



**Lights Up! Library
Classroom Activities**

An Enemy of the People

A new version of the Henrik Ibsen play by Rebecca Lenkiewicz

Directed by Doug Hughes



INTRODUCTION

Thank you for bringing Manhattan Theatre Club's Lights Up! Library initiative into your high school classroom! We're thrilled to provide to you and your students these classroom activities and the performing recording of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, in a new version by Rebecca Lenkiewicz.

Our goals for this initiative are:

- To help students better understand themselves and the world through the medium of theatre
- To help develop a knowledgeable, perceptive new audience for the theatre and for the arts in general
- To stimulate participants' imaginations, creativity, and critical thinking skills through engagement with challenging theatre works

The activities are divided into three sections:

- **Preparing Students to View the Play** — activities may include classroom discussion prompts, writing prompts, and theatre games or improvisations
- **Viewing the Play** — including questions for classroom discussion after students watch the performance
- **Follow-Up Activities** — further activities intended to deepen students' personal and intellectual interactions with the play

Additionally, [click here](#) to access supplemental resources which may include links to articles and videos meant to bring further context to this experience.

Our hope is that you will have the time to activate all of the activities in this document; however, we understand that time is among the scarcest resources in a high school classroom. One could maintain a rich experience by engaging in the framing questions, one preparatory activity, post-show questions, and one follow-up exercise. And, of course, please modify these activities — or devise your own — in any way necessary to meet the needs of each student in your classroom.

Some of the activities you'll find on these pages align to the [National Core Arts Standards for Theatre](#), and most will align to your local benchmarks and standards.

We hope that this experience will be enriching and educationally beneficial to your students!



ABOUT MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB

Over the past five decades, Manhattan Theatre Club has been a preeminent producer of the highest quality, award-winning theatrical productions of new works by American and international playwrights. Our over 600 premieres have been produced throughout the country and across the globe and have contributed a proud legacy to the American theatrical canon.

Our artistic mission, which Artistic Director Lynne Meadow created and has implemented since 1972, is to develop and present new work in a dynamic, supportive, environment; to identify and collaborate with the most promising new as well as seasoned, accomplished artists; and to produce a diverse repertoire of innovative, entertaining, and thought-provoking plays and musicals by American and international playwrights in our theatres each season. Our commitment to excellence extends to every aspect of the company: from the gifted permanent staff; to a supportive Board of Directors; to a first-rate Education program, which has served more than 100,000 students of all ages in New York City, across the country, and around the world; to a quality, paid career training program, which prepares the next generation of theatre professionals for jobs at MTC and beyond; to a robust behind-the-scenes developmental program for new work. MTC performs in multiple venues: our Broadway home at the 650-seat Samuel J. Friedman Theatre—formerly Biltmore Theatre—which we restored and reopened in 2003, and at New York City Center off-Broadway, where we created a 300-seat Stage I and a 150-seat Stage II.

MTC productions have earned 7 Pulitzer Prizes, 30 Tony Awards, 51 Drama Desk Awards, and 49 Obie Awards, amongst many other honors, but our success is not measured by awards. Instead, the merit of our work is represented by the output and talent of the myriad of writers and artists who have debuted at MTC and who continue to return for multiple productions. We are proud of the artists whom we have discovered and nurtured, as well as their impact on our industry.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Manhattan Theatre Club's production of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, in a new version by Rebecca Lenkiewicz, opened at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre on September 27, 2012. It was directed by Doug Hughes. The cast included Boyd Gaines, Richard Thomas, Maité Alina, Gerry Bamman, Kathleen McNenny, Randall Newsome, John Procaccino, Michael Siberry, and James Waterston. The scenic design was by John Lee Beatty, costume design was by Catherine Zuber, lighting design was by Ben Stanton, and original music and sound design were by David Van Tieghem.

ABOUT HENRIK IBSEN AND AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE



Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), the father of modern drama, liberated European theatre from the shallow, formulaic romances, melodramas, and musical entertainments that dominated stages throughout most of the 19th century. Ibsen reestablished the theatre as a forum for ideas and a source of poetic insight. His plays challenged the prevailing arid formulas and straitlaced bourgeois sensibilities that informed the drama of his day. His first two successful plays, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, written when he was in his 30s, not only broke open dramatic structure but expressed provocative, even disturbing views of the human psyche.

