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## Lesson Title: Spring Awakening Dramaturgy

**Focus Question:** How can an understanding of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany deepen a performance of *Spring Awakening*?

Lesson Objectives	Summative Assessment Strategies
<b>Drama-Based Objective:</b> Students will be able to devise and perform short performances based on dramaturgical material for <i>Spring Awakening</i> .	<b>Performance Tasks:</b> Devised Performance <b>Criteria:</b> Performance is engaging, creative, and informative; Performance meets criteria outlined in instructions <b>Documentation:</b> Check List (Appendix C)
<b>Drama-Based Objective:</b> Students will be able to analyze dramaturgical materials to select relevant information that will help deepen their performances.	<b>Performance Task:</b> Exit Ticket (Appendix F), Research Report <b>Criteria:</b> Provides specific examples, Demonstrates clear connection between information and relation to role; Articulates active steps to use information <b>Documentation:</b> Teacher Feedback on Exit Ticket (Appendix F) and Research Report (Appendix G)
<b>Language-Based Objective:</b> Students will be able to evaluate research materials to identify key concepts.	<b>Performance Tasks:</b> Devised Performance, Notes (Appendix D) <b>Criteria:</b> Incorporates relevant details from the materials, Portrays accurate picture of source material <b>Documentation:</b> Group discussion, Teacher feedback on notes (Appendix D)

### Related Standards:

#### Relevant New York State Standards for the Arts:

TH: Pr.4 Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

1. The essence of theater is storytelling.

HSIIb. Use theatrical research to determine choices that influence character.

#### Relevant Common Core ELA Learning Standards:

9-10R1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly/implicitly and make logical inferences; develop questions for deeper understanding and for further exploration. (RI&RL)

**Modifications Relevant to the Lesson:** Students will be provided written instructions and provided with additional verbal explanations as needed. Students will be given extra time as

needed to complete readings. Definitions will be provided as needed. Choice is provided in the devising activity to accommodate all learners.

**Spatial Organization:** The room will be cleared for *Wink Censor*, and then for the devising rehearsals, with each group finding space to put their performance together. An audience area and stage area will be set up for the performances.

**Materials Needed:** Instructions, Dramaturgy Handouts, Note-Taking Handouts, Exit Tickets

### Procedures

#### 1. Avoid the Censor (5 Minutes)

- a. The teacher introduces the day on *Spring Awakening* dramaturgy and briefly explains how the play was censored when it was first written. The teacher asks students for some suggestions of why something might be censored. The teacher fields some answers, then explains that the students are going to use these suggestions to take a quick look at censorship.
- b. One student is chosen to be the “Censor” by the teacher. That student faces away from the rest of the students.
- c. The other students spread out in the room and take on an “angelic, cleaned-up pose” that the “Censor” will find acceptable. The “Censor” then turns around and moves through the rest of the students.
- d. When the “Censor” is not looking, students must change positions and engage in some of the “censorable” themes discussed at the beginning.
- e. The teacher instructs all students to open their eyes and walk around the space. As they move, students should try to embody one of the censorship suggestions that was given. Since these topics may actually be controversial, the teacher should instruct students to find a goofy way to do this.
- f. As students pass each other, they must make eye contact. The “Censor” may wink at the other students as they pass. If one of the other students is winked at, they must wait a little, and then freeze in a cleaned-up pose. They should not make the “Censor’s” identity obvious by freezing right away.
- g. If a student suspects they know who the “Censor” is, they may stop the game and wager a guess. If they are right, the game is over, but if they are wrong, they must take on a cleaned-up pose. The “Censor” will try to freeze all the other students to win.
- h. The teacher asks students what they think *Spring Awakening* might have been censored for as they transition to the devising activity. The teacher asks students to keep in mind how censorship might’ve been received at the time of the play and why these topics were such a big deal.

#### 2. Devised Performance (33 Minutes)

- a. The teacher separates students into groups and hands out the instructions for the activity and dramaturgical materials.
- b. Working in groups, students create and rehearse short performances that address the information presented in the materials.

- c. Each group performs their piece for the rest of the students. Students take notes on the other performances, paying particular attention to information relevant to their characters.
  - d. Following each performance, the teacher leads a brief discussion in which students give feedback to each other about the performance, and anything they learned from it.
- 3. Exit Ticket (5 Minutes)**
- a. Students complete an Exit Ticket detailing how the day's activities will inform their performances in *Spring Awakening*.

**Homework:** Students will complete a brief research report on one of the topics from the day's activity.

## APPENDIX A

### DEvised PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

Work in your groups to devise a short performance (3-5 minutes) that incorporates relevant information from your dramaturgical materials. The piece will be used to teach the rest of the class about your topic, but should not just be a presentation. You can think about the following questions to help guide your work:

- What are the key ideas about your topic? What do you find most interesting and why? In other words, what stands out to you? What understandings would it be important for someone studying this topic to walk away with?
- How can we contextualize those ideas within our understanding of the world today? In other words, how was 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany different than 21<sup>st</sup> Century New York City, and how was it similar? What might we connect to, and what might we find more obtuse?

