

TARRAGON THEATRE

study guide for students and educators

Perfect Pie



**Written and Directed by Judith Thompson
Set & Costumes by Sue LePage
Lighting Designed by Andre Lundy
Sound Design by Bill Thompson
Stage Managed by Winston Morgan**

January 11 to February 13, 2000

Perfect Pie Study Guide

CHARACTERS:

Although there are 4 actors in *Perfect Pie* there are only 2 characters. Two women play each role: one actor is the character in present time and the other enacts the memories of her younger self.

Patsy: is a woman who lives in the town she grew up in (Marmora, Ontario). She is married with two children and helps run the farm on her family land. Patsy enjoys simple things in life and is very good at baking. Patsy's best friend while growing up was Marie – she has not seen or talked to Marie for a very long time but she worries about her. *Present day Patsy played by Nancy Palk. Young Patsy played by Tara Rosling.*

Francesca: is a woman who lives in Toronto and makes a successful living as an actor. She is not currently married (although she has been 3 times) nor does she have children. When she was young Francesca's name was Marie; she changed it after leaving Marmora. She has not been back to her hometown for many years but often thinks of her old friend Patsy. *Francesca played by Sonia Smits. Marie played by Liisa Repo-Martell.*

SETTING

There are many settings for *Perfect Pie*; some are locations for the present day action and some are locales from the women's past. Two settings in the present day are the city of Toronto, where Francesca lives and Patsy's family land in Marmora, where the old friends meet for a day. Patsy's land includes the farmhouse kitchen, the barn, fields and train tracks that run along the edge of the property.

Locales from memory are the farmhouse kitchen, Patsy's bedroom, the land around the farm, the schoolyard and school halls.

SYNOPSIS

Patsy sends a tape and pie to Francesca, out of the blue, and after almost thirty years, and invites Francesca to visit her, if ever she is passing by. Francesca, haunted by what she hears, turns up en route to a film gala in Montreal. They are uneasy with one another at first, as they catch each other up on their respective lives. Each has illusions about the other's world: Patsy assumes that Francesca's career and celebrity are a good deal more impressive than they are; Francesca assumes that Patsy's life is an uneventful, unadventurous one. There are misconceptions and revelations on both sides.

As the women talk, their reunion is interwoven with scenes from their youth. We see young Patsy befriending the emotionally submerged Marie; we see their growing relationship, as Patsy encourages Marie, gives her confidence, tries to move her toward a more 'normal' status. Both the childhood scenes, and the encounter between Patsy and Francesca slowly untangle the terrifying sequence of events that led, thirty years before, to the cessation by those railroad tracks of the girls' relationship and Marie's flight from Marmora. There is fear and pain in the return of those memories, but a new healed understanding as well.

NARRATION

This is a memory play and how the memories affect the grown women is at the center of the story. As the narration is played out Patsy and Francesca discover things they had not known about each other, and themselves; they take turns filling in the story line until both they, and the audience, have a whole picture of past events. It is their last evening together as adolescents, which comprises the climax of the story.

The narration is not a linear one progressing from childhood to present day; rather, it skips back and forth through time. However, the two time periods do parallel each other: as we see the women in the present time become reacquainted in the morning, we also are witness to the first meeting of their younger selves. As the story advances we perceive that, during the timeline of the play, this present day equals the entirety of the past relationship.

Therefore, as the present day progresses from meeting, to deep familiarity, to departure, so too do the younger years pass from first introduction at ages 8 & 9, to great friendship, to separation 8 years later. The four roles intersect only at the height of the story – the events on the railroad tracks.

ABOUT THE PLAY AND THE PLAYWRIGHT

Perfect Pie is a two-act play which is premiering at Tarragon Theatre and features Ms. Thompson in the role of director as well as playwright. This new work is an expansion of a solo drama which Judith Thompson performed herself on CBC Television in 1994. She has also developed *Perfect Pie* as a feature screenplay, which will be produced by Rhombus Media.

