

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

This study guide is researched and designed by the Education Department at Milwaukee Repertory Theater and is intended to prepare you for your visit. It contains information that will deepen your understanding of, and appreciation for, the production. We've also included questions and activities for you to explore before and after our performance of **SPEAKING IN TONGUES**.

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NOTE

*This show contains brief
adult language.*

SPEAKING IN TONGUES
is 2 hours long with a 15
minute intermission.

If you would like to schedule a classroom
workshop, or if we can help in any other
way, please contact

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Who's Who



*Costume
Rendering for
Pete*

Pete – Pete is married to Jane and does not cheat on her, despite not being entirely happy with their marriage. He still has feelings for Jane and wants to raise a family together.

Jane – Jane betrays Pete with Leon. When her husband is gone, she observes her neighbor Nick throw away a woman's shoe. When a woman is reported missing, she suspects Nick and reports him to the police.

Leon – Leon is a police officer who cheats on his wife, Sonja, with Jane. After this, he accidentally meets Pete and becomes very aware of the consequences of his actions. He is also the officer in charge of the case of the disappearance of a woman.

Sonja – Sonja is devastated by the fact that her husband, Leon, cheats on her. She meets Jane accidentally and realizes Jane is the woman Leon was with.

Neil – Neil is the stranger that Leon meets and tells him his story of unrequited love for Sarah. He is still in love with her and desperately tries to track her down after she leaves the country.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: Each character has a journey in the show. How do you think each character grew? Why do you think each character acted the way they did? How would you act in each of these situations? Jot down your ideas and then share them with your class.

*Costume
Rendering for
Jane*



Sarah – Sarah tells her therapist, Valerie, about Neil and a letter that she has received from him. She also tells her about her married lover, John.

Valerie – Valerie does not like Sarah because she knows about the affair with her husband. While driving home one evening, her car breaks down and receives help from Nick, but becomes panicky and bolts out of his car, leaving her shoe. After this, she is reported missing.

John – John is Valerie's husband and is interviewed by Leon after her disappearance. Only at the end does he reveal that he has been having an affair with Sarah and states his lack of feelings for Valerie.

Nick – Nick is Jane and Pete's neighbor, who also has marital problems. He picks up Valerie in order to help, but knows that he has unintentionally scared her. He tries to get rid of the shoe that she has lost, but is found out by Jane. Despite all this, his wife still believes his innocence.



*Costume
Rendering for
Sarah*



*Costume
Rendering for
John*

Synopsis

Spoiler Alert! This synopsis reveals crucial plot points.



*Costume
Rendering for
Sonja*

SPEAKING IN TONGUES is a three part story focusing on the interwoven lives of nine people. In the first part, we meet Pete, Leon, Sonja and Jane. Leon and Jane are in one room and Sonja and Pete are in another. These four people have just come from a bar and are about to betray their respective partners. We see each couple converse and discuss what could happen if they do betray their partners. Eventually, Pete and Sonja back down and do not have an affair, but Leon and Jane do cheat on their spouses.

We then transition to Sonja and Leon's house as well as Jane and Pete's house. The couples confront one another about where they have been and Pete and Sonja end up confessing to

Leon and Jane that they were with another person, but did not have sex. Sonja tells Leon that it's over. The scene ends with the couples kissing and with everything seemingly resolved, but Sonja and Pete realize that their spouses have cheated on them.

In the next scene, we see Pete and Leon at a bar. Leon tells Pete that his wife has left him and that he has had an affair. Pete admits that he almost had an affair. Pete states that he won't be able to forgive his wife because he feels it would be an invitation for her to do it all over again. Leon says that Pete should forgive

his wife, despite what she has done.

We cut to another bar on the same night. Here we see Sonja on the dance floor dancing by herself and Jane at a table having a drink. Sonja confronts Jane for staring and they begin talking about why they are there. Jane tells Sonja that her husband has left her and Sonja tells Jane that she has left her husband for the time being. They continue speaking about their problems and Sonja discovers that Jane is the woman that her husband, Leon, cheated on her with.

The next scene takes place at Leon and Sonja's house a few days later. Leon tells Sonja that he has taken up jogging and that he had a strange experience one morning. While jogging, Leon ran into another person

and yelled at him for no reason. The man leaves and Leon goes to confront him at the waterfront and the stranger breaks down crying and tells Leon about his problems. The next morning Leon is jogging he sees the stranger's shoes at the waterfront.

The final scene in part one takes place at Jane and Pete's house. Pete tells Jane that he has been to the doctor to see if his vasectomy can be reversed because he wants to have a child. Jane brushes this off and tells Pete about what she saw the other night: while being up late, she heard their neighbor, Nick, come home late and looked out the window to see him. As Nick got out of his car, he grabbed a woman's shoe, crossed the street and threw it into an empty



*Costume
Rendering for
Leon*



*Costume
Rendering for
Nick*



*Costume
Rendering for
Valerie*

lot. Jane went out to confront Nick and he told her that it was a dog bone from the front lawn of his house. The following day, Jane saw on the television that a woman was missing and she suspects Nick and reports him to the police.

