

ON STAGE  
DEC. 16-DEC17, 2014



# 4000 MILES

By AMY HERZOG

Directed by GARY GISSELMAN



*A new offering from our*

**3M** STUDENT  
SERIES

## Study Guide

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# Playwright's Inspiration

4000 Miles



Amy Herzog

## The Playwright's Inspiration

Amy Herzog is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and the 2011 recipient of the prestigious Whiting Writers' Award. Amy Herzog's *4000 Miles* premiered as part of Lincoln Center Theater's new works initiative LCT3 in 2011 and became the first play from LCT3 to graduate to a full Off-Broadway run at Lincoln Center Theater. The production received an OBIE Award for Best New American Play and the play was nominated for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

*4000 Miles* was inspired by Amy Herzog's own family members. In fact, Herzog unapologetically cites her extended Marxist family as source material. *After the Revolution*, Herzog's first full-length Off Broadway work, earned her acclaim at Playwrights Horizons. The crossover character in these two works is Vera Joseph, a spunky granny and dedicated Communist based on Herzog's own grandmother, LEEPEE.

Herzog based Leo, a [modern] hippie, on a cousin who lost a good friend at a young age, and even the character's onstage bicycle [featured in the original production] had biographical origins. It's the one Herzog rode from New Haven to San Francisco on a Habitat for Humanity fund-raiser after she completed her undergraduate degree at Yale in 2000.

Herzog credits her grandmother [who passed away in April 2012] with helping make Vera come alive. Herzog said, "I'm so lucky to be an adult person with a living grandmother who is very much a part of my life—and who's not grandmotherly. I interact with her in a complicated way, like I interact with people of my own generation."

The Josephs [family members] in Herzog's plays are also partly based on her father's stepfamily. "They certainly had reservations about the play," Herzog acknowledges. "Luckily, they were excited to have a dialogue with me about it instead of getting angry. They were happy to say, 'I don't like this part,' instead of taking it personally or feeling accused."

Beyond *4000 Miles*, Herzog thinks she may have one more play about the Josephs in her. And although she toyed with setting one in the 1950s, she now feels a third play should maintain the contemporary setting. "I'm interested in those moments of examination that, by necessity, come later," she says. "I really don't know anyone who is present and thoughtful going through their whole lives, and the things that we inherit from our families are the things that we really question."

Herzog's other plays include *Belleville* (Yale Repertory Theatre, Steppenwolf and New York Theatre Workshop), *After the Revolution* (Next Theatre in Evanston, Williamstown, Playwrights Horizons; John Gassner Award Nomination), *The Wendy Play* (ACT, San Francisco), *Hungry* (Ensemble Studio Theater), and *The Great God Pan* (Playwrights Horizons).

\*Excerpts taken from "Profile: Amy Herzog," an article written by Diane Snyder for *Time Out New York* on May 31, 2011.

# Plot Summary

*4000 Miles*



It is three o'clock on a September morning in a spacious Greenwich Village apartment. The year is around 2007, but it is apparent that the apartment hasn't been redecorated since the late 1960s. The 21-year-old Leo stands inside the apartment with his bike and fifty-pound camping pack, having surprised his grandmother Vera with a visit after a cross-country bike trip from Seattle to New York. Leo is not on good terms with his family back in St. Paul, Minnesota, and hasn't been in contact with them for some time. Leo's mother is Vera's step-daughter, and this lack of communication, as well as Leo's state of mind, worries his grandmother.

Later that morning, Vera receives a call from Ginny, another elderly woman, who lives across the hall. Vera and Ginny check in on each other every day to make sure they are all right. Leo decides to stay a few days with his grandmother before heading back to Washington. We learn that Leo rode to New York to finish a bike trip he started with his friend Micah.

Vera is a confirmed Marxist, and she and Leo share liberal-leaning political views, although they have different opinions on various issues.

A few days pass, and Leo is still staying with Vera who has just returned from a funeral for the last of her octogenarian friends. Many people she knows have passed away including her husband Joe who died ten years earlier. Throughout the play we see her frustration with aging—with her hearing loss, her false teeth, her forgetfulness, and her growing sense of loneliness as her friends die one after another. She begins to talk with Leo about his family back in St. Paul. Leo's family issues become more apparent when he tells Vera that his mother is on Valium and that he kissed his adopted sister Lily last summer—an event that resulted in Lily going into therapy.

Becca, Leo's girlfriend, visits the apartment to break-up with him and to put closure on their relationship. Becca accuses Leo of never actually being in love with her, and Leo accuses Becca of backing out of the bike trip. Through this conversation, the audience learns that Micah died on the trip and instead of going to the funeral, Leo continued on without keeping in touch with anyone.

