shaws entertained a great deal, and while Mrs Shaw was not a vegetarian herself, and neither were many of their guests, she was known to be an excellent organizer and would personally supervise all of her husband's meals. And so GBS would have his meals served to him separately from his guests, all expertly timed and presented. His wife's menus included vegetable pies, curries, nut cutlets, cheese flans, raw veggies, and fruit. And of course his favourite was sweet desserts. After a lengthy illness this remarkably attentive wife died, and her nurse, Mrs Alice Laden, was persuaded to stay on as Shaw's housekeeper. What better person to look after the fastidious GBS than Mrs Laden? Her husband had been a vegetarian and she had studied the art of vegetarian cooking under the German cookery expert, Mrs Gompertz. She was the perfect solution: nurse, cook, companion and housekeeper. Bernard Shaw was an extremely lucky man.



Costume Design for Cook by Nancy Bryant

During World War II, and for years after, food was severely rationed in Britain. But GBS insisted on having the best, and so the indefatigable Mrs Laden was ordered to find it. But she was further ordered never to buy black market items, which would have made finding items that much easier. Specialty foods during those years were extremely rare; most people hadn't seen bananas, pineapples, oranges, aubergines (eggplant) and courgettes (zucchini) since the war broke out, if at all. But Mrs Laden was given the chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce and ordered to scout the land for food, and she would leave Ayot St Lawrence and drive to London, a long twenty-five mile drive in those days, merely to find oranges. During the last decade of his life Shaw's taste for sweetness never

dimmed; chocolate biscuits, chocolate cake, fruit cake, everything covered in layers of marzipan or coated in icing sugar. According to Mrs Laden, GBS had such a sweet tooth that he would sit with a bowl of sugar, feeding himself spoonfuls. Just the thought makes one pucker.

Interestingly, even though alcohol is so prevalent in *You Never Can Tell*, in GBS's own life it was decidedly absent. He was a well-known teetotaler and while his many guests would enjoy a cocktail or some wine, he sipped on water or drank milk. But during the last couple of years of his life, Mrs Laden was instructed to slip a dram of whisky into his food when he felt 'off colour'. "Mr Shaw would have been horrified if he knew," she is reported as saying, "so I had to disguise it as best I could and I did so by putting it in his soup...But I think he did suspect, for a few days before he died, he said to me after finishing some soup: 'You have been playing tricks on me, Mrs Laden'."

And maybe she did play a trick or two...but it always worked, apparently. And no doubt, even at the risk of incurring the great man's wrath, Mrs Laden might say, as William does in the closing lines of *You Never Can Tell*, "I'd do it again, I assure you. You never can tell, sir: you never can tell."

\* Excerpts from *The George Bernard Shaw Vegetarian Cookbook; Mrs Alice Laden*, Ed. R.J. Minney (1972) Pan Books (1974)

# Classroom Applications

*The following pages suggest questions and activities students might explore*

**BEFORE** attending the play.

## Theme One WARM UPS

## ACTIVITY

### ***The “You Never Can Tell” Game***

*You Never Can Tell* is both the title of the play and its final line, spoken by a character who uses the expression whenever something unexpected happens.

- \* As a warm-up, have each student write a positive newspaper headline, set in the immediate or distant future, about a classmate of his or her choice. These headlines should seem presently improbable, but not impossible. For example, a headline for an athletic but non-academic student might read: Former basketball player becomes dean of science at the University of Toronto.
- \* Have students read their headlines aloud.
- \* Have the class guess who is being described in each headline.

### ***The “You think you would, but you wouldn’t” Game***

Another character in *You Never Can Tell* frequently says, “You think you would, but you wouldn’t”. He tells a father, for example: “You think you’d like to have your two youngest children live with you. You think you would, but you wouldn’t”.

- \* As a warm-up, have each student create a true sentence about him/herself beginning with: “I think I’d like to.....”
- \* In turn, have each student say his or her sentence aloud, with the rest of the class answering: “You think you would, but you wouldn’t”. After each statement, classmates suggest reasons to support the claim: “You think you would, but you wouldn’t”

### ***Name that Profession***

On various occasions, a dentist in *You Never Can Tell* is labeled an “ivory snatcher”, a “man of ivory and gold”, and a “gum architect”.

