

Letter FROM THE PRODUCERS OF URINETOWN THE MUSICAL

“*Urinetown!*? They’re kidding, right?”
“Why would I want to go to a show with a title like that?”
“Why would I bring my students to see it?”

Okay - the title. Let’s talk about the title.

Social satire has a long tradition of startling readers and audiences and shaking them loose from their traditional ways of thinking. From Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* to Saturday Night Live, satire has always broken the boundaries of public taste in order to make a point. Think of Jonathan Swift, who in his classic essay “A Modest Proposal,” suggested that the children of the poor be eaten, neatly solving the problems of famine and population control.

Urinetown: The Musical draws on that tradition. If you don’t know anything about it, you might not know what to expect. But unlike so many other pieces of entertainment one encounters these days – movies, television, even some books and plays – *Urinetown* has something to say about the world we live in. Not only that, it’s both entertaining and educational.

Urinetown challenges your expectations. It has a self-awareness that makes you think about what you’re watching. It draws on historical tradition – Brecht, Weill, Blitzstein – and yet it pushes forward into new territory.

But most important (for any audience of students): it’s really, really funny.

Urinetown: The Musical has wit, it has intelligence – and it also has an enjoyable surplus of vaudeville gags, physical comedy and low-brow humor. Want to get students doing more than sitting passively in their seats? Get them laughing, get them groaning, get them thinking. Take them to *Urinetown*.



Little Sally (Spencer Kayden) and the cast of *Urinetown: The Musical*

Synopsis

U*rinetown: The Musical* begins its satirical tale of industrial corruption in a Gotham-like city, where a 20-year drought has brought on a crippling water shortage. In a mad attempt to regulate water consumption, the government has outlawed the use of private toilets. The citizenry must use public, pay-per-use amenities owned and operated by Urine Good Company (or “UGC”), a private corporation run by the corrupt and iron-fisted Caldwell B. Cladwell. Anyone who refuses to pay is immediately and without question hauled off to Urinetown. Nobody knows exactly what happens in Urinetown, but the population is going mad, desperate for relief.

B. Cladwell. Hope finds her way to the UGC headquarters where she is to take a job as a fax and copy clerk, naively ignorant of her father’s coldhearted and profit seeking motives. Senator Fipp receives a bribe from Cladwell to insure that the new fee hikes are voted in; he plans to go to Rio with the cash.

Back at the Amenity, Old Man Strong, Bobby’s father, begs to be allowed to pee for free, but Ms. Pennywise refuses to make any exceptions. Old Man Strong, frustrated and desperate, relieves himself on the wall outside the Amenity. He is arrested by Officers

Lockstock and Barrel and taken off to Urinetown, never to be heard from again, except as a ghost.

Bobby is plagued with guilt, but doesn’t understand what to do until he sees Hope again. She tells him “be true to his heart,” advice that he takes to heart. When new fee hikes are announced the next day, Bobby knows exactly what he needs to do.

Bobby follows his heart and incites rebellion. In an idealistic fervor, the poor take over the Amenity and start “peeing for free.” The higher-ups at the UGC are terrified and outraged and order the police to arrest all parties involved. All gather at the Amenity.

Hope arrives and sees that Bobby is the cause of the all the trouble. She tries without success to get her father to be merciful. Bobby is shocked to learn that Hope is the daughter of his nemesis. Hope swears that she is the same girl he met the night before, but that she cannot possibly choose between him and her father. Bobby realizes that the only way to win the revolution and get the girl is to take Hope hostage. Act I concludes with general mayhem ensuing as the rebels escape, taking Hope with them.

Officer Lockstock welcomes us back to Act II. The rebels keep Hope hostage at the secret hideout. Bobby and Ma Strong are out spreading the revolution at other Amenities when they overhear Cladwell and McQueen discussing how Urinetown is just an idea to frighten the



Bobby Strong (Hunter Foster) and Penelope Pennywise (Nancy Opel) and the cast of *Urinetown: The Musical*

When the show opens, we are at Public Amenity No. 9. Officer Lockstock welcomes us to *Urinetown: The Musical*. Little Sally enters the scene to help Officer Lockstock narrate. She tells the audience about the drought years that brought about the current situation. As Lockstock and Little Sally discuss how much exposition the audience can handle, the musical begins around them.

A young woman enters looking for the Urine Good Company. Bobby Strong takes one look at her and is in love. He points her in the right direction, unaware that she is Hope Cladwell, daughter of the notorious Caldwell

Characters



Jeff McCarthy (Officer Lockstock) and Spencer Kayden (Little Sally) in a scene from *Urinetown: The Musical*

masses. Little Sally is caught by Officer Lockstock who tries to get her to tell him where the secret hideout is. She refuses and escapes. Back at the hideout, the rebels have become bloodthirsty and fantasize about killing Hope. Bobby shows up in time to save Hope but is then faced with the task of leading the revolution. Just as they are debating what needs to be done, Penny arrives to tell them that Cladwell wants to meet with Bobby to discuss the situation.

At the UGC headquarters, Cladwell offers Bobby "a lot of cash" and amnesty to all involved in the rebellion if they will return to the status quo. Bobby refuses and Cladwell orders Bobby to be sent to Urinetown, even though he knows this means that Hope may be killed. Everyone, especially Ms. Pennywise, who was Cladwell's secret mistress, is horrified by Cladwell's actions. Cladwell tells Senator Fipp that he can't leave for Rio until this matter is settled. Penny tries to escape to save Hope. Bobby is thrown from the rooftop.

Little Sally tells the rebels what happened to Bobby; they are devastated without their leader. Penny arrives to beg the rebels not to kill Hope and confesses that she is her mother. Everyone is shocked. Hope, now truly convinced of her father's wrongdoing, offers to lead the revolution. Mr. Cladwell is ousted and Hope becomes the new head of the UGC, making all toilets free. For a time the people live happily, but after a while, the water runs out and they begin to fall ill, left only with their dreams and high ideals.

OFFICER LOCKSTOCK

Narrator of *Urinetown: The Musical* and police officer in charge of maintaining law and order in the town.

