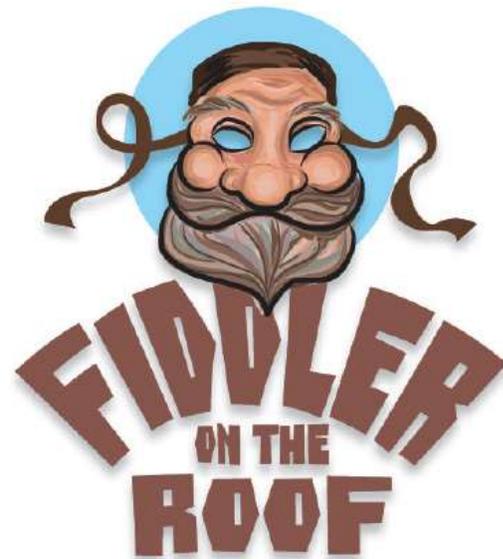


# STUDY GUIDE



Book by Joseph Stein,  
Music by Jerry Bock, and  
Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

2015

Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre



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# Fiddler on the Roof

ARKANSAS SHAKESPEARE THEATRE

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## ABOUT THE PLAY

Tevye is a poor Jewish milkman, living with his wife and his five daughters, wishing for a better life. The matchmaker visits, telling Golde that Lazar Wolf wants to marry Tzeitel. Shortly afterwards, Perchik, a radical Bolshevik teacher moves in with Tevye's family to teach them the Torah. They find out the Jews were evicted in a nearby town creating some tension and hinting at future problems for the family. Tevye agrees to let Lazar Wolf marry Tzeitel during a night of drunken mischief. Tevye tells Tzeitel this, but she is distraught because