The following night Leo brings a 19-year-old girl named Amanda back to the apartment. He tells Amanda, who is Chinese-American, about his sister Lily, also Chinese. Amanda asks Leo if Vera is a communist, and when he confirms this, Amanda tells him that her family left China because of Communist oppression, and she is not having anything to do with anyone who is associated with Communists. Leo then tells her that his best friend died this past summer on the bike trip and that he is in New York because he "doesn't know where else to be." This vulnerability tempts Amanda to be romantic with Leo; however, their rendezvous is inadvertently interrupted by Vera who startles Amanda, and when Vera leaves, Amanda decides she's going too.

Later that night, Leo reveals to his grandmother how Micah died. As they were riding through Kansas, with Micah in the lead, they were taking "shadow pictures" of themselves on their bikes when a Tyson truck loaded with live chickens passed them. Just as Micah turned his head to look at Leo, the truck bed separated from the cab, flew backward, and took Micah off the road, suffocating him under 3,000 chickens. After Micah's death, Leo filled out all the necessary paperwork, called his and Micah's parents, hopped back on his bike, and kept on riding.

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Leo continues to stay with Vera for three weeks and eventually lands a job in the Rocky Mountains as a camp counselor for the following summer. He decides to go to Colorado right away to spend the winter on the slopes finding work where he can; however, he informs his grandmother that on his way he is going to stop in St. Paul to sort out his problems with his family. Vera wants him to stay longer with her, to give city living a chance, but Leo considers New York a “concrete prison” and needs to be on his way.

Soon after their conversation and after Vera has gone out, Leo hears a thud in the direction of Ginny’s apartment, and the next scene begins a few days later, just before Ginny’s funeral. Unaware of what has occurred, Becca arrives and Vera explains to her that Leo took charge after he found Ginny dead in her apartment and that “he was very much a man.” After Becca leaves, Leo explains to Vera that he has done some research on Ginny’s life and written a speech for the funeral even though he hadn’t met her because he’s afraid “she didn’t know people.” Vera helps him add to the speech, and they continue to work on it together as the curtain closes.

### Note to the teachers:

Park Square offers *4000 Miles* to its student audiences with a caveat. We want teachers to be aware that the play contains adult language, some sexual references, and a few adult situations including, in one scene, the smoking of marijuana. We recommend that the play is most appropriate for mature students who can handle challenging material and themes.

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**By Marcia Aubineau**

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, RETIRED

# Meet the Characters

4000 Miles

**LEO:** A 21-year-old from St. Paul, Minnesota, who currently lives in Washington state. He enjoys the outdoors, rock climbing, and biking, and refuses to own a cell phone. He has biked all the way from Seattle to Manhattan, and is now staying with his grandmother, Vera, in Greenwich Village. Leo is coping with the tragic death of his best friend Micah, the breakup with his girlfriend Becca, and the ramifications of an incident in which he kissed his adopted sister Lily. He is in New York with his grandmother because he “doesn’t know where else to go.”

**VERA:** Leo’s aging step-grandmother who has been a passionate political activist. She lives alone in Greenwich Village and checks in daily with her equally elderly neighbor across the hall, Ginny. She is the last of the octogenarians, a group of friends who were all Marxists, and she battles with the frustrations of aging—loss of her memory, her hearing, her teeth, her balance. Vera married Joe, Leo’s grandfather, when Leo was very young, and she never had any children of her own.

**AMANDA:** A 19-year-old fashion-forward student who aspires to be an international art star. After meeting her at a bar, Leo brings her back to Vera’s apartment where he opens up to her about his life, his friends and his family. Amanda expresses her negative views on Communism and the reasons why her family left China.

**BECCA (BEC):** Leo’s 21-year-old ex-girlfriend who recently started college in New York. Becca does not want to get back together with Leo because she finds him aimless and lost, and because she doesn’t think he ever really loved her. Initially, she had planned to go on the cross-country bike trip with Leo, Micah, and another young woman, Alison; however, when Alison was injured and couldn’t go, Becca backed out also, so Leo and Micah made the trip alone.

## CHARACTERS MENTIONED BUT NOT APPEARING IN THE PLAY

**GINNY:** The woman who lives across the hall from Vera. They alternate calling each other every day to make sure the other one is all right.

**LILY:** Leo’s adopted sister from China who is extremely gifted musically. Leo kissed her at a party a few months earlier, and as a result she is in therapy. Lily has taken three years off of college and is currently living at home with her parents in St. Paul, Minnesota.

**JOE JOSEPH:** Leo’s grandfather and Vera’s second husband. He was a scholar and published books about Communism.

**MICAH:** Leo’s best friend with whom he went on a cross-country bike trip. Micah died during the trip in an accident with a truck full of chickens.

**ALISON:** Micah’s girlfriend who was unable to go on the bike trip because of a torn ACL.

**JANE:** Leo’s mother with whom he is not on good terms and who keeps checking in with Vera to make sure that Leo is all right.