- \* Divide the class into teams of approximately four members each. Have each team select a profession at random from a hat or jar. Give teams three minutes to come up with words or phrases to label the profession they have selected.
- \* Have each team present their words or phrases. Other teams guess the profession.

Teams might earn points for making the first correct guess.

## Theme Two

# IMAGINING AND PREDICTING CIRCUMSTANCES



### ACTIVITY

- \* Imagine that you are the child of a feminist single mother who is famous for writing advice books on such topics as cooking, clothing, conduct, and child-rearing.
- \* Imagine that you have no memories of your father, although you know that your parents were once married to each other.
- \* Imagine that your mother refuses to answer any questions you ask about your father.
- \* Imagine that you have been raised on a tiny, tropical island, a playground of the rich and famous. While not fabulously wealthy, your family has enjoyed a life of relative financial ease.
- \* Imagine that there are three siblings in the family: a daughter (Gloria) and twins (Dorothy and Philip), two years younger than Gloria.
- \* Imagine yourself as Gloria, Dorothy, or Philip.
- \* Based on what you know about your chosen character's background, imagine what your attitudes might be toward: (a) your mother (b) your father (c) your siblings (d) strangers (e) school (f) a career and (g) marriage.
- \* In groups of three or four who have chosen the same character, discuss your ideas and give reasons for your choices. Present a summary to the class.
- \* Compare attitudes of characters in the play with your predictions.

## Theme Three

### IMAGINING AND PREDICTING A SETTING

Shaw's descriptions of settings are detailed and precise. Settings in *You Never Can Tell* include a dentist's office, hotel terrace, and hotel room. Shaw describes the hotel room this way:

***An expensive apartment on the ground floor, with a French window leading to the gardens. In the centre of the room is a substantial table, surrounded by chairs, and draped with a maroon cloth on which opulently bound hotel and railway guides are displayed. A visitor entering through the window and coming down to this central table would have the fireplace on his left, and a writing table against the wall on his right, next to the door, which is further down. He would, if his taste lay that way, admire the wall decoration of Lincrusta Walton in plum colour and bronze lacquer, with dado and cornice; the ormolu consoles in the corners; the vases on pillar pedestals of veined marble with bases of polished black wood, one on each side of the window; the ornamental cabinet next the vase on the side nearest the fireplace, its centre compartment closed by an inlaid door, and its corners rounded off with curved panes of glass protecting shelves of cheap blue and white pottery; the bamboo tea table, with folding shelves, in the corresponding space on the other side of the window; the photogravures after Burton and Stacy Marks; the saddlebag ottoman in line with the door but on the other side of the room; the two comfortable seats of the same pattern on the hearth-rug; and finally, on turning around and looking up, the massive brass pole above the window, sustaining a pair of maroon rep curtains with decorated borders of staid green. Altogether, a room well arranged to flatter the middle-class occupant's sense of gentility.***

#### ACTIVITY

##### ***Drawing a Set***

- \* In pairs or groups of three, draw a floor plan of the set as Shaw has described it.
- \* Draw in detail one item of furniture that Shaw has included in the room.
- \* What words or terms from Shaw's description will you need to research in order to complete the drawings accurately?
- \* Describe the colour scheme of the room.
- \* The scene opens with a mother and her 20-year-old daughter in the room. What colors would you use for their costumes?

#### DISCUSSION

- \* Should a designer always follow a playwright's directions in designing a set? Why or why not?
- \* Would it be possible for a designer to follow Shaw's instructions and still exercise his or her own creativity? If so, how?

## Theme Four

### PREPARING A ROLE: PLAYING TWINS

Two characters in *You Never Can Tell* are fraternal twins whose habits of speech and movement create much of the play's comedy. In activities like the ones described below, actors playing these roles might work at coordinating or synchronizing their mannerisms and speech patterns. Music is a helpful addition to several of these activities.



