

The Goodman Theatre
Student Subscription Series
2004-2005 Season

Student Guide

I Am My Own Wife
By Doug Wright

Directed by
Moisés Kaufman

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EXPLORING THE PLAY

Biographical Information



Moisés Kaufman
Director

Is the founder and artistic director of the New York-based Tectonic Theater Project. For Tectonic he wrote and directed *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (Lucille Lortel Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, GLAAD Media Award, Lambda Book Award, Joe Callaway Award). With members of Tectonic, he also directed and wrote *The Laramie Project* (*Time* magazine's 10 Best Plays of 2000, American Library Association GLBT Literature Award). He directed the film adaptation of *The Laramie Project* for HBO (National Board of Review Award; Sundance Film Festival Opening Night Selection; Berlin Film Festival, Golden Bear Award Special Mention; IFC Open Palm nomination; four Emmy nominations including Best Movie, Best Director and Best Writing; Humanitas Prize). Other directing credits: *Women in Beckett*, *In the Winter of Cities*, *The Nest*, *Marlowe's Eye*. Mr. Kaufman is a member of Working Classroom. Last year he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in Playwriting.

New York: *I Am My Own Wife* (Playwrights Horizons); *Moe's Lucky Seven* (Playwrights Horizons); *Lydie Breeze*; *Quills*; *Culture of Desire* (New York Theatre Workshop); *Orestes* (En Garde Arts); *Bella, Belle of Byelorussia* (WPA). Regional: *I Am My Own Wife*, About Face Theatre (La Jolla Playhouse, Sundance Theatre Institute); *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (Williamstown Theatre Festival); *Misalliance*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (Long Wharf Theatre); *The Beauty Part* (Yale Repertory); *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Cherry Orchard* (McCarter); *Peter Pan*, *The Winter's Tale*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Woman in Black*, *The Lover*, *The Show-Off*, *Triumph of Love*, *Servant of Two Masters* (Center Stage); *Tartuffe*, *Fortinbras*, *Twelfth Night*, *Life During Wartime*, *Macbeth* (La Jolla); *Hamlet* (San Diego Repertory); *Miss Julie*, *Private Lives* (Actors Theatre of Louisville); *Outward Bound* (Westport Country Playhouse). Film/television: *Kinsey*, *Alfie* and *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*; *Cousin Bette*, *Low Life*, *Some Folks Call It a Sling Blade*, *Hudson River Blues*, *Grey Night*, "Liberty!," "Benjamin Franklin," "The Federalist Papers." Awards: Obie (1994), Drama-Logue (1997), Patte (2001), Garland (2001). Education: Yale (B.A.), UCSD (M.F.A.)



Jefferson Mays
Actor

Biographical Information



**Doug Wright
Playwright**

Won an Obie Award for Outstanding Achievement in Playwriting and the Kesselring Award for Best New American Play from the National Arts Club for his play *Quills*. He went on to write the screenplay adaptation, making his motion picture debut. The film was named Best Picture by the National Board of Review and nominated for three Academy Awards. His screenplay was nominated for a Golden Globe Award and received the Paul Selvin Award from the Writers Guild of America. Doug's stage work has been produced at New York Theatre Workshop, Lincoln Center, WPA Theater, Geffen Playhouse, Wilma, Woolly Mammoth, McCarter Theater and La Jolla. Titles include *The Stonewater Rapture*, *Interrogating the Nude*, *watbanaland*, *Buzzsaw Berkeley* and *Unwrap Your Candy*. Doug has been published three times in *The Best Short Plays* series and his work has appeared in *The Paris Review*. He's a member of the Dramatists Guild, the Writers Guild of America, East and the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. He serves on the board of the New York Theatre Workshop.

ACTIVITY: Writing a "Bio"

The paragraphs above are professional "bios" for each of the men that worked on *I Am My Own Wife*. This activity will help you construct short "bios".

1. After you have read the play, write a paragraph that describes Charlotte's life experiences. Use the bios above as a guide. Make the paragraph short and concise.
2. Write a paragraph that describes your life experiences. Make the paragraph about you short and concise.
3. Read the two paragraphs aloud. Do they sound interesting? What do they lack? How hard is it to fit everything you want to say into such a short piece? What do you wish you could add?

DISCUSSION: Doug Wright as a character

In creating *I Am My Own Wife*, Doug Wright, the playwright, included himself as a character in the play. He describes himself having trouble writing the play, being confused about Charlotte's story, and needing to know more about her world. How does this information in the play affect you as you read? Is it strange that he is a character in his own play? Why or why not? Why might that be unusual for the actor playing that character? Would it be difficult? Would it be easy?

Vocabulary

Anecdote	Gramophone	Piqued
Antiquity	Gulags	Plinth
Anti-Semitism	Hermetically	Polyphone
Bust	Illuminating	Pompous
Calliopic	Immunity	Prestigious
Caustic	Incarcerated	Presumptuous
Coffers	Ingenious	Proposition
Comandeering	Inimical	Refugee
Confiscate	Intermediaries	Relinquism
Contempt	Interrogation	Renounce
Contraption	Intrepid	Reunification
Covert	Jodhpurs	Reverently
Cylinder	Lacquer	Reverie
Deceptively	Machiavellian	Rheumatism
Demeanor	Mata Hari	Disdain
Deported	Mellifluous	Sentinels
Diminutive	Militarism	Sepia
Dissident	Moratorium	Staunchly
Eccentric	Mottled	Striated
Edison Amberol	Munitions	Subtly
Eloquently	Orthopedic	Swastika
Engender	Pathologically	Synagogue
Enigmatically	Penitentiary	Touche
Frippery	Phonograph	Vehemently
Futile	Pianolas	Versality

ACTIVITY: Vocabulary

1. Find each of the above words in the play.
2. Next to each word note the page in the play on which the word appears.
3. If you do not know the meaning of the word, see if the sentence that it's in gives you any hints. These are "context clues".
4. Look each word up in the dictionary and read the definition.
5. Then return to the play and read the sentence in which the word appears now that you know what that word means.
6. Create two sentences using this word.

