

MAJOR BARBARA

By Bernard Shaw



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The Shaw Festival Theatre

At the **SHAW FESTIVAL THEATRE**, we celebrate the work of an incredibly gifted playwright named **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW** (he shall henceforth be referred to as Bernard Shaw, as that was his preference).



If **BERNARD SHAW** was anything, he was a **RADICAL REBEL WITH A CAUSE**. At the Shaw Festival, we celebrate the work of this and other rabble-rousers.

Shaw wrote to educate people about social and political issues and to inspire people to **DO SOMETHING** about injustice and passivity about their circumstances. He took great pleasure in ruffling the feathers of the establishment and getting people to think about social and political issues.

That makes him **COOL**.

Because we celebrate that, the **SHAW FESTIVAL** is also, de facto, **COOL**.

He was a subversive provocateur, and by extension, we are too!

Shaw said "... a civilization can not progress without criticism."

He wrote and educated people about the injustices he saw in society.

Sometimes injustice takes place because nobody *knows* about it. Sometimes injustice persists because people don't know what to *do* about it.

Are you aware of some kind of injustice in your life or in the world around you? If you had unlimited power to fix any unjust situation, what would you do?

**Theatre can change the world...
Theatre can change *people* who
can change the world.**

-Jackie Maxwell,
Artistic Director



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

I WOULD _____

Synopsis

**“There are only two things necessary to Salvation.
Money and Gunpowder.”**

Barbara Undershaft is a Major in the Salvation Army who takes pride in her righteous vocation: she feeds the poor and hungry as long as they repent their sinful ways and “follow the fold”. Her father’s profession, however, is not so pious. He is an arms manufacturer who delights in gaining wealth and employing workers in his munitions factory. Father and daughter find themselves philosophically at odds and a debate ensues about which of them is truly doing good.

**“I had rather be a thief than a pauper.
I had rather be a murderer than a slave.”**

Bernard Shaw’s *Major Barbara* is a challenging play that examines the morality of poverty. Though Barbara and her father are on very opposite ends of the moral spectrum, Shaw very seriously questions which vocation will best fight what Shaw considers the ‘crime of poverty’.

Undershaft, who has been estranged from the family since his daughters were little girls, has always provided for them. His factory has made him a wealthy man but Barbara regards her father’s profession as sinful. Undershaft, however, regards his daughter’s self-righteous “rightness” as naive. The two agree to visit each other’s place of employment over the next two days in order to prove their theories. As Undershaft observes at the Mission, Barbara is dedicated and very passionate about her work. But Barbara’s notion of morality is tested when Undershaft offers a very large donation to the Salvation Army. Barbara is outraged that the Mission would even consider taking the money, which has been earned in a very unethical way; however, her superior argues that to take the donation would mean using it for Good.

Undershaft believes poverty is the worst crime of all, but Shaw questions the morality of both Barbara and Undershaft’s attempts to curb it. Though the Salvation Army feeds the poor, it is under the condition that they accept God and renounce their wicked ways, but as two newcomers to the Mission admit, this conviction can be easily faked by simply inventing a sinful past. Conversely, the unrepentant Undershaft has made a fortune by creating weapons for war; but if his lucrative business gives people homes, jobs and self-worth in gainful employment, is it an intrinsic crime? Barbara grapples with her faith as she asks herself the important question: whom should she preach to? The hungry, or those truly in need of spiritual salvation?

DISCUSS:

Shaw’s original title for the play was *Andrew Undershaft’s Profession*. Why do you suppose he changed the title of the play? Had Shaw stayed with the original title, would that change the way you view the play?

Who's Who



Andrew Undershaft

The absent father of the Undershaft family. He is a wealthy industrialist and head of an armaments factory. He is invited back to the family home by Lady Britomart, his estranged wife, to discuss the financial futures of their children: Barbara, Stephen, and Sarah.

Lady Britomart Undershaft

The daughter of an Earl and wife of millionaire, Andrew Undershaft. She and her husband have lived apart for much of their children's lives, but she invites him back to discuss important financial matters.



Barbara Undershaft

The older of the two Undershaft daughters, Barbara is a Major in the Salvation Army, and considers it her duty to come to the aid of the less fortunate by saving their souls.

Stephen Undershaft

The only son of Lady Britomart and Andrew Undershaft. Stephen aspires to a career in politics although his mother would like him to take over his father's armaments factory.

Sarah Undershaft

A more conventional woman than her older sister, Barbara. Sarah is engaged to Charles Lomax.