she wants to marry her childhood friend Motel. Tevye relents after listening to Motel's plea for them to marry. Tevye then makes up a story about a strange dream where Lazar Wolf's wife comes back to haunt Tzeitel which convinces Golde to let Motel and Tzeitel marry.

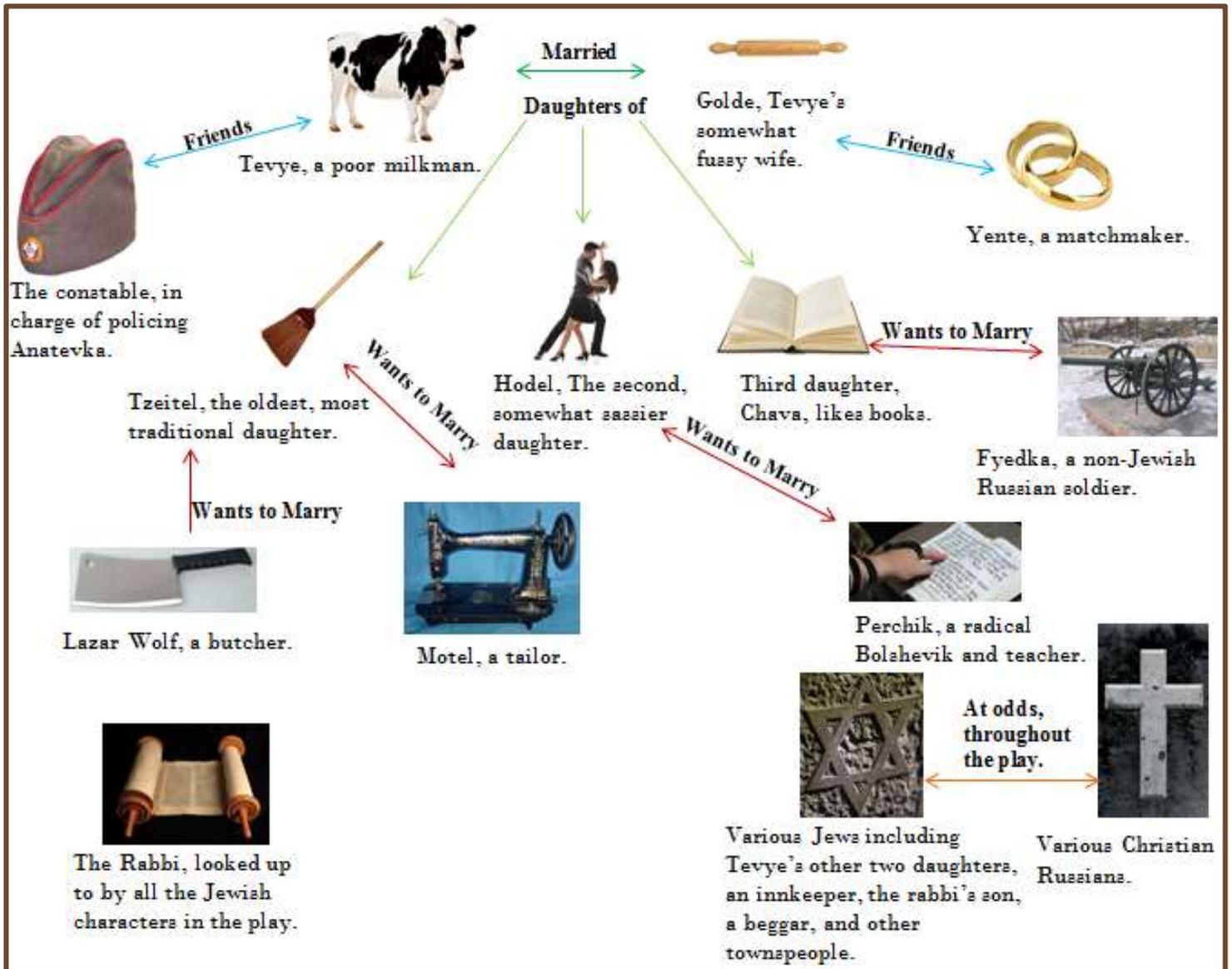
Meanwhile, Fyedka, a non-Jewish man starts showing interest in Chava. Perchik and Hodel's words during Motel and Tzeitel's wedding hint at their growing feelings for one another. Their joyous wedding is interrupted when the gentiles of the town destroy the wedding. Tension grows when Perchik leaves, but proposes marriage to Hodel. Even though they don't ask him for permission, Tevye agrees to give them his blessing. This causes Tevye, after twenty-five years of marriage, to tell his wife he loves her. After this touching scene, tension rises when Perchik is arrested, and Hodel leaves her family behind to keep Perchik company in Siberia.