Study Guide Questions

1. What was Charlotte's Aunt's name? Why was she important to Charlotte?
2. What hate groups are present in the state of Illinois? Did you know that they were present in Illinois? How do you feel about that?
3. What is the name of Charlotte's Museum? What do you think she loved about collecting old things?
4. What is discrimination? What are ways that people are discriminated against?
5. Who were the Stormtroopers? Why were they significant?
6. What is a Stasi file? What did Charlotte's Stasi file say about her? Why was that information difficult for playwright Doug Wright to handle?
7. When was Germany divided into East and West Germany? How was it divided? When did it return to being one country again? How did this affect Charlotte?
8. When did Hitler write his autobiography? What was it called? What were Hitler's beliefs?
9. After the war, who ruled East Germany? Who ruled West Germany? How did they conflict?
10. What was the Berlin Wall? Why was it constructed? When was it torn down?
11. What is a swastika? What does it represent? How is it still used today?
12. When did the United States enter WWII? What prompted the US to enter? What do you think about the late involvement of the US in the war?
13. How many Jews died in the Holocaust? What do you think about that?
14. What are the non-sexual definitions of gay and straight? How do those definitions inform views on sexuality?

EXPLORING THE CONTEXT

German History

- 1919 The German Worker's Party was formed. This was a socialist political party.
- 1920 Hitler advocated for a new name for the party, the National Socialist German Worker's Party.
- 1920 The "25 points" were established which were a set of guidelines and ideals for the party including a call to reunify the German people.
- 1921 Hitler became the leader of the party, and he also went to prison. After he got out of prison he formed the SA (strum abteilung= storm section/ storm troopers), created to disrupt meetings of other political parties and to protect Hitler.
- 1925-1926 Hitler wrote his autobiography, Mein Kampf (My Struggle), which was part biographical, part political propaganda. In the book he discussed the idea that the German race was superior to all other races, that the German race was threatened by intermarriage, that the German race was threatened by the Jewish race because Jews were lazy, responsible for prostitution and pornography, responsible for losing WWI, and greedy with their money.
- 1928 Hitler's party had few votes in the election and therefore few seats in parliament. To seem less extreme Hitler claimed he no longer wanted a revolution but just to make some changes in the government. He also said that an economic disaster was going to come soon.
- 1930 The Great Depression hit the US and Hitler was seen in a new light because he predicted the economic struggle.



**The German Flag:
Black Red and Yellow in color**



Adolf Hitler

- 1933 Hitler gained power in Germany. Immediately following that, left wing political parties were banned and Germany was declared a one-party state.
- 1939 Germany invaded Poland. England and France immediately declared war on Germany.
- 1940 Germany continued to invade European countries including Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. Hitler saw the war with Western European countries as a precursor to the war he wanted to wage on the Soviet Union. He thought that if the German race was going to dominate the world again they needed the land that the Soviet Union controlled.
- 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union despite the fact that Germany had an agreement with the Soviet Union that they would not be aggressive with one another.
- 1941 Germany's ally Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, which brought the US into the war.
- 1941 Hitler's original plan was to move all of the Jews in Europe out of Europe, but he realized that he did not have the time so he decided to systematically exterminate the Jews that were under German control.
- ****It is estimated that 6 million European Jews died in the Holocaust****
- 1944 The US, England, and Canada drove Germany out of France.
- 1945 The Western forces (US, England, Canada, France) and the Eastern forces (Soviet Union) squeezed in on Germany from either side, weakening the Germans' ability to move their troops anywhere.
- 1945 Hitler committed suicide on April 27th.
- 1945 Germany surrendered on May 8th.
- 1945 Germany was divided into two parts: the Eastern part went to the Soviet Union and became communist, and the Western part went to the US and its European allies and became a democracy.
- 1953 Stalin, the ruler of the Soviet Union, died. The Germans in the East were hopeful for better policies.
- 1961 The Soviets governing the East erected a wall separating East Berlin from West Berlin in order to prevent East Germans from fleeing to West Germany.
- 1989 The Berlin Wall came down.

THINK ABOUT IT: The Berlin Wall

- What if you woke up one morning and the city of Chicago was divided in half by a wall and you could no longer travel to the other half of the city. How would that affect you? What if you could no longer see relatives because they were living on the other side of that wall? Write a paragraph or a poem about what you would miss.

ACTIVITY: Lists

- Think about what it might be like to live in a country at war. Make a list of 5 things that you would miss if you had to leave your home today. Make a list of 5 things that you would take with you if you had to leave your home today and could only take what you could carry. Make a list of 5 things that are important to you everyday. (These things can be anything from tangible objects to feelings and/ or spiritual associations.)

German Language

- Abend**= evening
Achthundert= thunderous noise
Auf= at, on, onto
Auf Wiedersehen= goodbye
Bundes= federal
Bundesver dienstkreuz= Federal Republic of Germany
Danke= thank, thanks
Danke Schön= thank you
Deutsch= German
Freischwinger= free running
Freiwild= wild game
Fruhlingkinder= a record
Funfzehntausend= fifteen thousand
Grossmutter= grandmother
Grunderzeit= years of rapid expansion in Germany in the 19th Century
Guten= good
Guten morgen= good morning
Guten tag= Hello
Hat= has, hath
Herr= master, mister, sir, gentleman
Ja= yes
Kettennunde= infantry police
Kristallnacht= "Night of Broken Glass"- on the nights of November 9th and 10th, 1938 Nazi mobs destroyed some 7,500 Jewish businesses and more than 1,000 synagogues, killed at least 96 Jews and injured hundreds of others
Kunsthändler= art handler, art dealer
Laut= aloud, uproarious
Mahlsdorf= City where Charlotte lives
Meine= my
Mit= with, correspond with
Mutter= mother, mom
Nacht= night
Nein= no
Oder= or
Polizei= police
Regulatur= regulator
Republick= republic
Sammler= accumulator, collector
Schön= already
Sopranistin= soprano singer
Strasse= road
Toten, totete, hat getolet= to kill
Vertiko= a piece of furniture
Vielleicht= maybe
Wanduhr= wall clock
Wunder= wonder

This is the German Vocabulary used in the play that is not translated within the text. It is in alphabetical order for your reference.



Charlotte's Furniture



Gramophone:
An antique record player; the sound of the vibrating needle is amplified acoustically.