Adolphus Cusins

Barbara's devoted beau. He is an Australian professor of Greek, well-read and intelligent. For the love of Barbara, he has also joined the Salvation Army and beats a drum in the band.

Charles Lomax

A typical man-about-town. He is vacuous, but amusing and is known as "Cholly". He is engaged to Sarah Undershaft, but will not inherit enough money to care for them both until he turns 35.



The World of the Play

London, England, 1905...

The Edwardian Era (1901-1911) was a time of extremes of wealth and poverty. Millions of people worked in sweated industries, labouring for long hours, low pay, in unsafe conditions and/or with hazardous materials. They typically lived in slums with unsanitary conditions. Approximately one-third of the population living in London, lived well below subsistence level and in a state of desperate insecurity. Living conditions were so poor for so many that it was believed they were producing degenerate offspring, feeble children and young men who would be of little use to society.

There were many people in the upper classes who believed that the poor brought poverty and misery upon themselves through their own laziness, love of drink and/or general unwillingness to be a useful and productive member of society.

There were also many in the upper classes who were well-fed, well-bred, well-read individuals that believed that what the poor needed was NOT more library books, lectures on temperance or free bowls of soup, but that that the problem of poverty would be solved by more regular work with decent hours, decent working conditions and better pay. A great many people were troubled by the problem of poverty and wanted to fix it, but finding the remedy proved to be difficult. Still, there was hope.

Some of the important ideas that took root in England's political soil at this time included:

- State Welfare
- Fixed Minimum Wages
- Old Age Pensions
- Regulated Work Hours
- Unemployment Benefits

READ/WRITE/RESEARCH/DISCUSS:

Pre-Show

Have we solved the problem of poverty? Do you think that there is a solution to poverty?

If yes, how might we solve it?

If not, why not?

If there is no solution to poverty, should we stop trying to fix the problem? Why or why not?

Consider the emergence of the Occupy Movement. What is the purpose of this movement? What are its goals?

"We are the 99%" is the Occupy Movement's slogan. Who are the 99%? Who are the other 1%?

The World of the Play

THE CRIME OF POVERTY

In his preface to *Major Barbara*, Bernard Shaw asserts the following:

1. Poverty is a crime.
2. It is everyone's first duty not to be poor.
3. Security cannot exist where there is poverty.
4. Poverty breeds ignorance, imbecility, weakness, disease, ugliness, dirt, and all of the other results of oppression and malnutrition.
5. Poverty weakens individuals and society.
6. Money is the most important thing in the world. It represents health, strength, honour, generosity and beauty.
7. Teaching children that it is sinful to desire money is a lie.
8. Every citizen should insist on having enough money on reasonable terms.
9. Money is the first need of everyone in society.
10. Poverty is the vilest sin of man and society.

READ/WRITE/DISCUSS:

Post-Show

Discuss each of the statements above individually and ask the following questions:

Would Barbara agree with the statement?

Would Andrew Undershaft agree with the statement?

Do you agree with the statement?

Undershaft argues that poverty is the greatest crime. What does he mean by this? Why is he so passionate and insistent about this subject? How does he tackle the problem of poverty? Do you agree or disagree with him?

How does Barbara tackle the problem of poverty?

The Salvation Army is in financial trouble and accepts large donations from a distillery and a munitions factory in order to stay afloat. This results in Barbara's disillusionment and departure from the Army.

Evaluate the morality of the Salvation Army's decision.

Evaluate the morality of Barbara's decision.

Do you think the Army should have accepted those donations? Why or Why not?

Discuss the utopian community where the workers at Undershaft's factory live. Is this community realistic? Could this kind of community exist in a capitalist society?

The World of the Play

THE SALVATION ARMY

At the time *Major Barbara* was written, the Salvation Army had only been in existence for about 50 years. Today, the organization might be familiar to you as a chain of thrift stores and for its annual Christmas fundraising campaign.

The Army got its start with a pretty radical mission: striving to save the souls of the masses by employing a military model. As such, members of the Salvation Army took on ranks that mimicked those of the armed forces. Barbara Undershaft is a Major, which is a relatively high rank.

The activities of the Salvation Army were unconventional in many ways and, as a result, they received a lot of criticism. For one, the Salvation Army allowed women to preach (remember that at this time, women did not even have the right to vote!). Their outreach services were criticized for being socialist, utopian and impractical. Though many people were critical at first, by the end of the Victorian era, the Salvation Army came to be recognized as a champion for the poor and destitute and garnered a lot of positive recognition for its social work.

The Salvation Army's founders, William and Catherine Booth, were appalled by the misery and grinding deprivation of London's slum dwellers. They devised a social relief program to remedy the hardships that faced the poor. It was expressed in the slogan "soup, soap and salvation". This is what the Salvation Army hoped to provide. But, the organization did much more for the poor than that.

The goals of the Salvation Army also included the eradication of poverty, squalor and unemployment. To this end, their work included establishing homes for orphaned children; rescue centers for girls and women affected by prostitution; rehabilitation centres for alcoholics; jobs for the unemployed; clothing and blanket drives, homeless shelters, etc. In short, the Salvation Army sought to provide much-needed Social Services at a time when there was no social safety net in place.

The Salvation Army grew from an obscure Christian Mission, established in East London in 1865, into an effective international organization with a wide variety of social programs. By the end of the Victorian era it had become one of the most successful Christian social relief organizations. They supported first-wave Christian feminism by allowing women to preach and carry out social work. Their ministry stirred the social conscience of many Victorians and contributed significantly to a number of welfare reforms in Britain and beyond.

READ/WRITE/DISCUSS:

Post-Show

Do you think that it is significant that both Barbara and Andrew Undershaft perform their work within a military model? What are they fighting for/against? 'Blood and Fire' is the Salvation Army's motto. How does this pertain to their mission? How does it pertain to Undershaft's mission?

The World of the Play

MORALITY

“Right is right; and wrong is wrong ...”

-Stephen Undershaft, Major Barbara

Many views about right and wrong are stated in *Major Barbara*, and definite lines are drawn. “Right is right and wrong is wrong...” says Stephen Undershaft. “There is one true morality for every man; but every man has not the same true morality,” says Andrew Undershaft. Barbara says: “There are neither good men nor scoundrels: there are just children of one Father; and the sooner they stop calling one another names the better.” And finally there is Cusins, who says “One man’s meat is another man’s poison morally as well as physically.”

Who is right and who is wrong?

At the beginning of the play, the answer seems clear cut: Barbara and the Salvation Army, with their mission of saving the souls of human beings are clearly doing the right thing, and Undershaft and his munitions factory, with their mission of finding ‘improved methods of destroying life and property’ are clearly in the wrong. But, it’s more complicated than that.

As the story unfolds, the boundaries between right and wrong become blurred. Barbara’s faith is shaken when the Salvation Army accepts financial help from the profiteers of “drunkenness and murder” and when she realizes that the people she is trying to help are faking their conversion in order to have their needs for food and shelter met by a Christian organization.

As Barbara gets to know Undershaft and his world, she is confronted with some very hard realities, that without money one has little power and that the world is more complex than the two camps of good and evil. And although Undershaft always seems to have the upper hand in arguments, and it seems he has created a Utopian society where people are paid well, live decently and don’t need to fake religion in order to have their needs met, he doesn’t necessarily provide an answer that Barbara and Cusins can totally agree with.

Barbara and Cusins reach a new understanding near the end of the play. Cusins asks: “Then the way of life lies through the factory of death?” and Barbara answers: “Yes, through the raising of hell to heaven and of man to God, through the unveiling of an eternal light in the Valley of the Shadow.”

READ/WRITE/DISCUSS:

Post-Show

Why do Barbara and Cusins decide to take on the Undershaft family business?

How do they think they can improve upon it?

Barbara and Undershaft begin the play with a challenge for each to attempt to convert the other. Who wins?

The World of the Play

Andrew Undershaft agrees to 'adopt' Adolphus Cusins as his foundling and heir on the condition that Adolphus agrees to the 'true faith of an Armorer':

To give arms to all men who offer an honest price for them, without respect of persons or principles: to aristocrat and republican, to Nihilist and Tsar, to Capitalist and Socialist, to Protestant and Catholic, to burglar and policeman, to black man, yellow man, and white man, to all sorts and conditions, all nationalities, all faiths, all follies, all causes and all crimes

Undershaft weapons manufacturers live by the following mottos:

- 1) If God gave the hand, let not Man withhold the sword.
- 2) All have the right to fight: none have the right to judge.
- 3) To Man the weapon; to heaven the victory
- 4) Peace Shall Not Prevail save with a sword in her hand
- 5) Nothing is ever done in this world until men are prepared to kill one another if it is not done.
- 6) UNASHAMED

READ/WRITE/DISCUSS:

Post-Show

Do you agree that weapons should be sold to anyone who can afford them? If not, why not? Who should be allowed to have or buy weapons? Who should decide who gets to have weapons and who does not?

The Undershaft family motto is 'UNASHAMED'. Which members of the Undershaft actually subscribe to this motto? Which members of the Undershaft family do not subscribe to this motto? Do any of the Undershaft family members change their position to this motto over the course of the play?

