

THEATRE OUEST END PRESENTS

THE COVENANT

Written by
ALICE ABRACEN

Directed by
MURDOCH SCHON



**NOV 15 —
DEC 03 2022**

SEGAL CENTER STUDIO

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Study Guide

About the Play

The Covenant was first developed at the National Theatre School of Canada. There it was written by Alice Abracen with dramaturgy by Fatma Sarah Elkashef. It won the Canadian Jewish Playwriting Competition in 2017 and received a reading at the Segal Centre for the Performing Arts in 2018. In 2019 *The Covenant* was read at Temple Emanu El Beth Sholom, directed by Eda Holmes. Theatre Ouest End's production at the Segal Centre Studio in 2022 marks the play's world premiere as a full production.

About the Playwright

ALICE ABRACEN (she/her) is an award-winning playwright, librettist, and videogame writer. Her work has been featured with McGill Opera's Beta Lab, Boca De Lupo's Red Phone Project, Alumnae Theatre (Toronto) Underlings Theatre (Boston), the Harvard Radcliffe Dramatic Club, the Montreal Fringe, the New Words Festival of NTS, and two Women Playwrights International Conferences (Cape Town & Santiago). *What Rough Beast* will be featured as Centaur Theatre's Brave New Looks in March 2023. Alice is one of the founders of Theatre Ouest End.

Creative Team

PETER – Jonathan Silver
HILDE – Holly Gauthier-Frankel
ERIC – Brett Watson
KARLA – Laura Mitchell
JUDI – Romi Shraiter

Director: Murdoch Schon
Playwright: Alice Abracen
Production Manager & Technical Director: Morgandy McKinnell & Lee Tucker
Stage Manager: Elyse Quesnel
Set Designer: Diana Uribe
Costume & Lighting Designer: Zoe Roux
Sound Designer: Joey Zaurrini
Set Build Shopdogs MTL
Fight Choreographer: Shawn Baichoo
NTS Dramaturg Sarah Elkashef
First developed at the National Theatre School of Canada
Printing: Henry Roth at Core Business Centre
Theatre Ouest End Producing Team: Ayesha Hasan, Ann Lambert, Laura Mitchell, Anissah Van Horn

Dear Educator,

First of all, Theatre *Ouest* End thanks you for bringing your students to this play. We hope you find this study guide helpful in introducing the play beforehand and discussing it afterwards. There are some geographical as well as political frames of reference that will make it more meaningful if you preview them. While there are elements of love and humour, it is first and foremost a Holocaust play and therefore sometimes difficult. We believe the learning will be well worth any discomfort.

Synopsis

Inspired by a true story, *The Covenant* is set in June, 1944 at [Theresienstadt](#). Here, international Red Cross dignitaries are invited to marvel at this lively, cultural town which appears to be a haven for Jewish people in the heart of Czechoslovakia. Little do they know that this paradise is a ghetto and concentration camp elaborately staged in order to conceal Nazi crimes against humanity. Forced to participate in the terrible charade, the determined politician Peter and the dedicated doctor Hilde find their idealism, their faith, and their love put to a terrible test, as we see what shaped their lives together over the past years until this juncture in time.

Vocabulary Words- *Match the word with the definition*

Holocaust Genocide Concentration Camp Ghetto Kristallnacht Red Cross

A part of a city in which members of a [minority group](#) live, especially as a result of political, social, legal, environmental or economic pressure. Are often known for being more [impoverished](#) than other areas of the city

The occasion of concerted violence by Nazis throughout Germany and Austria against Jewish people and their property on the night of November 9–10, 1938

Also known as the Shoah, the genocide of European Jews during World War II

An international organization responsible for verifying the fair treatment of the sick and wounded during wartime

A place where large numbers of people, especially political prisoners or members of persecuted minorities, are deliberately imprisoned in a relatively small area with inadequate facilities, sometimes to provide forced labor or to await mass execution.

The deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying that nation or group.

Location of camp/village of Theresienstadt



Pre-show discussion questions

- 1) This play takes place during a war that took place over 80 years ago. Do you think it is important to learn about events that happened so long ago? Why?
- 2) A major theme of the play is the prejudice and discrimination that led to the Holocaust. Can you think of any current events happening in the world today wherein similar hatreds are occurring?
- 3) This play is called *The Covenant*, which means an agreement. Can you think of examples of covenants, both individual and collective, that we have as a society today?
- 4) The two main characters in the play have very different views. Hilde is devout and Peter believes in a political system that does not believe in religion. Can you think of other examples from plays, novels, or films where two characters believe in very different things but still have a relationship?
- 5) This play jumps backwards and forwards in time. It is not a film where flashbacks are easily portrayed. How do you think the playwright and director will be able to take the audience along?
- 6) Theresienstadt is the setting of the play. What Theresienstadt actually is and how the Nazis try to portray it are very different places. Why is it so frightening when those in positions of power manipulate the truth? What can we do as a society to stop this?
- 7) Although the play has 5 characters, there is another character we do not hear from, but that the main characters speak to. Is speaking to God the same as praying?

Themes

This activity can be used before or after the play, or both.

Encourage your students to listen for the following lines. The speakers are identified. Encourage them to identify the audience, the context, as well as the implicit important thematic topics. If the same lines are discussed during post show discussions see if they have changed their opinions.

1. **Peter** - At least I walked this earth. When was the last time you did that?
Genesis?
 - Audience-
 - Theme-
 - Context-

2. Eric- Let's make this place a real utopia!

- Audience-
- Theme-
- Context-

3. Hilde- My faith challenges me to heal the world.

- Audience-
- Theme-
- Context-

4. Hilde- Does it have to be you?

- Audience-
- Theme
- Context-

5. Peter- If we refuse to be useful they will find others who will be useful

- Audience-
- Theme-
- Context-

6. Judi- I want to go East.

- Audience
- Theme-
- Context-

7. Karla- And if they don't need all of us?

- Audience-
- Theme-
- Context-

Post Play Discussion Questions

1. What covenants are made throughout the play? How and when are they maintained or broken?
2. “How is the set coming?” Eric asks, referring to the town. The role of theatre and the arts is very important in the play. Considering the role of Karla, and the village itself, give some examples.
3. Peter has a chance to get out of Germany. Do you think staying was a difficult decision for him? What were some of the reasons you believe he stayed?
4. “We were only following orders” is a common excuse given by those committing unspeakably horrible crimes. Does the character of Eric have any redeeming qualities? Give examples.
5. Judy is the youngest character in the play. Are there any parallels between the experiences she goes through in the play and any conflicts young people may experience today? How is her understanding of the camp different than that of the other characters?
6. Peter and Hilde have very defined and different relationships with religion and God at the start of the play. How does that relationship evolve and change for each of them?
7. The Nazis were very transparent in their intentions regarding the destruction of the Jewish people. Why do you think they would even bother setting up with and going through with a charade like the village of Theresienstadt?