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By Marcia Aubineau

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, RETIRED

# Tossing Lines

FROM 4000 MILES

## Objective

The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with *4000 Miles* by exposing them to lines spoken in the play. Based on these lines, students are to make predictions about the play's characters and central conflicts and discuss these predictions. This activity helps students form questions, gain insight, and build excitement for seeing and hearing these lines acted out on stage. **"Tossing Lines" serves the students best if completed before they attend the play.**

## Time Allotted

20-30 minutes

## Materials

Tennis ball or hackey-sack

Slips of paper cut from Tossing Lines on the following page

## Procedure

Cut out the slips of paper printed on the following page and distribute them to volunteers. Give students a few minutes (or overnight, if appropriate) to practice or memorize their lines. When they're ready, have these students form a circle and give one student the ball. After she speaks her line, the student tosses the ball to another student who speaks his assigned line. Students toss the ball across the circle until all lines have been heard a few times. Encourage students to speak lines with varying emotions, seeking out a variety of ways to perform the lines. If there is time, reassign lines within the group or to other students in the class for another round.

## Optional:

Reassign lines within the group (or to other students in the classroom) and continue for another round.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Do any words or terms in particular jump out at you from these lines? Why?
2. What are these characters like? How old do you think they are?
3. In what location and time period do you think the play will occur?
4. What conflicts do you anticipate the play will contain?
5. What are some of the themes and issues you expect the characters will confront? Do you think this play be generally happy or sad?

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Adapted from Peggy O'Brien's  
*Shakespeare Set Free* (1993)



She's like a really good friend who I happen to be related to.

I am so tired of disappointing you, Leo.

Is your grandmother like a communist?

I'm not wearing my hearing aid. So I could only hear parts of what you said.

...[Micah] didn't have a cell phone. I don't have one either.

You'd think at my age I'd know better than to get used to anything.

You want a hug from a hippie?

I'm kinda rich and I don't really like to apologize for it.

My best friend died this summer.

Hey, I have no aversion to work, it's just gotta be the right job.

I'm like a caged bird here... it's like a concrete prison.

When I'm not furious at you I'm really worried about you.

...it would have been nice to have you there when he was killed, it would have been nice not to be alone for that.

That's why I'm here. Because I don't know where else to be.

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

## SCENE TO READ ALOUD #1

**LEO** has just awakened **VERA** in the middle of the night. He is standing in her doorway with his bicycle:

**VERA.** Will you – wait here.

*(She exits, still covering her mouth. He leans the bike against a bookcase and takes off one of the panniers – this takes some effort – it is extremely heavy. He puts it down on the floor noisily.*

**VERA** reenters, less disoriented, with teeth, and putting her hearing aid in.)

Are you high?

**LEO.** What? No.

**VERA.** Well, it's three o'clock in the morning so I'm just asking. Have you eaten anything in a while?

**LEO.** I'm cool.

**VERA.** That's not what I asked you. You've lost weight.

**LEO.** It's been a long road, but a good one.

**VERA.** You biked all the way here?

**LEO.** Pretty much.

**VERA.** From Minnesota?

**LEO.** Actually we started in Seattle.

*(brief pause)*

**VERA.** There are some mountains in the middle, aren't there, whichever way you go?

**LEO.** There are. There are.

**VERA.** I'll get you a banana.

**LEO.** A – no! Whoa, jet fuel.

**VERA.** What?

**LEO.** NO SUCH THING AS A LOCAL BANANA!

**VERA.** You don't have to yell, it's only when you speak very low or very fast that I can't hear you.

**LEO.** I'm just concerned about you, I was leaning on that buzzer for quite awhile.

**VERA.** Yes, well, I was asleep, and I didn't have my, whadayacallit, hearing aid in, and I wasn't expecting you.

**LEO.** Would you hear a fire alarm?

**VERA.** What?

**LEO.** WOULD YOU HEAR / A –

**VERA.** I heard you, listen, it's – it's the way you're acting I don't understand, actually, not your...the whole family's been very worried, I guess you know that. Your mother and father –

**LEO.** I'm sorry people worried, I am, but that's not something I can take responsibility for?

**VERA.** You should have called. You should have called your mother. She's been...she's really been...

*(He picks up his pannier, goes to reattach it.)*

CONTINUED...

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**LEO.** (*warmly, apparently sincerely*) Grandma Vera. It was awesome to see you.

**VERA.** What? – You're –

**LEO.** It's cool, I don't think either of us has to feel bad about the fact that the timing isn't right for me to be here.

**VERA.** You're going to – where will you go?

**LEO.** I have a tent and a camping stove and a love for the outdoors, I'll be all right.

**VERA.** You're in Manhattan!

**LEO.** Maybe you can give me a tip, somewhere out of the way?

**VERA.** There's no place like that! Listen, you're being – put that back down. Put it down.

*(He hesitates)*

You can leave tomorrow, I won't stop you. Just – sleep here for a few hours, and take a shower, and eat some breakfast. I can wash those – you smell terrible and I wouldn't be surprised if you had lice.