### ACTIVITIES

#### ***Mirrors***

The mirror activity is a classic theatre exercise used to develop focus and trust between partners. In pairs, students face each other, seated on the floor at first. Student A begins a simple slow action with one hand, Student B duplicating this action as though a mirror of A. Gradually, Student A broadens the area of movement, adding the second hand, shoulders, and head. On the teacher's instruction "Switch", B takes over as leader of the action. The change in leadership should be as invisible as possible, with B completing the action that A has already initiated, flowing from A's lead into a new action. After a few "Switch" instructions, the teacher instructs the pairs to continue the activity while moving to a standing position. Once on their feet, pairs create mirror images of the lower as well as upper body.

#### ***Delayed-action mirrors***

In this variation, the mirror-image copies an action only after it is complete. A complete action is defined as a movement of a body part from start to stop in a single direction. To begin, the leader makes a single move. (The move might involve more than one body part as long as each body part moves simultaneously). The follower copies the action. The leader then makes a second move and so on. Over time, the teacher instructs the follower to wait until the leader makes two consecutive moves before copying the sequence. As the exercise progresses, the leader might make five or more moves before the follower moves.

#### ***Distorted Mirrors***

In this version of the exercise, the follower distorts the actions of the leader, making them taller, smaller, or grossly misshapen. This can be done with either simple mirrors or delayed action mirrors.



## ACTIVITIES continued

### ***Shadows***

Instead of creating the illusion of a mirror, the follower becomes the leader's shadow. The leader stands with his or her back to the follower, who must duplicate the leader's actions as a shadow would. Faces should remain neutral throughout the exercise, and no actions may be performed in front of the body. As with mirrors, shadows may include delayed-action or distorted variations.

### ***Machines***

For this exercise, select music with a regular, distinct beat. Student A begins by making a repeated robotic movement with one body part only. Student B joins in by adding a repeated movement that somehow connects or interacts with Student A. Student A adds another movement to the sequence, and Student B adds on to that move. A third move from each is possible, but difficult to achieve. The entire pattern should be repeated several times in order to create the machine effect.

### ***Paired movement***

Imagine that you and your partner are an unruly pair of twins at approximately your own age. Practice how you would:

- \* enter a dining room together and sit down when you are both very hungry
- \* fight over the TV remote control
- \* get attention from a teacher in class

### ***Paired speech***

Imagine that you and your twin sometimes speak at the same time and sometimes finish each other's sentences. Practice how you would:

- \* explain to your mother how an expensive vase was broken
- \* describe a fantastic vacation to a friend
- \* place an order in a noisy restaurant

## Theme Five

# STAGING CONTRAST

*You Never Can Tell* offers examples of ways in which a playwright juxtaposes sound and silence, movement and stillness, to create specific effects. The following activities allow the class to experiment with a few techniques before viewing them in the play.



### ACTIVITY

#### ***Sound versus Silence***

Divide the class into groups of four.

Each group decides on three talkative characters plus one authority figure who dislikes noise. Examples might include three salesclerks and a store manager with a headache, three students and a teacher during a test, etc.

- \* Decide on a circumstance that allows the three talkative characters to begin conversing and build the conversation until they all speak at once, with no silence for several seconds.
- \* Decide on a gesture they will use to signal silence. (All three will eventually perform this gesture at the very same time).
- \* Decide on the moment when the authority figure will enter the scene.
- \* Decide on the moment when the authority figure will instruct the talkative characters to stop talking.
- \* Decide how the instruction to stop talking will be given. Will it be loud or soft; will it happen once or more than once; will it be emotional or calm; will it involve movement or stillness?
- \* When the talkative people stop talking, have them go from rapid speech to absolute silence immediately. At the same time, they should perform their gesture to signal silence.
- \* Allow the silence and stillness to hold for a count of three.
- \* Gradually build the conversation to a crescendo again.
- \* Decide how to end your scene. Will the authority figure command silence again? Will the talkative characters prevail? Will anyone leave?

## ACTIVITY continued

### ***Movement versus Stillness***

Divide the class into groups of four. Each group decides on three active characters plus one authority figure who dislikes uncontrolled activity. Examples might include three young children and a mother in a shopping mall, three criminals and their lawyer in front of a judge, etc.