To address these prompts, you may create a scene that can be in the style of a play, a sketch, a commercial, or a spoken word piece. If you are having trouble deciding on a form, think about what the main idea of your dramaturgical materials is, and think about *how* you might best *show* that information. Whatever form you choose, though, the piece **MUST** include:

- Participation from all group members
- A direct quote from your dramaturgical materials

And **2-3 of the following:**

- A moment (or more) of music
- A moment (or more) of stylized movement (could be dance, tableaux, slow-motion, anything out of the ordinary)
- A moment (or more) of everyone doing the same thing
- A wildcard (something we won't see coming that takes our breath away)

Think about how dramatic works *show* us information, and presentations *tell* us information. In other words, instead of *telling* someone you are a good musician or athlete, how might you prove it? How might you *demonstrate* it?

If you have a question about trying something in your piece, don't ask. Make a bold choice, and just be brave and do it (as long as everyone is gonna stay alive through the whole thing.)

**You should also use the attached worksheet to create a bulleted list of key information from your materials to share with the rest of the class online. Good luck!**

**APPENDIX B**

**TOPIC:**

**KEY IDEAS:**

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**HOW DO THESE IDEAS RELATE TO OUR WORLD TODAY?**

**APPENDIX C**

***SPRING AWAKENING* DRAMATURGY PERFORMANCE**

**GROUP MEMBERS:**

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>YES</b>
All group members participated in performance.	
Performance contains a direct quote from the dramaturgical materials.	
Performance contains at least 2-3 of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A moment (or more) of music</li><li>• A moment (or more) of stylized movement (could be dance, tableaux, slow-motion, anything out of the ordinary)</li><li>• A moment (or more) of everyone doing the same thing</li><li>• A wildcard (something we won't see coming that takes our breath away)</li></ul>	
Performance is engaging.	
Performance is creative.	
Performance is informative.	

**TOTAL:**

**/6**

**6=100% 5=83% 4=67% 3=50% 2=33% 1=17% 0=0%**

**COMMENTS:**

**APPENDIX D**

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
EDUCATION	
RELIGION	

ADOLESCENCE

SEXUALITY



ABORTION

ABUSE

SUICIDE	
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**OTHER THOUGHTS:**

## APPENDIX E

### EDUCATION

Despite its bleak portrayal in *Spring Awakening*, and the hatred of its students, the German education system in the 19th century was considered one of the best in Europe. Prussia's illiteracy rate in 1871 was only 12%. An American that observed the German system claimed that German schools were superior to American schools in almost every way. German schools were state sponsored and enforced a strict attendance policy, making it nearly impossible for students to miss school barring grave illness or death. As long as a boy stayed in school until he was at least 16 years old, he would only have to serve one compulsory year in the German military. Most boys like those in *Spring Awakening* would have spent many more years in school studying in the Gymnasium, a secondary school focused on preparing its students for college. Only about 8% of German boys went on to secondary education after elementary school. After that, only 1-2% would receive their diploma from schools that prepared students to continue on in college. This meant middle and upper class children did not mix with lower class children in schools. A boy could enter university after passing the Abitur exam, which could only be taken after eight years of secondary education. This was later replaced with the class system. If a boy failed a class they could repeat that class. However, repeating entire years', like Moritz, was also common. Following the timeline in the play, these exams took place in the spring. By the end of the 19th century the average graduation age was around 20 years old. All of this helped shape the school system as one of the main bureaucratic institutions holding the children of *Spring Awakening* within its death grip. Such a system left no room for personal expression or dissent of any kind, furthering the constrained anxiety teens like those in the play were likely to feel.

The Gymnasiums emphasized a classical education—including Latin, Greek, and much memorization. Subjects such as math and science were also included in the curriculum. Reformers claimed the classical style of education made it too important to learn “great quantities of dead material.” *Spring Awakening* sees Melchior attempting to fight for access to more information. While school is the main setting of *Spring Awakening*, the real education is happening outside of the schoolroom. Instead, school acts as a barrier to our characters getting the knowledge they need. Schools today can feel like this, especially with abstinence only education, but they pale comparison to the restrictions adolescents in the 19th century would have faced. After all, most schools aren't actively attempting to keep students ignorant of such things. Additionally, with today's digital culture, most teens aren't sheltered from such information at all.

Not everyone was blind to the drawbacks of the German education system. However, the criticism did not address some of the most soul crushing aspects. Reformer Gustav Siegbert encouraged a need for more individualized attention in the classroom and smaller class sizes. Those like Siegbert also claimed that more time needed to be made for physical activity. Unfortunately, many of the things that German school reformers criticized about German institutions at the end of the 19th century are becoming very contemporary problems in the American school systems. Test performance continues to be emphasized with national education programs such as No Child Left Behind. Class sizes are rising. The arts, clubs, and other programs deemed “extra” continue to be cut. In 19th century Germany reformers seemed to be most worried about the inclusion of physical activity in day. While at the time it was seen as a

way to calm the mind, and hormones, today it ties in with the very real obesity epidemic, even as some schools are being forced to cut P.E. from their budgets. The reforms Siegbert called for a little over two-hundred years ago parallel many contemporary education critiques. The style of education featured in *Spring Awakening* emphasizes the control of the authority figures. It outwardly seems to promote learning, while also attempting to suppress instances of free-thinking. They use Melchior's essay not only to have a scapegoat to pin Moritz' fate on, but to stop the rebellion of free thought.