PENELOPE PENNYWISE

An employee of Urine Good Company, she is in charge of Public Amenity No. 9, collecting fees from everyone who needs to pee there.

BOBBY STRONG

Our young hero, works for Pennywise at Public Amenity No. 9.

LITTLE SALLY

A twelve-year-old girl who saves her pennies to use the Amenity. With Officer Lockstock, she narrates *Urinetown: The Musical*.

HOPE CLADWELL

Pure-hearted ingenue and daughter of the tyrannical Caldwell B. Cladwell, the head of the Urine Good Company.

OFFICER BARREL

Officer Lockstock's partner.

OLD MAN STRONG

Bobby Strong's father, an honest and poor old man who doesn't have enough money to use the Amenity.

JOSEPHINE STRONG

aka MA STRONG
Bobby Strong's mother.

THE POOR PEOPLE OF THE TOWN aka THE REBELS

Soupy Sue, Robbie The Stockfish, Little Becky Two Shoes, Tiny Tom, Hot Blades Harry, Billy Boy Bill

THE RICH PEOPLE OF URINE GOOD COMPANY

CALDWELL B. CLADWELL

The head of the Urine Good Company.

MR. MCQUEEN

An executive of the Urine Good Company.

SENATOR FIPP

A corrupt politician, paid off by the UGC to pass fee hike laws.

MRS. MILLENIUM

DR. BILLEAUX

Satire and Social Commentary

The Uvic Writers Guide defines satire as “a manner of writing that mixes a critical attitude with wit and humor in an effort to improve mankind and human institutions... The satirist’s goal is to point out the hypocrisy of his target in the hope that either the target or the audience will return to a real following of the code.”

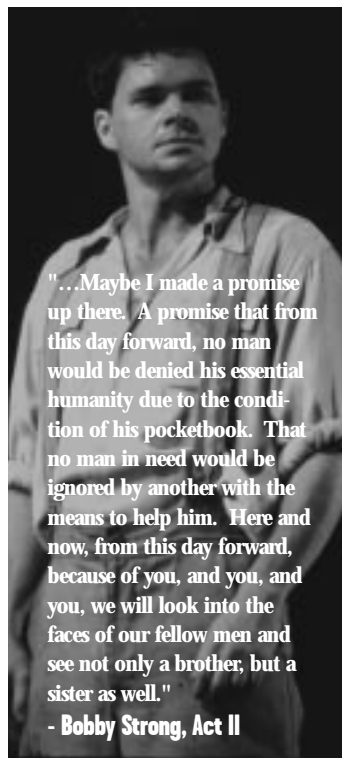
Urinetown: The Musical is a satire. Starting with an absurd, exaggerated premise – that all the toilets in a city are controlled by one greedy corporation – the show makes us laugh while it explores real social issues. It uses the medium of theater to examine corporate control, corruption, environmental conservation and the growing divide between rich and poor. With its sense of humor and critical attitude, *Urinetown* draws our attention to some of the most pressing problems in contemporary society. But it also uses humor to parody those “do-gooders” who try to make societal change happen without thinking things through.

Urinetown fits into a tradition of satirical social commentary and protest in the theater. It owes a debt to the pioneers of socially conscious theater in the early 20th century; the show simultaneously honors, updates, and pokes fun at artists such as Bertolt Brecht, Marc Blitzstein, and Clifford Odets. By tracing the theatrical roots of *Urinetown*, we can better appreciate its satirical approach.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a highly influential German playwright and director. He became known for encouraging audiences to think, instead of becoming too involved in the story or characters. His early work, during the reign of the Weimar Republic (a period of intense political change in Germany), was highly political and highly controversial. He became a Communist and was violently opposed to the upper class. When Hitler rose to power, he was forced to leave the country. Brecht lived in exile for 15 years, much of the time in the U.S. Here he continued to develop a form of drama called epic

theater, in which ideas or lessons are the most important element.

For Brecht, the theater was most useful as a forum for debate. His plays raised social issues that were of great importance to his audiences – often using humor mixed in with politics. *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939) explores the ways greedy entrepreneurs help to make devastating wars possible. *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1957) is a parable about Hitler’s rise to power, set in prewar Chicago. His most famous work, *The Threepenny Opera* (1931), is a musical, composed by Kurt Weill, that satirizes class differences and moral corruption in society.



“...Maybe I made a promise up there. A promise that from this day forward, no man would be denied his essential humanity due to the condition of his pocketbook. That no man in need would be ignored by another with the means to help him. Here and now, from this day forward, because of you, and you, and you, we will look into the faces of our fellow men and see not only a brother, but a sister as well.”
- Bobby Strong, Act II

Marc Blitzstein (1905-1935), an American writer and composer, was deeply influenced by Brecht, his mentor. As a young man, Blitzstein studied music seriously and considered art to be something for the elite. But he soon began to feel that art with no connection to its audience had no purpose. He was drawn to the work of Brecht because it connected with its audience in a real, meaningful way. Blitzstein became aware of the class injustices in society, and wanted to create work that

would inspire the working class by making “art that will bring it to a deeper knowledge of itself, and reality that will show a possible new reality.”

Blitzstein’s most famous and influential piece is a satirical musical called *The Cradle Will Rock* (1933). The show is set in the exaggerated, humorous reality of Steeltown, USA, where good-hearted, brave industrial workers fight for respect from their corrupt employer. The cartoonish story mirrored real-life struggles taking place between steelworkers and their managers throughout the U.S. during the 1930s. Conditions for steelworkers at the time were deplorable, and strikes and action by labor unions were beginning to cause real change at the steel corporations – a new reality. In *The Cradle Will Rock*, the hero,

in the Theater

archetypal worker Larry Foreman, takes on Steeltown's big boss, Mr. Mister – much like Urinetown's commoner Bobby Strong takes on Urinetown's big boss, Caldwell B. Cladwell. The difference is that in *Urinetown*, the commoners are ripe for as much satire as the ruling class. In this world, nobody is perfect.