Later, Chava marries Fyedka and Tevye disowns Chava out of shame. After that, the Jewish citizens of the town are given an edict forcing them to leave Anatevka. The Jewish characters somberly pack-up, each going their separate ways. Tevye sees Chava and tells her, "God be with you," hinting that he still cares for his daughter. The family escapes the horrors of Anatevka and Russia, but they can never return to their home. It is also unclear on whether Tevye and Golde will ever reunite with their three married daughters.



*1964 Playbill*

# WHO'S WHO: CHARACTER MAP

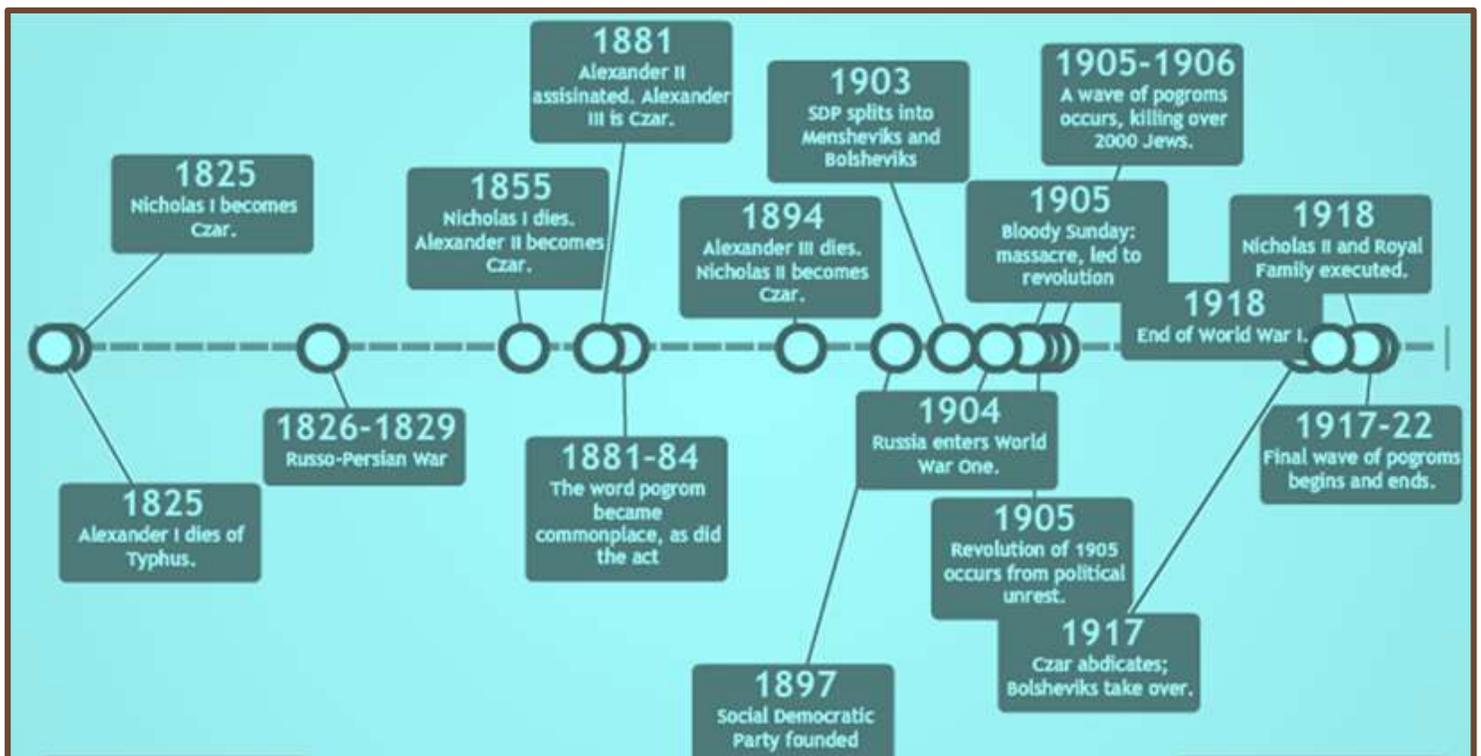


## SOME RUSSIAN HISTORY

*Fiddler on the Roof* takes place in the year 1905 in Anatevka, Russia. The political structure of Russia during this time was chaotic, and it reflects on the play. The czars were dying every few years, and this caused panic for many. The assassination of Alexander III caused so much controversy that it helped trigger the rise of the pogroms, horrid anti-Semitic riots.

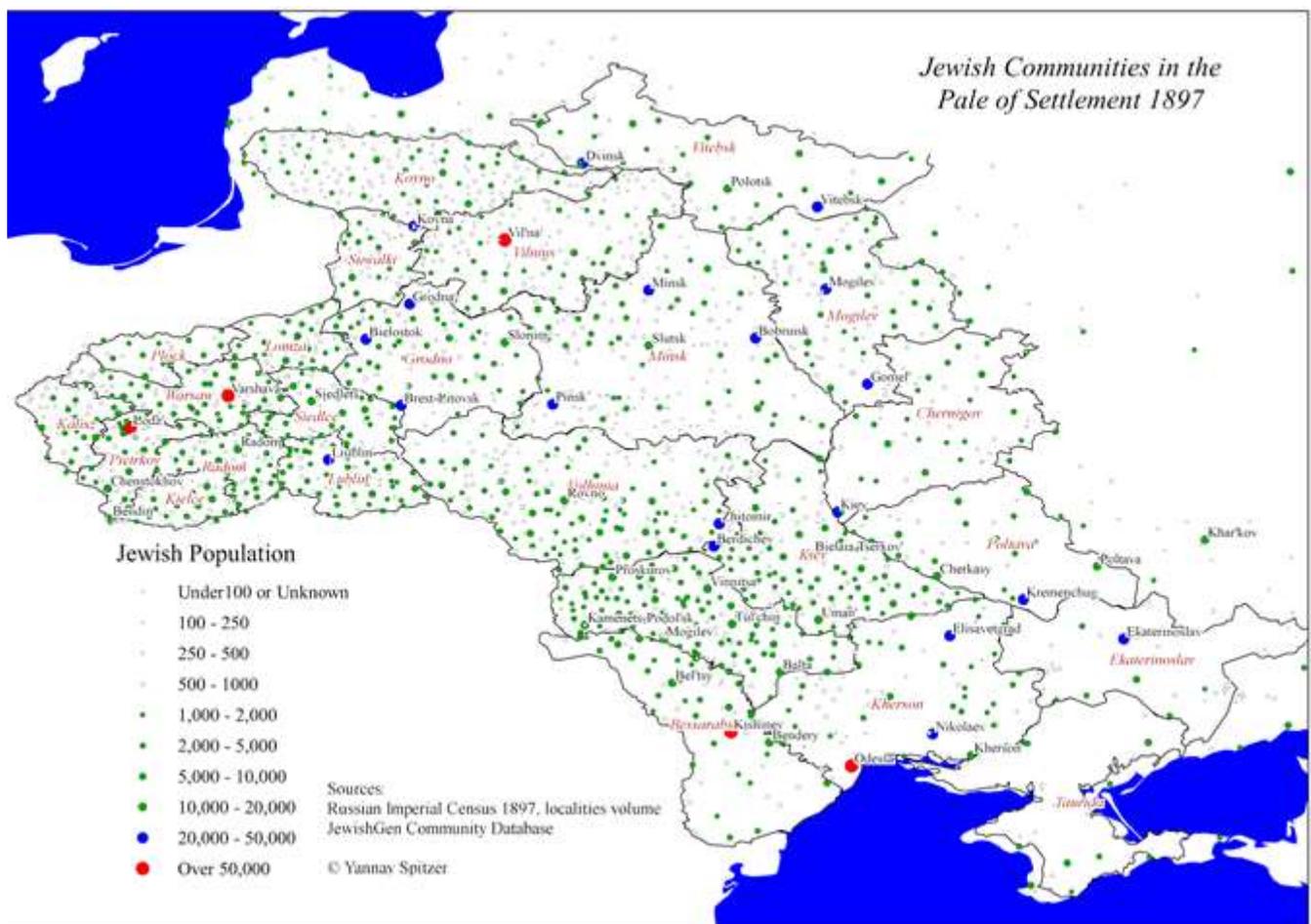
The Russian Socialist Democratic Labour Party also began to take political power. The party split into two factions: the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks were the less radical minority. The radical half of the original party, the Bolsheviks, were founded in 1897 by Vladimir Lenin and Alexander Bogdanov. By 1905, the Bolsheviks were a major organization. They gathered a following of mostly college-aged middle class men much like the one Bolshevik character in the play, Perchik. In this play, this affects the plot, because Perchik gets arrested in Kiev for activities related to his political alliances. Perchik is taken to Siberia, and Hodel, one of Tevye's daughters, goes with him. The Bolsheviks also played a relatively minor role in the 1905 Revolution.

Although the play begins and ends in 1905, the political unrest continued after the play. The story takes place during the rule of Nicholas II, who ruled from 1 November 1894 until his forced abdication on March 15, 1917. He was later executed on July 17, 1918. By leaving Russia at the end of *Fiddler on the Roof*, many of the major characters escape some of the horror that comes in Russia after the play ends.



## THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

The Pale of Settlement was established in 1797, which shows that the tension between Jews and gentiles in the area had been built up for over a century before the play. Anatevka is a shtetl (small Jewish village) within The Pale of Settlement. Russia took over a piece of Poland, and with it came many Jews. The Russians did not like this, and established The Pale of Settlement to keep the Jews separate. The majority of Jews in Russia were segregated from the rest of Russia and forced to live in this section of the country. At the beginning of the 20th century, about 95% of Russian Jews lived in these twenty-five provinces. There were about five million Jews in this part of Russia around 1900, which was nearly half of the Jewish population in the world. This constituted the largest segment of the Jewish population in the world during that period.



## POGROMS

In the play, after Tzeitel's wedding, the constable says that the gentiles of the town will be having a "demonstration." During this demonstration, the gentiles attack the wedding and destroy some of the gifts. The demonstration was called a pogrom, and it was a serious reality for Jews in Russia between the 1880s and the 1920s.



