



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside Out

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The THREE sisters

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The Anderson sisters, Alma, Marsha, and Katrina are celebrating Katrina's 20th birthday and marking the end of the year of grieving their father's death. It is 1859 in Petersburg, Virginia. The sisters, and their brother Andrew, live in the Big House of the plantation they've inherited from their father. Without a sense of purpose, filled with loneliness and the boredom of provincial life, each tries to find a source of contentment. They live off of the dream of a return to a grand life in Charleston, South Carolina.

For Alma, work as a teacher may hold some satisfaction, but she longs for a home and family of her own. Unhappily married to a pedantic schoolteacher and depressed by his attention, Marsha dresses in the black of mourning—for her father and her life. Katrina is the youngest; she looks forward to the arrival of true love and seeks her dignity through her work in a telegraph office. Brother Andrew holds the key to fulfilling their dreams by obtaining a professorship in Charleston, but this is thwarted by his infatuation with a local girl of lesser status. Vanessa Mae, an ambitious social climber, will soon win Andrew's heart—and much more.

With the threat of the Civil War looming, Petersburg is fast becoming a military post. Members of the regiment assigned there play significant roles in the sisters' lives as they bring interest and welcome distraction. For these genteel people, the storm is coming. The question is: can they weather it?



Photo by Gary Isaacs

“Look at yourselves, see how badly and boringly you live.”

– Anton Chekhov, conversation in 1902 with writer
Nicholai Tikhonov

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TimeLINE

1859- Jefferson Davis assumes presidency of the Confederate States of America.
Daniel Decatur Emmett composes “Dixie,” the anthem of the Southern States.

1860- Abraham Lincoln elected 16th President of the United States.
South Carolina secedes from the Union in protest.
Anton Chekhov is born in Russia.

1861- Congress of Montgomery forms the Confederate States of America: South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana.
Confederates take Fort Sumter, SC.
Outbreak of the Civil War, Charleston, SC, on April 12.
President Lincoln calls for a militia to suppress the Confederacy.
Confederate army victorious at Bull Run, VA.

1862- Union forces capture Fort Henry, Roanoke Island, Fort Donelson, TN and New Orleans, LA.
Union forces defeated at the second battle of Bull Run and Fredericksburg, VA.
Emancipation Proclamation is written.

1863- Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in rebelling territories.
Confederates victorious at Chancellorsville, VA, and Chickamauga, GA.
Confederates defeated at Gettysburg, PA; Vicksburg, MI, and Chattanooga, TN.
Lincoln delivers his “Gettysburg Address” at the Gettysburg cemetery.

Anton CHEKHOV

Anton Chekhov was born on January 29, 1860, in the poorest neighborhood of Taganrog, a Russian port city near the Black Sea. His grandfather was a serf who bought his freedom and that of his family some 20 years prior to Chekhov's birth. Though serfdom was abolished in 1861, this freedom was no defense against the reality of the poverty among the peasants and the working class. His father ran a small shop until he went bankrupt and was forced to flee the town to avoid debtors' prison.

Chekhov was permitted to stay in Taganrog on a scholarship. He began studying medicine in Moscow at the age of 19, received his Doctor's degree by age 24 and was writing stories for a variety of periodicals. The humor he brought to his writing gained him critical success and it was with money earned by writing that he supplemented his medical practice, as he often treated patients for free. Of his dual professions he said, "Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress; when I get tired of one I go to the other."

Two volumes of his short stories were published, and Chekhov's first play was produced in 1887. The first performance of *Ivanov* incited a riot of catcalls and laughter, ending in a brawl and the cancellation of the rest of the run. His next play, *The Wood Demon*, performed in December, 1889, failed as well, inspiring a break from playwriting. After an eight-month visit to the Siberian penal colony, Sakhalin Island, where he made a study of its appalling conditions, he published a sociological report on the topic.

Chekhov returned to writing plays and on October 17, 1896, one of his most famous plays, *The Sea Gull*, premiered in Moscow. When this production failed, Chekhov declared, "This is the end. I shall not write another play." Russian theatre artists Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko convinced him to let their new company, The Moscow Art Theatre, attempt another production. They remounted *The Sea Gull* in December, 1898. It was a triumph. Stanislavsky and Chekhov had a number of artistic differences. Chekhov once demanded that an actress be immediately recast, called Stanislavsky's acting "paralytic" and said that, under his direction, the characters in *Uncle Vanya* had become "cry-babies." Despite these difficulties, Chekhov continued a

working relationship with the company. The Moscow Art Theatre premiered *Uncle Vanya* while *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* were written especially for the company.

Although he refused to admit it, Chekhov had contracted tuberculosis. In the summer of 1901, Chekhov married actress Olga Knipper, though the couple was often separated. Chekhov's deteriorating health required frequent stays in Yalta, a resort town on the Black Sea and Olga's performance schedule kept her in Moscow. Under the advice of his doctor Chekhov and Olga traveled to Germany's Black Forest, a journey about which he told a friend, "I am going away to die like a dog." Though there were minor improvements in his health, Chekhov died in July 1904, of tuberculosis.

Chekhov was passionate about "culture" by which he meant not intellectuality, but rather a combination of humanity, decency, kindness, intelligence, education, accomplishment and will. He believed that cultured individuals could rise from any class of society. What was needed, he said was "constant work, day and night, eternal reading, study, will power."¹

"What matters most is to break out of the rut. Everything else is unimportant."

—Anton Chekhov

CAST *of* Characters

THE ANDERSON FAMILY

Alma Marie - the eldest sister, she runs the family. Though her inheritance has given her a comfortable life, she teaches to avoid idleness.

Marsha Anne (Masha) - the middle sister who married young. Though her husband is trying to elevate himself in the teaching profession, it is not Masha's aim to be a faculty wife.

Katharine Diane (Katrina) - the youngest sister and the object of all their affection. In her youth and idealism, she wants to feel useful in the world through work.

Andrew Lewis - brother to the three sisters. A would-be musician and scholar, he holds the deed to the house and land, although it was left to all of the siblings.

Vanessa Mae - a sharecropper's daughter with high social ambitions. She beguiles her way into the family through her marriage to Andrew.

Theodore Middleton - A well-meaning high school teacher who is married to Masha. Though she finds him dull, he adores her.

THE MILITARY

Dr. Castellini - a civilian doctor who is contracted by the military. He is a long-time friend of the family, having delivered Katrina at her birth.

Lt. Tusenbach - A German, graduate of one of America's finest military academies, he has no interest in battle.

Captain McDougal - a Scottish immigrant sharecropper and the first of his family to graduate from school. He joined the army and rose quickly through it's ranks.

Lt. Colonel Covington - an artillery officer from Charleston and friend of the family's father, the late General Lewis Anderson.

NEIGHBORS, LATER MILITARY

Frederick Henderson - son of a neighboring plantation owner.

Rigby Drayton Williams - a teacher at a local high school.

Edward Jenkins - a friend of Frederick's.

SLAVES

Aunt Sylvia - a member of the household for years and the former nurse of the sisters. She is now 81 years old and her service to the family has slowed considerably.

Abby - the youngest member of the household staff.

Walter - a slave owned Thomas Addington, owner of the bank and chairman of the city council.

Bill - a slave who is stationed at the front door to greet the Anderson's guests.

A Dream within A DREAM

Masha quotes from the poem “A Dream Within a Dream” by Edgar Allan Poe, written in 1829.

*Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow—
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.*

*I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand—
How few! Yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep—while I weep!
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?*

Petersburg *and* CHARLESTON

Petersburg, Virginia, in 1786 was described by New England Yankee, Josiah Flagg, as the dirtiest place that he had ever seen. He complained about the deep mud, the climate and the fever, but his most unflattering comments were about his hosts: “The Virginians as a people are given to Luxury and Dissipation of every kind.”¹

When Josiah Flagg visited Petersburg it was but two years old. At first, it was called Ft. Henry, one of several frontier forts erected to protect the colonists from the Indians, angry at the theft of their lands. For decades, it remained a trading post and the starting point of expeditions heading into the unknown. But by 1730, its promise as a commercial center was being noticed. Now named Petersburg (for Peter Jones, who married the trading post proprietor’s daughter), its location just below the falls of the Appomattox River, made it a natural exchange point for tobacco planters whose farms were nearby.