**LEO.** I don't have lice.

**VERA.** And you don't seem all right to me, you don't ...seem all right.

### Questions for discussion:

1. In what part of the play do you think this scene takes place? Early, middle, or late? Why?
2. What can we guess about the relationship between grandmother and grandson from this scene?
3. What can we guess about the relationship between Leo and his mother from this scene?
4. How old do you think Leo is? How old is Vera? How do you know?
5. What might have motivated Leo to come to his grandmother's apartment?
6. Why do you think Vera is so anxious for Leo to stay, now that he's come?
7. How will the scene end? Will Leo stay the night?

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**By Jill Tammen**

HUDSON HIGH SCHOOL, RETIRED

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

## SCENE TO READ ALOUD #2

This scene opens with **LEO** reclining and reading a book in his grandmother's apartment. His grandmother lets herself into the apartment and looks for a lost item. Then she says:

**VERA.** In case you're interested, I just came from a funeral, so that's where I've been all morning.

**LEO.** Okay.

**VERA.** It was for the last of the octogenarians.

**LEO.** The what?

**VERA.** There were seven of us, octogenarians, and we had dinner once a month for a lot of years and we were all lefties and there were a lot of memories and laughs and the last one just died, besides me.

**LEO.** Sorry.

**VERA.** Yeah, he was a rat, very aggressive, he used to make passes at me with his wife sitting right there. She had Alzheimer's so she didn't mind, but I did. Even so, he was the last one and I don't feel very happy about it.

**LEO.** You want a hug from a hippie?

**VERA.** No, I'm all right.

*(She goes back into the kitchen. A moment later she reenters. LEO goes to her and hugs her.)*

And I spoke to your mother this morning, too. And I did not tell her you're here, even though you were all she talked about, and she's really, whadayacallit, in distress, and I'm not feeling terribly proud of myself.

*(He separates.)*

**LEO.** You can't take all that on. You have to let her find her own way.

**VERA.** Well see, that's not how I think about things. Because I believe in a...a society where...here I go with my words. The point is you help people, it's about the community, it's not about I do what's best for me and you do what's best for you, because...you know the one thing I wasn't thinking when Joe was dying was I better pay attention to what he says, about politics, because I always relied on him to, to make the arguments, and explain the...

*(She shakes her head, lost, disgusted with herself.)*

**LEO.** *(gently)* I've been reading this book he edited, about Cuba?

**VERA.** Oh, yeah?

**LEO.** It's very interesting. I didn't know this stuff, about their healthcare system –

**VERA.** Oh, their healthcare is wonderful. And literacy, too.

**LEO.** Grandpa's introduction is really...I don't remember him all that well? You know? But I remember his voice, he had / that –

**VERA.** Yes.

CONTINUED...

CONTINUED

**LEO.** Yeah, so I've been imagining his voice reading this, and it's like...so sure?

**VERA.** Indeed.

**LEO.** The way he writes, it's...it almost reads as a little hokey, now, because it's so – but I think it must have been cool, to be so, um. Uncynical. Like I think I'm really uncynical, and Micah was definitely totally uncynical, but *you* guys. That's like a whole other level of...I'm definitely learning about Grandpa. It's definitely cool.

*(pause)*

**VERA.** Your mother told me something very upsetting about you this morning that I have been debating bringing up with you at all. Do you want to know what it is?

**LEO.** Not really.

**VERA.** She said in the beginning of the summer, when you home for awhile in St. / Paul –

**LEO.** Oh my *god*, she's / still –

### Questions for discussion:

1. What details can we guess about Vera's life from this scene? Where might she live? With whom? Why might she use the word "whadayacallit"?
2. What do the following words mean? If you cannot tell from context, look them up: octogenarian, leftie (leftist), uncynical.
3. Why might someone attend a funeral for someone they think was "a rat"?
4. Why might Leo's mother not know he is at his grandmother's? Why might Vera keep his secret?
5. What does Leo admire about his grandfather?
6. What do you think his mother revealed to Vera about Leo's behavior earlier in the summer?

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**By Jill Tammen**

HUDSON HIGH SCHOOL, RETIRED

# Pre-Play Text Analysis

## SCENE TO READ ALOUD #3

This scene takes place in **VERA'S** apartment where **BEC** has arrived to meet with Vera's grandson **LEO** to talk about their relationship. **LEO** is late, so **VERA** and **BEC** have tea while they wait for him to show. To fill an uncomfortable silence, **VERA** talks about her first husband.

**VERA.** When we had been married six months he went out to Hollywood with a woman...oh god, what was her name. She was rich and neurotic. *Muriel.*

...And she followed me into a cab and said, "Can't we be friends? It eats away at me that you're angry at me," and so forth. And I said, "Listen, Muriel, there are people you like and people you don't, and I don't like you, and I want you out of this cab." And she cried and carried on, this woman who had been sleeping with my husband for two years...

