

PARAMOUNT
THEATRE

THE PRODUCERS

STUDY GUIDE

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MUSIC AND LYRICS BY MEL BROOKS. BOOK BY MEL BROOKS AND THOMAS MEEHAN.
A NEW MEL BROOKS MUSICAL. DIRECTED BY JIM CORTI.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>The Producers</i> Synopsis.....	page 3
Characters at Play	page 7
History of <i>The Producers</i>	page 9
The Satire of <i>The Producers</i>	page 10
What Exactly is a Producer.....	page 11
Other Jobs in Theater	page 12
Theater Superstitions.....	page 14
Post-Show Discussion	page 15
Post-Show Activity	page 16
Cited Sources	page 17

THE PRODUCERS SYNOPSIS



1959, New York City. Producer Max Bialystock is getting ready for the opening of his newest show. And, it's a total flop. In fact, it's a flop in a long line of flops. Max begins to daydream about when he was "the king of old Broadway." He had huge successes and was praised by thousands. Now he's gone from being at the top of his game to, well, almost the bottom. Max has taken to sleeping in his office out of desperation. On June 16th, 1959, Max is sleeping on his office couch when he hears a knock at the door from a Leopold Bloom.

Leopold Bloom is an accountant with Whitehall and Marks and is there to examine Max's financial books. Max is annoyed, but lets Leo in. As Leo begins to look over Max's books, there is a knock on the door from one of Max's many investors. Leo is quite taken aback to see an older woman who refers to herself as "Hold Me-Touch Me" has arrived for some intimate time with Max. Max rushes Leo into the bathroom while trying to collect a check from Hold Me-Touch Me. Despite being asked to stay in the bathroom, Leo accidentally walks in on Max and Hold Me-Touch Me as they are in a moment of passion. Max sends Hold Me-Touch Me away with the promise of continuing their meeting later in the week.



Leo apologizes for interrupting Max but informs him there seems to be a problem with his books. "There's two thousand dollars unaccounted for," Leo informs Max. Max tells him the funds have already been spent and suggests Leo just move some numbers around to hide the missing money. Leo reluctantly agrees that since the two thousand dollars is such a small amount, it can likely be hidden from the IRS with relative ease. While moving the numbers around, Leo is struck with an amusing thought. "Hmmmm. Yes. It's quite possible. If he were certain that the show

would fail, a man could make a fortune." This sentence grabs Max's attention and he encourages Leo to continue his thought. How exactly would they go about doing this?



Leo explains that if Max could raise, "a million, put on your hundred-thousand-dollar flop, and keep the rest." Max can think of nothing else. He decides that he and Leo need to raise two million dollars-one million for Max, one million for Leo-and put on the worst show Broadway has ever seen. Leo is quite nervous at the thought of this idea, and no matter how much Max encourages Leo with a, "we can do it," Leo rushes away.

While back at the office, Leo finds himself among his accountant coworkers who are all, “very, very, very, very, very, very, very, unhappy.” Leo is unhappy too, especially after being yelled at by his boss upon his return to the office. It isn’t long before Leo begins to daydream about what it might be like to be a producer. It is during this incredible daydream that Leo has the realization, “stop the world, I wanna get on!” Leo quits his job right there and rushes back to Max’s office to begin his journey as a producer. Max is quite happy to see Leo again, and they spend the entire next day and night reading through scripts, trying to find the worst script ever written. Leo has just about reached his breaking point when Max believes he’s found the perfect flop. In fact, he thinks, “This play has got to close on page 4.” The show is titled *Springtime For Hitler, A Gay Romp with Adolf and Eva at Berchtesgaden*. They see that the author, Franz Liebkind, lives locally and they quickly run to ask him for the rights to produce his show.



When they arrive, they find Franz Liebkind on his roof feeding his beloved pigeons. Both the pigeons and Franz are dressed in shocking attire. Liebkind is wearing lederhosen and a German Army helmet, while his pigeons are dressed in Nazi armbands and German helmets. Max and Leo quickly begin to faun over Liebkind’s show with Max declaring, “we think it’s a masterpiece.” Liebkind is beside himself and excitedly begins to share the news with his beloved pigeons. Despite being extremely flattered that Max and Leo want to produce his show, he tells them he will not provide them with the rights to his show until they recite The Siegfried Oath. Max and Leo begrudgingly recite the The Siegfried Oath*, and they have themselves a show! Next, they move on to find their director.