Polyphone:
An antique record player; the sound of the vibrating needle is amplified acoustically through two horns.



Edison Amberola:
A player with a mechanical system that plays grooved cylinders and uses an internal horn to amplify the sounds.



Record Player:
A machine that reproduces sound by means of a needle in contact with a grooved rotating disk.

Charlotte's Furniture



Coffer:

A casket, chest, or trunk used for keeping money or other valuables.



Pianola:

A mechanically operated piano that uses a roll of perforated paper to activate the keys.



Grandfather Clock:

A pendulum clock enclosed in a tall, narrow cabinet.



Nipper:

A dog in England that was infatuated with the phonograph. He was always trying to figure out where the sound was coming from.

Charlotte's Life

March 18, 1928 Lothar Berfelde (later Charlotte von Mahlsdorf) was born.

1934 Lothar began collecting phonograph records and clocks.

1935 Nazis murder Lothar's Tante Luise's lover.

1937 Participation in Hitler Youth became mandatory.

1939 World War II began.

1942 Lothar and family evacuated Berlin and moved to Bischofsburg. He received Grunderzeit furnishings from Tante Luise.

1943 Lothar's father, Max Berfelde, died.

1945-49 Resurgence of gay life in Berlin.

1952-63 Communists closed gay and lesbian bars, including the Mulack-Ritze.

1959 Lothar took possession of Hultschiner Damm 333 and began restoration.

1960 Gründerzeit Museum (formerly Hultschiner Damm 333) opened.

1963 Mulack-Ritze Cabaret was resurrected in the basement of the Gründerzeit Museum.

1971 Lothar permanently assumed the identity of "Charlotte von Mahlsdorf."

1990 East and West Germany united. Charlotte received the country's Federal Service Cross for her restoration efforts.

1991 Charlotte moved to Sweden

April 30, 2002 Charlotte passed away in Berlin. She was 74 years old.

People who collect are called by many names. Some of their names are as unusual as the items they collect.

Collector= Collection

Archtophile= Teddy Bears

Bestiarist= Medieval Books on Animals

Bibliophile= Books

Brandophile= Cigar Bands

Conchologist= Shells

Copoclephile= Key Rings

Deltiologist= Postcards

Dologist= Bird's Eggs

Lepidopterist= Butterflies

Numismatist= Coins

Philatelist= Stamps

Philographist= Autographs

Phonophile= Phonograph Records

Plangonologist= Dolls

Receptarist= Recipes

Vecturist= Subway Tokens

Vexillologist= Banners or Flags





Facts about Germany



Area: 137,826 sq. miles, about the size of Montana
Western Germany: 96,095 sq. miles, the size of Wyoming
Eastern Germany: 41,731 sq. miles, the size of Virginia

Major cities: Population

Berlin: 3,398,800
Hamburg: 1,700,000
Munich: 1,188,900
Cologne: 962,600
Frankfurt: 643,900

Natural resources: iron ore, coal, timber, copper, natural gas, salt

Ethnic Groups: Germans, Danish and Serb minorities

Language: German

Religions: 33% Protestant, 33% Roman Catholic, 34% none or other

Government: democratic, federal, multi-party republic with representatives chosen directly by the people, elections held every four years

Money: 1948-2001: Deutsche Mark, As of January, 2002: Euro (€)
1 (€) Euro= (approximately) \$1.30

Literacy: 95%

Education:

Elementary school 'Grundschule': ages 6 through 10
Academic high school 'Gymnasium': ages 11-19
Vocationally oriented 'Realschule': ages 11-16

All students attend the elementary school and then either continue on to a vocational school, or to a regular high school. After high school they take a test that qualifies them for college.

Federal Defense: Troop Strength: 300,000

Army: 205,400, Air Force: 73,000, Navy: 22,200

Draft: everyone serves for 9 months, or 10 months alternative service for conscientious objectors

Federal flag: Three equal horizontal stripes in black, red and gold

Federal seal: Black eagle on a gold background

National Anthem:

Unity and right and freedom
For the German Fatherland
For this let us all fraternally
Strive each with heart and hand
Unity and right and freedom
Are the pledge of happiness
Bloom in the splendor of this happiness
Germany, our Fatherland

EXPLORING THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Sexuality

These definitions are not meant to be learned and/ or memorized. They are given here to demonstrate that there is a problem in defining sexuality because it categorizes certain things as acceptable and others as abnormal. As you read on, keep in mind that defining things often diminishes them. The first column is a list of definitions from a dictionary. The second is a list of the same terms found in gay resource material. Compare and contrast the different versions.

Homosexuality: A sexual attraction to (or sexual relations with) persons of the same sex

Heterosexuality: A sexual attraction to (or sexual relations with) persons of the opposite sex

Gay: A homosexual, especially male

Lesbian: A woman whose sexual orientation is to women

Bisexual: Having a sexual orientation to persons of both sexes

Transgendered: Appearing as a member of the opposite sex, wishing to be considered as a member of the opposite sex, or having undergone surgery to become a member the opposite sex

Transsexual: A person who has undergone a sex change operation

Homophobia: Fear of or contempt for lesbians and gay men; behavior based on such a feeling

Transvestite: A person who dresses in the style or manner associated with the opposite sex

Homosexual: A person who is attracted (sexually, emotionally, romantically, and/or intellectually) to people of the same sex

Heterosexual: A person who is attracted (sexually, emotionally, romantically, and/or intellectually) to people of the opposite sex

Gay: A man who is attracted (sexually, emotionally, romantically, and/or intellectually) primarily to other men

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted (sexually, emotionally, romantically, and/or intellectually) primarily to other women

Bisexual: Someone who is attracted sexually, emotionally, romantically, and/or intellectually) to both men and women

Transgendered: Someone who crosses normative gender boundaries. This may include, but is not limited to, cross-dressers, drag performers, androgynes, gender-fluid people, transsexuals, intersexed people, etc.

Transsexual: A person who presents him/herself as the gender opposite to his/her gender at birth

Homophobia: The fear, dislike or hatred of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. Also the fear of being labeled by association with gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgendered people.