Judith Thompson is one of Canada's leading writers, a celebrated, widely produced, prolific, award-winning theatre artist. Her previous plays include *The Crackwalker*, *White Biting Dog*, *I Am Yours*, *Lion in the Streets* and *Sled*; all but the first of these were premiered at Tarragon. In addition to her stage works, Judith Thompson has also written for film, television and radio. She received the Chalmers Canadian Play Award in 1987 for *I Am Yours*, and in 1991 for *Lion in the Streets*; and the Governor General's Award for *White Biting Dog* in 1984 and her collection *The Other Side of Dark* in 1989. She studied at Queen's University and at the National Theatre School; a fellow classmate at both of these institutions was Nancy Palk who plays the role of Patsy. Ms. Thompson is a professor of drama at the University of Guelph, and lives in Toronto with her husband and five children.

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

- a) What do you feel Ms. LePage (set designer) is trying to convey through her design?
- b) Name 5 different 'locations' that are created on the set. Sometimes, more than one location is portrayed in the same space on the set. What elements differentiate one location from another?
- c) How does the designer achieve a difference between interior and exterior settings?
- d) How does the lighting design reinforce these differences?
- e) What do the costumes tell us about each of the characters? How do they convey age as the young girls grow up?
- f) As Francesca rediscovers Marie throughout the afternoon, how do her wardrobe pieces change?
- g) What is the first sound heard by the audience (and by Patsy), even before Patsy speaks? What do you think is the effect the playwright & sound designer are trying to achieve?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES BASED ON THEMES IN THE PLAY

CRUELTY and PEER PRESSURE:

- a) Patsy tells Marie that when the other children tease her, she is just a “scapegoat”. What does she mean by this? Why are the other children so intolerant of Marie? What will they gain by their cruelty? Do you think they will regret their treatment of her when they are older?
- b) Is there someone you have been cruel to in the past and now regret it? Write that person a letter or a monologue. Perform the monologue for members of your class. If you cannot think of a scenario make up something you could imagine a child doing.
- c) Alternatively, improvise a scene in which one child is made fun of by a group of other children. Everyone in the group should have an opportunity to be the picked-on child. Discuss how it felt to play both roles.
- d) What does Donny like about Marie before they go to the dance? What changes when they get there? Is Marie any different; if not, why does Donny leave?
- e) Discuss how peer pressure plays a role in the events at the goalpost.

FRIENDSHIP:

Near the end of the play, Patsy says: “But you always had. Saved my life, Marie. Ever since we were little girls...”

- a) How do you think Marie emotionally “saved” Patsy’s life? What do you think makes Patsy first approach Marie in the schoolyard? What do the two girls end up giving and sharing with each other?
- b) What do we usually seek in our friendships? Why do human beings connect with each other in this way?

The play's first and last lines are Patsy speaking indirectly to Marie: "I will not forget you, you are carved in the palm of my hand".

- c) How do you imagine these two girls growing into woman if they had never met each other? Write a quick character sketch for each of them.
- d) How do you think they will be affected by their afternoon's meeting? Write a description of what the next day will be like for each of them.
- e) Think of a friend who was important to you growing up. Are you still in touch with that person? How did they affect you? Write a note to them explaining why they are or were important to you.
- f) Interview a parent or an older family member and ask if they can remember a significant friend from childhood. How were they affected by that friendship and do they think they would be different now without it? Write a monologue from the point of view of your interview subject about their friend.

THE RURAL AND THE URBAN:

Patsy and Marie both tell each other that they have "missed out". They are referring to work and family, but also to the places they live.

- a) From your point of view what are the advantages and disadvantages of life in the country and the city as they are presented in the play? Does this confirm or contradict your previous impressions of both worlds?
- b) Why does Patsy seem to love her home so much? Why does she not want to leave the way Marie did? Why did Marie flee to places like Buffalo and Toronto rather than another small town?
- c) Does seeing this play make you want to live in the country or the city?
- d) Draw a picture of the town of Marmora or Patsy's farm as you imagine it. Then as a group, try to act out this setting in a movement-based piece.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT:

- a) By changing her name to Francesca, Marie seems to be trying to leave behind her past. Do you think that is possible? Do aspects of Marie emerge in Francesca over the course of the play?
- b) Imagine Marie and Francesca are two different people and try writing a dialogue between them. Perhaps Marie will be asking to be let back into Francesca's life and perhaps Francesca will be telling her why she cannot accept her.
- c) Find a picture of yourself as a young child. Trying not to think of the child as yourself, try to describe his or her character just based on the picture. Reading your description does it reflect how you perceive yourself now?
- d) For much of the play, it is clear whether we are in the past or the present, but there are moments where the line is blurred. Identify some of these moments. What do you think the playwright is conveying by using this device?

