LES BELLES-SŒURS

By Michel Tremblay
Translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco
Directed by Esther Jun

GRADE RECOMMENDATION
8+

CONTENT ADVISORY
Please see the show page for a detailed audience advisory.

SYNOPSIS
When Michel Tremblay’s Les Belles-Sœurs premièred in Montréal in 1968, the province’s French majority were second-class citizens in all but name. The Anglophone elite and the Catholic Church held the levers of power, and the Québécois, effectively barred from the best jobs, had one of the highest birth rates in the West. Tremblay’s explosive play, which debuted in a pivotal year in the province’s Quiet Revolution, was a sign that things were finally starting to change.

Germaine Lauzon is a downtrodden Montréal housewife who thinks she’s finally won life’s jackpot when she wins a million Gold Star stamps from a local grocery store. She invites her family, friends and neighbours—a cross-section of 15 working-class women—to help glue the stamps into booklets. As the women work, they gossip, laugh and swap complaints. But the jovial, raunchy ambience is spiked with flares of jealousy, as these disempowered women rage against the strictures—of family, society, gender—that trap them in place. Their chorus of grievances also reveal seismic generational gaps in the women’s attitudes toward the Church, their husbands and families, and their own bodies. The older women, especially, may not like the way things are, but the rapid social and economic changes underway threaten the only life they’ve known.

A chronicle of the Québécois female experience in all its beauty and despair, Les Belles-Sœurs brought the struggles of ordinary working-class women to mainstream theatre audiences at its première. It was the first professionally-produced play performed entirely in joual, the vernacular dialect of the Québécois working class, a bold decision that initially alienated many critics. Audiences responded with wild enthusiasm, making the play a hit, and critics eventually caught on. Today Les Belles-Sœurs is recognized as a classic of Québécois and Canadian theatre and has been translated into more than 30 languages.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
• Curriculum Connections
  • Global Competencies:
  • Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Metacognition, Self-Awareness
• Grade 8
  • The Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Arts)
  • French as a Second Language
  • Language
  • Social Studies
• Grades 9-12
  • The Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Arts)
  • Canadian and World Studies
  • English
  • French as a Second Language
• Grades 11-12
  • French as a Second Language
  • Social Science and Humanities

THEMES
• Acceptance
• Class and Consumerism
• Community
• Expectations
• Family
• Generational Relationships and Rifts
• Guilt and Judgment
• The Quiet Revolution
• Religion
• Secrets and Repression
• Social and Economic Mobility
• Tradition vs. Modern Ideas
DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are young people or older people more open to change? Explain your position.
- In what ways does language impact identity? Do the language/s you speak define who you are? Why or why not?
- If you won a significant prize in a contest, would you share your winnings amongst your friends and family or keep it to yourself? Why?

STUDY GUIDES

2023 Shorts and Study Guides and those from previous seasons are available free of charge online at https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/Learn/Teachers/ResourcesPD

BOOKING INFORMATION: TICKETS, WORKSHOPS & CHATS

STUDENT MATINÉES

You may book any available date, but selected student matinée performances for this show are at 2 p.m. on the following dates:

- Wednesday, September 6th
- Friday, September 15th
- Wednesday, September 20th
- Friday, September 22nd
- Tuesday, September 26th
- Friday, October 6th
- Tuesday, October 17th

WORKSHOPS & CHATS

Pre or Post-Show Workshops and Post-Show Chats (virtual, onsite or at your school/centre) can be booked by calling the Box Office at 1.800.567.1600.