Transvestite: Man or woman who enjoys wearing the clothes of and appearing as the other gender. While many transvestites are heterosexual, the use of transvestitism in the gay "drag" culture is well documented.

Sexuality

continued

Other terms used when discussing sexuality:

Queer: People who define their sexuality and gender as they see fit, often with the understanding that sexuality and gender are fluid and shouldn't be limited with traditional labels

Questioning: People who are reviewing either what they believe or what they were told about their sexuality

LGBTQ: An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning

Ally: A heterosexual who fights for the rights and acceptance of non-heterosexual and/or gender-variant people

ACTIVITY: Secondary Definitions

Below are definitions of the words **gay** and **straight** that are not related to sexuality

Gay: Showing or characterized by cheerfulness and lighthearted excitement

Straight: Conventional, established, **OR** extending continuously in the same direction without curving

- What relation, if any, do you see between those definitions and sexual orientation? How do these secondary definitions affect social perceptions of sexual orientation?

ACTIVITY: Defining Sexuality

- Look at the definitions of sexual orientation on the previous page.
- Do you think they are accurate? Are the definitions complete? If not, what do these definitions lack?
- In comparing two different definitions for each word, what observations can be made?
- Think about who might be responsible for writing each of the definitions. One set is from a dictionary and the other is from gay literature. How important is the person who writes the definitions? Do you think it influences anything? Is this negative or positive?
- Write your own definitions for the words above based on what you believe the true meaning of each word to be. Do your definitions differ? How?

ACTIVITY: Relating it to Charlotte

I Am My Own Wife is based on the true story of Charlotte Von Mahlsdorf's life as a transvestite in Germany during the Nazi and Russian regimes. How does her sexuality and gender identity impact her story? Is it important? Would the story be as incredible without that aspect?

Male/ Female Sexual Stereotypes

Male

More self-focused
Need less intimacy
Identify with work
Need less approval
More independent
More detached
Worry less
Express anger
Highly competitive
More power-motivated
Obsessed with sports
Talk more about things
Talk more in public
Take things literally
Speak more directly
Quick decision makers
Gossip less
Focus more on solutions
Less apologetic
Less willing to seek help
Fearful of commitment
Thrive on receiving
More sex-oriented
Have fewer close friends
More sensitive to stress
Less trusting
Take more physical risks
Less concerned about looks
Shop out of necessity

Female

More other-focused
Need more intimacy
Identify with people
Need more approval
Less independent
More emotional
Worry more
Repress anger
Less competitive
Less power-motivated
Indifferent to sports
Talk more about people
Talk more in private
Look for hidden meanings
Speak more indirectly
Slower decision makers
Gossip more
Like to discuss problems
More apologetic
Seek help readily
Eager for commitment
Thrive on giving
More love-oriented
Have more close friends
Less sensitive to stress
More trusting
Take fewer physical risks
More concerned about looks
Shop for enjoyment

ACTIVITY: Gender Stereotypes

- Take a look at the columns above and the characteristics that are generally considered to be “male” as opposed to the characteristics that are “female”. What do you think of the way that these are categorized? Which ways do you differ from the “characteristics” of your sex? Think about what someone who was all on one side or the other might be missing.
- Which of these are learned behaviors? Are men taught not to be sensitive? Are women taught not to express anger?
- Write one full page about why associating certain things with one gender or another might be harmful to a person’s sense of self. You may use personal examples if you choose.

ACTIVITY: Relating it to Charlotte

- After you have read the play, go through these two columns and try to figure out which traits Charlotte might have. Circle each one that describes her personality.
- Then share your choices with someone else in class and compare your thoughts. Which ones are the same? Which are different?
- Finally, think about whether someone can embody both characteristics. Can someone be very trusting at certain times, and very cautious at other times? Did Charlotte show both sides of these listed traits? When?

Identity

What do we do with a Variation?

What do we do with a difference?
Do we stand and discuss its oddity or do we ignore it?

Do we shut our eyes to it or poke it with a stick?
Do we clobber it to death?

Do we move around it in rage and enlist the rage of others?
Do we will it to go away?
Do we look at it in awe or purely in wonderment?
Do we work for it to disappear?

Do we pass it stealthily or change route away from it?
Do we will it to become like ourselves?

What do we do with a difference?
Do we communicate to it?
Let application acknowledge it for barriers to fall down?

By: James Berry

First they came for the Jews

First they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.

By: Pastor Martin Niemoller

ACTIVITY: Differences

1. Read the poems above with a classmate and discuss their meaning. What are these two men trying to say through their poetry?
2. Think about a time in your life when you felt different or isolated from the people around you. How did that make you feel?
3. Write a poem of any style about feeling different. If you can't find a way to put it into a poem, just write down some phrases, thoughts and feelings.

ACTIVITY: Identity

For this activity you will be making three different lists that describe who you are as a person.

1. First, list who you are **physically**. What do you look like? Then, describe your ethnicity, heritage, sexuality, color, religion, gender, nationality, your job, and your family roles.
2. Second, make a list of words that describe your **personality**. List adjectives to express what kind of person you are. Also answer these questions: What do you like to do? What are your hobbies? What are your favorite foods, musicians, or television shows?
3. Lastly, make a list of the things that you **believe** in personally. List anything that is important to you in your life. This can be anything from your religious beliefs, issues at your school that you have an opinion about, to the war with Iraq, and everything in between.

Now take a look at all three of those lists. Which one do you think describes you best? Why?

Discrimination/ Hate Groups

Discrimination is behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships.

- **Racism:** The belief that one race is superior to another. The belief that a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by their genetic makeup.
- **Internet Hate:** Used by racists and extremists to post anti-Semitic, racist and hateful material on the Web so that it reaches a larger audience.
- **Anti-Semitism:** Hostility toward Jews simply because they are Jewish. It can take the form of religious teachings that preach the inferiority of Jews, perpetuating prejudiced stereotypes, or political practices to isolate the Jewish population.
- **Holocaust Denial:** An anti-Semitic campaign across North America and Europe that denies the reality of the Nazi regime and the execution of millions of Jews in World War II.
- **Neo-Nazi Skinheads:** A group that can be recognized by their shaved heads, tattoos and Nazi symbols on their clothing. They use intimidation and anger to express their message of hatred towards Blacks, Jews, Gays and other minority groups. In the US this group has been responsible for at least 45 deaths in the past 20 years. They dream of starting a massive race war in the years to come.
- **Ku Klux Klan:** At the end of the Civil War this white supremacist group formed. They use violence and intimidation to reassert white domination in the US. The attacks have been focused on Blacks, Jews, Catholics, immigrants and other minority groups. They are known for their white robes and hoods and for burning crosses at their meetings.
- **Homophobia:** The hatred or fear of homosexuals that leads to discrimination, hostility, and violent acts. This is not confined to one segment of society and can be found anywhere in the country.
- **Black Separatists:** They oppose integration and inter-racial marriage. They desire separate institutions for Blacks and ideally would like a separate part of the US for Blacks. This is a strongly anti-white movement as well.
- **Christian Identity:** This movement asserts that whites, not Jews, are the true chosen people of The Bible. They see Jews as soulless descendants of Satan and whites as the chosen race.
- **Neo-Confederates:** These are groups that embrace the racist attitudes that were held during the Civil War and desire segregation. They believe that whites are superior to Blacks and that the country should be divided based on that belief.



Photo:

A neo-Nazi group in the US salutes the Nazi flag in the style of the Nazi regime during World War II. They don the shaved heads, tattoos, and clothing that are typical of the movement.

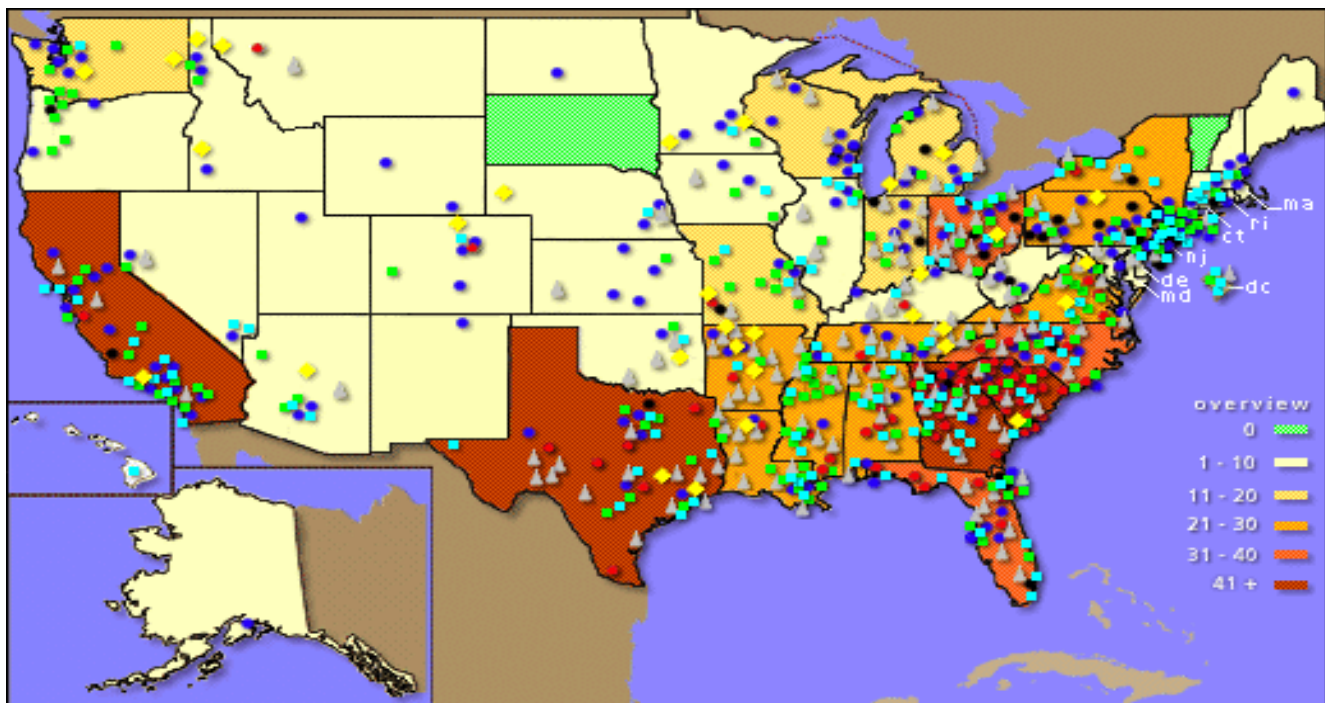
Hate Groups

In the United States:

Every hour someone commits a hate crime.

Every day at least eight Blacks, three Jews, and one Latino become hate crime victims.

Every week a cross is burned.



Above is a map of the hate groups in the United States that were known to be active in 2003.



This is a map of Illinois and the active hate groups in 2003.

The **star** denotes a Black separatist group.

The **teardrop** shape is a white hood denoting a Ku Klux Klan group.

The **Nazi symbol** denotes a Neo-Nazi group.

The **pushpin** symbol denotes other groups that do not fall into one of these categories.

Information found at www.tolerance.org

What can we do about it?

Think about it:

Charlotte faced many different types of discrimination during her lifetime. Some of the groups she faced are still around today, and close to your home. What do you think about that? Have you ever personally faced discrimination? How did it make you feel?

Write an essay about discrimination. In the essay, include a personal experience in which you felt discriminated against based on your race, gender, sexual preference, age, size, color, etc. Follow that with how it affected you personally and what you would do to make sure that nobody else has that experience.

Long Term ACTIVITY: Preventing Discrimination

1. Get into groups of four.
2. In your group come up with a list of at least 20 ways that you can help to prevent discrimination and hate in your school or work environment.
3. Then, each of you choose 3 of the things that you listed and put them into action! So, for example, if you listed "write a letter to your principal about discrimination in school" go ahead and write that letter. If the activity you chose was a daily change, spend a week doing it everyday. Log each of your activities through the week.
4. Then, get back into your groups and share what worked and what didn't. Keep working on your ideas. Every little bit helps!

For more information on discrimination and hate groups visit www.tolerance.org. This website has a list of 101 different ways to fight hate. You can send your ideas via email to 101tools@tolerance.org and they might be included in the next publication! At www.tolerance.org you can read discrimination testimonies, learn how to get involved, take tests to discover your own hidden biases, and view the Civil Rights Memorial.

You can also send ideas via mail to:

101 Tools c/o Tolerance.org
400 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS

Truth

Doug Wright, the playwright, has a conflicted relationship with Charlotte. She is the subject of his piece, and the story of her life is one of survival and strength. But, Doug begins to discover that Charlotte's life is filled with secrets. As she chooses not to answer his questions about certain subjects Doug becomes increasingly suspicious that Charlotte is hiding something.

Background Information: The Stasi

Established in 1950, the Stasi was the East German State Security. The Stasi used a huge network of informants to repress the citizens of East Germany. It was not uncommon for members of families to spy on each other for fear of blackmail, as a result of physical threats and even because of monetary rewards from the secret police force. In the late 1980s, the Stasi had nearly 175,000 official informants on their books, roughly one informant for every 100 people.

The Stasi operated with broad power and remarkable attention to detail. All phone calls from the West were monitored, as was all mail. Similar surveillance was routine domestically. Every factory, social club and youth association was infiltrated; many East Germans were persuaded or blackmailed into informing on their own families. The Stasi kept close tabs on all potential subversives.

Was Charlotte an informant?

Doug reads Charlotte's Stasi file and it goes into great detail about how she was a Stasi informant. According to the file Charlotte got people to trust her, learned about their lives, and then told to Stasi agents everything she knew. Her friend Alfred was arrested because the Stasi found out that he was selling antiques illegally. Re-read page 62 of the play. *Who is telling the truth, Charlotte or the Stasi? What do you think? Does it matter?*

What are the reactions?

Charlotte was given a medal of honor from the German government. After her Stasi file is revealed and there are questions about her being an informant, some people think that her medal should be revoked, while others believe that she still deserves it because of the difficult things that she had to endure. Read some of the excerpts below. *What do you think? Do you agree with any of these statements? Why?*

"If anyone has suffered because of her cooperation, if a human price was paid, then of course she should be stripped of the medal."

"We shouldn't even look at Charlotte's Stasi files, we should just burn them. One out of every three citizens was working as an informant. Finger pointing is pointless; it doesn't unify, it only tears people apart."

What should Doug do?

Doug is left with the conflict of knowing Charlotte might have worked with the Stasi and also being completely excited and enamored by her life story as a collector, a transvestite, and a survivor. Doug says in the play: **"I need to believe that a long time ago, in an attic, a generous Aunt handed her confused nephew a book and a blessing. That little boy, in his mother's housecoat, survived stormtroopers. That Lothar Berfelde navigated a path between the two most repressive regimes the Western world has ever known, the Nazis and the Communists, in a pair of heels. I need to believe that things like that are true."** So, he is left to write a play and is unsure what to write. *What would you do? Which parts of Charlotte's story would you focus on?*

How important is the truth?

Doug eventually puts his struggle to understand Charlotte's life into the play that he has written. He doesn't answer all of the difficult questions in the play, either. *How important is it to know whether she did or did not work as an informant for the Stasi? How important is the truth? Is her story diminished by not knowing the truth, or is it just as interesting? Does a story mean less if it isn't true?*

Truth

“I don’t believe that Charlotte was always telling me the truth, but I do believe that she was always telling me her truth.”

-Doug Wright on discovering Charlotte’s past

ACTIVITY: Your Personal Information

1. What if your school held a file on you in the office with information about your grades, after-school activities, detentions, family situation, etc.? How would that make you feel? Who would you want to have access to that information? Who wouldn’t you want to have access to that information?
2. Think about other organizations or institutions that might have information about you on file. (Ex. A doctor’s office, the police, etc.) Who would you want to have access to that information? Who wouldn’t you want to have access to that information?
3. Imagine you are in Charlotte’s position. Write a paragraph about what kind of information you would want someone to know if they were writing an article about you, and what you wouldn’t want them to cover.
4. How do you think Charlotte felt when Doug found her file? Write Charlotte’s inner monologue after Doug approached her with all of the questions about her past?

ACTIVITY: Your Personal Truths

1. Read Doug Wright’s quote at the top of the page. What do you think he meant by that statement?
2. When have you twisted the truth? When have you left out parts of a story? Why have you made those decisions?
3. Are there people in your life that you share information with and others you do not? Do you tell the same truths to your friends that you tell to your parents? What about your teachers? Why or why not?
4. How do you manipulate the truth in your own life? What do you gain from selective truthfulness?
5. Write a monologue in which you are the character speaking and you are telling a friend every detail about something that happened to you recently. Now, write a monologue about the same situation but spoken to a parent or adult in your life. Are they different? Why? What things do you focus on in each monologue? What do you leave out?

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Play Structure

I Am My Own Wife has a different structure than most plays. Since it is a one-man show there is no exchange of dialogue between different actors in the play. In addition to that, the play has scenes that are not numbered but titled. The following is a list of the scene titles for the play. What do you think the scene titles tell the reader about the play? Why do you think Doug Wright decided to use titles in this particular play?

ACT One

1. A lecture on the phonograph
2. The world flips upside down
3. Das Grunderzeit museum
4. Popping the Question
5. Translating Tante Luise
6. The Giveaway
7. Are you a boy or a girl?
8. Listening
9. Vaterland
10. Auf Deutsch
11. Durch Die Luft
12. Eine Spende
13. Mulack-ritze
14. Bundesverdienstkreuz
15. Berlin From Behind
16. I, Lothar Berfelde
17. Bated Breath

ACT Two

18. A Letter From Prison
19. Erasure
20. Mythology
21. Aktenvermerk
22. A Convenient Lapse
23. The Cross
24. The Three M's
25. Celebrity
26. Editorials: a phantasmagoria
27. Diagnosis
28. Abdication
29. On curating
30. Between two tigers

ACTIVITY: Scene Titles

- If you were going to write a play about your own life, how would you title the scenes? Start thinking about when you were very young and come up with ideas for five scenes about your life.
- Then, outline what would happen/ what would be spoken about in those five scenes.
- Finally, title each scene. How hard is it to come up with a title? What does the title say to the reader/ audience about what is going to happen in each scene?