Patsy speaks the words "I know you did not survive" during the opening of the play. And, in her final monologue, she says: "I like...form you; right in front of my eyes, right here at my kitchen table into flesh. Lookin' at me, talking soft."

- e) Is it possible that the events of *Perfect Pie* happen in Patsy's head only? Is there other evidence in the text or direction to support this perspective?
- f) Assume that these events do take place in Patsy's head, how does the story change with this information? Does it modify your outlook on Patsy, or on Francesca as a figment of Patsy's imagination? If so, how does it change?

EPILEPSY:

“Stalker knows he could get me again, he stands there lickin’ his dry lips, waiting, waiting with his dirty fingers to hold me too close and move me under and he knows; he knows that he can get me any time he wants.”

- a) This is how Patsy describes her disease. Does the “stalker” image work for you? From Patsy’s description, what seems to be the worst part of this disease?
- b) Playwright Judith Thompson has experienced epileptic seizures herself. In an interview with *The Globe and Mail* she said, “this disease makes you an other...” What other problems make people feel outside in our world? What can we do to make others more comfortable?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT SYMBOLISM

- a) In the first scene Patsy is rolling pie dough and Francesca is eating a pie. What are some of the many things that pie represents in this play? Why do you think it is called *Perfect Pie*?
- b) When the young Patsy climbs on the train track, she says, “...I am the train I am big I am metal...” What do you think the motivations for Marie and Patsy to get on the train tracks are? What might the train represent? What might the tracks represent?
- c) Make a list of as many instances as you can recall when water is a part of the play in some form. What effect do these images have on you? Why do you think the playwright might be using water imagery?
- d) Come up with a symbol of your own that might have the same impact as the pie or the train tracks. Can you devise another symbol to illuminate another aspect of the play?



INSIDE THE TARRAGON THEATRE **for teachers and students**

Welcome to the Tarragon Theatre! We are thrilled to welcome all of you to *Perfect Pie*. In addition to viewing and studying the production itself, it is also important to be aware of the mandate and history of the Tarragon Theatre. This in turn will broaden your understanding of the shows that are produced here.

MANDATE

The Tarragon mandate is “To develop Canadian playwrights and produce their scripts; to shape a community of Canadian artists and actors to interpret these plays; and to build an audience to receive and accept this work”. The theatre is continually reaching out to new artists---playwrights, actors, directors, and designers. By adhering to our mandate, we are able to celebrate the talents and stories of many, many Canadian artists thus making Tarragon an important aspect of Canadian culture.

OUR SPACES AND FACILITIES

If you take a tour around the theatre, you will soon notice that The Tarragon Theatre is a different type of theatre than The Elgin Winter Garden or the Pantages Theatre. Instead of sitting in a huge auditorium, you will be sitting in smaller more intimate “black box” theatre spaces. The Mainspace is Tarragon’s original 205-seat auditorium; it is the site of 5 of Tarragon’s yearly productions. In 1983, we added the Extra Space; this is a 100-seat flexible auditorium designed for more intimate experimental shows. It is the site of 3 Tarragon Theatre productions as well as numerous other touring and small theater-company shows. As well, both theatres have been venues for the Toronto Fringe Festival and Summerworks.

If you take a walk back-stage, you will see our scenery, properties and wardrobe shops, administrative and production offices. Upstairs we also house the Tarragon Studio; this end of the building contains a lobby and three spaces which play host to both our own rehearsing productions and rental companies, as well as provide room for receptions, workshops, and other developmental activities.

Our ground level, including both theatres and the lobby, provides full access and facilities for the physically challenged. In June of this year, Tarragon will briefly close its doors to renovate so that we can add an elevator making the entire building accessible. The addition of an elevator has prompted other renovations as well: when our doors reopen, Tarragon Theatre will proudly show off it’s new audience washrooms, box office, concession area, and soundproofing for the Extra Space!

HISTORY

Housed in a former cribbage board factory, the Tarragon theatre was founded in 1970 by Bill Glassco, a former professor at the University of Toronto. The first production was a play called CREEPS by David Freeman. This first play was representative of Tarragon's strong mandate to produce innovative, interesting new work by Canadian playwrights. This became a tradition, which has carried on up until the present. During Bill Glassco's twelve seasons as artistic director, Tarragon earned critical and popular acclaim and became a pioneer in the production of new Canadian plays and artists.

In 1982, Urjo Kareda, a former drama critic of the Toronto Star and literary manager of The Stratford Festival became the new Artistic Director. Under Kareda, the Tarragon continues to focus on exciting new Canadian work, and has productions of innovative international work as well. A continuing feature – begun by Bill Glassco - has been the presentation, on occasion, of modern perspectives on classic plays (by Chekhov, Ibsen, Strindberg, Goethe).

TARRAGON'S PLAYWRIGHTS

The Tarragon continues to champion works of protean Canadian playwrights such as Joan MacLeod, Michel Tremblay, Morris Panych, Don Hannah, John Murrell or Judith Thompson. We are also fostering a new wave of dynamic Canadian playwrights such as Jason Sherman, Janet Munsil, Diane Flacks, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Guillermo Verdecchia, Michael Healey, Ken Garnhum, M.J. Kang, Jonathan Wilson and Morwyn Brebner.

Many of these playwrights were originally members of one of the Tarragon/Chalmers Playwrights units. Established in 1982, the unit is renewed annually. The unit has six to seven writers who work on scripts or scripts in progress both collectively and individually with Urjo Kareda and Andy McKim. The process is very intensive. The writers who have been in this unit include: Jason Sherman, Joan MacLeod, John Mighton, Beth Herst, Brad Fraser, Don Hannah, Michael Healey and Atom Egoyan. The unit "shows its stuff" in a week of readings from their new plays. This free public offering is held in December and may be of interest to senior level, OAC students possibly working on plays of their own. Please call Kristen Van Alphen at (416) 536-5018 x.229 for more information or if you would like to join us at this event.

Playwrights-in-Residence

Tarragon has created four office spaces for playwrights-in-residence – a "room of their own" where writers can both work on their own and also connect with their peers and the theatre staff. This year's playwrights-in-residence are Morwyn Brebner, Daniel Brooks, Ken Garnhum, Jason Sherman, and Michael Healey.

TOURING AND VISITING ARTIST

Tarragon has mounted productions at the Edinburgh Festival, in London and Birmingham, the Mayfest in Glasgow, Edmonton, Expo '86 in Vancouver, the Young Canada Games in Charlottetown, the duMaurier World Stage Festival, and at Montreal's Festival Des Ameriques. Tarragon plays have been produced by many theatres across the country and outside of Canada: in the U.S, Great Britain, Australia, Europe, and South America.

AWARDS AND AUDIENCES

Tarragon has a continued tradition of high artistic achievement. In 1994, we received more Dora award nominations than any other theatre in Toronto. Our Governor General Award playwright recipients include Judith Thompson, John Krizanc, Ann Marie MacDonald, Joan MacLeod, Guillermo Verdecchio, Morris Panych, Jason Sherman and Michael Healey. Our Chalmers Award winners include David French, John Murrell, Tom Walmsley, Don Hannah, Ken Garnhum, Judith Thompson, Jason Sherman, and Michel Tremblay (Tarragon has been a pioneer producer of Quebec Playwrights in translation). Mallory Gilbert, Tarragon's General Manager, is a recipient of the Brenda Donohue Award and the M. Joan Chalmers Award for Arts Administration for her distinguished contribution to the theatre community. Urjo Kareda, who was awarded the Order of Canada in 1995, is the 1999 recipient of the Toronto Arts Awards for creative excellence in the performing arts.