Girls' Secondary School Class

## Females and Education

The girls in *Spring Awakening* are not ever depicted in a school. The boys as a whole are first seen in the classroom; the girls are found talking about boys, crushes, and eventual husbands. This gives a good insight into what was valued from each gender. The girls prepared for a household and family as the boys prepared for careers. However, it is important to understand how their education compares to that of the boys, especially as education, or lack of it, often defines the world of an adolescent. Girls did not have secondary schools that would prepare them for higher education until close to the 20th century. Traditionally, female education was to teach girls about religion and to build social skills rather than prepare for a career. Around the end of the 19th, early 20th century more secondary education opportunities began appearing for girls.

However, girls could be completed with these secondary schools by the age of 15 or 16, compared to the 18-20 range the boys faced. Women were not often taught the same subjects as the men, including Latin, Greek, math, and sciences. Neither did they have any exams administered by the state with which they had to contend. The attendance policy was not as strict, with parents pulling girls out often and for things like family vacations. Discipline is also recorded as being less harsh. School just did not seem to play as large a role in the everyday lives of girls, or have as lasting an effect. Journals of 19th century German girls do not turn up as many accounts of school as do journals penned by their brothers.

## Atmosphere and Discipline



“Progress in the Educational System: Civics is to be introduced as a new subject of study in Prussian schools. It goes without saying that instruction will be given by policemen.” In addition to actual education, the school functioned as a place of socialization and control for young Germans. State education was utilized in Germany, and much of Europe, as a place to teach morality. The system has been described as impersonal and bureaucratic. Boys were forced to study hard and sit exams that would determine a good deal about the rest of their lives. Additionally, an American observer said of German schools that the teachers, “seemed to exert an unhealthy dominance over the students and to use excessively harsh methods of discipline.” A

report related by Gustav Siegbert, a 19th century education reformer, tells of a 10-year-old girl beaten on her naked bottom despite her protests by a school inspector. This was abuse that began early. After all, a 10-year old girl is still a primary school student, not a secondary student as *Spring Awakening* portrays. According to reports, this inspector also happened to be a priest. One schoolmaster is recorded bragging about giving, “911,527 strokes with the stick and 124,000 lashes with the whip.” Although no timeframe was offered with those statistics, the numbers are still sickening.

Journals of male Gymnasium students are filled with loathing for the Gymnasium, and often antagonistic relationships with teachers. Author Thomas Mann wrote of his time in the German school system: “I detested school. I despised it as a place, criticized the manners of its authorities and found myself in a kind of literary opposition to its spirit, its discipline, its methods of training.” This is a hatred of the school environment that can be hard to understand today, this all-consuming detestation for a place where an adolescent spent most of their life. Yet these are the kinds of feelings Melchior most likely would have had for the system. After all, he was smart enough to excel within the system, but also smart enough to realize how the system was controlling young minds.

Academic pressure was not only put on students within the classroom. This emphasis on school continued into the home. Students who did not pass were often treated as idiots by their parents. This struggle is seen in *Spring Awakening* as Moritz attempts to talk to his father about what it would mean if he were to fail. Moritz’ anxiety over this goes beyond fears contemporary students might face in similar situations of being grounded, or facing a parent’s disappointment. In the world of *Spring Awakening* the failure of a child was an ultimate cause of shame. It is not as shocking Moritz was driven to thoughts of suicide when considering this disappointment, combined with the stifling bureaucratic nature of the school system, and the corporeal punishment. Moritz was not the only German student to consider such actions. In fact, German schools faced an epidemic of suicides at the time of *Spring Awakening*.

## **Primary Accounts from German students**

*A male student of the German Gymnasium's account of his education:*

"Later on, there was endless Latin, and even later, Greek. German and gymnastics were equally valued minor subjects. We had two hours of each per week; only in the higher grades was instruction in German allotted somewhat more time. I wrote many Latin verses – about peace, war, the swimming pool, the lyre, the piano – but I wouldn’t have known whether any poets lived in Germany or what kind, if I did not figure it out from the books that my father put on my mother’s desk. I was capable of calculating the surface area of an ellipse, but I did not have even a rough concept of a square kilometer or the salary of a full professor at university. We wrote Greek exams in the form of translations from German originals without a dictionary, which really constituted a particular waste of both Greek and German, because we did not have what it took for such work – basically we could not read Homer. We learned from Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico* about the construction of the bridge that Caesar had built for his legions over the Rhine and could name every brace and fret, but we did not know what the structure of the German Reich looked like according to the constitution. We were more familiar with the Second

Messenian War than with the Second Silesian War or the Wars of Liberation [from Napoleon], because our history lessons did not include these late events. The historical and political foundations of our lives remained completely unknown to us. However, this was by no means the teachers' fault; it had to do with the times, and I knew of no *Gymnasium* where the situation would have been any different. "

