



Chrysalis

EDUCATION GUIDE

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VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY THEATRE DEPARTMENT
EDUCATION GUIDE FOR
CHRYSALIS
BY KATHRYN PETERSEN
DIRECTED BY ED SOBEL
FEBRUARY 16- FEBRUARY 26

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

THIS EDUCATION GUIDE IS INTENDED TO HELP GUIDE AND INSPIRE CONVERSATION, REFLECTION AND FURTHER RESEARCH CONNECTED TO VILLANOVA THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF CHRYSALIS BY KATHRYN PETERSEN.

IT CONTAINS A SERIES OF PROMPTS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION ORGANIZED AROUND THE WORK ITSELF, VILLANOVA THEATRE'S PRODUCTION CONCEPT, AND BROADER THEMES. THEY ARE DESIGNED TO BE USED IN ANY ORDER AND CAN BE APPROACHED AS SINGULAR TOPICS FOR REFLECTION OR IN COMBINATION WITH ONE ANOTHER TO SUPPORT A MORE NUANCED CONVERSATION ABOUT IDENTITY, CULTURE AND INCLUSION.



ABOUT THE PLAY

Developed at Villanova in 2019 through the Sue Winge Award for Playwriting, *Chrysalis* explores the metamorphosis of Maria Sybilla Merian, 17th-century illustrator and naturalist, and her teenage daughter, Dorothea, as they redraw the lines of their personal and professional relationship. Determined to be taken seriously for her scientific discoveries in a male-dominated field, Maria embarks on a risky investigation that ultimately challenges how well she and her daughter know themselves and each other.

CONTENT WARNINGS

Content warnings are “verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive content.” Content warnings differ from spoilers because they don’t explain plot or context. Like a rating on a movie or TV show, content warnings give the audience a heads up about potentially triggering topics in the performance. We hope that providing the following content warnings will equip our audiences with the tools they need to engage with the performance in a meaningful and fulfilling way.

Like all good art, theatre asks audiences to engage with universal questions on a personal, sometimes challenging level. At the same time, please do note that there is a difference between trauma and discomfort. Without the latter, we can narrow and limit our experiences in ways detrimental to ourselves as individuals and as members of this community. Please use your best judgment and exercise self-care as needed.

Chrysalis by Kathryn Petersen engages with the following: sexual situations; references and depiction of infant mortality; implied nudity; and mention of enslavement, sexual assault, and abortion.

No animals, amphibians, insects, or humans were harmed in the making of the show.

MEET THE ARTISTS

KATHRYN PETERSEN

Playwright

is a playwright, actress and teacher residing near Philadelphia. A member of the Dramatist's Guild, Kathryn has had twelve plays produced and three published.

Little Red Robin Hood, commissioned by People's Light, was produced in 2019. Treasure Island the Panto was published by Playscripts Inc in 2013. It has had several productions since around the world. Cinderella, originally produced in 2008, garnered thirteen Philadelphia Barrymore Award nominations, including a nomination for Outstanding New Play of 2008. Arthur's Stone, Merlin's Fire, published by the Dramatic Publishing Company, has been produced by schools and theaters nationally and internationally. A member of the Actor's Equity Association, she has appeared in over seventy productions regionally; most recently, Dolly Levi in The Matchmaker and Helen Alving in Ghosts at People's Light: Angie in At the Old Place and Karen Weston in August: Osage County both at the Arden Theater in Philadelphia. She is a graduate of Temple University's MFA in playwriting program, a company member at People's Light. She is currently an Associate Professor of Theater and Director of the BFA in Acting Program at Arcadia University in Glenside, PA.



ED SOBEL

Director

is an Associate Professor at Villanova. Previously, he was Associate Artistic Director at the Arden Theatre Company and Director of New Play Development at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, overseeing development of more than 40 new plays including Tracy Letts' Pulitzer and Tony Award-winner August: Osage County, and Pulitzer finalists Red Light Winter and Man from Nebraska. Directing credits include world premieres of James Ijames' Moon Man Walk and The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington; productions of Endgame, Clybourne Park, Superior Donuts, Women in Jep and At the Old Place at the Arden; The Chosen, Huck Finn, and A Lesson Before Dying at Steppenwolf, and A Midsummer Night's Dream, Youth and Beckett Bites at Villanova. Broadway credits as dramaturg include The Minutes, Linda Vista, Superior Donuts, and August: Osage County. Writers whose work he has developed and directed include: Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, Rachel Bonds, Lydia Diamond, Kristoffer Diaz, Laura Eason, Hannah Khalil, Nimisha Ladva, Wendy MacLeod, Rogelio Martinez, and Bess Wohl. He is a recipient of the Elliot Hayes Award from the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas for outstanding contribution to the field. He holds a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and an MFA in directing from Northwestern.



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The adventure that the Merian women embark upon in the play is something that was unheard of during their time in history. In the 16th and 17th centuries, women were expected to maintain the home-life for their family in the roles of wife, mother and maid. Young women were expected to do their chores, married women to teach their children, and older women of society to practice piety and purity. Generally, only men were able to leave the city and venture into the wild to experience the unknown spectacles of abroad. Maria and Dorothea chose to take a leap of faith and travel to Suriname alone. As two women alone in new terrain, they empowered each other to realize their perspectives and aspirations. The mother-daughter relationship is also highly emphasized throughout the course of the narrative. Maria, the powerful single mother, employs her daughters, Johanna and Dorothea, to help grow her painting industry. The daughters are the ones who continue to carry out her legacy long after her death. The art of the Merian women has been able to live on through the empowerment they shared with each other.

PROMPTS

- What does empowerment mean to you? What does it mean to truly empower someone else?
- Throughout the play, Petersen draws attention to the tension between the Merian women. Can you connect to this mother-daughter dynamic in any way?
- The Merian women have established a strong foundation for women to emerge into the worlds of both STEM and art. Can you name any other women or members of a marginalized group who have pushed a boundary in their respective fields? How did they become empowered throughout their journey?
- Who is someone in your life that has empowered you? What are some similarities and some differences between your connection with them and the Merian women?



TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

The impact of the Eighty Years' War on the evolution of the fine arts is crucial to the Merian women's story. Having separated from Spain, the Netherlands were no longer dominated by a ruling nobility nor by the Catholic Church when it came to both political and artistic influence. Accordingly, the late 1690's were a time in which the desire for knowledge and artistic expressions flowed throughout Amsterdam. This period is often referred to as the Dutch Golden Age. Most importantly, art was being generated and shared on a large scale by ordinary citizens, whose priorities were shifting from religious-based art to more worldly themes.

Emphasis found its way to still life paintings of everyday objects, portraits and land, seascapes, group portraits of guilds, and other associations important in Dutch society. The landscape painting presented the "heroic elements" indigenous to the area such as a tree, windmill, or cloud-filled sky. Still life was utilized to imaginatively express both objects of beauty and the philosophical climate of the times through carefully composed arrangements and groupings. The popularity of these paintings grew due to their scientific accuracy. Art was used to express a celebration of Dutch identity, a new world that was fought for during the Eighty Years War. Some artistic scholars refer to the painting style of the Dutch Golden Age as Dutch



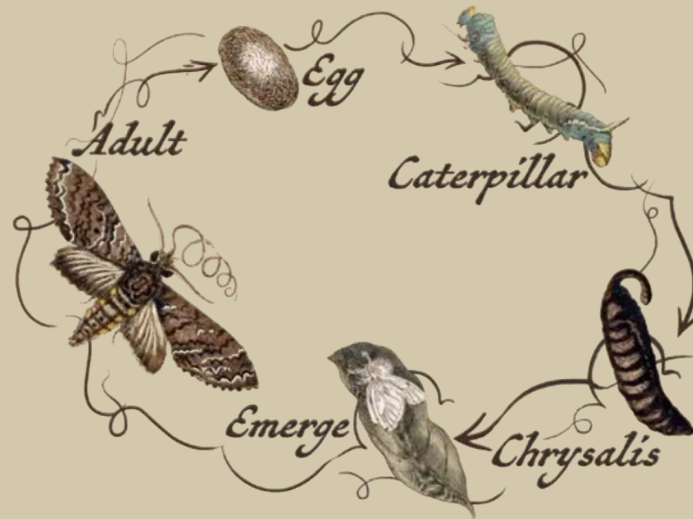
**TAKE THIS
PERSONALITY
QUIZ!**

PROMPTS

- Do you agree with the results of the personality quiz? Why or why not?
- How do you connect to art? What is the art that speaks to you? This could be film, television, music, etc...
- Do you think that art has the ability to influence culture and society? Where do you see art used to reflect or challenge society today?

METAMORPHOSIS

A CHANGE OF THE FORM OR NATURE OF A THING OR PERSON INTO A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ONE, BY NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL MEANS.



The term "metamorphosis" has often been associated with the world of insects, particularly for describing the life cycle of a butterfly. Throughout the course of the play Petersen articulates relationship between the personal transformations within our own lives through the relationships with the Merian women. This ranges from the professional transformation Maria has with her curiosity of the chrysalis while Dorothea experiences the physical, intellectual and emotional changes that come with her development from a young girl to a grown woman. These side-by-side transformations highlight the cycle of growth and change, both between mother and child and between egg and butterfly. Personal growth mirrors the metamorphosis of the insect. Nourishment occurs in the youthful caterpillar stage and we emerge into adult life ready to spread our wings after development within a chrysalis.

PROMPTS

- What stage of metamorphosis do you think you are experiencing currently?
How are you preparing for your next stage?
- Can you name a time in your life where you experienced a grand transformation or growth? What were the highs and lows?
- In what ways is the life cycle of a butterfly a useful tool for describing human growth and development? What are its limitations?"



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Ryan Henry's Dramaturgical Website
 - <https://rhenry139.wixsite.com/chrysalis-dfile>
- Maria Sibylla Merian Society
 - <https://www.themariasibyllameriansociety.humanities.uva.nl>
- Maria Merian's Butterflies
 - <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes//maria-merians-butterflies/the-queens-gallery-buckingham-palace/branch-of-duroia-eriopila-with-zebra-swallowtail-butterfly>
- Villanova Theatre's Website
 - <http://villanovatheatre.org>
- Villanova Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Phone: (610) 519-5719
 - Email: diversity@villanova.edu
- University Counseling Center
 - (610) 519-4050
- Center for Access, Success and Achievement (CASA)
 - casa@villanova.edu Villanova Public Safety: 610-519-4444
- Residence Life
 - Your R.A. / 610-519-4154