TARRAGON SPRING ARTS FAIR

Andy McKim inaugurated this free festival in 1985. An exciting arts event, which takes place this season over the weekend of May 27 & 28, the Spring Arts Fair features theatre, performance art, dance, readings, children's programming and more. Performances take place all over the theatre: in the Extra space, the studio, the prop-shop, the wardrobe, offices and places you would never expect. Students are encouraged to attend this free, fun, carnival type event. We have also begun to recruit a large number of students as volunteers - please call the theatre if you are interested.

TARRAGON PROGRAMS FOR EDUCATORS

This year we have begun to offer a variety of programs to educators. 'Teacher nights' is an event which occurs shortly after a show's opening and is designed to allow teachers from different regions to meet and interact in a social setting. It is also an opportunity to view our productions early to determine the possibility of incorporating them into class curriculums. A free ticket is included in the evening, as well as a pre-show 'drink and mingle', complemented by a brief chat with a member of the production.

We are also offering three workshops this season, anticipated to be of interest for personal, professional or curriculum development. The workshops again offer an opportunity for educators to meet one another outside the regular sphere, to receive creative stimulation, and to continue a relationship with professional theatre. This season's sessions are *An Approach to Playwriting*, *Design: The Creative Shoestring*, and *The Reviews*.

TARRAGON PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

All the students who come to the Tarragon Theatre are a very important part of our audiences. Many of our plays deal with subjects that are of great interest to young people. Students have enjoyed seeing productions that, though not written specifically for them, deal with issues pertinent to their own lives. Thought, humour, and innovation replace spectacle and students begin to realize that many different kinds of theatre are possible.

At our student matinees, we attempt to give our students an exciting and intensive theatre-going experience. We offer pre-show tours, so students can gain a full picture of the theatre that they will be attending and pre-show discussions and workshops concerning the play that they will be attending. Of course we continue to offer post-performance discussions so that students can comment and ask their questions "in the moment" with various members of the cast. We are in the process of expanding our educational programs this year and input from teachers and students regarding new avenues to explore would be greatly appreciated.

Tarragon's work with young people extends beyond their attendance at performances. We offer a variety of opportunities for students to engage in theatrical pursuits. Our focus in this area is to develop activities wherein students looking to make a serious commitment and accept a creative challenge can work with theatre professionals in a professional environment.

Spring Training Project

Every spring, we offer the Tarragon Theatre Spring Training Project where we select a group of talented young people to participate in an intensive series of workshops led by professionals in the field. These workshops are text based and result in a performance at the annual Spring Arts Fair.

Young Playwriting programs

Being a playwright's theatre, we have programs designed for young writers as well as young actors. Our first program in this regard is the annual *Under 20 for Under Twenties* playwriting competition. We accept submissions from Ontario resident writers who are under the age of twenty and all plays must be under twenty minutes in length. The winner receives \$250.00 and a professional workshop reading of their play at the Spring Arts Fair. We held this contest for the first time two years ago and it has become a great success. Some teachers have made the writing of the plays a class project. Again, viewing the free play-readings during December could be a useful tool in this process.

Our second program is the *Young Playwright's Unit*. Students interested submit a sample of their writing with a letter of intent, and meet with the Program Director. From this, a core group is chosen which meets throughout the March Break and weekly until June. The participants attend workshops in design, directing and improvisation to gain a sense of play development and through intensive sessions which include creative exercises and text study they begin to develop their own scripts. This year our program director is planning to take a summer break, to allow unit members to progress with their own writing projects, and meet again in the fall to review the script development of each participant.

Co-op Placements

Tarragon also takes on co-op students from the secondary and post secondary levels. Practice studies are made available in both administrative and production areas. There are no co-op placements available in terms of performance but through their co-op placements students are able to observe and experience the inner workings of a theatre environment.

Career Days

Tarragon also offers career days with tours and discussions for students considering a career in theatre or for those who wish to research it for a project. These days must be arranged a few weeks in advance. Please call Kristen Van Alphen, if you are interested.

Thanks to the generous support of Petro Canada, our youth theatre training encompasses workshop classes for high school students and educators, high-school matinees, training and performance projects for the Spring Arts Fair and young playwright development.

We hope that you have found this study guide to be interesting and informative. Thank you for attending *Perfect Pie*. We look forward to having you back for one of our many of our productions here at Tarragon.