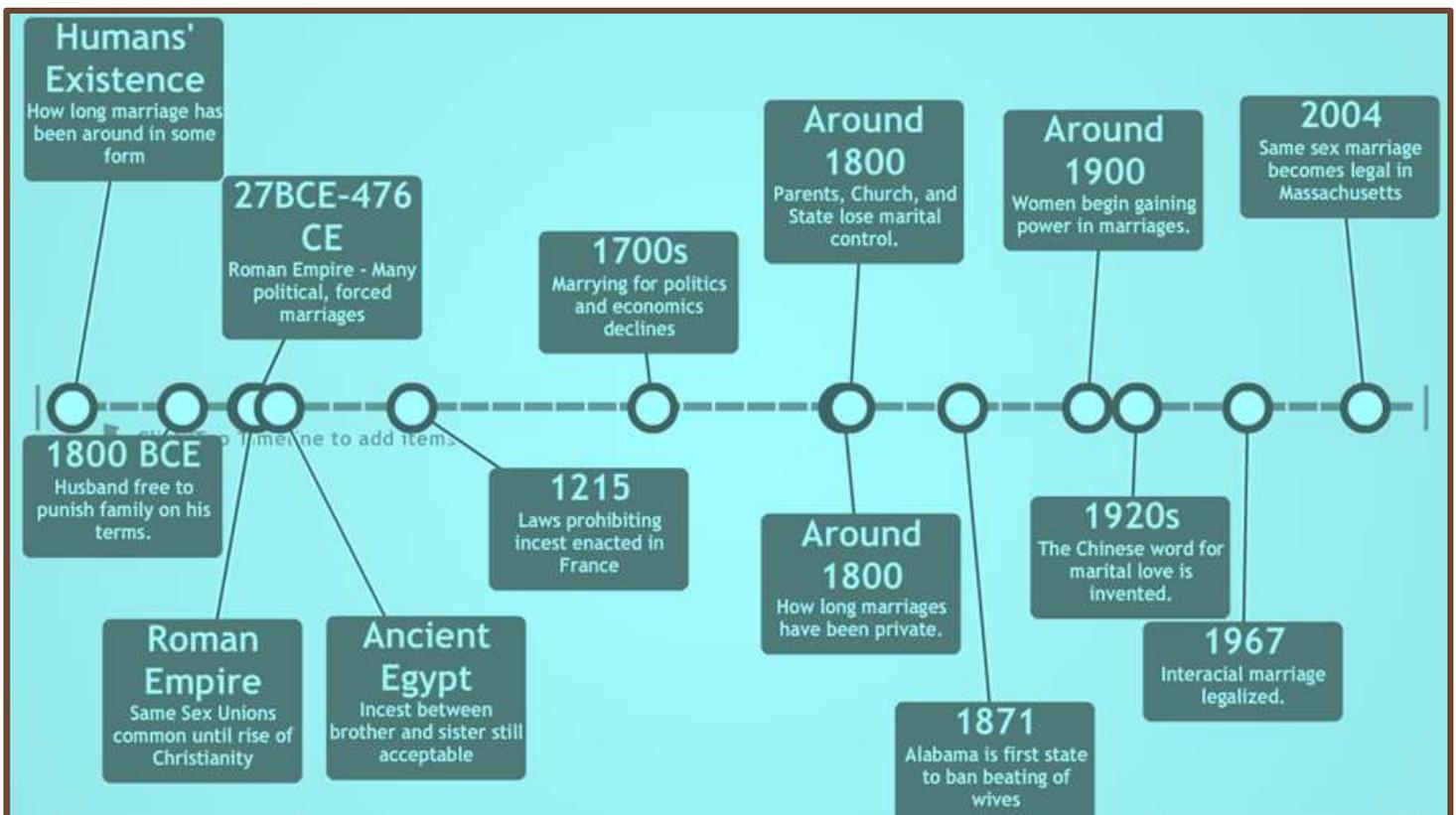
These rallies were shows of Anti-Semitic hatred, where Jews were often harmed or killed. They were performed more often in areas with high Jewish populations. They were an easy target for the Gentiles of the time, who were angry about the economic and political issues in Russia. "The question 'Who governs?' seemed open (after the killing of the czar in 1881 and during the revolution). The Jews will rule over us' was the most effective slogan used repeatedly by local agitators during both waves of pogroms." (Lowe, 18) These boundless statements killed many and increased the number of pogroms. Over 2,000 Jews died in the pogroms between 1905 and 1906, the time in which Fiddler takes place, alone.

## A (BRIEF) HISTORY OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Throughout the plot, marriage comes into question often, because the daughters' intents to marry for love creates much of the conflict within the play. In history, marriage and love appear in many forms. In the play, the daughters' insistence on marrying for love is considered radical and untraditional. Golde considers it strange when her husband of twenty-five years asks her if she loves him. Love is older than many think. Many once thought that romantic love was a relatively new concept, but it's existed throughout human history, and there are documented cases of love from the Roman Empire and before.

Similarly, different kinds of marriage, from arranged to for love have existed for thousands of years. Almost every type of marriage we've seen in the last two hundred years has occurred somewhere else, sometime before. The chart below is meant to highlight the changes in marriage over time and to show that, in some ways, the past and present are very similar.

Marriage is also a near-universal part of society. The Na people of China are the only society in world history that does not use what the rest of the world would call marriage. It is theorized that the male and female marriage pairing was created because it was good way to divide companionship, parenting, and divide daily work.

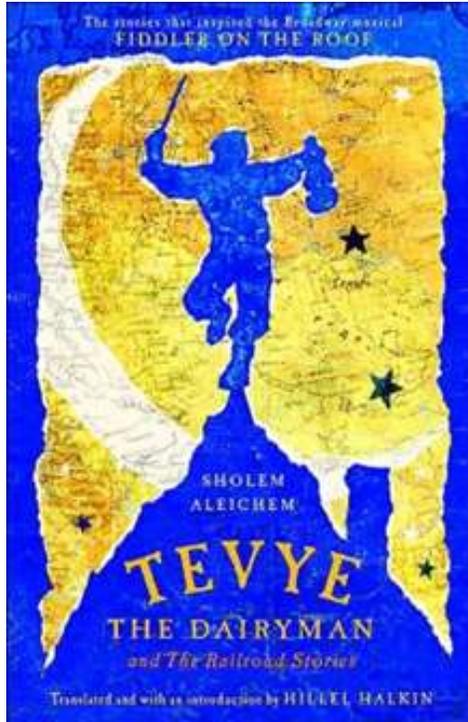


## JEWISH MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

- Shidduch is a system of matchmaking where single Orthodox Jews are introduced to each other for the purpose of marriage. When they meet, they see if they are attracted to each other and socially compatible.
- Physical contact is not allowed between a man and a woman until they are married (except for relatives), and also they may not be alone together.
- Before the wedding, it is customary for the engaged couple not to see each other for one week and for the bride and groom to fast for a day.
- The ceremony starts with the completion and signing of the *ketuvah*/marriage contract.
- The couple marry under the canopy or the chuppah, a decorated piece of cloth held aloft as a symbolic home for the new couple. When the bride arrives at the chuppah she circles the groom seven times with her mother and future mother-in-law, while the groom continues to pray.
- The groom places a plain gold ring on the bride's finger, and recites, "Behold you are sanctified to me with this ring, according to the Law of Moses and Israel."
- A glass is now placed on the floor, and the groom shatters it with his foot to represent the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the fleetingness of life.
- In-between this, people drink and bless lots of wine. The bride and groom are now allowed to be alone together.
- An important of the wedding is the *Hora*, or chair dance. In this tradition, a few strong and brave guests hoist the bride and groom high above the crowd on chairs to the infectious sounds of "Hava Nagila," which means "let us rejoice" in Hebrew. It is supposed to bring joy to the bride and groom on their wedding day.
- As a note, the bottle dance in the play is not a traditional aspect of Jewish weddings. It was created by the producer, Jerome Robbins, who was inspired by a drunken man balancing a bottle at a wedding.



## THE ORIGINAL STORY AND ITS ADAPTATIONS



There are four film adaptations of Sholem Aleichem's original story, including *Fiddler on the Roof*. *Tevye and his Daughters*, one of multiple stage adaptations of the story, which was written by Arnold Perle, contributed to the plot of *Fiddler on the Roof*. The character of Tevye first appeared in print in 1894.

*Fiddler on the Roof* is in many ways much lighter than previous versions of the story. In the original tales, Tevye has seven daughters instead of five. Five of his daughters get stories written about their lives and they are the ones who appear in the play. Of the other two daughters, one is never named and the other, Taybele, is not in any stories where she is a primary character. The play does not include the suicide of one of Tevye's daughters, Shprintze, after her lover leaves her.

The author of the original stories portrayed Tevye disowning Chava more positively. In a later story, where their family is forced out of Russia, Chava leaves her husband Fyedka and rejoins her family. In one of the stories, Tevye actually succeeds at becoming rich, what he desires throughout the play. By the end of the original stories, Golde and Motel (and Shprintze, whose death is mentioned above) are dead. Instead of going to America after being evicted from Anatevka, Tevye goes to Israel.

## ABOUT OUR PRODUCTION: Q & A WITH DIRECTOR JEREMY WILLIAMS

**Q: How is this version of Fiddler different from other versions? How is it going to stand out?**

A: We're not trying to recreate the Broadway production. We're returning to the script and score, and staging it with this large group of artists. We're focusing on the story. I've seen productions that gloss over the dark material, and we're not doing that. Anatevka is poor. It's not a happy place. We're exploring more with the authentic circumstances for these people and how to respond to it. The musical numbers retain their fun lightness, but we're going deeper into it. The musical numbers are still the cheerful explosions that come out of this. The kind of rupture in the darkness causes there to be song. It's too great to even speak, so you have to sing.

**Q: What's your favorite song to rehearse with the cast?**

A: I love *Sabbath Prayer*. It's so beautiful that it opens my heart. I feel this really strong sense of community and love that comes from the family. Even though it's a hard life, it's a really compassionate community. I love *The Dream*, because it's Tevye's imagination, so I can do anything I want with the direction. It uses a bunch of different elements to tell the story. My last favorite is *Far From the Home I Love*. And to hear this young woman so secure in herself and so committed to love that she pleads her case beautifully. It's a devastating song. She loves her family so dearly, but she has to go. I also love all the dance-y songs.

**Q: How do you feel about working with such a large cast?**

A: I like working with large casts, and the last two projects I did in New York, had about twenty dancers, and the other had sixteen actors. I thought that was big. Thirty-two is epically large, and it is a lot of fun to have so many bodies to play with.

**Q: What is the most challenging part of directing this play?**

A: The schedule, (we rehearsed 6-10, six days a week, for only a few weeks) because there are a lot of moving parts, but the combination of thirty-two people plus a short schedule is the biggest challenge for me. Luckily, everyone is wonderful, so we zoom through quickly.

**Q: How do you feel about performing this play in an arena style?**

A: As soon as my set designer suggested it, I got super excited. There are a lot of circle dances in this play, so it fits the style. The audience is also close, so this increases the connection to the character and story. It shows that we have nothing to hide. There's a demand for more honesty from the actors, because they are seen from all sides at all times.

**Q: What makes Fiddler relevant to today?**

A: The question of what is marriage and what is traditional marriage? It's a clear example of how marriage is always changing. It's nice to see someone struggle it that from a compassionate place. Tevye struggles with his daughters' nontraditional decisions, but he continues to love his daughters. He recognizes the love Chava has for Fyedka, and he continues to love her, even though he disowns her. There's also the idea of being uprooted and having to find a home again, which relates to some of these large natural disasters. I like that the play asks a lot of questions, but says that it is more important to ask questions than to have the answers, which is a large theme of Judaism.

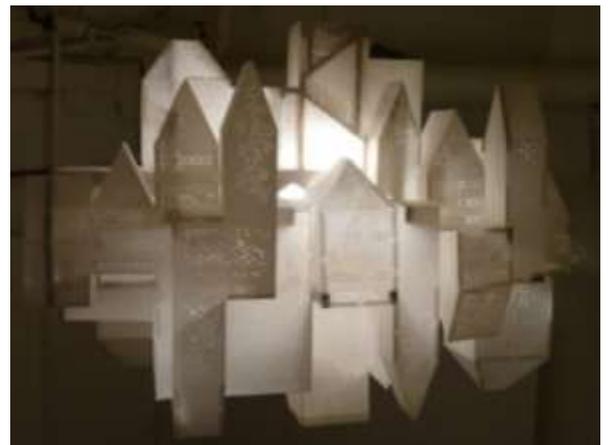
## SPOTLIGHT ON SET DESIGN: JEFFREY KMIEC

We wanted to approach the design for *Fiddler and Merchant* as a true “Festival” style season, meaning that both shows would share the same footprint and we would try to shape each space uniquely within that space. Both shows are served very well by the “in-the-round” configuration as each is heavily focused on the theme of community. *Fiddler* in particular focuses directly on this small, tight-knit, community, isolated in the furthest, most undesirable, part of Russia.