Clifford Odets (1906-1963) was another American playwright who expressed his political views through his work. As a teenager, he became a part of the influential Group Theatre in New York City, a company devoted to producing plays with social significance. In 1934, he joined the American Communist Party; like others in the party, he felt that American capitalism was one of the major reasons for the Great Depression. His political stance, and compassion for the poor, led him to write *Waiting for Lefty*. The play tells the story of the members of a taxicab union who have gathered to organize a strike. Odets used the play to say that supporting labor unions was the best way to uplift the downtrodden victims of the Depression. The play received major attention and is considered one of Odets' best works.

The writers of *Urinetown*, Greg Kotis and Mark Hollman, use many of the same techniques as their theatrical predecessors to comment on contemporary society. Much like the political plays of Brecht, Blitzstein, and Odets, *Urinetown* pits the downtrodden common folk against the self-interested ruling class. For all of these writers, the theater is an effective medium for social commentary that can uplift, provoke, and entertain. *Urinetown* is part of a tradition of live theater that makes us laugh, makes us take a hard look at our society and, perhaps most importantly, makes us think.



Bertolt Brecht

What is

“Brechtian”?

Bertolt Brecht's theories about theater have been so influential that a word has been coined to describe his theatrical style.

"Brechtian" is the term used to characterize the type of theater that Brecht not only wrote, but also directed and developed through extensive work with actors. Besides drawing on the socially conscious content of Brecht's plays, *Urinetown* uses a number of Brechtian theatrical techniques.

We can understand the importance of Brecht's innovations by looking at the dominant theatrical style of the time – which is what he was rebelling against. Most Western theater (theater from Europe and the United States) of the early 20th century was based on the Aristotelian concept of drama. The Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote a book called *Poetics* that outlined an important and influential theory of drama. In essence, Aristotle's type of theater can be called the drama of illusion: it aims to create events that the audience believes are occurring in the present, it wants the audience to identify with the characters, and it wants the audience to undergo a process of catharsis (a purifying or figurative cleansing or release of emotions or tension).

Brecht's conception of theater was almost the complete opposite of the drama of illusion – in fact he wanted his theater to be about reality, not illusion. Whereas popular theater of his day strove for the illusion of eavesdropping on real events, Brecht instead wanted it clear that the actors on stage were just that – actors on a stage, acting out roles. He wanted to emphasize the fact that everything on stage is not an illusion, but rather the result of human activity. By showing that theater was an art that anyone could do, Brecht helped to create a sort of populist theater – a theater for the people.

Urinetown similarly pokes holes in the illusions of the theater. Some of the characters speak directly to the audience and are aware that they are in a theater (such as when Little Sally makes fun of *Urinetown's* title and asks "What kind of musical is this?" about the very musical she's in). And yet, at the same time, we are also drawn in to the characters and their world. By updating, twisting, and personalizing some of these Brechtian techniques, *Urinetown* strives to create a theater for the people of today.

The Tragedy of Comedy

It's February 20, 2001 at 10 a.m. and the cast and creative team of *Urinetown: The Musical* gather in a rehearsal studio for the first time. There is a feeling of first-day-of-school hesitancy as people introduce themselves to strangers they will undoubtedly get to know in the upcoming weeks, as well as camaraderie among people who have already worked together. It is the first day of rehearsal for a big Broadway show - or is it? Well, yes and no.

The road to Broadway is different for every show, but *Urinetown's* path was longer and more winding than most. The rehearsal on that day was for the Off-Broadway production and came only after the completion of two separate readings as well as an Off-Off Broadway production. Although working on Broadway is a goal of most professional actors, the actors gathered on that cold winter morning were only planning on a four-week run in a 150-seat house. Well, those four weeks turned into six weeks, then into ten weeks, and eventually a transfer to Broadway where *Urinetown* is still playing to enthusiastic audiences today.

What was it like rehearsing *Urinetown*? One of *Urinetown's* traits that many people have talked about is its parodies of other musicals. What is parody? The dictionary defines parody as "a humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece of literature or writing." So, is *Urinetown* a satire or a parody? Was that discussed in the rehearsal process and how many references to other works are found in *Urinetown's* staging? We asked cast member David Beach ("Mr. McQueen") to give us a look inside the process that unfolded in a small rehearsal room a couple of blocks west of Broadway:

"To a certain extent, I think the first day of rehearsal sets the tone for all the work to follow. Everyone comes into a rehearsal room for the first time with their own take on the play, their own ideas about their character, and their own way of putting those ideas into practice. A good director can take all those different energies, figure out how to harness them

creatively, and, most importantly, get everyone working on the same page. John Rando set *Urinetown* on the correct path by driving home one simple belief on that first day. His point was clear: THIS PIECE IS SERIOUS. As odd as the title might sound, as farfetched as the premise might seem, as hilarious as the lines, lyrics and music are, even with all these characteristics, it was vital that we told the story with a commitment to truth, a commitment with life and death stakes. Rando's excitement and respect for the writing was contagious. He suggested that we approach scenes as if we were in an episode of *Law and Order*, rather than a traditional musical comedy."

Law and Order? Life and death stakes in a play entitled *Urinetown*? Wouldn't playing the lines with utter seriousness rob the piece of humor? Just the opposite. Spencer Kayden, who originated the role of Little Sally and who has been with the show since its inception, says her motto was "Truth before humor; the more truthful we are, the funnier it is." Two time Tony Award® winner John Cullum explained this concept in a similar vein, "If you 'wink' at the audience instead of playing the truth of the play, you rob them of the chance to discover the humor themselves, which is always more satisfying."

David continues to tell us, "Our rehearsals were concerned with telling the story in a truthful and compelling way; we had this wonderful piece of work that we all threw ourselves into with a great sense of discovery, discipline and subversiveness. No one in the cast remembers discussing whether the piece was satirical, or Brechtian, or a parody. When asked about how he remembers the rehearsal process, John Cullum said, "I don't even know what people mean when they use the term 'Brechtian' since it has different connotations for different people. The actor's primary task is to realize the work from the inside, rather than the outside. 'What is



Spencer Kayden as Little Sally



John Cullum as Caldwell B. Cladwell



David Beach as Mr. McQueen



A scene from
Urinetown: The Musical

Many people think the energetic folk dance at the beginning of Act II is supposed to be a parody of dances from *Fiddler on the Roof*; however, when we were working on that dance, Carrafa asked us to think of those Russian dance troupes that do fiercely athletic dances. The old business saying 'the customer is always right' has its theater equivalent, 'the audience is always right.'"

my character's story? What does my character want and how far will they go to achieve those goals?"