- \* Decide on a circumstance that would allow the three active characters to move all at once for several seconds. The characters may or may not be speaking while they move.
- \* Decide on a sound the active characters will use to signal stillness. (They will eventually make the same sound at the same time).
- \* Decide on the moment when the authority figure will enter the scene.
- \* Decide on the moment when the authority figure will instruct the active characters to be still.
- \* Decide how the instruction to be still will be given. Will it be loud or soft; will it happen once or more than once; will it be emotional or calm; will it involve one or more gestures?
- \* When the active people stop moving, have them go from excessive action to absolute stillness immediately. They should also make their sound to signal stillness.
- \* Allow silence and stillness to hold for a count of three.
- \* Decide how to end your scene. Will the authority figure command stillness again? Which characters will prevail? Will anyone leave?
- \* After practicing a few times, show your scenes to the class.
- \* When viewing *You Never Can Tell*, note instances of movement vs. stillness.



*Costume Design for Mrs Clandon by Nancy Bryant*

## Theme Six

# POWER RELATIONSHIPS

Many relationships in *You Never Can Tell* are affected by struggles for power and status between characters. These characters include parents and children, husband and wife, server and customer, lawyers and clients, and an infatuated young man and woman.



### ACTIVITY



#### ***Playing a script***

Assign the following excerpts from *You Never Can Tell* for students to rehearse and perform. Before rehearsing the script, students should read it aloud at least three times and answer the following questions:

1. Describe the relationship between the two characters.
2. What does each character want from the other character?
3. What source(s) of power does each character hold over the other?
4. What attempts does each character make to get what he or she wants from the other character?
5. Which character has the most power at the beginning of the scene?
6. Does the balance of power shift throughout the scene? If so, how often? When?
7. Which character has the most power at the end of the scene?
8. Do characters always mean what they say in the scene?
9. Do any lines or actions of the characters offer insights into human nature?
10. How will you use stage positioning, movement, and timing to reinforce the meaning of the scene?



# ACTIVITY

## Scene A

**Characters:** *Valentine and Gloria (a young man and woman who have recently met)*

**Setting:** *a hotel suite rented by Gloria's mother*

**Time:** *about 5 pm*

*Gloria stares coolly at Valentine, then deliberately looks at her watch.*

Valentine: I understand. I've stayed too long. I'm going.

Gloria: *(disdainfully)* I owe you some apology, Mr Valentine. I am conscious of having spoken to you somewhat sharply. Perhaps rudely.

Valentine: Not at all.

Gloria: My only excuse is that it is very difficult to give consideration and respect when there is no dignity of character on the other side to command it.

Valentine: How is a man to look dignified when he is infatuated?

Gloria: *(angrily)* Don't say those things to me. I forbid it. They are insults.

Valentine: No, they're only follies. I can't help them.

Gloria: If you were really in love, it would not make you foolish. It would give you dignity! Earnestness! Even beauty.

Valentine: Do you really think it would make me beautiful? *(She turns her back on him with cold contempt)* Ah, you see, you're not in earnest. Love can't give any man new gifts. It can only heighten the gifts he was born with.

Gloria: *(sweeping around at him again)* What gifts were you born with, pray?

Valentine: Lightness of heart.

Gloria: And lightness of head, and lightness of faith, and lightness of everything that makes a man.

Valentine: Yes, the whole world is like a feather dancing in the light now, and Gloria is the sun. *(She rears her head haughtily)* Beg pardon. I'm off now. Back at nine. Goodbye. *(He runs off)*

Gloria: *(at the top of her voice, furious at him for leaving her)* Idiot!



# ACTIVITY

## Scene B

**Characters:** *M'Comas (a lawyer) and Mr Crampton (his client, a powerful man who hasn't seen his teenaged children in almost 18 years)*

**Setting:** *a hotel suite*

**Time:** *about 9 pm*

*M'Comas is already in the room. Mr. Crampton enters anxiously. He sits down wearily and timidly on the ottoman.*

M'Comas: I can depend on you, can't I?

Crampton: Yes, yes, I'll be quiet. I'll be patient. I'll do my best.

M'Comas: Remember, I've not given you away. I've told them it was all their fault.

Crampton: You told me it was all my fault.

