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THE PLAY

Anatevka (ah-nah-TEV-kah) is small, rural Jewish town in Russia. The year 1905 is a turbulent one in Russia, but **Tevye** (Tevy-ya) the milkman is preoccupied with his daughters' marriages and his own dreams of being rich enough to support his family.

Tevye and his wife **Golde** (Goal-da) want to find good husbands for their daughters, but as a poor family unable to provide a **dowry**, they can't be picky. **Yente** (Yen-ta), the matchmaker, tries to arrange marriages for the girls.

Traditions, like matchmaking, keep order in the town. Jewish tradition dictates how to eat, sleep, dress, marry, etc. Tevye takes comfort in tradition because, "everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do." What happens, though, when Tevye's daughters have dreams that don't align with tradition?

These breaks from tradition and revolutionary stirrings across Russia cause upheaval in both Tevye's family and the village, as the characters struggle to keep their balance in the face of an uncertain future. ●

dowry – money or property brought by a bride to her marriage

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Now playing in the Fichandler

October 31, 2014 – January 4, 2015

Book by Joseph Stein

Music by Jerry Bock

Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

Directed by Molly Smith

Original choreography by
Jerome Robbins

Choreography adapted
and restaged by Parker Esse

Based on the stories of
Sholem Aleichem



"Every one of us is a fiddler on the roof, trying to scratch out a simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy... And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in a word – tradition!" – Tevye

MEET THE CREATORS



From left: Sheldon Harnick, Joseph Stein, (at piano) Jerry Bock and Jerome Robbins
Credit: Photofest

In 1960 bookwriter Joseph Stein, composer Jerry Bock, and lyricist Sheldon Harnick walked into the office of Harold Prince (producer of *West Side Story*) to propose a musical adaptation of Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Milkman* series.

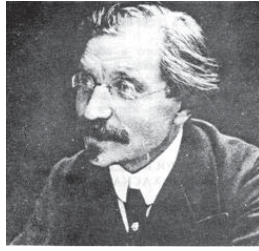
Bock and Harnick had won a Tony award and Pulitzer Prize for their musical *Fiorello!* Joseph Stein was already a Broadway success. Shows he had written and co-written, like *Enter Laughing*, had glowing reviews and big name stars.

Prince suggested adding director Jerome Robbins to the team. Robbins had just choreographed and directed the smash hit *West Side Story* on Broadway in 1957. The film version that he co-directed and choreographed went on to win ten Academy awards, including Best Picture and Best Director.

Prince felt that Robbins would make the characters relatable and get to the heart of *Fiddler*. After joining the team, Robbins repeatedly asked, "But what's the show about?" When replies repeated the plot, he would say, "I don't know what it's about, but it's not about that," and walk away. Finally, in a moment of frustration, Harnick yelled, "For God's sake, Jerry, it's about tradition!" Robbins replied, "That's it. Write about that." And so the opening number was born.

Fiddler on the Roof won nine Tony awards, including best musical, **score**, **book**, direction, choreography and even producer. It was the first musical to surpass 3,000 performances and held the record for the longest running musical for almost 10 years. ●

score – a musical's music and lyrics
book – a musical's script



Sholem Aleichem (1859-1917)

"To make people laugh was almost a sickness with me." – Sholem Aleichem

Sholem Aleichem (Sho-lem Ah-lay-hem) was the penname of Sholem Rabinovich, the preeminent writer of Yiddish literature. Aleichem's most beloved character was Tevye the Milkman, the stories of which inspired *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Aleichem grew up in a Russian shtetl like Anatevka. He fictionalized many aspects of his life in his stories. He had a unique talent for turning tragedy into comedy. He could find the funny side of any situation, no matter how grim.

He was the first to write popular literature in Yiddish, a language solely spoken by the Jews of Eastern Europe. This radical choice helped him to reach a wide audience through the Yiddish newspapers. It became a Friday night ritual for Jewish families across Europe and the United States to read his stories aloud. Aleichem's writings gave significance to the modern trials of the Jewish people and celebrated who they were. When Aleichem died in 1917, his was the largest funeral in New York City to date. ●

The Sholem Aleichem penname comes from the Hebrew greeting "shalom aleichem" which translates to "hello to you all."

The title "Fiddler on the Roof" came from the paintings by Marc Chagall, a Russian-Jewish painter. The inspiration especially came from "The Green Violinist," painted for the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre in 1920.



FIND
OUT
MORE

GLOSSARY

- Rabbi – a Jewish religious leader, who is a scholar in Jewish law and teachings
- Reb – a traditional form of address, like "sir," for a man who is not a rabbi
- L'Chaim – a Hebrew toast meaning "to life"
- Mazel Tov – a Jewish phrase for congratulations or wishing good luck.
- Chosen People – the Jewish people are considered (in Jewish and Christian tradition) as having been selected by God for a special relationship with Him.
- Fruma – a name meaning "pious one"



a! **ACTIVITY** Do your family members use words or phrases in different languages or dialects? Make a list of these words or phrases and find out their meanings and origins.

JEWISH TRADITIONS

MATCHMAKER, MATCHMAKER, MAKE ME A MATCH!



A traditional Jewish wedding starts with matchmaking. A matchmaker pairs two people together and brokers the agreement between the families. This tradition has modernized and still exists in some Jewish communities.