ACTIVITY: Writing a One-Person Show

- Take the ideas for scenes about your life that you came up with in the above activity and choose one to actually write. Decide the characters that you want in the scene and what you want to have happen. Make sure that it is about an important or significant moment in your life.
- Write the scene. It only has to be one or two pages, and use as many characters as you would like.
- Now, read over the scene that you just wrote and consider how you would make that into a one-person show. If one person had to speak all of those lines, what might you have to change? What would be difficult for that actor? How would it change the reader's/ audience's perception and understanding of the story? Try to write it again as a one-person scene. How do you like the changes?

Comparing the book and the play

In addition to a play being written about her, Charlotte also has an autobiography. Here are excerpts from both the book and the play referring to the same scene, the moment where Charlotte's Aunt found her wearing women's clothes for the first time. Compare and contrast the different forms.

Excerpt from Charlotte's Autobiography: I Am My Own Woman

From Bischofsburg, I went to visit my godmother, Aunt Luise, who owned a farm nearby. I discovered her old dresses in a baroque wardrobe. She had last worn them in 1895 when she was fifteen. After that she wore men's garments: boots, jodhpurs, jackets that buttoned to the right, with a Tyrolean hat, and green loden coat. Broad-shouldered and small-hipped, she looked like an estate inspector. Obviously, this was a practical outfit for someone running a farm, but there was also another reason for her style of dressing that I did not suspect at the time: my aunt was a lesbian.

Wearing an ornately trimmed dress with a cinched waist, I was admiring myself in front of the mirror one day, when suddenly the door opened. I could see my aunt's reflection in the mirror as she entered the room. My aunt was a strong-minded person: I was afraid I was really in for it. Instead she smiled and came toward me. Taking me by the waist, she turned me around and looked me up and down. She seemed amused, "You look really pretty! Tell me, do you like to wear such outfits?" When I nodded shamefacedly, my aunt declared, "You know, nature played a joke on both of us. You should have been a girl, and I, a man." Then, with clanking spurs, she stomped out.

Excerpt from *I Am My Own Wife*

Meine Tante Luise was working on an estate in East Prussia, and she raised horses. On a large farm. And since she was fifteen years old she never wore ladies' clothes.

No.

Only boots. And jodhpurs. The clothes of a land inspector, not a fine lady. (She gives a long knowing look to punctuate that thought. Then she continues.)

And so I was coming in August in 1943 to East Prussia and I found in her closet clothes. Girl's clothes. And... (She whispers with an almost erotic intensity.)

I... put...them...on.

(Charlotte steps before an imaginary mirror. She gazes into it as if she were looking at herself- truly examining herself- for the first time. And she's delighted by her image in the glass. She turns, raising her skirt as if it were an exotic fan. Suddenly she's stricken with a look of terror. She sees another reflection, looming behind her.)

And my aunt was coming into the room, and I was standing there, and she looked at us in the mirror, and then she said:

(Charlotte becomes Tante Luise, with a stirring alto voice.)

Tante Luise: Weisst du, mit uns beiden hat die Natur sich einen scherz erlaubt. Du hattest ein madchen werden müssen und ich ein mann!

(She repeats the phrase- eloquently- in English.)

Did you know that nature has dared to play a joke on us? You should've been born a girl, and I should've been a man!

These two excerpts tell the same story but in different ways. How are these excerpts different? In what ways do the language, form, and structure differ? What about the characters? Which excerpt is more interesting to you? Which is easier to read? Which is more dramatic? Which is simpler?

Creating a Character

As Jefferson Mays approached this play he had to define and distinguish all of the different characters that were going to appear on stage. Creating a character has many different aspects, and here are some ways that you can start to create characters for the plays, scenes, or class activities you are working on.

Internal:

Who am I?

- Answer this question by writing down the things that other characters say about your character, as well as the things that you say about yourself.
- Make a list of the adjectives that are used to describe your character.
- Then make a list of all of the things that your character wants in his/her circumstances. What are the things that are the most important to him/her?
- What are the obstacles that your character faces; what stands in the way of what he/she wants?
- What does your character do to get what he/she wants? What kinds of tactics does he/she use?
- How is your character described physically? What does he/she look like?

What are my circumstances?

- What time is it?
- What day is it?
- What year is it?
- What is the season?
- Where is it geographically?
- What is the weather?
- What is going on politically?

What are the relationships?

- Who does your character love?
- Who does your character hate?
- How do the other characters relate to your character?
- Does your character have family, friends, children, or a spouse?
- Why is your character there? What does he/she do to help tell the story?

Creating a Character

continued

Internal:

How do I feel?

- Make a list of all of the emotions that are mentioned in the play. (Ex: angrily, sadly, etc.)
- How does your character feel about the other characters?
- How does your character feel about certain issues in the play?
- What kinds of emotions does your character express?
- Are those the only emotions that your character could express?
- Try going through all of your character's lines saying them angrily, then sad, hurt, excited, and happy, etc. Make a note of which emotions work on specific lines.
- Try going through all of your character's lines expressing a different emotion on each line. Changing the emotion with each line can give you different ideas about how to say the lines.

External:

- How does your character move?
- How does your character walk?
- How does your character hold or carry things?
- How does your character stand?
- What gestures does your character use?

ACTIVITY: Developing a physicality

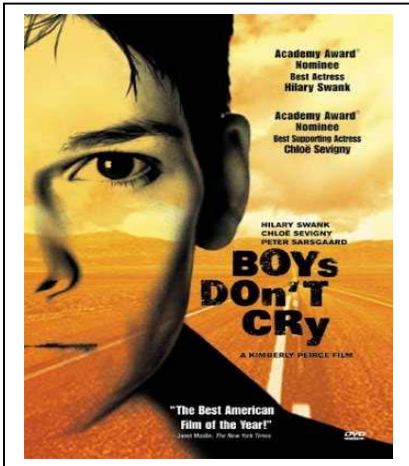
- Choose two characters from *I Am My Own Wife*.
- Using the questions above as a guide, develop a physical life for each of the characters that distinguish them from one another.
- Partner with a classmate.
- Show your character's physicality to your partner. You may walk, gesture, etc. to show your ideas.
- See if your partner can guess each of your characters after you demonstrate their physicality.
- See if you can guess his/her characters.