*Another boy's account of his school experience:*

"To call the town's high school "humanistic" must have been a misunderstanding, if one understood this to mean instruction with the goal of free and independent thinking and the attainment of a basic education. The "humanistic" element of this school consisted more or less in the instruction of Latin and Greek grammar. We hadn't the slightest clue of the vitality of these languages, of language as an expression of an intellectual attitude, its logic, its poetic power, and beauty. And so Ovid, Virgil, Cicero, and Homer were nothing more than bothersome schoolwork, sentence constructions that we had to prepare laboriously with a dictionary for the next day, and which passed over us without a trace. With modern languages the situation was quite pathetic. The teachers assigned to instruct them were incapable of speaking them themselves. Hardly any of these stiff, old gentlemen had ever seen France or England, not to mention having any knowledge of French or English literature, or being able to convey to us an image of our neighboring countries. Obviously, for this remote province of Upper Silesia, these teacher-caricatures, who contented themselves each day by covering the prescribed dosage of instruction and then rushing off to their patriotic discussions in the local pub, were just good enough. If we, a small group, moved by our natural, youthful urge towards knowledge, had not taken it upon ourselves to expand our own horizons, we would have grown up like barbarians. Certainly there were better schools elsewhere in Germany. What we heard about the French high school in Berlin, about high schools in Frankfurt, Breslau, and a few other cities, aroused our envy and admiration. But I am afraid that the majority of the schools in small towns, particularly those in the eastern provinces, were more or less like ours."

*Part of a German girl's recount of her education:*

"[ . . . ] What I learned in my school years [at the girls' upper school] was minimal, even though I was considered one of the best pupils. "Spatial theory is the theory of space" – that's how each and every physics class started out. [ . . . ] In history class, I learned and experienced only two periods: the ancient Greeks and, in later grades, the era of Frederick the Great. We acquired no picture of the world or of culture whatsoever. Similarly, I only learned some geography later on in life, at the side of my educated husband, through travels with him. In German class, we had to write essays on "The Apple Tree" and "The Grape Harvest" – I can still see the childlike images before me that were put up in front of our class. In the upper grades, dissecting Schiller's dramas was a requirement. The only thing I retained was some knowledge in German and French grammar."









Source: <http://springawakeningbsu.weebly.com/education.html>

## RELIGION

Wendla sounds incredulous at the thought of Melchior not believing in God because at the time of Spring Awakening it was hard to reconcile the idea of atheism when religion permeated so much of society. The church set the standards by which so much of these children's lives were ruled at home and at school. Home of Martin Luther's Reformation, Germany had a great divide between its Catholic and Protestant citizens. Most towns were strictly one denomination or the other, and tensions could become high when forced to cohabit, or even interact, with other denominations. However, Germany was predominantly Protestant, and the town of *Spring Awakening* would have been Protestant. German conservatives critiqued the materialism and emphasis on self of the modern Germany. In many ways the church stands as a representation of the past and an opposition for the adolescents in the play. The 19th century also saw the rise in popularity of evangelical movements and missionary works. This required a more active role in religion. Wendla mentions her mother's work with the local missionary society. Missionary work, especially to third world countries continue to be a focus of many American churches today. The Christingle chorale would also have been a part of these movements, the first chorale beginning in 1878.

Additionally, religion was not confined to the church in 19th century Germany. It played a large role in the classroom. Students in Prussian Gymnasiums received two hours of religious instruction a week in 1901. Religious teachings are reported as being more prevalent in elementary schools, although after approximately 1890 it began to become possible for students to opt out of such education. Today, religion does not play as large a role in the classroom. In fact, it is supposed to be left out of public education. However, remnants still find a way in.

In the world of *Spring Awakening*, religion exists as a means for control. It is an institution like the school and family that hold these children in check. However, while religion was used as a form of control in 19th century Germany, it seems to be reaching out more to young people today. The church today recognizes that it cannot get contemporary adolescents to obey the rules of the church by force, so they attempt to appeal to teens, making it their choice to follow the church's code of conduct. Yet, as explored previously, even if an adolescent does not subscribe to the Christian brand of morality they are still subject to cultural judgment based heavily on Christianity. The church in Germany at the time was controlled by the state. John E. Groh, a scholar on 19th century German Protestantism postulates that the Protestant church served to model the ability to live "freely within authority." This adds yet another layer of authority and control, and it is exactly what the teens in *Spring Awakening* are fighting against. In some instances clergymen also performed services for the government. This furthered the church's role as another looming institution for Melchior, Moritz, Wendla, and the others. Additionally, religion provides the morality to which the middle classes so desperately cling. Some sources from the time claim that since the Enlightenment there was a decline in church attendance and faith in many German towns. Yet, many scientists considered themselves religious. Indeed, far from becoming a thing of the past, in 1851 one-sixth of all books published in Germany were related to theology. Groh observes that German Protestantism as the end of the century was filled with such paradoxes. Religion seemed to simultaneously flourish and decline. There were those who remained pious, and those who clung to the ideas and the morality without much thought, going through the motions.

In many ways religion feels to be in the same societal place today as in 19th century Germany. Many would claim a decline in religion, that faith is not as imperative to people's lives today as in the past. Despite this religion still features prominently in the national discourse. Faith plays a large role in the deciding of what is morally acceptable. Religion provides a heavy arsenal in the gay marriage debate. It is also religion that supplies the main arguments against women's reproductive rights. While atheism is not nearly as shocking today as Wendla considered it, the church remains an institution representative of the middle class morality. This leads to some of the same oppression as experienced by the children in *Spring Awakening*.

Source: <http://springawakeningbsu.weebly.com/religion.html>

## ADOLESCENCE

*"When I think back on this period it seems like a rich and happy time, but youth is too restless to be happy and in many diary entries and letters there is much written about wounds and scars. But people often deceive each other and I have the very girlish feeling that everything was not yet real life. Sometimes I felt like I was sitting in a waiting room."* Elly Heuss-Knapp (1881-1950)

Today, the teen years may not be well loved, but they are accepted. And they are sure catered to in marketing and advertising. None of this changes the fact that it's still confusing to make that transition into being a teenager. Every teenager has felt like they were back in the 19th century figuring it all out for the first time with no help or support.