Max and Leo call upon whom they believe is one of the worst directors, Mr. Roger De Bris. They are greeted by Roger’s “common-law assistant” Carmen. Carmen calls for Roger who enters in a stunning gown, all set and ready to go to the choreographer’s ball that evening. Roger says that he’s read the script and loves it, but he doesn’t think it’s the right show for him to direct. Before he says no completely, he calls upon the rest of his production team to see what they think. Max and Leo are greeted by Roger’s set designer, costume designer, choreographer, and lighting designer, each one with their own distinct personality. Despite Roger’s continued protestations, Max tells Roger to, “think of...the Tony!” Roger and his production team can think of nothing better, and Roger agrees to sign on to direct.



With their production chosen and director signed on, Max and Leo move to the discussion of auditions and casting. While sitting in Max's office, they get a knock at the door, and in walks Ulla Inga Hansen Bensen Yonsen Tallen-Hallen Svaden-Svanson. Ulla says she would like to audition for the show. Ulla sings a rousing number called, "When You Got It, Flaunt It." Max immediately offers her a role in the show and even gives her a job as their secretary while they wait to cast the rest of the show.

Confident their perfect plan is falling into place, Max decides to head to Palm Springs to hit up his investors for the two million dollars. All of Max's investors gladly hand over the money he's asking for, and Max and Leo are on their way to creating and producing the biggest flop in Broadway history. Once back from Palm Springs, Max and Leo get to work on casting the rest of their show and putting a down payment on the theater. Franz Liebkind becomes frustrated with the progress of the auditions and throws a fit. He shows the room how he thinks the role needs to be played, and Max declares, "That's our Hitler!"



Finally, Max and Leo have everything in place for opening night. In a fit of excitement, Leo wishes the creative team "Good luck!" Everyone comes to a complete halt backstage and explain to Leo the bad luck it brings to wish anyone good luck in theater on opening night. And sure enough, moments later their leading man, Franz Liebkind, breaks his leg offstage. Roger is convinced that they'll have to cancel the



show, while Max decides to convince Roger that he himself can take over the role. Roger decides, "All right, you're right. I'll do it! By God, I'll do it!" With what they believe to be their biggest crisis averted, *Springtime for Hitler* has its opening night. After all of their hard work and dedication, Max and Leo have a... hit! They can't believe it. They actually have a hit. Critics are calling it, "A satiric masterpiece," and "A surprise smash!"

Leo and Max are beside themselves. Leo feels there's "no way out." Not only can they not pay back their investors, but they quickly discover that Franz Liebkind is not pleased with the way his show was received. Liebkind is furious, screaming that "You made a fool out of Hitler!" He begins shooting at Max and Leo, as well as Roger and Carmen. Max

stops Liebkind and says who he should really be mad at is the actors. After all, the audience was laughing because, "the actors were making fun of him." Liebkind agrees, and is about to leave to "kill all zee actors," but before he can leave, the police show up. The police quickly find two binders, one marked "Show to the I.R.S." and the other marked "Never Show to the I.R.S." Since Leo has hidden himself, Max is the only one dragged away by the police. Ulla finds Leo in his hiding place and convinces him to take the two million dollars and run off to Rio with her. Leo thinks that sounds a lot better than jail, and they both head to Rio and leave Max in the wind.

While in jail, Max receives a postcard from Leo explaining where he and Ulla have been. Max becomes so furious that he has a complete mental breakdown. After his breakdown, Max heads to trial. He is quickly found guilty, but right before sentencing, Leo enters the courtroom with Ulla. Leo tells the judge, "Your Honor, this was all my scheme. I wish to turn myself in, and here is the two million dollars we stole." The judge says, "Gentlemen, it breaks my heart to break up such a beautiful friendship. So I won't. Five years in the state penitentiary at Sing Sing!"