Then there was the waitress he met in Arkansas. And he came home and confessed he was in love with her, and I said, "Listen, she's a hick, you have nothing in common, I'm sure the sex is terrific and whatnot but why don't you go back there and spend a few weeks with her and see if there's really enough there for you to leave our marriage." And he did. And sure enough he came back and said, "You're right, we ran out things to talk about." And that was that.

**BEC.** (*blurting it out*) I'm not sure what you're trying to tell me.

**VERA.** What?

**BEC.** I don't know what you want me to – why are you telling me this?

**VERA.** I was just making conversation. I wasn't getting much help from you.

**BEC.** But you're going on and on about these – like, parables of tolerance and forgiveness – you should have left him!

**VERA.** I did, eventually.

**BEC.** But you put up with like – and you tell these stories like you're proud of them.

**VERA.** (*seeing that BEC is truly upset*) Okay, listen –

**BEC.** This woman who you tried to push out of a cab, you should have pushed *him* out of a cab, she was coming to you / for understanding –

**VERA.** I see I've struck a / nerve.

**BEC.** I'm not going to forgive him!

**VERA.** All right. All right.

(*BEC struggling to get control, VERA totally unsure what to do.*)

**BEC.** I'm sorry, I've been really...

**VERA.** Listen, I wasn't trying to say forgive him or don't forgive him. I don't know what you should do, that's your affair.

I was trying to say...men sometimes do things that can be very...but you have to remember that it's more out of stupidity than anything else. It's not whaddayacallit. Malicious. It's just stupid and childish.

**BEC.** I guess, um...

CONTINUED...

*(searching for the inoffensive way to say this)*

I don't make those kinds of allowances, based on gender? I wouldn't want anyone to make those kinds of allowances for me, so...

**VERA.** I suppose you think I'm very backward.

**BEC.** No. –

*(The sound of a key in the lock. BEC hears it immediately and prepares herself, VERA looks around suspiciously to see what she heard. LEO enters, his pants covered in dirt. Both women look at him. He grins.)*

**LEO.** I found a community garden.

*(VERA winds up and stands.)*

**VERA.** Excuse me.

*(She exits into her bedroom slowly. LEO heads for kiss, BEC dodges him.)*

**BEC.** I told you I have class at two.

**LEO.** Am I late?

### Questions for discussion:

1. How well do you think Vera and Bec know each other? What makes you think so?
2. Why would Vera be so willing to share information about her first husband? What kind of person does she describe him to be? Is it appropriate for her to talk about him like this to her grandson's girlfriend?
3. Do you think the examples Vera gives of her husband's cheating are "malicious" or "stupid and childish"? Do you agree with Bec that Vera should have been more sympathetic to Muriel, or do you agree that Vera should have pushed her out of the cab?
4. What might Leo have done to anger Bec?
5. What do you think will happen in the rest of the scene between Leo and Bec now that Vera has retired to her bedroom? Will they reconcile? If you think so, what are the clues in scene that lead you to think so? Or will Bec not forgive Leo? If you think this is what will happen, what are the clues in the scene that lead you to think so?

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**By Jill Tammen**

HUDSON HIGH SCHOOL, RETIRED

# Exploring How Characters Grieve

## A POST-PLAY CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

In 1969 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published a book, *On Death and Dying*, in which she identified stages (or cycles) of response to traumatic events, particularly to death and terminal illness. For many years these stages have been used to make sense of human responses to life's tragedies. Although the stages appear to be sequential, they may be experienced in cycles or in pairs, and they do not always occur in a set order. However, they are useful markers for talking about human grief and how we respond to loss.



Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926-2004)

The five stages of grief can be a means to explore and better understand Vera and Leo's actions in the play. Below is a classroom activity to use the stages of grief to promote students' deeper understanding of Vera and Leo.

### I. Preparation:

Step one: Project the following chart for students to see.

The Five Stages of Grief as presented by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross	
Stage	Interpretation
1 – Denial	Denial is a conscious or unconscious refusal to accept facts, information, reality, etc., relating to the situation concerned. It is a defense mechanism and is perfectly natural.
2 – Anger	Anger can manifest in different ways. People dealing with emotional loss can be angry with themselves, with the person who died, with situations unrelated to the loss, or with other people, especially those close to them.
3 – Bargaining	Traditionally the bargaining stage for people facing death can involve attempting to bargain with the universe or whatever higher power the person believes in. People facing less serious trauma can bargain or seek to negotiate a compromise. For example "Can we still be friends?" when facing a break-up, or thinking that if they do something good, the situation will get better or go away.
4 – Depression	Also referred to as preparatory grieving....It's a sort of acceptance with emotional attachment. It's natural to feel sadness and regret, fear, uncertainty, etc. It shows that the person has at least begun to accept the reality.
5 – Acceptance	Broadly this stage is an indication that there is some emotional detachment and objectivity. People dying can enter this stage a long time before the people they leave behind, who must necessarily pass through their own individual stages of dealing with the loss of a loved one.