Ibsen is sometimes regarded as a social critic who wrote didactic plays about moral and ethical issues of his day. Such a characterization is simplistic and unjust. While it's true that some of his best-known plays—*A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People*—address social problems like women's rights, marital inequality, and political corruption, they, like all his work, are finally efforts to explore and address the mysteries and complexities of the human heart.

Ibsen's early works were episodic, exuberant, energetic, and untidy verse dramas. The plays that followed, in Ibsen's "middle period," including those cited in the preceding paragraph, were realistic, with middle-class characters and largely domestic settings. Through these plays Ibsen is considered the father of realism—the dominant dramatic style in world drama to this day, as reflected not only in the vast majority of the plays written over the past century but also in fictional works on mainstream television and in movies.

Ibsen's final works (including *The Master Builder*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and *When We Dead Awaken*) became increasingly symbolic and abstract, anticipating and influencing playwrights of the late 20th century and beyond who abandoned conventional plotting and characterization.

According to some biographers, Ibsen wrote *An Enemy of the People* in a fit of personal pique: He felt ill-used by critics and the general public who had denounced his play *Ghosts* as obscene and scandalous because of its allusions to venereal disease. But rather than a generalized attack on the late-19th-century moral hypocrisy that underlay the condemnation of *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People* targets the deceitfulness of politicians and

the press, who, in Ibsen's view, are motivated by expedience and self-interest rather than a concern for social welfare. Ibsen's condemnation does not end there, however: The play also expresses contempt for the general public, "the people," who allow themselves to be taken in by the lies and distortions of politicians and journalists.

But Ibsen was too wise and sensitive an artist to see the world and the issues in the play in terms of simple, clear-cut alternatives. Ibsen understood that social issues and morality are complex; that motives are often mixed and murky; that determining the right course is often difficult; and that any policy decisions, no matter what their motivation, may have unintended consequences.

The central conflict in *An Enemy of the People* is between two brothers, Dr. Thomas Stockmann, the chief medical officer in a Norwegian coastal resort town, and his brother, Peter, the town's mayor. Thomas discovers that the waters of the town's increasingly renowned spa baths have been contaminated by industrial waste and insists on closing them. Peter, recognizing that the town's economic survival, as well as his own political future, depends on the baths, succeeds not only in opposing his brother but finally in turning the community against him, condemning him as a public enemy.

In the play's final ambiguous scenes, Thomas spurns offers to compromise and reconcile. Increasingly an outcast, he faces professional and financial ruin. Yet surrounded by his dismayed but loyal family, he remains defiant to the end, asserting that "The strongest man. He's always alone."

Ibsen Biography

- A comprehensive biographical essay is available at www.ibsensociety.org/ibsen-life-and-works
- Several biographies have been published, all available through <https://bookshop.org>, including
 - *Ibsen's Kingdom: The Man and His Works*, by Evert Sprinchorn (Yale University Press, 2021)
 - *Henrik Ibsen: The Man and the Mask*, by Ivo de Figueiredo (Yale University Press, 2019)

Review and Article

- NY Times review of the MTC production: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/28/theater/reviews/an-enemy-of-the-people-at-samuel-j-friedman-theater.html>
- New York Times article about the unusual number of productions of *An Enemy of the People*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/theater/enemy-of-the-people-ibsen.html>

CHARACTERS AND SETTING

DR. THOMAS STOCKMANN: Medical Officer at the Baths.

CATHERINE STOCKMANN: His wife.

PETRA: Their daughter, a schoolteacher.

PETER STOCKMANN: Thomas' brother, Mayor, Chief Constable and Chairman of the Baths Committee.

MORTEN KIIL: Master tanner, Mrs. Stockmann's foster father.

HOVSTAD: Editor of the People's Messenger.

BILLING: An Employee at the People's Messenger.

HORSTER: A Sea Captain

ASLAKSEN: A Printer

TOWNSPEOPLE: Present at a public meeting.

SETTING:

The action takes place in a coastal town in Southern Norway.

PREPARING STUDENTS TO VIEW THE PLAY

FRAMING QUESTIONS

Either through classroom discussion or individual journaling, ask students to reflect upon these questions:

- What does the term “whistleblower” mean, and how could it apply to me?
- How much would I be willing to risk to right a wrong?
- What are the possible consequences, social and personal, of standing alone against injustice or a harmful policy?
- What are the dangers in the concept of “majority rule”?

WRITING ACTIVITY: DECONTAMINATION

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re8.1-II.b., TH:Cn11.1-II.a.

Ask the students to write a poem entitled “Decontamination.” Discuss what they wrote in connection to *An Enemy of the People*.

ACTIVITY: WHEN TO BLOW THE WHISTLE

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re8.1-I.c., TH:Re8.1-II.b., TH:Cn10.1-I.a., TH:Cn11.2-II.b.

Whistleblowing is a fraught topic for teenagers. A central tenet of their ethical system is often “no snitching.” You don’t rat out a peer, no matter what. We can speculate on why it’s true—resistance to authority, loyalty to the pack, fear of retribution—but whatever the cause, it’s a prevalent attitude.

And *An Enemy of the People* is quintessentially a whistleblower play, which means that its central action will be a rich topic for reflection and discussion for young people.

Blowing the whistle is often not solely a matter of principle: The attendant ethical issues are complicated by personal motives and political implications. No matter how egregious the abuse, the act of informing may result in unwelcome, even painful consequences. Indeed, arguably, the worse the alleged violation or impropriety, the more motivated the perpetrators may be to prevent its exposure by intimidating or otherwise dissuading the would-be whistleblower. And of course, there may in fact be mitigating facts that are unknown, overlooked, or even ignored by the well-meaning informer.

In raising the issue, you might want to discuss some of the well-known films about whistleblowers: *Silkwood*, *Erin Brockovich*, and *The Insider*. Whistleblowing is most often associated with workplace issues or matters of public health and safety, but it certainly could arise in a school setting. Ask your students to brainstorm the kinds of ethical, moral, or legal abuses that might take place at a school—obviously in doing so they can draw on actual experience or their imaginations. These might include:

- an organized cheating scheme;
- a teacher or school official in an inappropriate relationship with a student;
- persistent bullying;
- a construction defect or asbestos in the walls, remediable only by closing the building or canceling an event at an inopportune moment.

Once the class has come up with a range of examples, do the following exercise:

1. Have the class line up side-by-side on one side of the room, facing the opposite wall.
2. Ask students privately to imagine (or recall) a whistleblowing situation. You have discovered a condition or situation at the school that is dangerous, seriously unhealthy, illegal, or a violation of ethics or morality. The possible consequences if the condition is not remedied are dire.
3. Read a series of statements about the potential consequences of whistleblowing. Say to the class, "If your response to the statement is 'yes,' take one step forward. If you can't say 'yes,' remain where you are. Bear in mind that there will always be ambiguity and subjectivity in the propositions and your responses. Do the best you can; respond as precisely as you can. But there can be no right or wrong responses and no judgments. There are too many variables, some of which we are not privy to. Here goes:

I would blow the whistle even if:

- It would negatively affect my relationship with my friends
- It would lessen my prospects for academic advancement
- It meant becoming an outcast at school
- It would get me in trouble with school authorities
- It might mean getting suspended
- It might mean getting expelled
- It meant public disgrace
- It jeopardized my family's future
- It meant my family and I would be completely isolated and bereft

Discuss what happened. Which students kept advancing, regardless of the consequences? Do you infer that they were more courageous than the rest of the class, or more foolish? Might the issue/abuse they chose have affected their willingness to continue?

At this point it might be interesting and appropriate to ask the students to reveal the situations they had imagined (again, perhaps anonymously).

Ask students to reflect on the exercise, perhaps using the following questions:

- As a result of this activity, what did you discover about the idea of whistleblowing?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What question(s) about *An Enemy of the People* did this activity raise?

The Human Barometer is a useful activity that can be used to ascertain the range of opinions in a group. There are many variations, but essentially it involves individual group members indicating their opinion or their degree of agreement with a proposition by moving to a spot in the room. Often the opposite sides of the room are designated as “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree.” Participants place themselves in the room appropriately in response to a proposition announced by the leader. The exercise generally involves a series of propositions on the same topic, and it’s often interesting to notice the shifts in space in response to each successive statement from the leader. Human Barometer is a tried and true method of assessing the group and generating discussion. The version here is a variation on the basic exercise.

ACTIVITY: OPPORTUNISTS, BETRAYALS, AND FRACTURED ALLIANCES

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr1.1-II.c., TH:Cr2-II.b., TH:Pr4.1-I.a., TH:Pr4.1-I.b., TH:Pr4.1-II.a., TH:Re7.1-I.a., TH:Re9.1-III.c., TH:Cn10.1-III.a.

In Act II, it becomes increasingly evident that Stockmann’s supposed allies—Billing, Hovstad, and Aslaksen—are in fact simply opportunists, using the doctor for their own political and financial ends. Their ardent support for Stockmann’s cause—exposing the town’s baths as a major health threat—evaporates almost immediately as soon as the mayor begins to exert political and financial pressure of his own.

Nineteenth-century Norwegian municipal politics may seem remote and irrelevant to your students. To help them connect on a personal level to the deplorable, sordid, though all-too-human behavior of Stockmann’s faithless associates, have them do the following:

- 1. Working in small groups, drawing on direct and indirect personal experience, students devise scenarios about:**
 - One individual using another for personal gain or advantage, for example:
 - Establishing a romantic relationship in order to get academic help
 - Doing the same to make a third party jealous
 - An individual switching allegiances when a more attractive alternative emerges:



- Turning their back on a long-standing friendship for the sake of some kind of social status or financial reward
- Changing sides in a social or political protest action, school, or community because of promises from the other side
- Switching sports teams or other affiliations despite long-standing ties

2. Class shares scenarios.

3. Based on this work, write either or both of the following scenes:

- A character with power or status pressures a lower-status character to change sides, abandoning an ally.
- A character who has been abandoned confronts the betrayer.

4. Discuss the improvised scenes. What did students observe, and how did the scenes relate to “real-life” situations?



VIEWING THE PLAY

You'll receive a link and password to the performance recording of the play on the first weekday of the month for which you registered to view the play. The recording may be viewed only during regularly scheduled class time in classrooms or assembly spaces on your campus. Viewing credentials may not be shared with students for individual viewing at home or on social media.

You may wish to assign each student to "track" a character during the performance using a [Character Profile Form](#).

CLASS DISCUSSION

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re7.1-1.a., TH:Re8.1-1.c., TH:Re9.1-1.b., TH:Re9.1-1.c.

After viewing the play, use these questions to facilitate a class discussion about the theatergoing experience:

- What moments in the production were particularly vivid and powerful?
- What was surprising?
- What was confusing to you?
- What were the pivotal moments?
- Who of the characters seemed most sympathetic? Why?
- Which characters were less admirable? Did they have redeeming qualities that helped you understand their behavior?
- Why do you think the playwright wrote this play?
- In Act IV, Thomas asserts (p. 81), "The most dangerous public enemy is the majority." Do you agree? Track Stockmann's evolving view of the majority through the play.
- Stockmann's final line (p. 105) is "The strongest man. He's always alone." Do you agree or disagree? What do you make of Catherine's and Petra's questioning response to his statement?
- To what extent has your understanding of and feelings about whistleblowing in particular and democracy/majority rule in general changed or evolved as a result of engaging with *An Enemy of the People*?



FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

DRAWING CONNECTIONS

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re7.1-III.a., TH:Re8.1-I.b., TH:Re8.1-II.b., TH:Re8.1-III.b., TH:Re9.1-III.c., TH:Cn10.1-I.a., TH:Cn11.1-I.a.; TH:Cn11.2-I.b.

How does this play connect to the world around us?

Individually or in small groups, ask students to find an article, news feature, interview, or other recent artifact from current events that reflects one of the play's themes or ideas. Then, have students share and discuss:

- Why is this theme or idea relevant today?
- Have they encountered the theme or idea in other artistic mediums or media?
- Does this new information alter your personal response to the production? If so, how?

What did we discover?

Ask each student to identify a topic in the play with which they were previously unfamiliar. The student should gather as much information as they can on this subject and share with the class. Sources could include articles, news features, videos, interviews, or other relevant artifacts. Guide students through the compilation of research and the structure of the sharing as best appropriate for your subject area and curricular goals.

FEEDBACK FOR MTC

We appreciate that you chose to bring Manhattan Theatre Club's production of *An Enemy of the People* into your classroom, and we hope that your students had a great experience with these activities and the play.

You'll receive an email at the end of the month in which your class had access to the performance recording. Please complete the Lights Up! Library Feedback Form linked in that email so that we can continue to improve this initiative.