At the time of *Spring Awakening*, adolescence was new. Previously, a person was either a child or an adult, hence the subtitle on Wedekind's original play reads "a Children's Tragedy." Adolescents were forced to inhabit a weird limbo in which they were told to grow-up, but also kept from participating in adult life. This in-between place is explored from the opening moments of *Spring Awakening* when Wendla wants to stay in the clothes of her childhood, and does not understand why this wish would be considered inappropriate in any way. Her body is that of an adult, but she is also still a child in many ways and she's not yet ready to wear the clothes of an adult. Adolescence today is still a period of confusion and high emotions, a time in which many are finding themselves. The adolescents of *Spring Awakening* were attempting similar things. Unfortunately, the strength of the patriarchal family, harsh schools, and religion led to ever increasing turmoil for teens at the time. The child was at the whim of the parents often leaving them feeling helpless, isolated, and in some cases suicidal.

One was considered a child as long as he or she was in school. Therefore, middle class children, like those in *Spring Awakening*, were considered children for longer than their lower class counterparts. The final exam of secondary school was often called a "maturity exam" for this reason. Previously adolescence, as defined by a longer period of dependence and extended education, had been reserved for the wealthy. A number of factors contributed to the development of adolescence as a more widespread stage of life. The first major factor was the Industrial Revolution and the growing power of the middle class. The 19th century began to see middle class children excluded from labor, and their time spent in school increased.

In the era of *Spring Awakening*, according to Neuman, children were treated as "weak creatures who had to be shielded from adult sinfulness, whose moral weakness had to be overcome through schooling." Many beliefs supported this, asserting that a child is naturally wicked, and that education functions as a tool of correction. Today it is generally accepted that the teen years are spent developing a personal identity and gaining independence. This was impossible in the world of *Spring Awakening* between the combination of controlling parents and organizations attempting to keep teens inside the already established lines. This led to a multitude of reactions. Some teens, like Melchior, acted out, attempting to gain their independence despite all the forces of opposition. Others, like Moritz, caved, unable to live in a world where they were constantly defined by the expectations of others, expectations they could never quite reach.

As adolescence became a more established stage of life, it began to get more attention and exploration. Salinger and Chbosky still may have been a long way off, but novels from authors such as Mann, Hesse, and Musil all explore the “turmoil” associated with adolescence. Of the many women who recalled their adolescence at the time, none of them remembered their period of puberty particularly fondly. The rule of the parents was absolute. Germans had a great respect for authority, and children and adolescents were subject to the authority of the elder generations. This created a lot of tension between authority figures and adolescents, a relationship that can be seen in *Spring Awakening* through relationships like that of Melchior with his teachers. However, this antipathy did not exist for everyone. At the time, interference in a child’s life was seen as a way to protect them. Parents that held complete control over their children would not have considered it a cause for disdain. Rather, they would have felt they were caring for their children and protecting them from a corrupt world.

*Spring Awakening* manages to take an already grim stage of life and paint it, in a very Expressionist manner, even darker. The children of *Spring Awakening* were facing all of the same problems as children today. They were experiencing pressure to perform well in school, being told that their performance in the classroom could very well decide the rest of their lives. This mirrors the ever-increasing pressure to perform well enough in school to get into the best schools, and obtain the best scholarship to be able to fund those schools. They encountered sexual urges and first crushes. Some faced devastating cases of depression or abuse. Unfortunately, while the teens in *Spring Awakening* were dealing with problems that still exist in the modern world, they were doing so with society pushing back against them. They had no access to information. They were made to feel ashamed of their new bodies and urges. The onslaught of emotions and feelings they were being told at home, in school, and at church were sinful, odious, and wrong surely only increased the anxiety surrounding such developments, especially when they had such little control over their own thoughts.

The adolescents of *Spring Awakening* were shielded from the adult world to an extent that is not seen today. Wendla did not know how babies were made, and she had no access to that information. Moritz had to learn about his new sexual urges from a friend because too much shame surrounded the idea of asking his parents. In addition to things parents kept from their children specifically, like Frau Bergman not informing Wendla how babies are made, there was vast amounts of censorship at the state level as well. While it is common for teens to seek out information from their peer group, the adolescents of *Spring Awakening* really had no other choice. They were forced to try and find comfort and knowledge from others just as confused, anxious, and shamed as themselves. The setting of 19th century Germany heightens the confusion that is still present in adolescents. The generational struggle, the idea that parents and guardians just don’t get it, remains. *Spring Awakening* serves as a warning that even the best intentions for a child can go horribly wrong. Wendla’s mother thought she was protecting her from the real world by not informing her of the specifics of conception. Instead, she ended up dying from a botched abortion, a fate totally preventable. Moritz’ parents wanted him to succeed and have a good future. Yet, he ended up with no future at all because of all pressure. Melchior’s mother gave him more reign, but she didn’t really take the time to discuss important things with her son. Today there are still parents that seem too overbearing, not budging an inch on an issue. There are also parents who seem to allow too much freedom, becoming friend rather than guider. These stories are still relevant.