ACTIVITY: Truthful Acting

- Find a partner in class.
- Sit across from one another and make eye contact.
- Each of you will take turns repeating simple statements. The trick to this is that your partner is not allowed to let you stop making the statement until he/she believes you are being honest. Then, it is your partner's turn to say the statement to you.
- Statements to use, in this order: you make me smile, you make me laugh, I like you, you make me sad, you make me angry, you make me smile, you disappoint me, you hurt me, you make me laugh.
- Take your time with each statement, making sure to be very truthful and genuine in how you repeat the statement.
- When you are done with all of the different statements, think about how an activity like this could help you if you were working on a scene from a play with a partner.

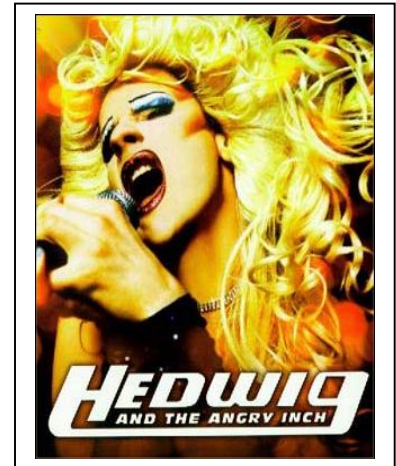
Further Study

If you are interested in the subjects discussed in this Student Guide and in *I Am My Own Wife*, here are some other things to check out.



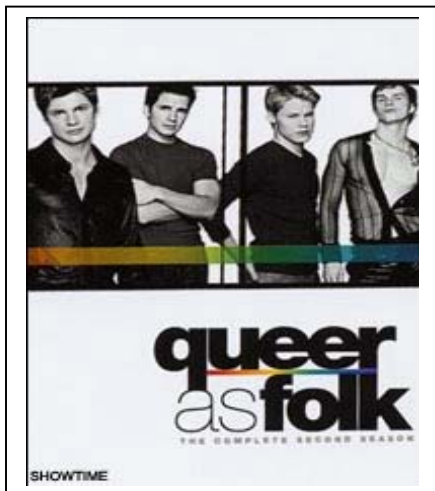
Movies

- Boys Don't Cry
 - The Birdcage
- Hedwig and the Angry Inch
 - Normal
 - Soldier's Girl
- Kissing Jessica Stein
 - Flirting
 - Bent
- But I'm A Cheerleader
- The Laramie Project



Comedy

- Eddie Izzard
- Margaret Cho
- Ellen DeGeneres



Television

- Will and Grace
- Queer as Folk
 - Ellen
- Queer Eye for the Straight Guy
- Straight Plan for the Gay Man
 - The L Word

Magazines

- The Advocate
 - Out
 - She



Questioning?

Check some of these resources: www.outproud.org, www.queeramerica.org, www.pflagchicago.com, www.glbtc.com, 773-472-3079= PFLAG hotline, GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens= book, and The Broadway Youth Center on Belmont= a drop in center for LGBTQ teens

REFLECTING ON THE PLAY

Response Letters

Now that you have discussed your responses to the matinee, it is time to let us know what you thought. The artists at the Goodman Theatre like to receive feedback about the works they present. Therefore, we want you to **write a letter** to them letting them know what you thought of *I Am My Own Wife*. Your letter should be addressed to someone involved in the production—the director, the actor, or a designer. That artist will receive your letter at the end of the production’s run. You might even receive a response!

If you can, please use a typewriter or word processor/computer to write your letter. If you cannot type your letter, please print legibly. Also, remember to include your *name, age, grade, the name of the class that brought you to the production, the name of your school, and your school address* so the artist can respond to your letter. Give your letter to your teacher who will send it on to us at the Goodman.

Following are excerpts from student letters about *Finishing the Picture*:

Dear Mr. Falls, (Director)

I enjoyed seeing Arthur Miller’s play put to life. Your adaptation of the play was just as I pictured it. I pictured the hotel environment with the up-beat cast and depressing atmosphere. The set design crew did a good job setting up the environment. The hotel room was modern and not cluttered.

The best part of the play was the scene with Jerome and Flora in their hotel bedroom. It was very refreshing to see a comic relief after all the bickering and arguing in Mr. Ochsner’s hotel room. I will never forget the way Jerome admired himself in the mirror.

The story written by Arthur Miller is very realistic. I read the Student Subscription Guide and learned that people like Kitty really existed and that life was not a piece of cake for female actresses in the 1960’s.

The most impressive aspect of the play was the use of movie projector screens. Besides their use for projecting the characters in the last act, they were directly related to the title and message of the play. The play is about making a movie, while the actors act it out in live theatre.

I love going to the Goodman. The Goodman has a very classy atmosphere. When I go to the Goodman I always feel like I will not be disappointed with any production I see.

Sincerely,
Luba Pollack

Dear Mr. Miller (Playwright)

I’m writing to complement you on your well written play *Finishing the Picture*. Specifically, I liked how you used fire and animal symbolism to show that people can be both culpable and innocent in the midst of personal crisis.

The fire seemed to represent the conflict that threatened to consume both the characters and the picture. Edna was especially worried about having to move Kitty away from the fire, just as Kitty would be most affected if the picture shut down. At the end of the first act, the characters explicitly stated that the fire might prompt a shutdown. The fire subsides as the end of the play, as the main conflict is resolved.

Just as there is a fire, so too is there an arsonist. Kitty, by failing to work, precipitates a crisis that affects not only her, but also, as Paul says near the end of Act I, all of the people who depend on her “Fluffiness.” At first it appears that she is the one whose match ignites the blaze. Later on, you cause us to reexamine whether or not she is really guilty. We wonder whether Kitty has a will or if she is the “animal” that Case calls her, whose fate is chosen by others. In the midst of the fire that she has created, Kitty remains inert, even though her life is on the line. It’s difficult for us to blame her, though, because inertia seems to be part of her nature.

I was pleased with how you raised this question in the context of Kitty; it is a question that has ramifications in the real world.

Sincerely,
Thomas Graham