To begin the wedding, both bride and groom fast from dawn until the end of the marriage ceremony. The bride wears a veil to symbolize modesty and to show that physical attractiveness is less important than soul and character. All Jewish weddings are performed under a *chuppah* (hu-pah), or canopy, which symbolizes the new home the couple will build together.

During the ceremony, the bride circles around the groom seven times in accordance with the number of days it took their God to build the world. In doing so, the bride is figuratively building the walls of their new world together. Next, in the *Kiddushin* (kid-uh-shin), or blessing of betrothal, the rabbi prays over a glass of wine from which the couple drinks. At the end of the ceremony, a glass is placed on the ground and the groom shatters it with

his foot. This act connects the couple with the spiritual and national identity of the Jewish people and pays tribute to the destruction of the temple. This ritual is followed by shouts of “Mazel Tov!” to the couple.

The matchmaker’s name, “Yente,” is the Yiddish word for a very talkative woman or gossip. Another Yiddish word you might have heard is klutz, which is a clumsy person.

Next, there is a large meal with all the guests. The *Hora*, a traditional circle dance, is usually done during the reception. During the dance, the bride and groom, seated in chairs, are lifted up by the wedding party.

Shabbat: The Day of Rest

Shabbat, or Sabbath, is the Jewish day of rest. Shabbat is observed a few minutes before sundown on Friday until the appearance of three stars on Saturday evening. It begins by the matriarch of the house lighting candles and saying a prayer to welcome the spirit of the Sabbath. Absolutely no work is to be done during the Sabbath. It is a time to contemplate the spiritual aspects of life and spend time with their family. Shabbat is similar to the Christian Sunday. ●



ACTIVITY

Pick a tradition your family has and write about it. Research the origin of this tradition. Is it unique to your family or do other people share this tradition? Interview your family members about your tradition.

SETTING THE SCENE: THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT



Map of the Pale of Settlement.

Teve’s village of Anatevka was based on Sholem Aleichem’s own shtetl (village). Both shtetls were part of the **Pale** of Settlement, a single region in Russia in which permanent residency by Jewish citizens was allowed. Outside this region, Jewish residency was generally prohibited.

“The Pale” was first established in 1791. Officially, it was said to serve national interests by limiting competition between Russian and Jewish merchants and by encouraging settlement in new Russian territories. However, before the creation of the Pale, many tsars and tsarinas had tried to remove all the Jews from Russia unless they converted to Russian

Orthodox Christianity. Therefore, it is likely that the economic reasons were an excuse to segregate a minority group that the monarchy didn’t like.

Jews in Russia were also subject to restrictive laws called May laws that took away their rights. The shtetls also became the object of pogroms, or raids and massacres by Russian soldiers. Eventually many Jews were forced to leave their villages. Because of the harsh life in the Pale, approximately 2 million Jews emigrated from Russia, many to the United States. ●

pale – an area enclosed by a fence or boundary

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1905 AND 1917

“A revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation.”
–Vladimir Lenin

Perchik, the student from Kiev, brings news to Anatevka of the rest of Russia. Perchik supports new ideas and the uprisings across the country.

Like Perchik, many of the revolutionaries were students. Perchik says, “In this world, it’s the rich who are the criminals. Someday their wealth will be ours.”

In January 1905, Tsar Nicholas II ordered a massacre of peaceful demonstrators outside his Winter Palace. This event, known now as Bloody Sunday, sparked many more revolts across the country. The people of Russia lived in terrible poverty. The new working class, created by the Industrial Revolution, was not satisfied with an absolute monarchy. The workers hated that they worked so hard, but the majority of the wealth in their country was held by nobles who were rich by birth.



Revolutionaries march on the Red Square during the Revolution of 1917.

The tsar deemed those against him enemies of the state and exiled them to Siberia, a Russian region infamous for its remoteness and frigid temperatures.

The people’s anger and desire for equality would eventually lead to the Revolution of 1917, in which the people overthrew and killed the tsar and his family. Russia was on its way to establishing a communist government. ●

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
- Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
- Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
- Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
- Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
- Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.
- Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.
- Enjoy the show!**

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1. What traditions should be broken and which ones should be kept?
2. What have your parents or grandparents done or given up to make your life better?
3. Why are certain groups of people persecuted?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

- *Tevey the Dairyman and Motl the Cantor’s Son* by Sholem Aleichem
- *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem: The Remarkable Life and Afterlife of the Man Who Created Tevey* by Jeremy Dauber
- *Tradition!: The Highly Improbable, Ultimately Triumphant Broadway-to-Hollywood Story of Fiddler on the Roof, the World’s Most Beloved Musical* by Barbara Isenberg
- *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* by Alisa Solomon

MOVIES

- *Fiddler on the Roof: The Mirisch Production Company, 1971.*
- *Sholem Aleichem: Laughing in the Darkness: Riverside Films, 2011.*

ON THE WEB

- Producer Harold Prince discusses *Fiddler on the Roof* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ6KgnM3Vgk>
- Zero Mostel, original Tevey, performing “If I Were a Rich Man” at the 1971 Tony Awards <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahAOUIHZXlc>

MUSEUM EXHIBITS

- *Orphée* a mosaic by Marc Chagall, a permanent and public work on display at the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden.



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