Source: <http://springawakeningbsu.weebly.com/adolescence.html>

## SEXUALITY



Sex plays an integral role in *Spring Awakening*. It affects every teen in the show in one way or another. Wendla knows nothing about sex and conception, and eventually pays the price for that ignorance after a botched abortion. Moritz commits suicide partly due to his own confusion about his sexual urges. Otto is sexually attracted to his older piano instructor. Hansy and Ernst have a homosexual affair. Martha and Ilse are sexually assaulted by older men. All of the other children deal with the awakening of their sexuality and accompanying urges as well. Melchior, although understanding more than most of his classmates, is still ruined by the attitudes toward sexuality.

As if the perpetuation of morality from church leaders was not enough, doctors and scientists began to become the upholders of morality as well. At the time of *Spring Awakening* it was believed that sexual curiosity in teens was a sign of moral corruption. Frau Bergman not wanting to explain to Wendla how babies are made was not necessarily an act of negligence. Rather, Wendla's mother may have genuinely believed that the explanation would have corrupted her daughter. Additionally, the middle class in the 19th century was noted for prudery. Parents were guilty of repressing sexuality in themselves as well as their children. Sexual excess, or sex beyond what was necessary for conception, within marriage was not acceptable. Although more open than in the days of *Spring Awakening*, adolescent sexuality remains a touchy subject today. In recent memory, popular television programs such as *Gossip Girl* have received major backlash and accusations of glorifying sex to teenagers. Yet society also seems to have accepted that many teens are sexually active. Popular teenage girl magazine *Seventeen* often provides articles on staying physically and mentally healthy in regards to sexual activity. While parents in the late 19th century denied their adolescents information on sex and attempted to prevent their



children from experiencing such feelings, today most parenting websites encourage parents to engage in an active dialogue with their teen about sex.

The private issues and sexualities of adolescents became a big concern for parents, doctors, and teachers. The expression of sexuality was believed to upset the natural order. One way to prevent sexual activity from adolescents was to keep the sexes separated. When Melchior and Wendla meet in the forest it would have been one of very few opportunities to interact, let alone without supervision. Additional ways to attempt to redirect sexual energies included a campaign to include physical exercise in the school day. It was believed that “nervous unrest, bodily weakness, and psychological depression,” all often commonly used to refer to sexual activity or desires, could be fixed through exercise and a simple lifestyle. All authority figures worked hard to perpetuate the myth of childhood innocence.

The combination of an extremely repressive society and the young ages of the adolescents in *Spring Awakening* can make it difficult to believe that all of the sex in the play is not an exaggeration. Yet, despite middle class morality in relation to sexuality and vested interest from older generations, students were not celibate. In fact, there are reports that some children searched for sexual opportunities more zealously in reaction to monitoring. The era began to see a rise in venereal disease (syphilis and gonorrhea being reported often), illegitimate children, and other instances of sexual deviance. A study done with university students at the time indicated that 70% lost their virginity in secondary school. That statistic represents 44% of the general population. One student reported that 10-20% of his class engaged in regular sexual activity. This compares to 47.4% of high schoolers surveyed by the CDC in 2011 who admitted to having engaged in sexual intercourse. Many students began to have sex at approximately 16, although some began as early as 14. These numbers line up with the ages in *Spring Awakening*. Also like in *Spring Awakening*, many of these students were ignorant of ways to prevent pregnancy. Regardless, the topic holds as much fascination today as it did to the adolescents of *Spring Awakening*. The environment at large may be vastly different in terms of available information, but the time of discovery and sexual awakening can still feel as confusing and clandestine.

## **Masturbation**

Masturbation was heavily frowned upon in 19th century Germany. There was a commonly held belief that masturbation could lead to disease, including everything from acne to homicidal insanity. It was believed that masturbation led to a loss of “vital energy” that would help make one susceptible to such diseases. John Harvey Kellogg wrote in 1884 that signs of a masturbator included “acne, sudden changes in disposition, fickleness, bashfulness, boldness” and other things that could apply to most teenagers. One French physician wrote, “In my opinion neither the plague, nor war, nor smallpox, nor a crowd of similar evils, have resulted more disastrously for humanity, than the habit of masturbation: it is the destroying element of civilized society.” Masturbation was considered a social evil.

## **Homosexuality**

Hansy and Ernst provide a unique challenge within *Spring Awakening*. They are depicted as having a homosexual affair. While it has been established that people at the time believed

masturbation caused mental illness, those in 19th century Germany also believed it could lead to the practice of sodomy. In fact, before the topic was given attention by scholars such as Berlin's chief medical officer Johann Ludwig Casper, the predominant belief in relation to homosexuality held that male "sodomites" were often oversexed predators who had grown tired of women. The era attempted to remove all eroticism from friendship, something that might not have been as closely monitored before.

In the 1850s and 60s Johann Ludwig Casper studied "sexual deviants," ultimately declaring that homosexuality was how people were born. However, this was the beginning of a new attitude, one that questioned the illegality of homosexuality. In 1857 Ambroise Tardieu described homosexuals as female in appearance and as having diseased bodies as a result of their sexual deviance. Many believed homosexuality was the cause of other illnesses, and even those that didn't put stock in the idea regarded those who preferred the romantic company of their own sex as different in terms of appearance and carriage. Homosexuality was illegal in Germany. Yet, following Casper's assertion and the work of others, Homosexualität was included in a German encyclopedia in 1908. The entry speculated that 1.5-2% of the German population was gay.