Stephen Undershaft has enjoyed a life of privilege, but is shocked to learn that the money he, his mother and sisters depend on for their lifestyle comes from his father. Why does this upset him?

Discuss the meaning of the following excerpt of dialogue from the play:

ANDREW UNDERSHAFT: "Poverty, my friend, is not a thing to be proud of."

PETER SHIRLEY: "Who made your millions for you? Me and my like. Whats kep' us poor? Keepin' you rich. I wouldn't have your conscience, not for all your income."

ANDREW UNDERSHAFT: I wouldn't have your income, not for all your conscience, Mr Shirley."

Human Needs and Human Behaviour

Post-Show

DISCUSS:

Read the diagram on the opposite page, explaining Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a theory in psychology that has been used to explain human needs and how needs motivate behaviour.

As a means of understanding the motivation of the characters in the play, consider where the following characters sit on the pyramid depicting Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how their needs (met and unmet) motivate their behavior.

Andrew Undershaft
Snobby Price
Lady Britomart

Barbara Undershaft
Peter Shirley
Charles Lomax

Bill Walker
Rummy Mitchens

Discuss the different levels of the pyramid. Do you agree with the order in which human needs are presented here?

Do you think a person could be working to fulfill needs from different levels of the pyramid at the same time?

Much of *Major Barbara* centres around money: who has it, who needs it, and how to get it. Why is money so important to the characters? Why was Shaw writing about money?

Through Barbara's Salvation Army work, she is trying to fulfill others' needs. Which needs is she trying to fulfill for them? What needs are Andrew Undershaft trying to fulfill? Are they succeeding?

In groups of four, discuss the similarities and differences in your answers. Do you agree/disagree with each other? Explain why.

At the start of the play, what is Barbara's view of helping others? How does Barbara's opinion of how best to help others change over the course of the play? What changes her mind?

How does this relate to Undershaft's belief that "poverty is a crime" and every individual owes it to themselves to see that they have money enough to care for their needs?

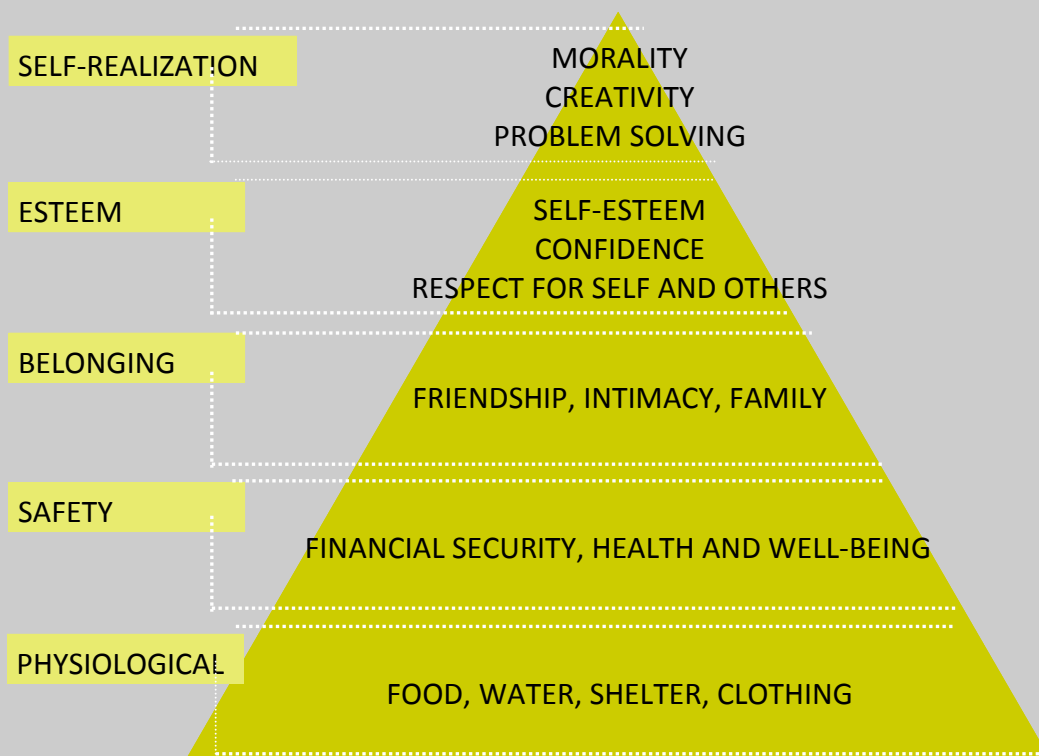
Andrew Undershaft declares "...I am a millionaire. That is my religion." What does he mean by this? Do you agree or disagree with him?