Both Max and Leo go to jail and, of course, spend their time producing their next show. Both men receive news from the governor, "Gentlemen, you are hereby granted a full pardon for having - through song and dance - brought joy and laughter into the hearts of every murderer, rapist and sex maniac in Sing Sing." They leave prison as two friends and two successful producers.



**The Siegfried Oath is a comedic take on the Hitler oath. It's also known as the Soldier's Oath, and was a commitment of loyalty to Hitler from German officers and soldiers during WWII.*

CHARACTERS AT PLAY



MAX BIALYSTOCK

*Blake Hammond**

Once “The king of old Broadway,” Max is a Broadway producer down on his luck. He’s had flop after flop and can’t seem to get back on his feet. He’s taken to living in his office and swindles every dime he can out of his dearly devoted investors who all happen to be rich, elderly women. When Leo Bloom walks in, he begins to feel that his life is finally on a turn for the better. Leo gives him the greatest idea he’s heard for a scheme that will set them up for life.



LEO BLOOM

Jake Morrissy

Leo is quite a nervous man who mostly keeps to himself. He is an accountant for a company called Whitehall and Marks, and he comes to Max’s office to do his financial books. He quickly becomes swept up in Max’s eventful life, and Max tries to convince Leo they should work together on the biggest financial scheme Broadway will have ever seen. At first, Leo is far too overwhelmed to agree, telling Max, “I’m afraid you’ve made a terrible error in judgement. You’ve mistaken me for someone with a spine.” Once Leo heads back to his office though, he can think of nothing else but becoming a producer, and he decides to quit his job and join Max.



FRANZ LIEBKIND

*Ron E. Rains**

Franz Liebkind is the playwright that Max and Leo are putting all of their hopes in, having written *Springtime For Hitler*, *A Gay Romp with Adolf* and *Eva at Berchtesgaden*. He spends much of his free time on his roof, tending to his beloved pigeons. He has dressed them in Nazi armbands and even taught them to perform the Nazi salute. More than anything, he seems to be homesick, and he misses “the hills and dales and vales and trails of old Bavaria.” He becomes extremely excited at the prospect of his musical being put on Broadway.

*denotes members of Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.

CHARACTERS AT PLAY (CONT.)



ROGER DEBRIS

*Sean Blake**

Roger is a New York theatrical director who Max considers to be one of the worst directors in all of New York. Max and Leo believe he will be the perfect director for their show. Roger has a larger than life personality and up until this point, he has been known mostly for directing “frivolous musicals.” *Springtime for Hitler* might be his one chance to change all of that, but he would prefer that no matter what, they “keep it gay.”



CARMEN GHIA

Adam Fane

Carmen is Roger’s “common-law assistant.” He stands by Roger for every decision both professionally and personally. He is very protective of his relationship with Roger and feels *Springtime for Hitler* will be his shot at finally winning a Tony Award.



ULLA INGA HANSEN BENSEN YONSEN TALLEN-HALLEN SAVDEN-SVANSON

*Elyse Collier**

Ulla is a young woman from Sweden who hopes to make her Broadway debut with Max and Leo’s production of *Springtime for Hitler*. Max and Leo are both infatuated with her beauty, and she blows them away with her amazing audition. Max and Leo decide to find a place for her in the show, as well as in their office. Ulla not only has amazing theatrical talents, but can also tidy up and redesign a space like no one else.

*denotes members of Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.

THE HISTORY OF THE PRODUCERS

“We can do it, we can make our dreams come true.”

The title of James Robert Parish’s 2007 biography on Mel Brooks is titled, *It’s Good to be the King*. Not only is that a lyric from *The Producers* and a famous line from the Mel Brooks film *History of the World*, but it is also quite an apt way to describe Mel Brooks. Since the 50s, Mel Brooks has been leaving audiences in stitches. Starting with his writing on television sketch shows *New Faces* and *Your Show of Shows* in the 50s, all the way to voicing a character in *Hotel Transylvania 3* in 2018. Despite countless credits as an actor, writer and director, his very first film, *The Producers*, still has us all rolling in the aisles.

