College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Drama Club I
Unit 8 of 8

Art and Drama

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Sunday in the Park with George is a musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and a book by James Lapin. The musical was inspired by Georges Seurat's pointillist masterpiece shown below, called "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte."

http://www.crazytownblog.com/.a/6a012876c6c7fb970c01bb07e59a1c970d-500wi
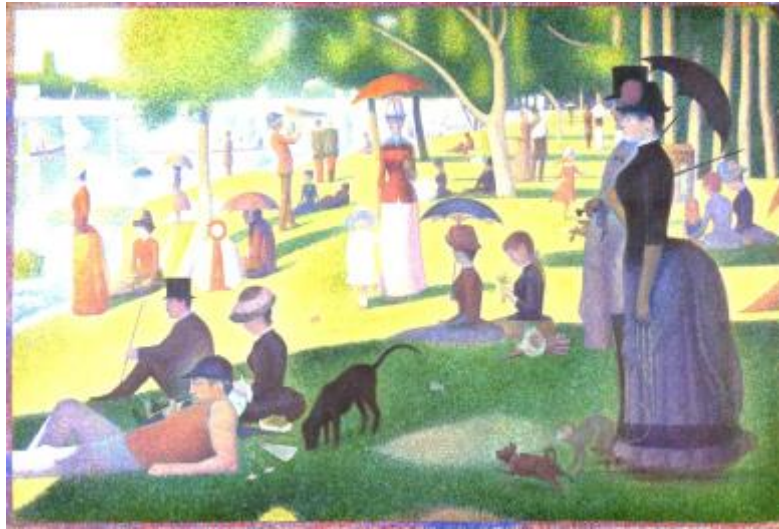
Sondheim and Lapine's musical celebrates the art of creation and the creation of art. In the first half, set in 1884, the people in the painting come to life in a world where, for the artist Georges, art comes before life, before everything. In the second half, a century later, Seurat's great-grandson is wrestling with the same obsessions in present-day New York. The scene that follows is the opening of the show. Note how musical directions, not just stage directions, are included.

http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/02/22/theater/Sunday1600.jpg

GEORGE *enters downstage. He is an artist. Tall, dark beard, wearing a soft felt hat with a very narrow brim crushed down at the neck, and a short jacket. He looks rather intense. He sits downstage on the apron at an easel with a large drawing pad and a box of chalk. He stares momentarily at the pad before turning to the audience.*

GEORGE: White. A blank page or canvas. The challenge: bring order to the whole.

Arpeggiated chord. A tree flies in stage right.

Through design.

Four arpeggiated chords. The white portals fly out and the white ground cloth comes off, revealing a grassy-green expanse and portals depicting the park scene.

Composition.

Two arpeggiated chords. A tree tracks on from stage left.

Balance.

Two arpeggiated chords. Two trees descend.

Light.

Arpeggiated chord. The lighting bumps, giving the impression of an early morning sunrise on the island of La Grande Jatte -- harsh shadows and streaming golden light through the trees.

And harmony.

The music coalesces into a theme: "Sunday", as a cut-out of a couple rises at the back of the stage. GEORGE begins to draw, then stops suddenly and goes to the wings and brings on a young woman, DOT. She wears a traditional 19thcentury outfit: full-length dress with bustle, etc. When he gets her downstage right, he turns her profile, then returns downstage to his easel. He begins to draw, She turns to him. Music continues under. Annoyed.

No. Now I want you to look out at the water.

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DOT: Why did we have to get up so early?

GEORGE: The light.

DOT: Oh.

GEORGE: *lets out a moan.*

DOT: What's the matter?

GEORGE: (erasing feverishly). I hate this tree.

Arpeggio. A tree rises back into the fly space.

DOT: (*hurt*). I thought you were drawing me.

GEORGE: (*muttering*). I am. I am. Just stand still.

DOT: *is oblivious to the moved tree. Through the course of the scene the landscape can continue to change. At this point a sailboat begins to slide into view.*

1. From looking at Seurat's painting and the photo from the Broadway show, imagine what relationship three other characters might have with Georges.

2. A playwright can have a character talk to him/herself in between interacting with the other characters. What stage directions would you give to make these transitions go smoothly?

3. What are the advantages of having a character address the audience directly?

4. Write a scene (twenty lines or more) where the main character occasionally addresses the audience or talks to him/herself.

5. What kind of play are you most eager to write? (Ex: comedy, tragedy, romance, mystery, horror…a combination of these…) If you are in fact eager to write a play, Drama Club 2 is an opportunity to use each unit to write successive scenes of a single production.

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Since this is your final Drama Club I unit, we'd appreciate any feedback or suggestions you might have for improving the course!

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Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes