



## Pre-performance questions

What other works of art have you seen or read that have included edgy, risky, or risqué humor? What parts of those works did you find funny? Were there any parts of those works that you found offensive? How did the work try to generate, or eliminate, offensiveness?

What is the definition of satire? What works have you seen or read that you consider satiric?

What is the definition of parody? What works have you seen or read that you consider parodic?

What kinds of tools do satire and parody use to make their subjects look ridiculous? Are these "fair"? Why or why not?

## Post-performance questions

Why is the get-rich-quick scheme that the two main characters cook up illegal? Do you think it is even possible? Why do you think something this outrageous is the main plot of the musical?

Would you describe this musical as a satire? As a parody? What other ways would you describe it?

Adolf Hitler is one of the most evil people in history. Why do you think the author used such an extreme figure? In what other ways does the musical use extremes in order to draw laughs?

Does anyone in the musical come off looking good? Who and why? Why might an author try to make all his characters look ridiculous?

Where in literature does the name of the character "Leopold Bloom" come from? Why do you think that is the name of one of the main characters?

## Activities

Rent the non-musical movie version of *The Producers*; this is the script that Mel Brooks used to create the musical theater piece. What kind(s) of music do you think would be appropriate for this kind of movie? Which moments of the movie do you think would be appropriate for musical numbers? Which moments of the movie do you think would be inappropriate for musical numbers?

Try creating a soundtrack for the movie: what kinds of music can you pick out that would help to convey the mood of the various different scenes? Then compare your soundtrack with the music you hear when you see the musical. How similar or different were the two soundtracks?

Pick other writers of satire (like George Orwell, Terry Pratchett, Mark Twain, Sacha Baron Cohen, or Stephen Colbert) or parody (like the Scary Movie series or other Mel Brooks works.) In what ways is *The Producers* similar? Which of the techniques in those other works can you find here?

Pick an idea or situation that you find ridiculous and write a satire or parody of it. In what ways can you make it look even more ridiculous by the way you write about it?

What are the differences between the film and musical versions of *The Producers*? Why do you think the musical made those changes?

## Did you know?

The script calls for the accountants' office to look "like a scene out of an Expressionistic silent German movie or out of Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*." Other stage directions include comparisons to *West Side Story*, *A Chorus Line*, the dancing of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and "Swedish moderne."

A much more serious satire on Adolf Hitler is Charlie Chaplin's 1940 film, *The Great Dictator*. The Three Stooges also did a parody of Hitler, called *You Nazty Spy!*

*The Producers* on Broadway won 12 Tony awards, breaking the 37-year record of 10, previously held by *Hello, Dolly!*

## Resources

A complete multi-activity lesson plan is available from PBS at [www.pbs.org/wnet/gper/education/plan\\_producers\\_overview.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gper/education/plan_producers_overview.html).

Help with translation of the Yiddish words in the musical is available at [www.yiddishdictionaryonline.com](http://www.yiddishdictionaryonline.com).

## At the first rehearsal

At the first rehearsal for *The Producers*, each of the members of the production team had a chance to speak to the cast and crew. Here are some highlights.

Director Bill Hamer read some quotes from author Mel Brooks. Here is Brooks on Hitler:

"How do you get even? How do you get even with the man? There's only one way to get even - you have to bring him down with ridicule. Because if you stand on a soapbox and you match him with rhetoric, you're just as bad as he is. But if you can make people laugh at him, you're one up on him. One of my lifelong jobs has been to make the world laugh at Adolf Hitler."

...and here is Brooks on show business:

"I went into show business to make a big noise."

Hamer said the goal of his production is to combine Brooks's outrageousness with "a sense of truth."

Music Director Paul Linnes said of Brooks, "he has production number-itis."

Lighting Designer Richard Schaefer summed up the feeling about the musical: "This is not a subtle show."

## For Students

Seattle Musical Theatre offers a free class on *The Producers*, September 28-October 1.

Middle and high school students are welcome to join us for the class, which runs Monday-Wednesday, 4-6, and Thursday, 7-10:30 and includes a free ticket to see the show. All classes will take place at our Magnuson Park theatre. Students will get a chance to act out scenes from the musical and to meet members of the cast and crew.

Space is extremely limited, so please contact us ASAP to reserve a space, at (206) 363-2809 or [jeremy@seattlemusicaltheatre.org](mailto:jeremy@seattlemusicaltheatre.org).

## For Teachers

The activities and questions in this guide incorporate EALRs in reading, writing, and the arts. For help applying specific activities to SPS standards, please contact [jeremy@seattlemusicaltheatre.org](mailto:jeremy@seattlemusicaltheatre.org).

Free tickets for teachers to see *The Producers*! Call the Box Office at (206) 363-2809 and mention this offer for your two free tickets to any performance.