

EDUCATION DEPARTEMENT

A divine detective story...gritty, blasphemous intelligence. *Sunday Times (London)*



PAUL

by Howard Brenton directed by Tony Estrella

sandra feinstein-

GAM
theatre

STUDY GUIDE

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Table of Contents

Prologue:

Note from Education Director, Steve Kidd
Using This Study Guide in Your Classroom
Benefits of Core Prep visits

Act I: Theatre Audience Etiquette

Act II: Howard Brenton and Paul

Act III: Our Production
From the Director
Tony Estrella
Dramaturgical Notes
Jennifer Madden

Act IV:

Questions for Discussion

Epilogue:

Thank you!
How to learn more through The Gamm

*This study guide was prepared by
Tracy Morreo and Steve Kidd*

This study guide is made possible thanks to the generous support from: The Rhode Island Foundation, the Alice I. Sullivan Foundation of Collette Vacations, the Carter Family Charitable Trust, MetLife Foundation, Bristol County Savings Charitable Foundation, Bank of America, The Hassenfeld Foundation, The June Rockwell Levy Foundation, Alliance Blackstone Valley Federal Credit Union, a Community Development Block Grant, The John Clarke Fund, Arts Funding in Pawtucket, and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.

PROLOGUE

Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to share with your students designed to prepare them for our production of the North American premiere of *Paul* by Howard Brenton.

And *now* let us talk about what you will find in this study guide.

This Study Guide is broken into four acts. In the first act, you will find a few more reminders for you and your students about the nature of performance and what is expected of all audience members attending the theatre. In the second act, we delve into the world of Howard Brenton and *Paul*. In this act, you will find a biography of Brenton and the production history of the play. In act three, Director Tony Estrella articulates his vision and ideas behind our production and then a dramaturgical look at the play from our resident dramaturge, Jennifer Madden. Finally, we will close our Study Guide with act four, some questions for consideration and discussion and information on how to learn more about The Gamm's Educational offerings.

As part of our Core Prep program, I would like to offer a workshop with your classroom/school before your visit and help prepare your students for the play. In these workshops, I will not only discuss the play and our production concept(s), but we will also get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the themes, motifs and the language of the play. This type of kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and the sort of text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning.

Much of this work was discovered, developed and inspired by the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University. I had the good fortune to work with "ArtsLit" and the strategies and models for learning developed by the organization continue to serve as a foundational pedagogical tool for all Gamm Education programming.

Some benefits of ArtsLiteracy learning include:

- **Community Building in Your Classroom** (Applied Learning New Standards: A1; A2; A5)
- **Inspiration and Background on the Artist** (English Language Arts New Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; Applied Learning New Standards: A2; A3; A5)
- **Entering and Comprehending Text** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)

- **Creating Text for Performance** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- **Performing in Your Class** (Applied Learning Standards: A1; A2; A3; A4; A5)
- **Reflecting on Your Performance** (E2; E3; A1; A2; A5)

Moreover, the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) has developed GSE's (Grade Span Expectations) and GLE's (Grade Level Expectations) to help "capture the "big ideas" of reading that can be assessed."

We believe that all of our Literacy through Performance work helps to develop the following literacy skills.

WRITING

- W-2: Writing in Response to Literary Text (showing understanding of ideas in a text). A "text" covers not only books and plays, but film and other kinds of media.
- W-3: Making Analytical judgments about text (how good was it? What stuck out?)
- W-4: Creating a Storyline
- W-5: Applying Narrative Strategies (how did they tell the story?)
- W-14: Reflective Essay

ORAL COMMUNICATION

- OC-1: Interactive Listening (how well students listen; how much information they pick up hearing something once – asking a student to write a comprehensive account of a play certainly works)
- OC-2: Making Presentations (each senior in Rhode Island will be asked to put on a senior exhibition, capstone project or portfolio that includes a public demonstration on a particular subject. Learning about public performance is an obvious tie-in).

READING

- R-4: Initial Understanding of Literary Texts (where is the climax in a story? How would you set this play in contemporary society?)
- R-5: Analysis and Interpretation of Literary Text/Citing Evidence
- R-11: Reading Fluency and Accuracy (part of the benefits of reading a script out over and over in rehearsal is an increase in reading fluency and accuracy)

Please see more exercise and strategies for ArtsLiteracy learning at www.artslit.org. We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year.

Steve Kidd
Resident Actor/Education Director
The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre

Act I: Theatre Audience Etiquette

What is so exciting about attending the theatre - especially in a smaller space such as the Gamm - is that it is live! Live theatre is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television you are encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors. Thus, you the audience, play an active role in the experience. The actors can see and hear you and any distracting behavior (talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc) can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking or making any noise during a performance. Thank you!

The Nature of Performance

Controversial British playwright Sarah Kane once observed: "There's always going to be a relationship between the material and that audience that you don't really get with a film... People can walk out or change channels or whatever, it doesn't make any difference to the performance... It's a completely reciprocal relationship between the play and the audience."

The performance you see will never be precisely the same, for it will never have the same audience; every performance is unique. Theatre scholar Robert Cohen observed the essential paradox of live performance:

- It is unique to the moment, yet it is repeatable.
- It is spontaneous, yet it is rehearsed.
- It is participatory, yet it is presented.
- It is real, yet it is simulated.
- The actors are themselves, yet they are characters.
- The audience is involved, yet it remains apart.

(From Robert Cohen's *Theatre: Brief Version*)

"Theatre is not just another genre, one among many. It is the only genre in which, today and every day, now and always, living human beings address and speak to other human beings... It is a place for human encounter, a space for authentic human existence..."

Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic and Playwright

Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theatre is different from film, television and sporting events.

Act II: Howard Brenton and Paul



Born in 1942, Portsmouth, Hampshire England, English playwright and screen writer Howard Brenton is known for having a provocative voice in British post-war political theatre. He has written or co-written more than forty plays as well as poetry, essays, a novel, dramatic adaptations and for television.

Brenton was born the son of a Methodist Minister which perhaps led to his fascination with the subject of religion, a reoccurring theme in his writing. He was educated at Chichester High School for Boys and later studied English Literature at Saint Catharine's College, Cambridge. He wrote his first play, *Ladder of Fools*, while at Cambridge in 1965. His one-act play, *It's My Criminal*, was performed while he was in Cambridge as well at the Royal Court Theatre. In 1968, Brenton joined the Brighton Combination as a writer and actor. He joined the Portable Theatre in 1969 as an actor and writer, writing many plays including *Christie In Love* and *Fruit*. In 1973, he was commissioned to write a "big" play for Nottingham Playhouse. The result was *Brassneck*. His next major success was the play *Weapons of Happiness* which was staged in 1976 and won the Evening Standard for Best Play.

Brenton gained notoriety for *The Romans in Britain* which was staged at the National Theatre in 1980. His political comedy *Pravda* was co-written and directed by David Hare in 1983 and won them an Evening Standard Award.

Paul was first performed at the National Theatre in London from September 2005 through February 2006, in modern dress. Two hundred letters of complaint were received before the opening night of the play. Despite the controversy, it received an Olivier Nomination for Best Play.

The Gamm Theatre is proud to be staging *Paul's* North American Premiere.

Act III: Our Production



From the Director:

Faith, a Virtue?

Paul is a play about a man and the power of his faith. It examines the fundamentals of one particular form of faith, and its growth from a nascent, localized cult to a world-wide organized religion. It is a story about how and why we tell stories, the power of fiction, and how our dreams literally shape our reality. But unlike so many stories about faith, *Paul* does so by reserving for its subject “the maximum of respect with the minimum of credulity.”*

Paul is the third production in a kind of unofficial trilogy here at The Gamm that examines the role of religion in a young century baptized in the almost daily bloodletting and terror of faith-based violence. In 2007, we opened *Sin: A Cardinal Deposed*, a docu-drama chronicling the evidence in New England of child rape by catholic priests and its systematic cover-up by church officials—a veil of secrecy and corruption that has yet to be fully torn away despite the trail of crumbs leading all the way to the papal chambers of the Vatican. Two years later, The Gamm was among the first theaters to produce *Grace* by Mick Gordon and A.C. Grayling, a moving family drama about an Oxford don and vehement opponent of religion who must come to terms with her son’s faith and his violent death at the hands of the “armies of god.”

If *Sin* and *Grace* implicitly asked *why* then *Paul* begs its corollary *how*: “How did we get to this point?” and “Where did it all begin?”

Paul is a secular re-telling of the Saul of Tarsus conversion myth. More than anyone, Saul/ Paul is the founder of the Christian church. If Peter, in the words of Jesus, was its “rock” or foundation, then Paul would become its walls, roof, and eventually the stained glass. Many of the tenets of Christianity, ripped from the womb of Judaism, began with Paul and continue to define it to this day. His first-century teachings continue to hold major sway in contemporary life. Paul’s intense advocacy for celibacy and the denial of human sexual desire codifies itself in the strictures of the Catholic priesthood and, evidence suggests, is at the root of churchwide sexual

assaults. His homophobia is echoed loudly in a recent *Providence Phoenix* cover story that asks here in Rhode Island “Will the Catholic Church Kill Gay Marriage?” In Paul’s contempt for reason (“*The more they call themselves philosophers, the more stupid they grew...they made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened*” Romans 1:21-22) we can begin to make sense of the centuries-long mistrust of science that, in its extreme, condemned Galileo and still lends theological justification to the belief of the majority of American Christians who deny evolution. This is not to suggest that Paul is guilty for crimes hundreds and thousands of years after his death. (It is noteworthy to remember that he expected the world to end during his lifetime, so it wouldn’t matter to posterity what he or anyone else thought.) It is also not sufficient to account for his influence across 2,000 years. He was a charismatic, self-sacrificing fanatic and visionary and in his famous letters (First Corinthians is quoted at length in *Paul*) continues to stir hearts with its insistence on the power of love above all. He is a complex divisive figure whom, across centuries, we can only investigate “through a glass darkly” and to whom Howard Brenton has done an extraordinary justice in this reexamination. Simply put, the playwright renders Paul not a mad prophet or a Saint, but a man. If there is any hope in understanding him and his troubling legacy it can be only this.

—Tony Estrella

*Christopher Hitchens on the poem “*Churchgoing*” by Philip Larkin

Dramaturgical Notes:

Who Was Saint Paul?
By Jennifer Madden

“The beauty of the idea – that Paul knew that perhaps Jesus hadn’t risen from the dead, but that he wanted the idea of the resurrection to transform humanity – is a metaphorical expression of everything Howard has always written about, which is the contrast between the need for a dream and the reality. I think it’s one of the most remarkable plays of the new century.” –David Hare

In *Paul*, playwright Howard Brenton provides a secular reading of Christ’s resurrection and the foundations of Christianity’s short but meteoric rise, with the complicated figure of Paul the apostle at its center. Dozens of charismatic, messianic figures wandered across the pagan polytheistic Roman Empire but one rose above all others; and, though he never met Jesus, *Paul* was critical of the rapid growth of Christianity. How did Christianity go from a marginalized, fringe practice that the Romans nearly extinguished to one of the most powerful political and cultural forces on earth?

Roman-occupied Judea (what is now part of the West Bank) was a seething cauldron of religious fervor and fanaticism. The Romans tolerated and absorbed dozens of belief systems and sects. Yet, they were profoundly alarmed and threatened by Christianity in particular. They mocked, trivialized, and viciously tried to eradicate this new faith. One man known for his violent persecution of Christians was Saul (later Paul). How did a man known for his loathing of Christianity become almost solely responsible for its eventual triumph? How could one man be so divided?

What do we know about the man a recent BBC documentary called “one of the most important figures in the history of the Western world”? Born Saul in Tarsus (modern-day Turkey) sometime between 5 and 15 C.E., he labored as a tentmaker and was eventually martyred for his Christian beliefs. We know that he was Roman and Jewish, and that he changed his name to Paul after his famed conversion on the road to Damascus. The original purpose of this trip was to persecute Christians. (Although filmmaker Margaret Koval observes that “conversion” might not be the most apt description, for “Christianity as we understand it today simply did not exist.” It was in effect created (in its lasting form) and disseminated by Paul himself.

According to the PBS documentary *Peter and Paul and the Christian Revolution*, Paul “spent the rest of his life spreading the new faith, and his letters to the various congregations around the Eastern Mediterranean are the only contemporary records from the movement.” These writings and their interpretation are the source for much of the confusion surrounding Paul’s beliefs. Was he a misogynist or did he encourage women’s participation in the Church? Were his own conflicted desires the root of his scathing condemnation of homosexuality? One could (and academics and theologians certainly have) argued both sides. Paul’s complexity and seeming divided self are playwright Howard Brenton’s primary interests: “That’s the theme, that’s what I was going for: a man who is split in half, who goes from one extreme to the other.” Though his writings (and ultimate intent) are endlessly interpreted and reinterpreted (and therefore unknowable), we do know one thing: One man and the extremity of his belief changed the world forever.

Act IV: Questions for Discussion

1. How does the historical reality of this story compare to the Biblical reality?
2. What does it say about the need for stories in peoples lives?
3. Why do we tell stories to begin with?
4. How does this change or alter our own impression of the story of Jesus and the birth of the Catholic Church?
5. What did you find surprising?

6. What questions would you have for the playwright? For the Director?

Epilogue

Thank you for joining us for Paul and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm. Our education program also provides classes for students in junior high and high school and our GSI Pawtucket is the thing to do for summer time theatre fun. To learn more, find us on the web at www.gammtheatre.org or reach Steve Kidd at 401 723 4266 ext. 17.