It's very somber looking, and it's accurate to its time period. This fits the life of the poor Jews in Anatevka, and the director's vision of making the hard life of the characters in Anatevka apparent. Its connection to *Merchant of Venice* is also fitting considering that there is some overlap in the story.

We wanted to focus on not only the isolation and fragility of the community, but also the strength and support it takes to maintain it. The intimacy that we get by placing the audience all around the action helps make the story feel more immediate and the struggle to maintain the traditions of the community more real. Our goal for both shows is to strengthen the relationship between the audience and actor, making it more direct and intimate.



## SPOTLIGHT ON COSTUME DESIGN: NATALIE LOVELAND

For *Fiddler*, we really wanted to stay true to the story that was originally written. The costuming follows the traditional idea of storytelling. We were interested from a visual perspective in allowing the costumes and the people in the space to become sculptures. We're highlighting them using lighter colors than what we're seeing in the set, and trying to draw focus to them, because it's

a very minimal set. We're going for a realistic appearance. We're also lucky enough to be close to the audience, so we can add a lot of detail for the audience to see. We can have a more realistic portrayal of the people in the town. With musical theater, and the show of theater, there's often a choice to exaggerate the wear and tear of the clothing. We're keeping the clothing neutral for the time and place, rather than putting a specific ethnicity on the clothing. We're using more folk ideas of clothing rather than specific to a region. Another thing I like about costuming this show is how the clothing fits the plot and the religion of the main characters. I've learned about the reason behind certain Jewish traditions and why they wear certain articles of clothing, and how it expresses their beliefs. Clothing is important to the traditional ideas in the show. I express this in how I costume the production.



## BEFORE THE PLAY

- Come see our lovely lobby display outside, which can help you learn more about the production of *Fiddler on the Roof*.
- Be sure to catch the other shows AST is performing this summer: *As You Like It*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *Merry Wives of Windsor*.
- Check out Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre's website, which has more information about the play and the cast.
- Auditions for 2016 for AST will take place from October - December 2015. They will begin to hire production staff in January 2016.



## AFTER THE PLAY

- Why do you think the play is entitled *Fiddler on the Roof*?
- How do you feel about the Jews' plight?
- What did you think of Tevye's choice to disown Chava? Do you think the family will ever reunite with Chava?
- Do you think you could ever have considered agreeing to an arranged marriage?
- Did you like being so close to the actors? What did you think of being able to see the audience from all four sides?
- Do you identify with Tevye's struggles to follow tradition?
- What do you think about Golde and Tevye finally saying they love each other after twenty-five years of marriage?
- Do you think Hodel made the right decision when she left her family to go be with Perchik in Siberia?

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Sholem Aleichem was an acclaimed Yiddish writer and playwright. He was originally from Kiev, which was mentioned in the play, and he wrote about the things happening around him. The Bolsheviks and the pogroms had an influence on his work. He was even forced to hide out in an inn during one of the pogroms. He moved to America, later on in life, where he found a lot of success.

Joseph Stein was an American playwright. His most well-known works are *Zorba* and of course, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Stein loved theatre and writing, but he never thought he'd pursue either. He earned a master's degree in Social Work from Columbia, but continued writing in his time off. He then met comedian Zero Mostel, who would later work on *Fiddler*, and gave him suggestions for his comic routine. This started Stein's career. He continued to work on many other Broadway shows, and he died at age 98.



Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick had been hired separately to work on *Fiorello!*, and the show was so successful that it won the Pulitzer Prize for drama. This caused the two to partner up again for *Fiddler on the Roof*. They are both best known for their musical partnership.



Sheldon began writing music in high school. After serving in the army, he earned a Bachelor's degree in Music from Northwestern University School of Music. He was encouraged to work on his music by one of his idols, Yip Harburg. He later began work on *Fiddler on the Roof*, where he found success. His last musical, based on *The Phantom Tollboth*, premiered in 2007.

Jerry developed his musical talents when he was a child by practicing piano. He went on to write a musical at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, called *Big As Life*. It toured the state and had a run in Chicago. After college, he began writing television revues with lyricist Larry Holofcener. He later met Sheldon Harnick and collaborated with him on eight musicals including *Fiddler on the Roof*. He died ten days after Joseph Stein's funeral.



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