"If I were going to try to make stab at categorizing *Urinetown*, I would probably call it a satire that uses parody as a means of accomplishing its satirical goal. Certainly part of the fun of the show is its inherent theatricality; it celebrates musical theatre while at the same time poking fun at that tradition. While *Urinetown's* staging definitely makes passing references to many other famous musicals throughout its two acts, that was never really a stated goal in the rehearsal process."

"When our choreographer, John Carrafa, was staging a song, his goal was always how to best tell the story. In the world of *Urinetown*, the vocabulary for telling that story draws heavily from the long tradition of musical theater. One can see many direct and indirect allusions to other works, but not all of them were intentional."

"For example, in Act II's 'Snuff That Girl,' the finger-snapping diagonal cross is a clear homage to a famous piece of choreography from *West Side Story* and the marching-in-place banner waving in the Act I finale clearly mimics the protest theatrics in *Les Miserables*. Other moments, on the other hand, sprang from the loose collaboration that Rando and Carrafa encouraged in rehearsal and are more evocative than literal in nature."

"I think as cast members, we've all been a little surprised when our friends compliment the show on some piece of stage business that they believe directly skewers some famous show. In reality, that was often not our intention."

"So even if we didn't intentionally attempt to reference *Fiddler on the Roof* (or *Sweet Charity*, or *Guys and Dolls*, etc.), if other musicals are evoked and recognized by an audience member, so much the better. There is a connection between the audience and performer that is based on a shared history -- much like the jazz listener hearing specific influences in a soloist's stream-of-conscious riff."

"Many of the actors that I work with in the production have been singled out for their incredible individual performances. What makes the production outstanding is how all those individual performances come together in a cohesive, unified whole. An actor must wear two hats, one where they are concerned primarily with their individual piece of a puzzle, and one where they have to see the entire puzzle and how their piece fits into the whole. Rachel Coloff, who created the role of Soupy Sue, credits John Rando with helping the cast feel at home in the world that Greg Kotis and Mark Hollman created."



Rachel Coloff as
Soupy Sue

"She remembers that 'Rando gave us very specific ideas on the tone and focus, and yet we had absolute freedom to experiment; he never said 'No, that's wrong.' But then again, with so much going right, maybe he didn't need to.'"

Environmental Awareness

“Water, water everywhere not any drop to drink!”

Water is essential to human life. Accessing a clean supply of fresh water (as opposed to salt water) has historically been a major concern of people all over the world. Today in the United States, access is not a problem.

However our water supply is not as secure as it may seem. A combination of factors: population, pollution and an aging water infrastructure all work to diminish and contaminate our water supply. Drought in itself is not the cause of the problems. Rather it is our unsustainable water use and our overuse of reserves that make drought so severe.

Christine Todd Whitman, the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, calls the water supply "the biggest environmental issue that we face in the 21st century." The CIA predicts that by the year 2015, drinking-water access could be a major source of world conflict and others talk of water becoming as valuable as oil.

POPULATION DEMAND

It is estimated that the U.S. daily water supply demand is 100 gallons per person and can go as high as 500 gallons per person. With population growing at a rate of .6 % per year (higher than most industrialized nations), the demand is expected to grow.

POLLUTION

While federal law has been relatively successful at regulating pollution from large industry, it has been less successful in regulating how towns and municipalities, with their burgeoning populations and urban sprawl, use their water. Often municipalities disperse untreated or partially treated sewage into the same lakes and rivers from which they and neighboring towns draw their drinking water. Recently streams nationwide have been found to be laced with over the counter and prescription drugs and even caffeine. Laws requiring proper sewage treatment are becoming more widespread but only solve part of the problem as sewage treatment deals mostly with bacteria and not with viruses and phosphorus and nitrogen compounds which contribute to the destruction of lakes and ponds.

DROUGHT

Droughts have occurred throughout history, but the consistent rise in the temperature of the earth's atmosphere in the past 100 years, also known as Global Warming, leads many to believe that in general there will be less rain and more drought. Global warming also contributes to evaporation of existing reserves and a rise in sea levels, which may cause fresh water reserves to be contaminated with salt water, effectively rendering them useless.

What is causing this warming? Some believe that air pollution is at least partially responsible. The Greenhouse Effect is a term that describes how human driven increases in carbon dioxide and other gasses in the atmosphere help maintain the temperature of the Earth's surface.

DECAYING INFRASTRUCTURE

To further compound the problem, millions of gallons of water are lost every day en route to U.S. homes and businesses because of leaks in decaying pipes, many of which are over 100 years old. In addition, when pipes fail, pressure drops and sucks dirt, debris and often bacteria and other pathogens into the huge underground arteries that deliver water. One way of dealing with this is to flush out the contaminants and increase the chlorine dose, but this is not a long-term solution.

PRIVATIZATION

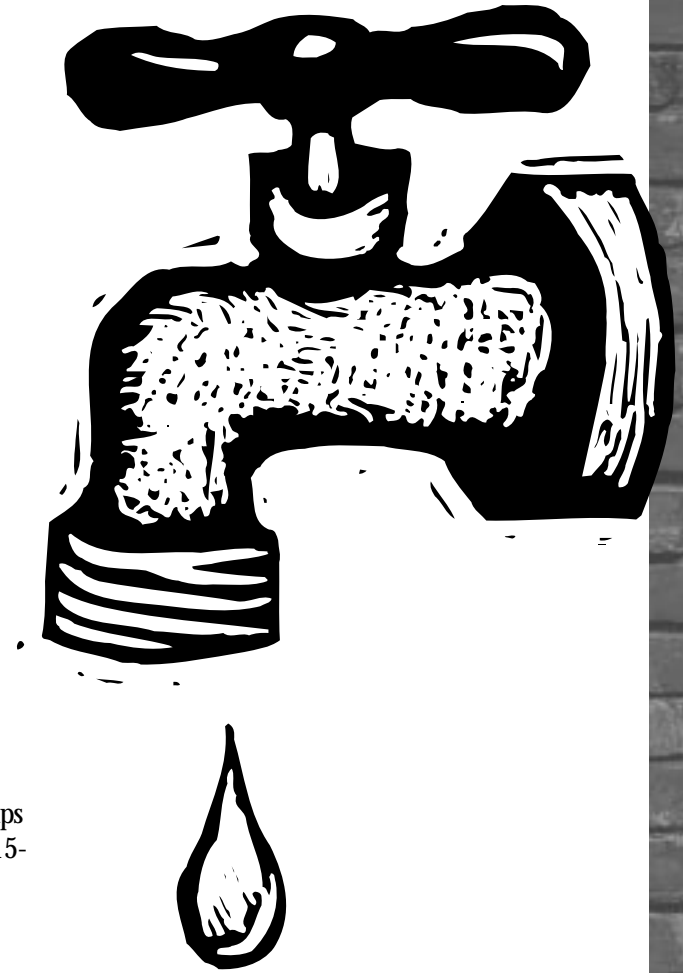
Repairing the system requires a huge investment of capital. Therefore many towns have been encouraged to have private companies bid to repair and manage their water systems. This has worked successfully in some places and less successfully in others. Some towns that privatized are now in the process of de-privatizing, complaining that not only did the prices go up, but the quality of the service went down as the company was effectively a monopoly and had no competition. (This is a much bigger issue in third world countries where multinational corporations are seeking not just to own the infrastructure but to buy the actual water itself!) Having municipal water systems run by private companies is controversial. If water prices go up significantly, many worry that the gap between the rich and the poor will widen, as in *Urinetown*. Nonetheless there is a growing argument in favor of privatization.

SPEND MORE, WASTE LESS

In the United States less than 15% of “drinking water” is used for drinking or bathing; most of it goes to flushing toilets and watering lawns! Because of the way we use water, many believe that a diminishing water supply is inevitable and that we will have to look to new technologies for purifying and distilling contaminated water and salt water. Others believe that price regulation is the answer and that raising the price of water is the only way to get Americans to stop using so much of it.

So what can we do?

- ✓ Take short showers. If you take a bath, fill the tub only half way.
- ✓ Install water saving showerheads, toilet, and faucets.
- ✓ If you can't install a water saving toilet, place a plastic bottle filled with water in the toilet tank to reduce the flow.
- ✓ Don't over water your lawn or plants.
- ✓ Install aerators in faucets.
- ✓ Repair leaky faucets and turn taps off tightly. A slow drip wastes 15-20 gallons each day.
- ✓ Don't flush the toilet unnecessarily.
- ✓ Turn off the water while shaving, brushing your teeth, or washing dishes.
- ✓ Don't open fire hydrants.
- ✓ Sweep your sidewalk or driveway, don't hose it down.
- ✓ Don't run the dishwasher or clothes washer until they are completely full. If possible, use the short cycle.
- ✓ Water before 9 a.m. or after 7 p.m. when lower temperatures reduce evaporation.



Thomas Malthus

“Hail Malthus!”

At the end of *Urinetown*, the people cry “Hail Malthus!” Who is Malthus and why is he being brought up for the first time at the end of *Urinetown*?

Thomas Malthus was a 19th century economist and pioneer in population growth theory. He believed that as population growth occurs faster than the means of subsistence, poverty and disease are unavoidable. Many of his predictions have proved false and his ideas for solving problems have been deemed too politically incorrect to be taken seriously. However, his emphasis on population growth as a major issue was prescient.

By hailing Malthus, the people of *Urinetown*, in their typically iconoclastic way, are reminding us that even predictions that seem too dire or absurd can become reality.

Taming Your Fear

A Conversation with the Creators of *Urinetown: The Musical*

StageNOTES™ spoke with the writers of *Urinetown: The Musical* about the creation of their musical. Greg Kotis (Book and Lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (Music and Lyrics) discussed inspiration, creative process, and nature.

StageNOTES: What was the inspiration for *Urinetown*?

Greg Kotis: The inspiration was being broke while traveling around Europe for a couple of weeks. I'd gone to Romania to perform in a theater festival and decided to travel through Western Europe on my way back. I had so little money at the time that I began delaying trips to the pay per use public toilets they have in Paris and other cities as part of my budget plan.

Mark Hollman: [Greg] saw one of those pay toilets looming on the horizon, and as he considered whether or not to spare his precious coins for a visit, the idea for a play called *Urinetown* came to him, with the premise that there is a town where water is so scarce that people have to pay an evil, monopolizing corporation for the privilege to pee.

SN: How did you choose the theatrical style for the show?

GK: I used to write for and perform with a company called The Neo-Futurists. A big part of their aesthetic is all about breaking down the fourth wall and putting the performers on the same plane as the audience. The Neo-Futurists put a lot of stock in speaking the literal truth, performing actual tasks as part of the action on stage, that sort of thing. *Urinetown* owes a big debt to that company.

SN: What shows, writers, and composers served as models for the book and music of *Urinetown*?

MH: Certainly I found Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* to be an inspiration and model for *Urinetown*. Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* was another show that I admired and hoped to emulate in writing the score for *Urinetown*.

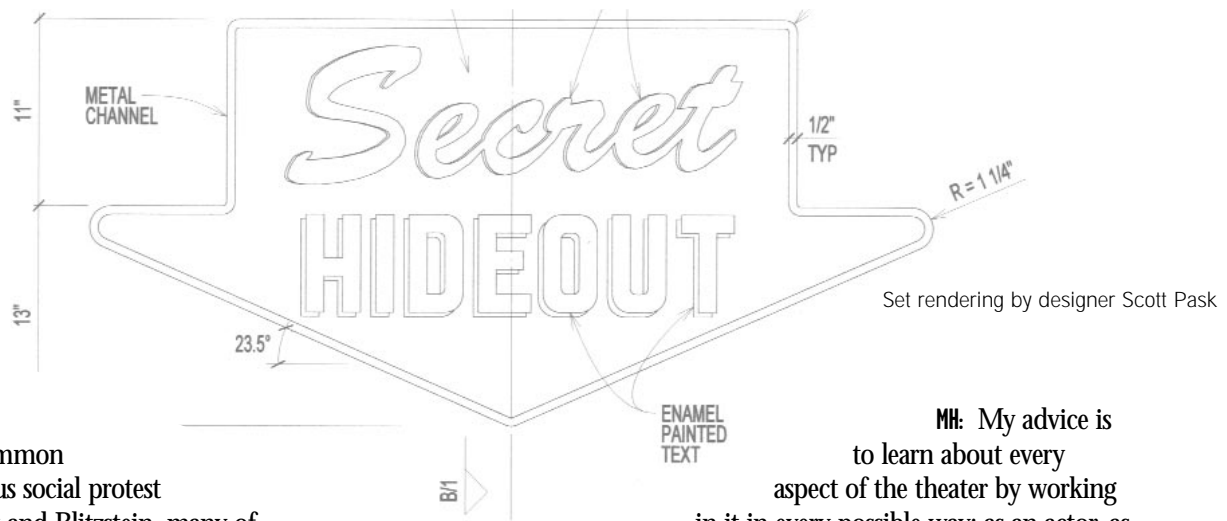
SN: Describe the writing process. What was your collaboration like?

GK: After getting the idea, I wrote a few scenes to try to feel out the characters, the tone of the play, the pace of the dialogue. Then I drew up a rough outline, trying to guess where the play was going to go, roughly. Mark started working with me at this point, offering up song candidates for existing scenes.

MH: Sometimes Greg would come in to our work sessions with a completed lyric, and I would revise it, or vice versa. Also, sometimes we would write a song lyric simultaneously. In this way of working, we would each start writing stanzas of a song whose purpose and place in the show we had agreed upon beforehand. As we wrote, we would share our work with each other as we went along, and after a few hours of that process, we would end up with enough material to cobble together a first draft of a lyric.

GK: I worked to finish the book while Mark continued writing songs, then I doubled back and worked with Mark as we made our way through the rest of the book, musicalizing each scene as we went. That's my memory of it, more or less. The process was very organic, I tried to make Mark laugh, and he did the same to me.

MH: An unusual thing about *Urinetown* was that much of it was written in a church. I served as organist from 1996-2002 at Christ Lutheran Church in Manhattan, and it was there at the piano in the sanctuary that Greg and I met on Sundays after church to collaborate on *Urinetown*.



SN: *Urinetown* has a lot in common with the famous social protest plays of Brecht and Blitzstein, many of which aimed to provoke their audiences to some kind of political or social action. What do you hope audiences take away from *Urinetown*?

GK: Most of all, we hope people have a good time. Beyond that, *Urinetown* tries to speak to this sense of dread that many people have about the world and what we do in it. Comedy is very much about taming your fear, and *Urinetown* certainly aims to do that. But once tamed, our hope is that the fear and dread can still guide us to act in a way that can keep the future a welcoming place.

SN: *Urinetown* playfully explores a political argument from both sides. Do you think the show sides with one particular political view over another? Was this a conscious decision you made while writing it?

MH: As Greg has put it, it's like a pox on both your houses. No one has the answer; *Urinetown* merely raises the questions.

GK: We wanted to allow the characters to function at the top of their intelligence, and we wanted the story to honor their choices with reasonable consequences given the terms set up by the story of the play. Cladwell is cruel and heartless, but he also knows what must be done to maintain the system as it exists. Bobby is idealistic and brave, but his plan doesn't go past relieving the people's immediate needs. Both are well intentioned in their own way, the trouble is there aren't enough resources for everyone regardless of the outcome of the story.

SN: What advice do you have for young writers and composers?

MH: My advice is to learn about every aspect of the theater by working in it in every possible way: as an actor, as a director, as a designer, as a producer, and every other job from hanging lights to cleaning the toilets. Greg and I got this kind of experience when, with a group of friends from college, we ran our own theater company in Chicago in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We wrote plays, acted in them, and produced and publicized them ourselves by renting the theater and putting up posters with our own money and time. I think it's this kind of hands-on experience that will teach you better than any classroom what works in front of an audience, what is producible, and what is possible theatrically.

Furthermore, if you acquire this ability to put on your own shows, you will find it useful when you are rejected as a writer. As Tony Kushner advises in his wise prologue to *The Dramatists Sourcebook*, if every theater turns down your play or musical for production, produce it yourself! After being rejected by about 60 theaters and 50 agents, that's exactly what Greg and I did with *Urinetown*.

GK: The advice I was given early on was listen to your audience. Do whatever you have to do to get your material in front of people, and listen to how they respond. I believe in this, more or less. Experiencing an audience will teach you many things about your work, and why you want to write plays in the first place. The hard thing, obviously, is getting your work in front of people in the first place, so it's sort of a Catch-22. For me, the solution was working in Chicago storefronts for a long time, and being willing to produce my own work. But the joy of theater is it can happen anywhere, anytime (if you choose), and on any terms you can imagine. There are things you can do as a playwright, or an actor, that can be infinitely more thrilling than the most expensive special effects.

Lesson #1

Discussion

Objective:

Students will learn to think critically about their world and compare it to an imaginary world in literature.

From the Script: Act 1, Scene 2

Cladwell:

...twenty years ago, we came to the people of this community with a simple proposition: Look the other way while we run this company the way we see fit and we will keep the pee off the street and the water in the ground.

Exercise:

Could it happen here? In the musical *Urinetown*, the Cladwells of the world have taken control of the town's water supply, and consequently, the citizens of the town have to pay the Urine Good Company high fees in order to pee. Have your students brainstorm items in today's world that are free and under personal control, such as walking down the street, making a personal phone call, breathing the air, etc. Once they have come up with a large list, have them choose one to debate with a partner the possibility or impossibility of personal freedom versus authoritarian control of these activities.

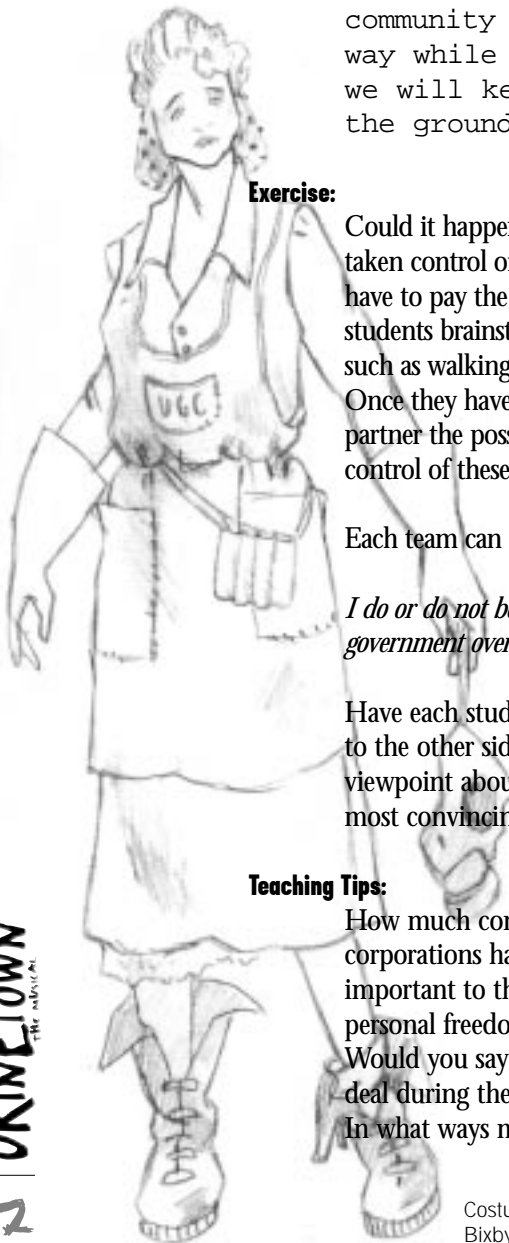
Each team can follow a debate format, starting with the topic:

I do or do not believe that breathing the air could ever be taken over by a corporation or government overriding its citizens' personal freedom.

Have each student present two arguments advocating their point of view, rebuttals to the other side's arguments, and a closing statement summarizing their viewpoint about the topic. After the closing statement, the class can vote for the most convincing argument.

Teaching Tips:

How much control does the government have of our lives? How much control do corporations have of our lives? What personal freedoms would you consider most important to the citizens of any world? Do you think that people take their personal freedoms seriously or not? Give examples of your opinion on this topic. Would you say that the world that you are living in is capable of changing a great deal during the next 20 years? In what ways do you think that it might change? In what ways might it stay the same?



Lesson #2

Writing

Objective:

In this lesson, we will explore creative ways to demonstrate social injustice through dramatic techniques of satire and parody.

From the Script: Act 1, Scene 2**Hope:**

Gosh, Daddy they certainly do seem to adore you. So why do I feel so conflicted?

Cladwell:

Nonsense. Did I send you to The Most Expensive University in the World to teach you how to feel conflicted or to learn how to manipulate great masses of people?

Exercise:

In the Glossary of Literary Terms (page 16), you will find the definition of satire is “A manner of writing that mixes a critical attitude with wit and humor in an effort to improve mankind and human institutions...” The definition of parody is “A humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece of literature or writing.” In both instances, an author mixes exaggeration, humor, and a desire to reveal hypocrisy and evoke truth. Serious as this mission may sound, it is always based in an entertaining format and meant to be fun to both write and view.

In the excerpt above, the authors are making fun of corporate hypocrisy. Encourage your students to do the same. Have them begin by picking a format such as a TV sitcom, an MTV video, a novel, a poem, a musical comedy, etc. to parody. Then in order to demonstrate a social injustice, encourage them to make fun of hypocrisy whenever they can.

Students can partner up and write a two- or three- character scene, which they can volunteer to act out in front of the class.

Teaching Tips:

What would you consider to be the most successful sitcoms on TV? What tends to make them particularly successful for you? Do you think that imitation is good form of art? Why or why not? Is comedy funniest when the joke is on the audience or when the joke is on the characters on the stage? What is the difference between these two kinds of comedy? Can you give examples of each?



Costume sketch of Little Sally by designers Gregory Gale and Jonathan Bixby

Lesson #3

Experiential

Objective:

The class will look at environmental factors that could have an impact on their futures.

From the Script: Act 1, Scene 6**Bobby:**

Now run, everybody! Run for your lives! RUN!!

Lockstock:

Well, that's it for Act I. As you can see, the rebel poor are making their getaway with Hope as a hostage. The rest of us have been thrown into confusion because - well, because we're all moving so damned slowly.

Exercise:

In the Environmental Awareness feature (pages 8 and 9), students learn that by the year 2015, drinking-water access could be a major source of world conflict with "water becoming as valuable as oil." After discussing issues such as population demand, pollution of the water supply, drought, climate changes, Global Warming and the Greenhouse Effect, students can look at their present world and survey the fragility of the environment in relation to the water supply today. In order to do this in a scientific or organized manner, have your class design a survey that they can take and then discuss. The survey can ask questions about water conservation, such as those discussed in the "So what can we do?" section. They can add to those questions and cover factors such as the need for filtered water and general concerns of cleanliness in the water supply.

Once they have taken the survey, have them discuss their answers as a class and decide whether or not they think our water supply is at risk. It would be interesting for the producers, writers, cast and crew of *Urinetown* to read a short letter from the class about their estimation of the health or fragility of our water supply in New York City today. Included in this letter can be suggestions for maintaining healthy water practices, as well as planning for improvements in our maintenance of this environmental necessity.

Teaching Tips:

What do you consider the most endangered part of our environment? Explain your thoughts. Do you prefer to drink water out of the tap or bottled water? Is this just a habit or based on some other information? Do you feel that large populations are beneficial or detrimental to the well being of most communities? Explain your answer. If you were going to exaggerate the ills of your environment, what would you choose to exaggerate and how?

Costume sketch by designers Gregory Gale and Jonathan Bixby of Bobby Strong

URINETOWN
THE MUSICAL

Lesson To Go

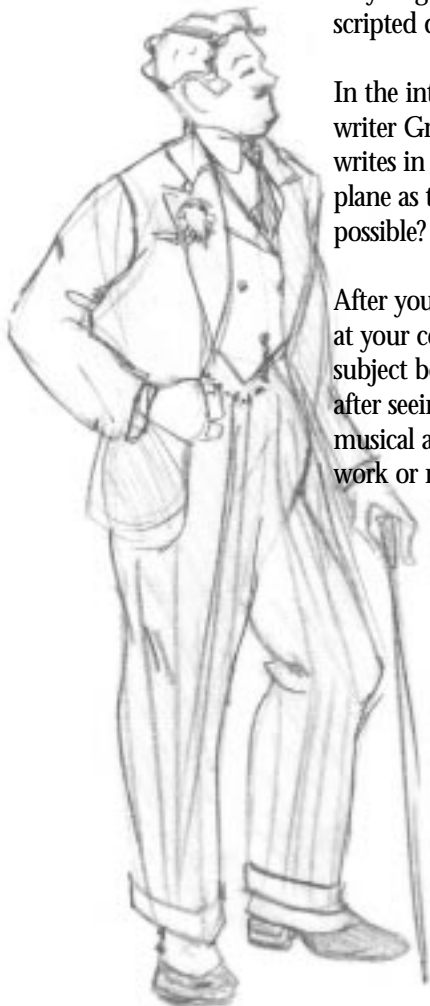
NAME _____ DATE _____
CLASS _____ TEACHER _____

1. What do you think?

What do you think about musical comedy? What do you think of characters bursting into song in front of your eyes on the stage? What would you think if someone walking down the street on Fifth Avenue in New York City suddenly burst into song in front of you? In your opinion, what is the difference between what you see on the stage and what you see on the street? Why might writers of musicals want to have their characters sing? Where and why might they choose to include songs rather than scripted dialogue?

In the interview with *Urinetown* book and lyric writer Greg Kotis (page 10), he suggests that he writes in order to put his “performers on the same plane as the audience.” Do you think that is possible? Explain your answer.

After you have seen the show, come back and look at your comments. Compare your thinking on the subject before seeing the show with your thinking after seeing the show. In what ways is this energetic musical a parody of a musical? In what ways does it work or not work for you as a musical itself?



Costume sketch of Caldwell B. Cladwell by designers Gregory Gale and Jonathan Bixby

2. Express Yourself

Either set up a little pocket tape recorder that you can keep on record for an hour in the day when you know that you will be engaged in conversation with people, or do your best to recall and write down a conversation that holds interest for you. Play this back to yourself or read your written account, and listen for the tone and the pace of the conversation and think about what the conversation might suggest about the characters who are talking. Rewrite this conversation, making yourself either the hero/heroine or the villain of the scene. Don't be afraid to exaggerate and express your most dramatic side.

3. After Hours

Find the lyrics to two or three songs that have been written by the same composer and lyricist. For example, Elton John, Bruce Springsteen, Guiseppe Verdi, Eminem, etc. Think of a plot that might connect all those songs in a short musical. Bring in scenarios and music to pass around in the class and have the class choose one or two that they might like to perform. (If there is a good producer in the classroom, you may have a hit show on your hands!)

Glossary of Literary Terms

In *Urinetown*, Officer Lockstock and Little Sally are characters within the action of the musical, but they also serve as narrators. As narrators, they do more than relate the events on stage. They deconstruct or analyze the musical in literary terms, thereby acknowledging the artificiality of the musical structure. In so doing, they create a different relationship with the audience, one that is rooted in the reality of the present moment. Below are some of the literary terms used by Little Sally and Officer Lockstock.

Catharsis is a purifying or figurative cleansing of the emotions, especially pity and fear, described by Aristotle as an effect of tragic drama on its audience. He believed that this release of emotional tension within the controlled context of a drama would restore or refresh the spirit of the audience. The **cathartic moment** is the climactic moment.

Exposition is the act of exposing or explaining the meaning or purpose of a story. It is generally thought that good storytelling uses exposition sparingly, allowing the drama to reveal itself through action and character. "Show, don't tell" is the most common admonition to young writers.

A **finale** is the last and often climactic event in a series of actions. In musicals and operas, it is traditionally the last sections or piece of an act usually arranged for a large ensemble.

The **hero** is the principal personage in a poem, story, play or film as Achilles in the *Iliad*, Ulysses in the *Odyssey*, and Aeneas in the *Aeneid*. Traditionally, the hero is endowed with great strength and character and faces a series of challenges. If the hero is villainous or weak, he is an "anti-hero."

A **literary conceit** is a fanciful, odd or ingenious idea used as an element of a story. It is the old word for concept. The central conceit of *Urinetown* is that a large corporation has taken control of all the toilets.

Metaphysical thought (from the Greek, 'meta' which means 'after' and 'phusika' which means 'nature') means examining the nature of reality and refers to the theoretical principles or philosophy of a discipline as opposed to the concrete details.

A **narrator** relates a series of events or transactions.

Parody is a humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece of literature or writing.

Satire is a manner of writing that mixes a critical attitude with wit and humor in an effort to improve mankind and human institutions.

Symbolism is a method of revealing or suggesting intangible truth by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings of significance to objects, events, or relationships. For example, a sword may be a sword and also symbolize justice. A symbol embodies an idea. There are two general types of symbols: universal symbols that embody universally recognizable meanings wherever used, such as light to symbolize knowledge, a skull to symbolize death, etc., and constructed symbols that are given symbolic meaning by the way an author uses them in a literary work, as the white whale becomes a symbol of evil in *Moby Dick*.