M'Comas: I told you the truth.

Crampton: If they will only be fair to me.

M'Comas: My dear Crampton, they won't be fair to you. It's not to be expected from them at their age. If you're going to make impossible conditions of this kind, we may as well go back home at once.

Crampton: But surely I have a right.

M'Comas: *(intolerantly)* You won't get your rights. Now, once and for all, Crampton, did your promise of good behaviour only mean that you won't complain if there's nothing to complain about? Because, if so- *(He moves as if to go)*.

Crampton: *(miserably)* No, no. Let me alone, can't you? I've been bullied enough. I've been tormented enough. I tell you I'll do my best. But if that girl *(he's referring to his daughter)* begins to talk to me again like that and to look at me like—*(he breaks off and buries his head in his hands)*

M'Comas: *(relenting)* There, there, it will be all right, if you will only bear and forbear. Come: pull yourself together: there's someone coming.

*M'Comas goes to the door. Crampton, too dejected to care much, hardly changes his attitude.*

M'Comas: *(to Crampton's daughter at the doorway)* There he is, Miss Clandon. Be kind to him. I'll leave you with him for a moment.

*M'Comas leaves Crampton to face his daughter.*

The following pages suggest questions and activities students might explore

**AFTER** attending *You Never Can Tell*

## Theme Seven

### CHARACTER DOUBLES

Most characters in *You Never Can Tell* can be identified as sets of pairs or doubles. The most obvious are the twins, Dolly and Phil. More subtle doubles include the play's two fathers, two sons, two lawyers, two daughters, and two young adults who have left a trail of broken hearts behind them before meeting each other.

### ACTIVITY

#### **Double Portraits**

Of the play's characters, select a pair from:

- \* Dolly and Phil (twins)
- \* Waiter and Mr Clandon (fathers)
- \* Phil and Bohun (sons)
- \* M'Comas and Bohun (lawyers)
- \* Dolly and Gloria (daughters)
- \* Gloria and Valentine (lovers)

With a partner, decide which of you will play each character in the pair. Your task is to portray these characters entering a photography studio and posing for a formal portrait of the two of them together. The photographer should be imagined in the action, but not depicted by an actor.

Questions to consider include:

- \* In what ways are your characters similar?
- \* In what ways are your characters different?
- \* Do they enter the studio at the same time? If not, which one enters first?
- \* How does each one approach the camera?
- \* What do the characters say to each other as they prepare for the photograph? Do they speak to the photographer?
- \* How do they pose?
- \* How do they leave the studio?
- \* How will you use movement and speech to reveal similarities and differences between the characters?

Show your depictions to the class and explain your choices of action and words.

### DISCUSSION

- \* Do you think that Shaw intended the characters in *You Never Can Tell* to be seen or played as doubles?
- \* What purpose is served by the doubling of characters in the play?

## Theme Eight

# FAMILY CUSTOMS AND EXPECTATIONS

*You Never Can Tell* offers information about customs and expectations of British family life exactly one century ago. The following activities and discussion questions allow students to compare these conventions to modern North American practices.



### DISCUSSION

#### ***Who's your daddy?***

Early in the play, Valentine refuses Philip's invitation to lunch because it would not be proper for him to dine with people who don't know who their father is. He changes his mind when Dolly announces that their grandfather was canon of Lincoln Cathedral.

- \* Is parentage still a factor when accepting or rejecting invitations?
- \* Do young people today make friends based on who their parents are?
- \* Do people have prejudices about single-parent families?
- \* Do people make judgments about other people based on their parents' occupations or backgrounds?

In groups of three, improvise a series of telephone conversations among friends discussing another friend's new choice of girlfriend/boyfriend. The new girlfriend or boyfriend comes from a different background than the original group of friends.

#### ***Children have rights too, you know.***

When Phil asks his mother to identify his father, she refuses. In response, Gloria insists twice: "We have a right to know".