Part two introduces us to Neil, Sarah, Valerie and Nick. The scene begins with Sarah dancing alone, Neil at a table writing a letter, Nick in a police interview room and Valerie in a phone booth. We cut to only Neil and Sarah, now in her therapist's (Valerie) office, and their conversations. Neil is writing a letter to a former lover, Sarah, telling her how much she hurt him. While this is going on, Sarah describes to her therapist how she feels about Neil. These

conversations are intermingled with brief comments from Valerie, wondering why her hus-

band hasn't answered the phone at home and about a dream she continues to have. Nick, Sarah and Neil also explain a dream they have been constantly having. After all the details, we cut to Nick explaining what happened the night the woman, Valerie, disappeared.

Part three begins with John and Leon. Leon is there interviewing John about the night his wife went missing. We then cut to Valerie and Sarah in Valerie's office with Sarah talking about her relationship with her new beau. After this, we are back with Leon and John and their conversation leads to marriage and infidelity and we find out that Sarah's new beau is John.

Each part of the play is connected with each other through characters and themes and produces a story about love, trust, forgiveness and the human experience.



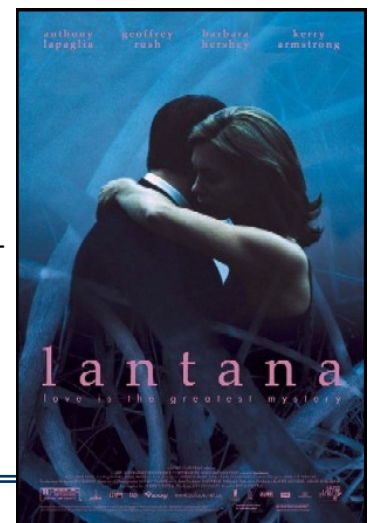
*Costume
Rendering for
Neil*

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: SPEAKING IN TONGUES takes place in many different locations: a bar, in various homes and at a doctor's office. How do you think the stage will look to accommodate all these places? Will there be any set changes? If so, how will they happen and what might they look like? Draw out your ideas and share them with your classmates.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: Compare and contrast what you've drawn previously to what you saw at the theater. Did the set work to accommodate all the locations? What did you especially like? Was there anything that you didn't like? Discuss your answers with your classmates.

Did you know...

SPEAKING IN TONGUES was made into a movie in 2001. *Lantana* received seven Australian Film Institute awards including those for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay. The film was a huge success and grossed over \$12 million in Australia and starred many well known actors including Barbara Hershey, Glenn Robbins, Anthony LaPaglia and Geoffrey Rush.



About the Author

An award-winning screenwriter and playwright, Andrew Bovell currently lives in Australia. He has won many awards, including the Australian Writers' Guild's annual award for his plays *HOLY DAY*, *WHO'S AFRAID OF THE WORKING CLASS?*, *SPEAKING IN TONGUES* (1996) and *SCENES FROM A SEPARATION*. *SPEAKING IN*



TONGUES was so successful that it later on became a film entitled *Lantana* (2001). Other screenplays Bovell has worked on include *Strictly Ballroom*, *Head On* and *Edge of Darkness*. Bovell's work for the screen has won him over 10 awards in Australia as well as the 2003 London Critics' Circle Film Award for best screenplay for *Lantana*.

Here's what the playwright has to say about *SPEAKING IN TONGUES*...

"*SPEAKING IN TONGUES* is about the right and wrong of emotional conduct. It's about contracts being broken between intimates while deep bonds are forged between strangers. It maps an emotional landscape typified by a sense of disconnection and a shifting moral code. It's about people yearning for meaning and grabbing onto small moments of hope and humour to combat an increasing sense of alienation. The play is written in two halves. Each half has a particular tone. It has been written for four actors but there are nine characters. It's in three parts. Each part is an exploration of the relationships between four people. But they are not mutually exclusive. The connections between the characters exist across the parts as well as within them. Characters reappear, others

disappear. Stories told in one part take on significance in another part. It's driven by a sense of mystery. The answers are there but they are elusive. The plot doesn't always move forward. It leaps sideways and backwards. It travels back to moments already seen but reveals them from a different angle. I'm conscious of the play being structurally difficult. It doesn't follow the normal rules of playwriting. I'm worried that the audience will experience a degree of frustration with it. But I have faith that audiences are seeking different narrative shapes and new modes of dramatic exchange. The least I hope for is that they leave the theatre as haunted by these people as I am and perhaps asking the same questions they do. How do I conduct myself in this world? How do I survive it?"

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION: Bovell states that he is worried that the audience might become frustrated with the structure of the story. Why do you think he chose to have such a complex storyline? What are the advantages of having a plot that jumps around a lot? What are some disadvantages? Discuss your ideas with a small group.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY: After seeing the show, make a time line of all the events that happen with a small group. Do you think that keeping the plot as a straightforward episodic play would be more effective? Or do you think that the complex structure worked? Share what you have created and your ideas with your classmates.