Source: <http://springawakeningbsu.weebly.com/sexuality.html>

## ABORTION

Today, it may seem absurd for Wendla to believe the doctor when he tells her she has anemia. For a girl who does not even understand how she came to be pregnant, it is much more understandable. Additionally, the diagnosis of pregnancy was not as exact in 19th century Germany as it is today. While the teenage pregnancy rate has dropped in the United States in the last two decades, the U.S. remains highest in teen birth rates when compared to countries such as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan. Reasoning for lower teenage birth rates in these countries include better education and easier access to contraceptives and a social acceptance of sexuality. In 2010, nine percent of births were to teenagers. Many of the problems regarding teen pregnancy, as well as sexuality, that appear in *Spring Awakening* can be seen mirrored in contemporary America.

Wendla's doctor prescribes pills after her diagnosis, presumably pills with abortive powers. The musical version also follows Wendla's mother arranging and sending her daughter to an abortionist. Both methods would have been feasible at the time, and both would have been illegal. Wendla's mother herself could have faced up to two years in prison for her involvement, as a person who caused a pregnant woman to abort without her knowledge could be prosecuted. As Wendla did not know how she became pregnant, it is not likely she really understood where her mother was taking her when she went for the abortion. The only time abortions were allowed under German law was for medical emergencies and to save a woman's life. Despite this, abortions still occurred. Noble women who had more open access to abortions, and funds to pay for them, rarely delivered illegitimate children. Lower class women however, often had to resort to folk remedies, like the pills in Wedekind's original work. At the time, at least in Canada, up to 1/6 of all pregnancies ended in "forced miscarriages." Abortion remains as hot-buttoned an issue today as ever. The recent reduction of funding for institutions such as Planned Parenthood because of their relationship with abortion is just one recent example. Wendla's situation seems to be demonstrating the danger of abortions being illegal. After all, history has proven that despite the law women will often attempt to secure abortions. Often, these ways could be extremely dangerous for the woman involved.

The end of the 19th century was a curious in-between time where modern medicine began to be favored over folk remedies. Yet, the folk remedies in terms of abortions still persisted as well. German folk medicine tended to favor the use of plants like the root of worm fern, thyme, parsley, and lavender in tea form. The modern age also gave rise to the use of substances such as turpentine, castor oil, Epson salts, ammonia, and opium as abortants. There were the physical acts of extreme exercise, heavy lifting, hot baths, jumping, and shaking. Additionally there was the use of pills that would hazard against use if pregnant, often cleverly advertising in that way.

Then, as seen in *Spring Awakening* there were abortionists. Not all women would see abortionists right away. Many would first enlist the help of their friends and family in terminating a pregnancy, friends and family that had no clue what they were doing. When this failed, the name of an abortionist was most often secured through a female, word-of-mouth network. They were also known to advertise in code like the following:

"Frau R.

gives advice on all intimate matters  
and guarantees absolute discretion  
menstrual blockage, discharge, ect.  
treated by unique method  
safe results guaranteed.  
Practice hours daily 12-3 and 4-7.”

One trip to an abortionist was often not enough, with 2-3 visits average to terminate a pregnancy. Female abortionists were generally preferred, and there were not many male abortionists in practice. It was believed men abortionists were not as reliable because they did not understand the female body as well as a woman. Regardless of the gender of the abortionist, the procedure was fraught with peril, as witnessed by Wendla's death. Wendla's gravestone reads that she died of anemia, which is what her doctor prescribed her with to her face. However, in light of her trip to an abortionist, it is likely that she died from bleeding caused by the abortion.

Source: <http://springawakeningbsu.weebly.com/abortion.html>

# ABUSE



The number of deaths per day related to child abuse rose to five plus in 2010 compared to approximately three a day in 1998. Today, 9.2% of children are sexually abused. Over 90% of children and adolescents who report sexual abuse knew their abuser in some way. The idea of abuse plays heavily into *Spring Awakening* with both the acknowledged abuse of Martha and Ilse, and Wendla's subsequent decision that she needs to be beaten to feel (although some of that crosses over to sexuality). The level to which abuse existed in Germany at the time further helps construct the dark, terrifying world the adolescents are living in within these scenes. Especially in a world where physical abuse was readily accepted, these girls would have felt utterly devoid of any ability to change their own fate.

## Physical Abuse

Fear of beatings, at home and school, was a leading cause in the increase of school suicides during the period. Corporal punishment was accepted in Germany through the 1960s. At the

beginning of the 20th century, a study reported 89% of German parents admitting to beating their children, most often with implements such as canes, whips, and sticks. In the 19th century, it was not only Germany that turned a blind eye to the beating of children, as a form of discipline or otherwise. Before 1880 in France the only crimes that existed against children were abortion and infanticide. Therefore, anything up to death was not punishable by law. While not accepted today like it was in Germany at the time, the sad fact is child abuse still exists. Neglect is the most common form of child abuse reported today. However 17.6% of children suffer from physical abuse.

A December 1892 entry from the journal of Frank Wedekind (the author of *Spring Awakening*) offers the following nonchalant glimpse into domestic abuse.