The Producers was released as a film in 1968, despite turmoil throughout the making of the film. Brooks had a very specific vision for the movie, and was less than kind to those who might try to change or edit his vision. While critical reviews of the film were mixed, audiences loved it. Mel Brooks even won an Oscar in Best Writing, Story and Screenplay for the film. Audiences continued to enjoy the film and its humor for decades, and while Brooks was approached a few different times to turn the show into a musical, he always refused. That is, until he was persuaded by producer David Geffen. Geffen convinced Brooks that creating a musical from the film would add to the legacy of the film, and wouldn’t take anything away from it, as Brooks feared it might.

The Producers had an out of town tryout in Chicago, IL at the Cadillac Palace Theatre on February 1, 2001. It was instantly a hit and won rave reviews from critics. The show transferred to Broadway and opened on April 19, 2001. The show again was a hit, starring both Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick. At the 2001 Tony Awards, *The Producers* walked away with 12 Tonys which is still the record for most Tonys won by a single show. *The Producers* also broke the record for largest single day box-office ticket sales, making more than 3 million dollars in a single day. The show ran for 2,502 performances and closed April 22, 2007.

In 2005, a movie version of the Broadway musical was created, also starring Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick. While it did not find as much success as it’s stage musical counterpart, it is still enjoyed by many.

PARAMOUNT THEATRE 2019 PRODUCTION



1968 TRAILER



2005 TRAILER

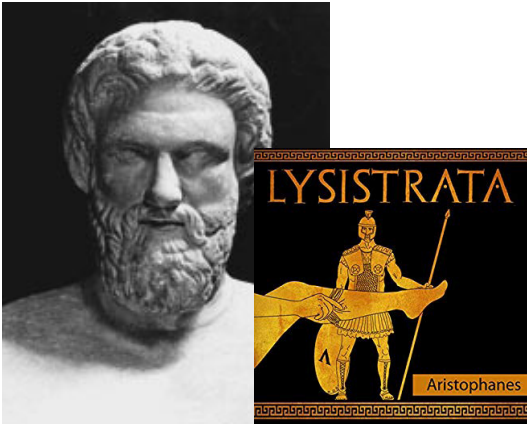


THE SATIRE OF THE PRODUCERS

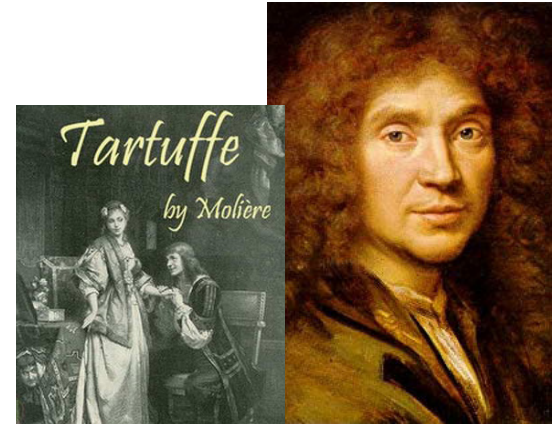
“Humor is just another defense against the universe.” - Mel Brooks

The Producers uses satire throughout, poking fun at nearly every character, even Hitler himself.
But, what exactly is satire?

Satire is defined as a literary device used to ridicule human vices. Satire can include using ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody or caricature.



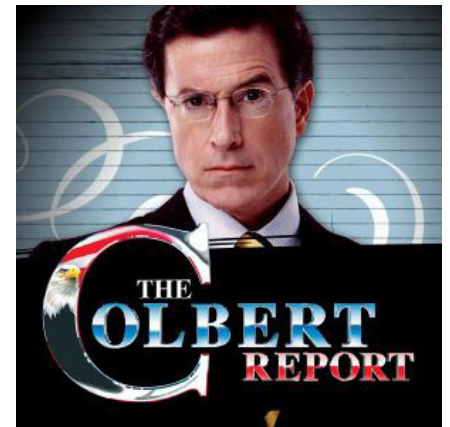
Satire was being used as far back as 5th century in Athens. Aristophanes used satire in several of his works, including Lysistrata.



Molière used satire in his play Tartuffe, and even George Bernard Shaw considered himself a satirist.

Some current examples of satire include:

The Simpsons
The Daily Show
The Colbert Report
Saturday Night Live



WHAT EXACTLY IS A PRODUCER?

“I wanna be a producer, show the world just what I’ve got.”

A producer is the person charged with the development of a show from start to finish. Often they will be providing the money for the production, or more likely, they will be helping provide money to the production from many different people. They also have final say when it comes to almost every decision in the production, from designs to actors.

There are also different levels of producers:

ABOVE THE TITLE PRODUCERS:

Above the Title Producers get their name above the title of the show which they are producing. They also may be investing their own money in the production, or be the person who puts together an investment group of people. Perks include being invited to producer meetings, show memorabilia, and the ability to purchase a Tony if the show they produce wins one.

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS:

Associate Producers enjoy many of the same perks as above the title producers do except they are listed below the title of the production. They also do not get the perk of being able to purchase a Tony Award if the production wins one.

PRODUCERS:

Anyone else who would like to invest money into a show, but not as much as an above the title or associate producer, is simply known as a producer. The perks of being a producer are attending the opening night party, having the ability to order house seats for a show, and being able to call themselves a producer of the production they are investing in.



OTHER JOBS IN THEATER

“I should ask my production team what they think.”

Most people are familiar with the actors and director of any particular production and now may be aware of the producers as well. But there are many other people involved in the creation of a show.



“THIS IS MY SET DESIGNER, BRYAN.”

The set designer is the person charged with designing the look and feel of the set. They’ll work one on one with a director, listening to the director’s overall ideas for the story, and they will then bring that world to life through their set. The designer will also often need to work closely with a technical director. The technical director will be in charge of constructing the actual set, and they’ll make sure the designer’s work can come to life onstage.

The Producers Scenic Designer: William Boles

Paramount Theatre Resident Technical Director: Jason Pikscher

Paramount Theatre Resident Assistant Technical Director: Kelly Steimel

“AND HERE’S MY COSTUME DESIGNER, KEVIN.”

The costume designer will help bring characters to life on stage through their work. They too will talk and work closely with a director to figure out the world they are trying to create for these characters. After those conversations, the designer will design the costumes for that world and after approval from a director, will then make or build the costumes. At Paramount Theatre, most of the building and purchasing of the costumes come from our very own costume shop.

The Producers Costume Designer: Jordan Ross

The Producers Assistant Costume Designer: Amanda Vander Byl

Paramount Theatre Resident Costume Shop Manager: Matt Guthier

Paramount Theatre Resident Costume Shop & Design Associate: Christina Leinicke

OTHER JOBS IN THEATER (CONT.)

“NEXT, SCOTT, MY CHOREOGRAPHER...”

In musical theater, a choreographer is in charge of helping tell the story of the production through dance. They will work closely with a director and musical director to make sure all of the dancing fits within the story and music of the show. They often will work with an assistant and dance captain. These two people help make sure that the choreographers work is communicated clearly to the performers onstage. Throughout the run of the show, they see to it that the choreography stays looking sharp.

The Producers Choreographer: Brenda Didier
The Producers Associate Choreographer: Tiffany Krause
The Producers Dance Captain: Sawyer Smith

“AND, AH, FINALLY, LAST AND LEAST, MY LIGHTING DESIGNER, SHIRLEY MARKOWITZ.”

Lighting is another incredibly valuable tool in the storytelling of a production. Not only does a lighting designer need to make sure the actors and set are visible, they are in charge of helping create mood and setting with their design. Along with other designers, they will need to speak and work directly with the director of the production to understand their vision for the show. Once they have those meetings, they work closely with their assistant to help bring that vision to life. At Paramount Theatre, they also work closely with our lighting, sound and media supervisor as well as our technical director, to make sure their design can work within the theater.