The Script

Andrew Bovell's script is full of overlapping dialogue and characters saying the same lines simultaneously. While this can be complicated to read, it is easier to process the script by reading it aloud and taking it section by section. Below is a brief excerpt from the script. Note: whenever the / symbol appears within the dialogues, it is to indicate that the remainder of the speech is spoken simultaneously with the speech following.

SONJA/JANE: Tell me about your wife.

LEON: Who?

JANE: Your wife.

PETE/LEON: Why?

SONJA/JANE: Is she happy?

PETE/LEON: With me?

SONJA/JANE: With life.

PETE/LEON: Yes.

LEON: Maybe. / I don't know. Why do you want to know?

PETE: I don't know. Why do you want to know?

SONJA/JANE: I want to know something about the woman I'm hurting.

LEON: Let's get something clear. / You're not hurting her. I am.

PETE: You're not hurting her. / I am.

SONJA/JANE: Then I want to know something about the woman you're hurting. [*Beat.*] What's her name?

PETE: Jane.

LEON: Sonja.

JANE/SONJA: Nice name. I'm sorry

SONJA: Jane.

JANE: Sonja.

PETE/LEON: Don't.

JANE/SONJA: What?

PETE/LEON: Talk as if she was here.

JANE: Sorry. / What's she like?

PETE/LEON: She's attractive.

LEON: Strong.

PETE: Fragile. She depends on me.

LEON: I depend on her.

PETE/LEON: It drives me mad.

LEON: Her strength

PETE: Her fragility.

LEON/PETE: And yet that's what attracts me. Isn't that strange?

PETE: Stupid.

LEON: Idiotic.

PETE/LEON: Whatever. What about him?

SONJA: Who?

PETE: Your husband.

SONJA: Oh. / His name is

JANE: His name is

SONJA: Leon.

JANE: Pete.

SONJA/JANE: He's no one special.

JANE: But I love him. / Ordinary to look at.

SONJA: Ordinary to look at. / But looks never mattered much to me.

JANE: But looks never mattered much to me.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: Have four students read the excerpt aloud in class with the rest of the students following along. Pick four more students to read and then re-read with the class just listening. Was it easier to understand when you followed along or when you just listened? Why do you think that is? If you read, was it difficult to read the script with the overlapping dialogue? Why or why not? Discuss your answers with your classmates.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION: Why do you think Bovell wrote the play in this style? What difficulties might a script like this cause? Do you think it would be more or less hard to memorize a script like this? Discuss your answers with a small group.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: What difficulties did you have watching and listening to the play? Did you get confused at any time? Do you think having the overlapping dialogue was effective? Jot down your ideas and share them with your classmates.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES features Rep Resident Acting Company Members Deborah Staples and Lee E. Ernst as well as guest actors Jonathan Smoots and Jenny McKnight and is directed by Laura Gordon, Rep Resident Acting Company Member.

(left to right respectively)



Works Cited and Further Reading

Andrew, Paul. *Andrew Bovell*. 8 October 2009. Australian Stage. 6 January 2011.

<<http://www.australianstage.com.au/200910072892/features/melbourne/andrew-bovell.html>>.

Bovell, Andrew. *Into the Dark*. 15 September 2006. Roundabout Theatre Company. Front and Center Online. 6 January 2011. <<https://www.roundabouttheatre.org/fc/autumn01/bovell.htm>>.

Bovell, Andrew. *Speaking in Tongues*. Australia, 1996.

Grode, Eric. *Stage to Screen: Speaking with Andrew Bovell*. 9 December 2001. Playbill.com. 7 January 2011. <<http://www.playbill.com/features/article/66672-STAGE-TO-SCREEN-Speaking-with-Andrew-Bovell>>.

Lantana. Dir. Ray Lawrence. Lions Gate Films, 2001.

Visiting The Rep

Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our box office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater and the Intercontinental Hotel. If you walk into the center of this area, you'll see a staircase on your left. Behind the staircase is the entrance to the Stiemke Studio.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains, and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) in the coat check room, and enjoy them outside the theater during intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full "running time" of the play.

*For more information on our education programs and our productions,
please visit our website at www.milwaukeeerep.com*

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"You need three things in the theatre – the play, the actors and the audience –
and each must give something." – Kenneth Haigh

Theater is described as a collaborative art form. The success of a production relies upon every member of the process: playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, actors and the audience. Plays require audiences to give a new life to performances through their careful attention and enthusiastic reactions. The audience has an active role to play and the actors rely on you to be respectful and attentive. Through your observation of sets, costumes, lighting and the work of the actors, you'll be better able to follow the story and enjoy its live presentation. You are important in the final performance and your participation is what makes this process worthwhile.

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater Education Department

<http://www.milwaukeeerep.com/education/outreach.htm>

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