“Am up and about by nine, put *Schwigerling* under my arm, and drive to Frau Gotthelf’s. Her husband receives me in the drawing-room. He’s short and stout, with a puffy red face, pouting lips, and a rather furtive look. He invites me to come more often. His brother-in-law, Lewis, told me he was a monster, gets drunks every day, comes home and beats his wife and children, doesn’t contribute a sou to the household expenses, and had allowed the youngest of his children literally to starve to death. I read the first act to Frau Gotthelf in the dining-room.”

Wedekind wastes no more time contemplating the horrors he has recorded. At this point he had already written *Spring Awakening*. The same entry even goes on to record Frau Gotthelf making recommendations of to who he should introduce *Spring Awakening*, and offering her own connections. Yet, he offers no more thought to this woman’s domestic plight. There is judgment in calling her husband a monster, but also acceptance that this is normal in the fact he does not analyze it further. It mirrors the reactions of the girls in *Spring Awakening*. After expressing horror at the situations of Martha and Ilse, Wendla tells Melchior she “has never been beaten,” implying it is not a unique occurrence. While this can also be attributed to a youthful naiveté, there is recognition there that beatings are more commonly accepted in the world of *Spring Awakening* than in society today.

## **Sexual Abuse**

While specific accounts or research on child abuse for the period is hard to find, sexual abuse may be even more so. Today, the concept of sexual abuse receives a lot of press and research attention, mostly in relation to how heinous the crime is considered today. In the 1880s a French physician named Amroise Tardieu tried to bring attention to the victims of sexual abuse, but after he died skeptics alleged many of his reports were made up. Victims of sexual abuse could often face a backlash from their community, although reports did not get much more specific about what exactly the backlash would entail. Additionally, denial, minimization, and rationalization were often opposing factors facing those trying to bring attention to the problem. No account indicates that sexual abuse was perpetuated or accepted as much as physical abuse during the time. Writings that would seem to indicate this are called out by contemporary scholars as attempts to justify the author’s own feelings and behavior. It seems more likely that in an era of intense sexual repression, the idea of recognizing, let alone talking, about such abuse was unthinkable. Additionally, Germany saw the control of major institutions including the state, church, school, and the family. Questioning the authority and practices of a family was most

certainly not common.

Source: <http://springawakeningbsu.weebly.com/abuse.html>

## SUICIDE

Unfortunately, in the late 19th century, Moritz's actions may not have been all that shocking to the German public. Some scholars, like English historian Thomas Henry, felt a rise in suicide was a normal consequence of modernization, and that nothing could be done to prevent such tragedies. However, England did not see a rise in adolescent suicides; this phenomenon was restricted mainly to Germany. While in 1883 sixty-four out of 32,000 German male students committed suicide, other European countries reported only four in 100,000. In Prussia between 1883-1889 there were 289 suicides linked to school in some way. Today, suicide is the third leading cause of death for those between the ages of 10-24. Beyond the fatality rate that can be attributed to suicide, 149,000 youths 10-24 receive treatment for self-inflicted wounds every year, and 15% of students polled in a nationwide survey of public and private schools reported seriously considering suicide.

It was mainly middle class students, those in the Gymnasium like Moritz and his friends, that were that were taking their lives in 19th century Germany. When one German Gymnasium director was informed a student had committed suicide the director simply gave thanks it hadn't occurred in the school, a reaction one could expect from the teachers in *Spring Awakening*.

One half of male suicides during the era were caused by school stress (one third for females). Fear of punishment played into this as well. In an account hauntingly similar to that of Moritz's one boy's suicide note simply read, "Because I didn't pass my exams." Suicides tended to increase in the spring when promotions were happening in schools. In addition to all the fear related directly to school, staying in school for longer increments of a student's life also contributed to this stress. Students were being expected to act like children, although their bodies and minds were not those of a child. This also meant students faced longer periods of dependence. Many reformers felt that reevaluating the way the German schools operated would drastically help solve the suicide problem. Scholar Gustav Siebert believed a restructuring of the German home, church, and school could prevent many suicides. Siebert believed the stress put on students in school was a major factor in the high suicide rates. Critics denied the connection between schools and the suicides.

One thing is for sure: the idea of adolescent suicides caught the attention and interest of the German public. The topic began to become featured more in German plays, like *Spring Awakening*, and novels. New genres began to be associated with works dealing with the topic of suicide. Accounts of adolescent suicides were invariably featured in local newspapers. The media response to youth suicides today are not all that different from in 19th century Germany. Often, they receive a lot of attention, and many are still linked to school. Regardless of if suicide is considered an epidemic as it was in the late 19th century, by the media or society at large, it remains a serious issue that touches the lives of many teenagers.

Source: <http://springawakeningbsu.weebly.com/suicide.html>



**APPENDIX F**

**EXIT TICKET**

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHARACTER NAME(S)** \_\_\_\_\_

**DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING TODAY THAT HELPED INFORM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD OF *SPRING AWAKENING*? PROVIDE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES.**

**HOW DOES THIS INFORMATION CONNECT TO THE CHARACTER(S) YOU PORTRAY IN THE PLAY?**

**HOW WILL YOU USE THIS INFORMATION TO DEEPEN YOUR PERFORMANCE? PROVIDE SPECIFIC ACTIONS YOU WILL TAKE.**