Adapted from: Chapman, Alan. *Elizabeth Kubler Ross Grief Cycle model, five stages of grief in death, dying and bereavement*. Businessballs.com, n.d. Web. 6 July 2014. [http://www.businessballs.com/elisabeth\\_kubler\\_ross\\_five\\_stages\\_of\\_grief.htm](http://www.businessballs.com/elisabeth_kubler_ross_five_stages_of_grief.htm).

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**II. Introduction:**

- A. Briefly explain the stages of grief and make sure students understand that these stages need not be consecutive and that they may, in fact, be cyclical.
- B. Ask them, as you read through the stages, to consider what losses and traumas the characters in *4000 Miles* have experienced, both recently and in the past.
- C. Ask them if they can identify behavior or comments showing these stages of grief for the characters in the play.

**III. Individual Investigation:**

- A. Project or write on the board the traumas suggested by the students OR use the nine traumas listed below:
  1. The death of Vera's second husband (Leo's grandfather)
  2. The death of Vera's octogenarian friend
  3. The death of Vera's neighbor
  4. The cheating of Vera's first husband.
  5. Vera's realization that she is becoming more frail and is getting closer to death
  6. The death of Leo's best friend Micah
  7. The trauma created by Leo kissing his sister
  8. The break-up between Leo and Becca.
  9. Leo's realization that Vera is becoming more frail and is getting closer to death
- B. Have students number off from 1-9. Based upon his or her number, assign each student a trauma from the projected list.
- C. For the trauma they have been assigned, ask each student write down what stage or stages of grief their character demonstrates in the play in response to that loss. If possible, they should include specific scenes or lines they remember to support their claim.

**IV. Group Investigation & Discussion:**

- A. Then ask all students with the same number to come together to see if they agree on their assessment of their character. After giving them some time to share their ideas in small groups, ask each group to report back to the class.
- B. After students have shared their character assessments with the entire class, discuss:
  1. What constitutes a trauma? Do all of the events listed above qualify?
  2. Why might some people accept trauma more quickly and with less apparent pain than others?
  3. Are there other responses to trauma that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages do not include?
  4. What might cause people to move from one stage to another? What movement do we see in the play from both Vera and Leo? What events might have contributed to their movement?
  5. What stages of grief have you experienced in response to a loss or trauma?

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**By Jill Tammen**

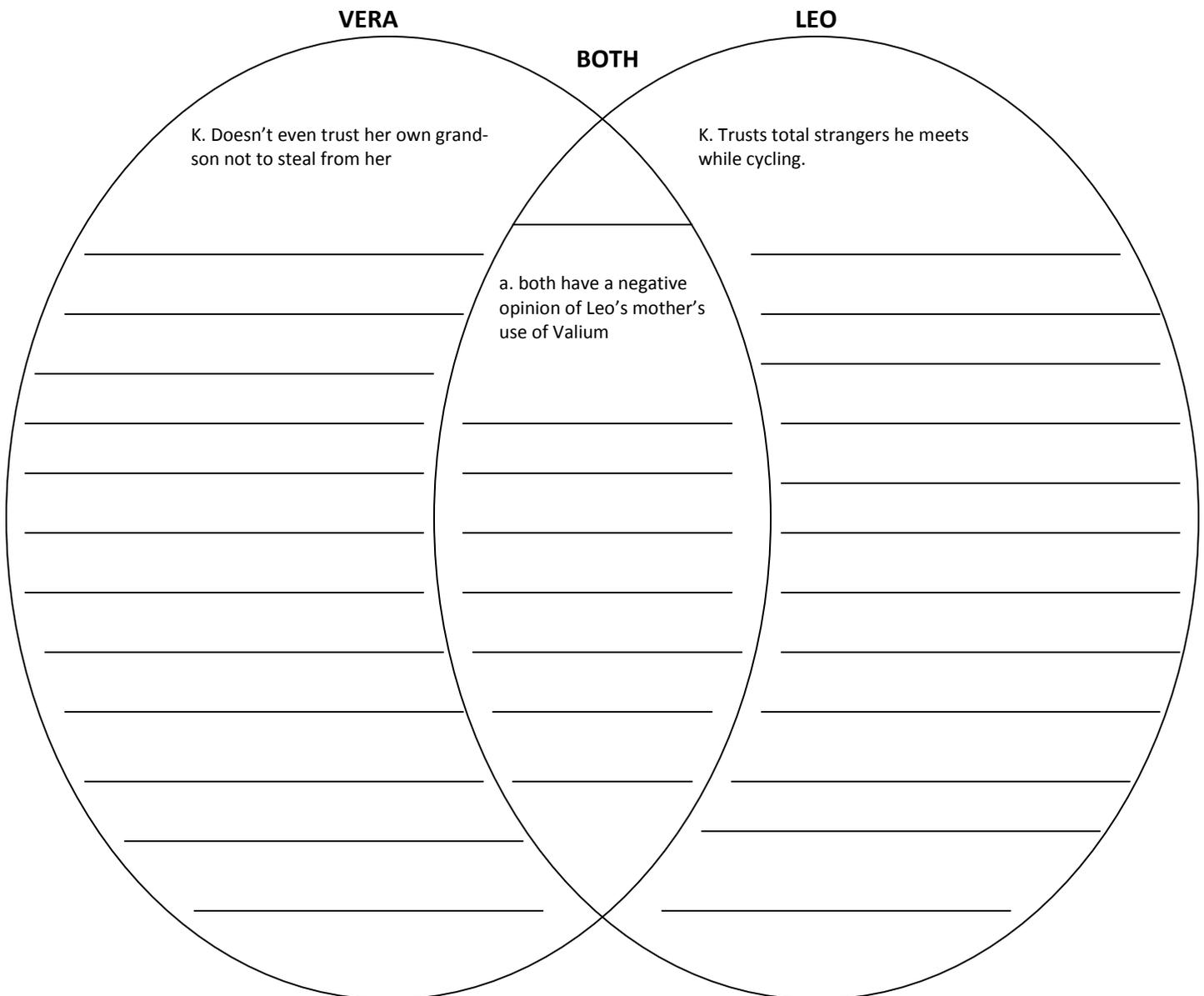
HUDSON HIGH SCHOOL, RETIRED

# Finding Common Ground Between Generations

A POST-PLAY CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

**Directions:** Select at least five of the eleven topics below and determine in which areas Vera and Leo differ, and in which areas they manage to find common ground. Write similarities in the center section of the Venn diagram and differences in the outer sections. Try to use specific examples that you remember seeing in the play.

- a. Family
- b. Friendship
- c. Relationships / Love
- d. Political Beliefs
- e. Vocabulary / Lingo
- f. Forgiveness
- g. Tolerance / Acceptance
- h. Death / Grieving
- i. Money
- j. Technology
- k. Trust
- l. Add Your Own



CONTINUED...



**Directions to Teachers:** Distribute the sheet on page 18 to each student. Ask students to read the directions and then begin filling in the Venn diagram independently. After a few minutes, ask students to join a partner and compare charts. Allow them a couple of minutes to revise and add to their own papers. Then, either project the Venn diagram onto a Smart Board or draw the chart onto a whiteboard. Ask students to contribute examples of similarities and differences and write them in. Upon completion, you may use the discussion questions to guide a follow-up conversation.

### Follow-Up Questions for Discussion:

1. Leo and Vera's differences in perspective results in some tension in the play. Which differences interfere in their relationship most? Do either of the characters learn something from their exposure to the other's point of view?
2. Despite the generational gap, Vera and Leo have much in common. What common ground do the two share? To what do you attribute these similarities?
3. Which is more important to the characters' relationship: their similarities or their differences? Why?

### Optional Follow-Up Activity:

Have students create a second Venn diagram on loose leaf paper or in their notebooks. This time, using the same eleven topics, they should look for commonalities and differences they have with a family member or friend who is of a different generation and write them in the appropriate section of the Venn diagram.

# Talking about the Generations



Tana Hicken (right) and Grant Harrison in the production *4000 Miles* at Studio Theatre  
(Photo by Scott Suchman)

The study and defining of generations is a recent development. It was not until the 1800s that people of the United States began to define age groups as having common values and experiences. Much of this research is used to help generations understand each other, especially in the workforce.

Herzog's play focuses on Vera and her grandson Leo. While grandmother and grandson come from different generations, they are able to find common ground and connection through the bonds of family.

Vera is from the Greatest Generation, those who were born between 1901 and 1924. The term "greatest" comes not only from them surviving the Great Depression, but was also coined by Tom Brokaw, a journalist, in his book *Greatest Generation*. People like Vera came of age in a time of great economic build and collapse; they also witnessed two world wars and saw the United States brought into the modern era of the 40s and 50s when their children, the Baby Boomers, were being born.

Leo's generation, called the Millennials, is comprised of people born between the years of 1982 to 1996, though some scholars put the dates anywhere from 1980 to the mid-2000s. They are the largest generation since the Baby Boomers and are often called "digital natives" who are defined by the technological culture with which they're familiar. Millennials grew up in a post-9/11 world with a level of diversity that past generations have not known.

While there are nearly seven decades between Vera and Leo, their generations have much in common. Both Vera's generation and Leo's generation have seen economic depressions. In Vera's youth, she survived the Great Depression when unemployment was at an all time high of 25% in 1933. For Leo's generation, 44% of college graduates are underemployed and 70% are saddled with student loan debt that will take decades to pay back.

Both generations have also been concerned with their use of resources. During the Great Depression when Vera was a teenager, everything was saved and reused in a time of great poverty and uncertainty. This was also something she experienced with rationing during World War I and World War II. Leo's his generation is growing up with a different awareness of the earth and conservation. For example, in this age of climate change debates, many young people are concerned with "green" forms of transportation, like Leo's bicycling, or reusable resources that will not add to worldwide landfills.

While Vera and Leo came of age at very different times in the history of the United States, they share common economic experiences and cultural values.

CONTINUED...

### Discussion Questions:

1. What do Vera's and Leo's generations have in common? Were you surprised?
2. Do you know anyone from the Greatest Generation? What are your impressions of them?
3. Based on your own experiences, do you think the generalizations made about Millennials are accurate?
4. Compare and contrast the Greatest Generation's economic situation to that of Leo's generation. Are the economics better or worse today than they were in the 1930s?
5. In what ways did Vera's generation need to conserve? Why do you believe Leo's generation is interested in conservation and other "green" methods?

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**By Alexandra Howes**

TWIN CITIES ACADEMY

# Back in the Day and Today

## A POST-PLAY CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

**Objective:** To help students do a close reading of articles focused on the Greatest Generation and the Millennials.

**Directions:** Two articles have been selected, one that focuses on Vera's generation and one that focuses on Leo's generation. Print out the articles or allow students computer access to read the articles. If applicable, allow students to annotate and take notes on the articles.

**The Greatest Generation:** Born 1901-1924: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/b/brokaw-generation.html>

**Millennials:** Born 1982-1999: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-those-spoiled-millennials-will-make-the-workplace-better-for-everyone/2012/08/16/814af692-d5d8-11e1-a0cc-8954acd5f90c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-those-spoiled-millennials-will-make-the-workplace-better-for-everyone/2012/08/16/814af692-d5d8-11e1-a0cc-8954acd5f90c_story.html)

After students fill out the Close Reading Chart on page 23, have them answer the following questions as a class and discuss quotes from the articles that caught their attention.



WWII Food Propaganda Poster

### Discussion Questions:

1. Each of these generations have been labeled. Does defining or labeling a generation do more harm or more good? Explain and support your answer.
2. Which generation do you feel you have more in common with? The Greatest Generation or the Millennials?
3. Are there more similarities or differences between these generations?
4. What are the challenges of being old? Of being young? How might the old and the young learn from each other?
5. Do you resist the norms of your generation? In what way?
6. Can we learn from past generations? Can past generations learn from younger generations?

CONTINUED...

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Close Reading Chart**

<b>Greatest Generation Article</b>	<b>Millennials Article</b>
Write down quotes you agree with:	Write down quotes you agree with:
Why do you agree with those quotes?	Why do you agree with those quotes?
Write down quotes you disagree with:	Write down quotes you disagree with:
Why do you disagree with those quotes?	Why do you disagree with those quotes?

**By Alexandra Howes**  
TWIN CITIES ACADEMY

# Post-Play Discussion Questions

4000 MILES

1. What are the conflicts between Vera and Leo? Are these conflicts due to their generational differences or other factors, such as personality? Explain.
2. Think about the nuances in the political viewpoints of Vera and Leo. Vera is a “card carrying” Communist and Leo is all about sustainability and the environment. Both are serious leftists – and yet their viewpoints are not perfectly aligned. In what ways is their relationship strained – and at the same time, strengthened – by their political beliefs?
3. At one point in the play, Leo says of his grandmother, “She’s like a really good friend who I happen to be related to.” How would their friendship be different if Vera were Leo’s age? How would it be different if they weren’t related? Would they get along as well, better, or worse? Why?
4. Vera’s hearing loss and her poor memory are reminders of her age and frailty. How does her response to these weaknesses compare to Leo’s response to them? Why might the playwright have created a grandmother like Vera instead of a more physically and mentally robust character?
5. In this play Vera is widowed, attends a funeral for a man she doesn’t admire, and is about to attend a funeral for her neighbor. For each of these deaths she responds quite differently. Why? What factors make us deal with death differently? What eases the loss? What makes it worse?
6. Leo arrives in New York having viewed the accidental, meaningless death of his closest friend. As we learn about his trip after the accident, we see that his responses to the incident were hurtful to many others who are also grieving Micah’s death. Is Leo selfish by isolating himself from other grievers? Does he owe the others anything? Is his response believable?
7. Why do you think the author chose to have Micah killed by a truck filled with Tyson chickens? Is there any significance to the fact that Leo’s camera was confiscated? Explain.
8. When Vera offers Leo a banana, he responds with the phrase, “jet fuel.” What does he mean? What insight might this remark give us into his value system?
9. When we finally hear Leo explain how Micah died, the monologue comes out all in a rush. But after his revealing the details of this horrible experience, Vera’s response is, “I’m not wearing my hearing aid. So I could only hear parts of what you said. But I didn’t want to interrupt.” