Welcome to Cuesheet, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC. This Cuesheet is designed to help you enjoy the performance of Dreams in the Golden Country.

The Statue of Liberty marks topics for discussion or activities you may want to do with other students, friends, or family.

What’s in Cuesheet?

What Happens in Dreams in the Golden Country? pages 2–3

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The play begins in 1934. Actress Zipporah Feldman has returned to New York after performing in Europe. During an interview with reporters, Zipporah Feldman remembers her original trip to America as an *immigrant* when she was twelve years old.

Flashback: In 1903, Zipporah (Zippy), her older sister, Tovah, and their mother arrive at *Ellis Island* after *emigrating* from a small town in Russia. Their father had emigrated several years earlier. Although he was a violinist in Russia, Mr. Feldman has worked in a clothing factory to earn money for his family’s passage to America.

Although the family is happy to be reunited, they face difficult adjustments. In particular, Mrs. Feldman worries that her family is ignoring their Jewish traditions.

As time passes, Zippy learns English and makes *accelerated* progress in school. She also acts in plays in the *Yiddish Theater*. Tovah works to bring *labor union* protection to factory employees. Mr. Feldman is invited to join an orchestra. Mrs. Feldman starts sewing clothes at home and begins learning English.

Meanwhile, Tovah and Sean, an Irish-Catholic neighbor, fall in love. Despite the difference in their religions, they get married. Learning the news, Mrs. Feldman declares that Tovah is dead to her.

A fire in the Diamond *Shirtwaist* Factory traps the employees. Frightened that Tovah could be inside on union business, Mrs. Feldman allows her anger about Tovah’s marriage to fade. Although many die, Tovah is safe.

Reunited with Tovah, Mrs. Feldman accepts the changes that have taken place in her family and their new life in America.
Flashback: Back to the Future

A flashback interrupts the progress of a play or story to include an incident that took place at an earlier time. A flashback gives the audience information that helps them better understand the present situation. In *Dreams in the Golden Country*, the flashback helps the audience understand the experiences of a family of Russian-Jewish immigrants.

The Golden Country

Before the performance, discuss what immigrants might mean when they say a country is “a golden country.”

After the performance, discuss what caused Mrs. Feldman to use the phrase “golden country” to mean its opposite – as a criticism of America?

*During the performance, notice how Zipporah removes parts of her costume to reveal this costume underneath. The costume change marks the beginning of the flashback to 1903 when Zipporah/Zippy was a twelve-year old immigrant. (Zippy is played by Rana Kay.)*

*When Papa gives Mama a sewing machine, it marks the beginning of her adjustment to America. (From left: Laura Giannarelli and Terence Aselford)*
Fiction and Fact

Based on Real Events

Dreams in the Golden Country is historical fiction. It combines real settings, characters, and events with characters and a plot that are not real. Read the facts behind the play.

Running for Their Lives

For centuries, Jews were not allowed to settle in the land ruled by the Russian Czar (pronounced ZAR). Thousands of Polish Jews came under the control of the Czar when sections of Poland became part of the Russian Empire in the 18th century.

In 1791, the Czar declared that Jews must live separately from other Russians in an area called the Pale of Settlement. When Russian revolutionaries assassinated Czar Alexander II in 1881, the new Czar used the Jews as the scapegoat for the crime. Alexander III began a series of pogroms (puh-GRUHMZ), brutal attacks against Jewish settlements and inhabitants. The pogroms, along with additional restrictions on Jewish life, created a huge wave of Jewish emigration.

If You Had to Leave...

As a result of poverty and pogroms, Russian Jews left their homeland with few possessions. Mrs. Feldman, Tovah, and Zippy arrived in America with one trunk and two small suitcases.

If you could take only one small suitcase before leaving your home forever, what would you pack?

scapegoat—someone unfairly made to take the blame for the mistakes or crimes of others

The scraps of fabric on the floor and bolts of fabric fueled the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company so that it spread quickly.

Jews were forbidden to live outside the Pale of Settlement.
From the Ashes

On March 25, 1911, the building which contained the Triangle Shirtwaist Company caught fire. Approximately 275 employees, mostly Jewish immigrants ages 13–23, were inside. Within 15 minutes, 146 died. The death toll was especially high because the factory owners illegally kept the doors to fire escapes locked.

People were outraged by the tragedy and called for laws to improve workers’ safety. The New York state government passed such laws. Workers saw the advantage of having someone to fight for their rights, and joined unions.

Making Sense of a New Land

Beginning in the 19th century, theater groups presented plays in Yiddish to Jewish communities throughout Europe. Yiddish was a shared Jewish language. It allowed Jews who spoke different national languages to communicate with one another. For some Jews, Yiddish was the only language they knew. Jewish immigrants relied on familiar things like the Yiddish theater to help make sense of the language and customs of their new home.

Our American Vocabulary

This play focuses on the Feldman family’s adjustment to America. However, America was also adjusting to the culture of its immigrants. Many words from immigrants’ original languages — including Yiddish — became part of America’s vocabulary.