The Producers Lighting Designer: Jesse Klug
The Producers Assistant Lighting Designer: Aaron Lorenz
Paramount Theatre Resident Lighting, Sound, & Media Supervisor: Alex Buholzer

This is only a small taste of all the extremely talented people involved in putting on a major musical production.

THEATER SUPERSTITIONS

“It’s bad luck to say ‘good luck’ on opening night.”

It’s true, theater professionals wouldn’t dare utter, “good luck” to someone before a performance. Instead, we often say “break a leg!” But, why? Where did this superstition come from, and what other superstitions are held in the theater community?

#1: SAYING “BREAK A LEG” INSTEAD OF “GOOD LUCK”

There are a few different origins for this saying. One possible origin comes from the days of vaudeville. Theaters would have actors wait just offstage, unless they were granted the privilege of performing that evening. If they were able to step onstage, or “break” onto the stage, they would get to perform that evening. “Breaking” onto a stage was the only way they would be paid.



#2: THEATERS MUST ALWAYS USE A GHOSTLIGHT

Almost every single theater will use a ghost light at night after a performance is over. Logic might suggest that a ghostlight is present to make sure that if someone enters in a dark theater, they’ll still be able to see and won’t hurt themselves by running into or tripping over anything. Some people also believe that the ghostlight serves the purpose of keeping at bay any spirits lurking within the theater. Many theaters are said to be haunted by spirits, and these lights are supposed to provide them with enough comfort to keep them from bringing harm to anyone working within the theater.



#3: NEVER SAY THE WORD “MACBETH” IN A THEATER

Unless you are in an actual production of Macbeth, theater lore suggests that you should never say the word “Macbeth” inside of a theater. The origin of this superstition varies. Some believe the first actor to ever portray Macbeth died tragically during the performance. Others believe that the play itself is so violent that even mentioning its name in a theater will bring unkind energy into your theater and onto your current production. Don’t worry, though. If you happen to slip up, you can exit the theater, spin around in a circle three times, and spit. According to legend, that should appease the spirits that be, and your production should go on with no bad energy. to pitch”



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION

1. *The Producers* is partly a love letter to Broadway. What nods to Broadway did you notice throughout the show? What references were made to other productions or other theaters?
2. Director Jim Corti said he wanted New York to be visible in the background for much of the show. Why do you think he asked for this design choice? How do you think it added to the action/environment of the show to always be able to see the city?
3. From dancers jumping into the pit to show girls appearing out of filing cabinets, what technical elements surprised you the most? What did you enjoy most about those moments?
4. There is a ton of comedy in this show, which moves at a breakneck speed. Which comedic moments did you enjoy the most in this production?
5. Critics in *The Producers* love *Springtime For Hitler*, calling it a “satiric masterpiece.” What about the show do you think led them to believe the show was satire instead of sincere?
6. The music and lyrics of *The Producers* was written by comedy legend Mel Brooks. The film version of this story won him an oscar in 1969. What are some current examples of satire today? Do you see any entertainment today that could have been influenced by Mel Brooks’ humor?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY

Currently on Broadway there are 10 shows that were movies before they were musicals:

*Waitress, Pretty Woman: The Musical, King Kong, The Lion King, Anastasia,
Mean Girls, The Band's Visit, Aladdin, Kinky Boots and Frozen*

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.

Pick your favorite movie and decide how it might be turned into a musical. Once you've picked your show, figure out how you would pitch it to producers to get them to invest.

Things to think about when choosing your film turned musical.

1. What about the story makes you think it would be a great musical? *Example:* Is it a story that's already super popular, is there already music in the movie?
2. Which scenes do you think could be turned into musical numbers? *Example: The Lion King, Aladdin, Frozen* - they already have great musical numbers. If there's not already music in your movie, which scenes do you think lend themselves to the best musical numbers?
3. What kind of set do you think your show would have? *Example: Waitress* has a proscenium filled with pies. *Mean Girls* does a lot of fun choreography within a school lunchroom.
4. Are there any fantastical technical elements that would draw a crowd to your show? *Example: King Kong* and *The Lion King* use incredible puppets to help in their storytelling.

After you've chosen your show, you should be able to present it to a producer using a short five-minute pitch.

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