- \* Why has Mrs Clandon told her children nothing about their father?
- \* Do you agree with Gloria that children have a right to know who their father is?
- \* Would there be any circumstances under which you would not want to know who your father is?
- \* Assign half the class to take the perspective of Mrs Clandon, and the other half to take the perspective of her children. Those taking Mrs Clandon's perspective will think of a completion to the sentence: "I haven't told you about your father because.....". Those taking the children's perspective will think of a completion to the sentence: "We want to know about our father because....". Have the class sit in a circle with alternating perspectives seated side by side. In turn, go around the circle completing the sentences. After hearing the sentences, discuss reasons offered for each character's stance. Is one character's stance more compelling than the other's?

## DISCUSSION

### ***Do as I say, not as I do.***

When Mrs Clandon refuses to tell her children about their father, Dolly quotes from one of Mrs Clandon's books on parenting: "Answer all your children's questions, and answer them truthfully, as soon as they are old enough to ask them."

- \* Imprevise short examples of modern times when parents might say one thing and do the opposite.
- \* Imprevise short examples of parents forbidding their children to behave as the parents do.
- \* Discuss the mood created by these brief scenes.

### ***I'm your father, that's why.***

When Mr Crampton sees his family for the first time in almost 18 years, he bitterly calls himself "a guest at the head of my own table". During their lunch together, he complains about the twins' behaviour, and insists that their last name should be his and not their mother's. When his children call him Mr Crampton instead of father, he says: "What right have they to talk to me like that? I'm their father!" When Gloria asks: "What do you expect us to feel for you?", Crampton states that children owe their father "duty, affection, respect, obedience".

- \* What do you think children owe their parents by right of birth?
- \* What do parents owe their children?
- \* Do you consider Mr Crampton's expectations realistic?
- \* What is your opinion of the way his children behaved at lunch?



*Costume Design for Mr Crampton by Nancy Bryant*

# Theme Nine

## FORUM THEATRE



### ACTIVITY

Forum theatre is a technique that explores alternative behaviours to a problematic situation. In this activity, the situation will be the behaviour of Mr Crampton and his children at the lunch where they meet for the first time in almost two decades. Characters include Mr Crampton, Dolly, Phil, Gloria, and Mrs Clandon. Here are the steps:

- \* One group of 5 students (Group 1) will prepare a reenactment of events as they recall them from the play.
- \* The rest of the class will be divided into 5 groups and assigned one character per group to discuss (The Crampton Group, the Dolly Group, the Phil Group, the Gloria Group, and the Mrs Clandon Group).
- \* While Group 1 prepares their scene, the other groups discuss ways in which their character might have behaved in the scene in order to change the relationship between the children and their father.
- \* Group 1 performs their scene for the class to watch.
- \* After the scene is performed, character groups confer with their corresponding actor in Group 1 and offer ideas for changing the outcome of the scene.
- \* Group 1 improvises the scene again, this time incorporating ideas from the character groups. If agreed upon, someone from the character group might take the place of the Group 1 actor.

The exercise might be repeated a few times until the class has explored various possible outcomes of the situation.



*Costume Designs for Mr Crampton, Mrs Clandon, Gloria, Philip and Dolly by Nancy*

## Theme Ten

### MY SON, THE LAWYER

#### DISCUSSION

William Boon, the waiter in *You Never Can Tell*, offers a glimpse of how occupation was linked to social status in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. In the script, all major characters except William are identified by name. William is identified as Waiter throughout the play. Why do you think Shaw made that distinction as playwright?

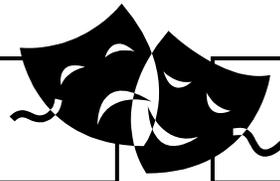
William Boon is a man of common sense and wisdom, yet his position in society denies him the authority his common sense and wisdom are due. Have the class discuss the following aspects of Boon's character and interactions:

- \* When Boon announces that his son works at the bar, it is assumed that Boon's son is a bartender, not a lawyer. Why is this assumption so readily made? Recall as much as you can of Boon's response to this assumption. What similarities does Boon suggest exist between bartending and serving as a lawyer? Which does he say he would have preferred his son to be and why? Do you think he means what he says?
- \* Describe the relationship between Boon and his son. Why did Boon change the spelling of his last name from Bohun? Why did his son keep the name Bohun?
- \* Recall the scene in which Bohun asks his father to sit and serve as a witness. How did Boon respond to the request? What does his response tell you about his character and social status?
- \* Why do you think Shaw gave the last line of the play to William? Why do you think he used that line as the title of the play?