The burgeoning tobacco trade became a source of wealth and property, which led to the town’s expansion. By 1790 Petersburg was Virginia’s third largest town. Out of a population of 3,000, nearly half were slaves, another 10% were African American and free, and the rest were whites of diverse origin, mostly immigrants from the British Isles. Over the next 20 years, the rich stayed rich, while the poor grew more numerous. These “poor whites inhabited the low infertile plains of the coastal region, the pine barrens and the sandy areas that often flanked the more fertile plantations” and eked out a living as sharecroppers.² Petersburg became a sharply stratified city with significant divisions in class, color and sex.

To Dr. John Herbert Claiborne, a Petersburg resident in the 1850s, society was exclusive, but also refined, hospitable and liberal. He writes the “population of 6,000 whites [was composed] of fine women and brave men... There were few people of large fortunes... but a large proportion of the population was possessed of comfortable estates and incomes sufficient to insure a generous support.”³ In addition, the military had a presence in Petersburg as it had had since 40 years before the outbreak of the Civil War. In Claiborne’s time there were three companies of infantry and one of artillery, made up of men of all classes, social conditions and professions.

By 1860 Petersburg had a population of more than

18,000 and was Virginia’s second largest city. And where were women in all of this? Elite women were allowed to work as Alma and Katrina did, but according to Josiah Flagg, they were not valued for their accomplishments, but only “for the number of slaves and plantations [each] possesses.”⁴ By the early 19th century, romantic love began to prevail and a concept known as “companionate marriage” appeared. In this arrangement couples married for love, but male command was replaced by shared activities and joint decision-making. “The result for women was enhanced status—greater power, greater autonomy, and a strong, even equal, voice in family affairs.”⁵

Vanessa Mae seems to be an early proponent of this practice, for she assumes all the power, autonomy and voice that she can grasp. She also adheres to the Petersburg principle—that “money helped make a marriage and marriage was an honorable means of making money.”⁶

“The palavery kind of Southerners; all that slushy gush on the surface, and no sensibilities whatever—a race without consonants and without delicacy.”

—Willa Cather: *My Mortal Enemy*, II, i.
[Ms. Cather was a Virginian.]

The three sisters yearn to return to Charleston, a wealthy city with a huge export business of rice and cotton, and was home to a wealthy, privileged class. Unfortunately, the wealth was created on the backs of African slaves. The inequality in the distribution of riches was enormous: some 155 white persons, or just three percent of households, controlled the property that made up half of Charleston. But most Charlestonians owned neither land nor slaves, leading one English visitor in 1850 to remark that there seems to be “no middle class, only rich and poor.”⁷

Charleston was a city that placed “a premium on good looks, good companionship, bright conversation and a rounded personality.”⁸ The dilettantes and

the elite gathered at the city's grand mansions for ostentatious parties and balls punctuated by slaves serving champagne, turkey, ham, partridge, pheasant, oysters and immense quantities of bonbons, cakes and jellies.

As the 1850s waned, Charleston suffered an economic downturn coupled with a steady stream of immigrants seeking employment. Soon 40% of the white population was composed of Irish and German immigrants who had more in common with the blacks than with the white elite. Thus, class divisions became as obvious as racial ones. But Charleston's aristocrats remained aloof to the concerns of the laboring classes, both black and white. By 1860 the elite only comprehended that "the crisis is approaching."

"The complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away with the debris of history."

—John F. Kennedy

ACTIVITIES

Colorado Model Content Standard: Geography

#4.1: Students know the characteristics, location, distribution, and migration of human populations.

During the late 19th century, emigration from Russia to the United States was unusually high. Research the historical events occurring in the Russian political and social environment that may have caused such a mass migration. (Hint: Look at the treatment of various religious groups.)

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6:

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Write a brief description of each character's life. You may use the character list in this study guide to help you get started. What does each character learn about his/her life within the course of the play? Do you think his/her life changed after they left Charleston? If so, how?

Colorado Model Content Standard: Theatre #5:

Students analyze and assess the characteristics, merits, and meanings of traditional and modern forms of dramatic expression.

Constantin Stanislavski is considered the prince of theorists. He, primarily through the work of Chekhov, helped actors understand realism versus melodrama and how to re-create it on the stage. One of the most important methods that Stanislavski

invented was the idea of an "objective." **Objective** may be simply defined as what the character wants to gain or achieve in the course of the play. Decide what the objective of each character might be for *The Three Sisters*. Next, identify the **super-objective** or the larger purpose of the play; in other words, the **theme**. As Stanislavski described, "Anton Chekov wrestled with the triviality of bourgeois life and it became the *leitmotiv* of the majority of his literary productions." Using your own words, describe the super-objective of *The Three Sisters*.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #4:

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

Define each of the following terms and describe how they relate to the plot and /or characters of *The Three Sisters*:

Ennui
Realism
Epiphany
Dormancy
Pastoral
Bourgeois

Colorado Model Content Standard: Geography

#1: Students know how to use and construct maps, globes, and other geographic tools to locate and derive information about people, places and environments.

ACTIVITIES

C O N T I N U E D

At the end of the lesson, each student:

- Will list three characteristics of an area where people would settle.
- Will explain how landscape has been a significant factor to the success of a city.
- Will explain the significance of transportation in the success of industry.
- Will identify two successful industries of a southern city in 1860.

Materials:

Copies of the unmarked maps of Petersburg with focus questions.
Pencil and paper

Relevance:

The power of place has played a large role in determining the course of American history. Settlers who traveled miles and miles over water and land for a new beginning probably did not randomly select where to land their boats or carriages to make their new homes. They looked for certain characteristics of the land where they settled.

Involvement of the Students:

What are some questions you would have for your parents, if they announced that the family was moving to a new city?

Transition to Explanation:

Now, imagine that you have no telephones, no cars and no electricity. What would you look for in a place to make your home?

Explanation/Activity

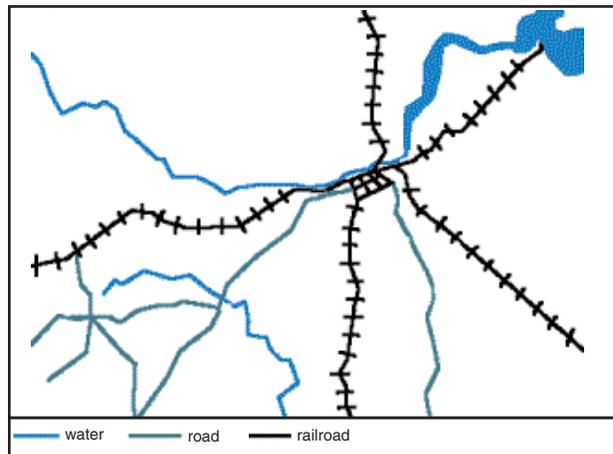
Pass out pieces of white paper. Instruct students to draw a picture of a place where they would make their home, if they were moving to a new state or territory in 1860.

Write a brief paragraph to accompany your drawing. Explain what you would look for in a city or state and why.

Pass out the blank maps of Petersburg in 1861. Do not tell students what city is represented on the map. Students will read the scenario of this city, answer the focus questions about this place and finally decide if he or she would choose to live there.

Scenario of the Unknown City

When the war began in 1861, this was a growing city filled with fine houses, busy shops and successful factories. The city's 18,000 residents were proud of this prosperous town, which was a trading center for local and world markets. Farmers would bring their crops from the surrounding countryside. Town merchants did well thanks to the traffic that came in and out of the city. By 1860, this city had become the third largest in the state and one of the most important.



- Why was this city so successful, according to the map?
- Why would people from the surrounding countryside bring their goods into the city?
- How did these travelers help the economy of the city? (Hint: Think of the local merchants)
- If you were new to a state, is this a city where you would choose to live? Why or why not?

Closure:

Provide clues to the students about what city is represented by the map.

This was a city in the state of Virginia.

This city was home to tobacco manufacturing companies, cotton and flour mills, and iron works industries.

This city was located 23 miles south of the capital of the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Answer: Petersburg, VA

Question for thought: Why were the citizens of Petersburg worried that it might become a target for the Union army during the Civil War?

ACTIVITIES

C O N T I N U E D

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6: Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Objectives:

At the end of this lesson, each student:

- Will describe the possible experiences of a slave, a plantation owner, and a military general by looking at and listening to the songs of the period.
- Will explain two hidden meanings in the songs.
- Will compare songs of the Civil War era to a song of today and explain how the words reflect the culture.

Materials:

Copies of the songs and music that will represent slaves, southern plantation owners and soldiers.

Relevance:

Through the years, songs have been used as a medium to tell stories of peoples' lives and experiences. Just as songs today reflect the culture of the people, songs of Civil War times also reflected the events and lifestyles of this period. Students will look at songs from long ago and identify what stories they tell.

Involvement of the Students:

Have students choose an appropriate, popular song of today and write a few of the lyrics on the board. Students can explain how the lyrics reflect the culture and events of today.

Example: Will Smith – “Just The Two of Us”

*It's a full-time job to be a good dad
You got so much more stuff than I had
I gotta study just to keep with the changin' times
101 Dalmatians on your CD-ROM
See me--I'm trying to pretend I know
On my PC where that CD go
But yo, ain't nuthin promised, one day I'll be gone
Feel the strife but trust life does go on...*

Album: *Big Willie Style*

Transition to Explanation:

How do the songs of today reflect the current events and lifestyles of our generation? What do the lyrics of the songs say about us and what type of families exist in the 2000s? Let's take a look at songs from another time.

Explanation/Activity:

Students may work in pairs to read the lyrics of the song handouts. Handouts will represent the songs popularly sung by soldiers, slaves, or farmers. Students will need to identify whether the song would have been sung by a soldier, a slave or a plantation owner. After the student pairs identify who would have sung this song, they must explain why the song reflects the lifestyle of the person they chose.

Upon completing these questions, students will need to look for hidden meanings in the song. Students may pick one verse of the song and summarize what story the verse is telling.

Students will share their songs with the class and explain their interpretation of the song. What does this song say about the events of the Civil War time period?

SONG LYRICS

A SLAVE, One Slave's Perspective

*We raise de wheat
Dey gib us de corn
We bake de bread
Dey gib us de cruss
We sij de meal
Dey gib us de huss
We peel de meat
Dey gib us de skin
And dat's de way
Dey takes us in*

Frederick Douglass recorded this song indicative to the slave's sense of planter's oppression.

- What image does Douglass give the reader of slavery?
- Is slave life portrayed in a positive or negative light from this passage?
- Do you believe that all slaves felt this way about their circumstance in life?

ACTIVITIES

C O N T I N U E D

A *PLANTATION*, One Southern Perspective

*Secession is our watchword,
Our rights we will demand;
To defend our homes and firesides
We pledge our hearts and hand.
Jeff Davis is our President,
With Stephen by our side;
Brave Beauregard, our General,
Will join in our ride.
Our wagon is the very best,
The running gear is good;
Stuffed 'round the sides with cotton,
And made of Southern wood.
Carolina is the driver,
With Georgia by her side,
Virginia holds the flag up,
While we all take a ride.*

- What does the word secession mean in these lyrics?
- Why might the lyrics refer to cotton and Southern wood?
- What is the opinion of the writer and singers of the words above? Do you believe that most Southerners felt this way?
- Do the lyrics refer more to the issue of slavery or of states' rights?

A *WAR*, One Union Perspective

*We're fighting for our Union, we're fighting for our trust,
We're fighting for that happy land where sleeps our Father's dust
It cannot be dissever'd, tho' it cost us bloody wars.
We can never give up the land where float the Stripes and Stars.
We do not want your cotton, we care not for your slaves,
But rather than divide this land, we'll fill your southern graves.
With Lincoln for our Chieftain, we'll wear our country's scars.
We rally round that brave old flag that bears the Strips and Stars!*

- What are the reasons for fighting the Civil War according to the lyrics of this song?
- What is the opinion of this writer (or singer) of the south?
- Do you believe that all northerners felt this way about slavery?

Closure

Pass out a copy of the song "Follow the Drinking Gourd."

While songs are often an expression of the lifestyle of a people during a certain time and place, some songs truly have hidden messages. Songs of the slaves were often sung to communicate certain messages to one another. The song "Follow the Drinking Gourd" was often sung by slaves who worked on the Underground Railroad. Read the lyrics of the song, and see if you can identify what the possible hidden messages are in the words.

Follow the Drinkin' Gourd

Follow the Drinkin' Gourd

For the old man's waitin' for to carry you to freedom,

If you follow the Drinkin' Gourd.

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,

Follow the Drinkin' Gourd

For the old man's waitin' for to carry you to freedom,

If you follow the Drinkin' Gourd.

What the lyrics could have meant:

"When the sun comes back" - Sunset

"And the first quail calls" - Bird sound

"Follow the Drinking Gourd" - Go north, following the North Star, located in the Big Dipper

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