Survey people to see if they know the meaning of these Yiddish words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yiddish Word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chutzpah</td>
<td>HOOT-spah</td>
<td>bold rudeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glitch</td>
<td></td>
<td>defect or malfunction in a machine or plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kibitz</td>
<td>KIB-its</td>
<td>offer advice or criticism; to joke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kvetch</td>
<td></td>
<td>complain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oy</td>
<td></td>
<td>expression showing annoyance or frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schlemiel</td>
<td>shleh-MEEL</td>
<td>awkward or unlucky person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shlep</td>
<td></td>
<td>move slowly or with difficulty; carry with difficulty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Triangle Shirtwaist Company was located on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the building. The firemen’s ladders could not reach higher than the sixth floor and the pumps could not force the water to the highest floors.
God and Torah

Judaism is a religion based on the central ideas of God and Torah (TOR-ah). In Judaism, there is one eternal, all-knowing Supreme Being — God. God’s instructions for living a Jewish life are contained in the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. All Jews have a responsibility to study the Torah so they can learn, live, and teach God’s words.

There are three major groups within Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. All groups share the belief in God and Torah. However, each group has a different interpretation about which religious rituals and traditions apply to everyday life.

The Feldmans are Orthodox Jews, which means they live according to all 613 commandments in the Torah. During the performance, watch and listen for the ways that the family’s religion is part of their everyday lives.

**Watch** how Mrs. Feldman keeps her hair covered at all times by either a wig or a scarf.

Orthodox girls and women dress modestly by wearing long-sleeved tops and long skirts. Also, for reasons of modesty, a married Orthodox woman keeps her hair covered around everyone except her husband.

The Torah is traditionally written by hand in scroll form. The man working on this Torah has an untrimmed beard, typical of Orthodox Jewish men. During the play, listen for the conversations about Mr. Feldman’s beard and its importance as a sign of his Jewish beliefs.

Orthodox Jewish males wear a four-cornered undershirt with fringes (called tzitzes) under their regular shirt. These fringes are a reminder of God’s commandments.

**Look carefully** at Mr. Feldman’s clothing to see the four clusters of fringe showing at his waist.

Orthodox Jewish males wear a four-cornered undershirt with fringes (called tzitzes) under their regular shirt. These fringes are a reminder of God’s commandments.

Tzitzes is a Hebrew word that is pronounced with a short "i," short "e," and "s" ending. This is the pronunciation used by Jews from central and eastern Europe, like the Feldmans.
rituals—sets of actions that are always performed in the same way, as part of a religious ceremony

Watch how the actor lights candles and says prayers to begin the Sabbath.

The Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and lasts until sundown on Saturday. This special day is a weekly reminder of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Orthodox Jews avoid work and spend their time in prayer, quiet thought, and socializing with friends and family. The woman lighting the candles closes her eyes and moves her hands over the candles as part of the ritual welcoming the Sabbath. This is one of many rituals shared by all Jews.

Listen for Mr. Feldman’s line, “Sean will come in after dinner…. He’ll turn off the lights when we’re ready for bed. He’s going to be our Sabbath goy.”

The Torah commands Jews not to kindle a fire on the Sabbath. With the invention of electricity, the commandment came to mean that Orthodox Jews could not turn lights off or on. Jewish families would hire a goy, a non-Jew, for the job of turning off lights which had been switched on before the start of the Sabbath.

Listen for Mrs. Feldman reciting Kaddish, a prayer which begins, “Yitgadal ve-yitkadash, Shmei rabbah…”

For whom is the prayer said?

Kaddish is more than 2000 years old. Although this prayer is recited in honor of the dead, the prayer says nothing about death. It’s theme is the greatness of God. Jews recite Kaddish to show their faith in God in the midst of tragedy and grief. The opening words mean “May His name be magnified and made holy…”

The Sabbath has such an important place in Judaism that even a simple thing like bread is made to honor the Sabbath. A challah loaf is made more beautiful by braiding the dough. During the performance, listen when Zippy says she has bought a challah (HA-lah) for Sabbath dinner.
You, the Audience

The performers in *Dreams in the Golden Country* need help from you, the audience. You are an important part of the play. Being a member of an audience in a theater is different from watching a movie or television show. The performers are in the same room with you and are affected by what you do. To do their best, the performers need you to watch and listen closely. Other audience members also depend on your quiet attention during the performance so they can watch and listen, too.

Watch. Listen. Think. Imagine. Enjoy *Dreams in the Golden Country*!

In Russia, Papa was as a symphony violinist. In America, he works in a clothing factory. Papa is thrilled when he is invited to join an orchestra in New York organized by Russian immigrants. (Front: Terence Aselford; Back: Rana Kay)

Meeting on the roof each night, Tova’s and Sean’s friendship deepens into love. (Front: Michael Laruino and Lee Mikeska Gardner; Back: Rana Kay)

Mama recites a prayer while lighting the candles to mark the beginning of the Sabbath. (From left: Rana Kay, Lee Mikeska Gardner, Laura Giannarelli and Terence Aselford)

Resources

You may want to…
go online:

*Dreams in the Golden Country*
www.kennedy-center.org/goldencountry

American Family Immigration History Center.
www.ellisisland.org/Immexp/index.asp?

The Lower Eastside Tenement Museum.
www.tenement.org/index_virtual.html

The Triangle Factory Fire.
www.lrr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/

visit:

Folksbiene (FOLKS-bee-neh) Yiddish Theatre, 45 East 33 Street, New York, NY 10016. The Theatre, founded in 1915, is still in operation in its original location.
www.folksbiene.org/kids2002.htm

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