#### ACTIVITY

##### ***You Never Can Tell: Boon's Version***

- \* Imagine that *You Never Can Tell* was written entirely from the perspective of William Boon, the waiter.
- \* In groups, identify 5 moments in the play of most importance to Boon.
- \* Create tableaux to depict these moments in their correct order.
- \* Give each tableau a title
- \* Present the tableaux to the class. Announce the title before showing each one.



**BLOCKING:** The actor's movement on stage is known as "blocking". The Stage Manager writes the blocking notation into the Prompt Script.

**COSTUME:** Anything that an actor wears on stage is referred to as a costume. The Wardrobe department (the department responsible for creating costumes) provides clothes, shoes, hats, and any personal accessories such as umbrellas, purses and eyeglasses.

**DROP:** A drop is a large piece of painted canvas that is "flown in" by the flyman (see FLYMAN).

**GREEN ROOM:** The green room, usually near the entrance to the stage, is where the actors and crew sit while waiting for their turn to go on stage. One possible explanation of how the green room got its name is that actors used to wait for their entrances at the back of the theatre in an area where the scenery was stored. Perhaps the scenery was green, or the name "scene room" evolved into "green room".

**ORCHESTRA PIT:** The orchestra pit is the place where the musicians perform during a musical. Usually the orchestra pit is between the front row of the audience and the stage.

**PROPS:** A property or "prop" is anything that the audience sees that is not worn by an actor and is not a structural part of the set. Some examples are: tables, chairs, couches, carpets, pictures, lamps, weapons, food eaten during a play, dishes, cutlery, briefcases, books, newspapers, pens, telephones, curtains and anything else you can imagine.

**PROSCENIUM:** A term describing the physical characteristics of a theatre. A proscenium theatre is one in which the audience and the actors are separated by a picture-frame opening that the audience looks through to see the actors. Surrounding this opening is the PROSCENIUM ARCH. If there is an acting area on the audience side of the proscenium arch, it is referred to as the APRON or FORESTAGE.

**SCRIM:** A scrim is a piece of gauze that is painted and used as part of the scenery. When a scrim is lit from in front it is opaque, you cannot see through it. When a scrim is lit from behind it is transparent, you can see through it. This allows for many different visual effects to be created by the lighting and set designers.

**THRUST STAGE:** A thrust stage is a stage that is surrounded on three sides by the audience.

**DIRECTOR:** The person who guides the actors during the rehearsal period. The director decides what the important messages of the play are and how they will be conveyed to the audience.

**DESIGNERS:** The people who work with the director to decide what the production will look like. Designers must choose the colour, shape and texture of everything you see on the stage. There are several areas that need to have designers: costumes, set, lighting and sometimes sound. The designers work very closely with the director to create the environment in which the play will take place.

**DYER:** The person who dyes fabrics for the Wardrobe department.

**FLYMAN:** The person responsible for the manipulation of the scenery which is in the fly gallery (the space above the stage). The scenery is manipulated by ropes attached to a counterweight system.

**MILLINER:** The person who makes the hats which the actors wear on stage.

**PROPS BUYER:** The person who buys items that will be used or adapted to become props. Props buyers also purchase the raw material used to build props.

**SCENIC ARTISTS:** The people who are responsible for painting and decorating the surfaces of the set. Some of the techniques they use include: wood graining, stenciling, marbling and brickwork. They also paint the drops and scrim that are flown in.

**STAGE CARPENTER:** The person who ensures that everything runs smoothly on stage during a performance. The stage carpenter and stage crew are responsible for changing the sets between scenes and acts.

**STAGE MANAGER:** The person who makes sure that all rehearsals and performances run smoothly. During a performance the stage manager also makes sure that all of the technical elements (e.g. lights, sound, curtains flying in and out) happen at exactly the right time.

**TECHNICAL DIRECTOR:** The person who is responsible for coordinating all of the technical elements of a production. Technical directors work with the people who build the sets, props, costumes, wigs and special effects to make sure that everything runs smoothly.