Do you think it's true that 'the graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life' - things like love and honour, truth and justice—all depend on 'money and gunpowder', as Undershaft suggests? If yes, why? If not, why not?

MASLOW'S

HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

A THEORY ABOUT HUMAN NEEDS PROPOSED BY
ABRAHAM MASLOW.



THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS ARE SHOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PYRAMID. Maslow suggested that the most basic level of needs must be met before an individual can focus on higher needs. For example, if you do not have access to food, shelter and water, all of your actions will be focused on obtaining those things. It is only when those basic needs are secured, that one can focus on needs that are higher up on the pyramid. Striving to fulfill these needs is what motivates a person's behavior.

Character Development

Pre-Show

WRITE / RESEARCH/ CREATE:

- Costumes are very important in relaying information about character. Information such as the characters' age, ethnicity, social class, job, etc.
- Bring a variety of hats into the classroom. Have students try on the hats and discuss what kind of character each hat would belong to, answering some of the questions from the Character Map Exercise on the following page.
- Choose a historical period that's interesting to you and create costumes for people of different economic and social backgrounds for that period. You'll need to do some research! Divide students into groups and show their designs to one another. What do the costumes say about the character's class/social position?

Post-Show

WRITE/RESEARCH/CREATE:

- When actors are getting to know the characters they portray, they sometimes use a "character map". A character map lists background details, which helps the actor to flesh out a character and create a back story. It fills in the blanks not provided in the context of the play to help the actor understand what is in that character's past and why they do the things they do. Using the character map provided on the following page, create a map for one of the following characters: Andrew Undershaft, Major Barbara, Adolphus Cusins, Bill Walker, Snobby Price, Peter Shirley

DISCUSS:

- How do Barbara and Adolphus Cusins change over the course of the play?
- Can you identify the moments in the story that were turning points for these characters?

CHARACTER MAP

Character's name _____

Background Information

Family: _____

Education: _____

Occupation: _____

Hobbies: _____

Intellect: _____

Values and Beliefs

Core values: _____

Religion: _____

Philosophy of life: _____

Likes: _____

Dislikes: _____

What does the character say/think about themselves: _____

External Impressions

What others say/think about this character: _____

Dress: _____

Voice: _____

Mannerisms: _____

Glossary of Terms

Corker - Something or somebody striking or outstanding.

Pauper - A very poor person.

Propensity - An inclination or natural tendency to behave in a particular way.

Philanthropist - One who promotes the welfare of others by charitable aid or donations.

Conscientious scruple - A moral objection.

Mug of skyblue - Thin and water milk, having a bluish tint.

Treacle - A syrup.

Rowton doss - Low-cost housing for working people in London and Dublin.

Field glass - A small refracting telescope.

Hellas - Greek name for Greece.

Armorer - A maker of weapons.

Blight - Any cause of destruction, impairment, ruin or frustration.

Bloke - A man; fellow.

Prig - A self-righteously moralistic person who behaves as if superior to others.

Kowtowed - Act in an excessively subservient manner.

Foundry - A workshop or factory for casting metal.

Bosh - Something regarded as absurd; nonsense.

Repudiate - Refusal to accept ; denial of the truth or validity of something.

Lyddite - An explosive made in the town of Lydal in Kent.

A Glossary of Locations

Lady Britomart Undershaft's house is located at **Wilton Crescent**, a wealthy community in Belgravia, London. In the 19th and 20th centuries it was home to many prominent British politicians, ambassadors and civil servants.

Cambridge - A university town and the administrative centre of the county of Cambridgeshire, England.

Hampstead - An affluent area of London, England.

Bedford Square - An upper, middle class neighbourhood in a garden square in Bloomsbury.

West Ham - One of London's most deprived neighbourhoods. This is the location of Barbara's Salvation Army shelter.

Canning Town - Another of London's poorest neighbourhoods. Barbara states that everyone in Canning Town knows where her West Ham shelter is.

Kennington - A district located in Central London, England.

Perivale St Andrews - The Utopian city that is home to Andrew Undershaft's munitions factory and its workers. "A spotlessly clean and beautiful hillside town."

Stevenage - A town roughly 50km north of central London. The neighbourhood entered a period of decline in the early twentieth century. Middle-class households ceased to employ servants and no longer sought out the large houses of Kennington, preferring London's suburbs. Houses in Kennington began to be used for multiple occupation and were divided into flats and bedsits, providing cheap lodgings for lower-paid workers.

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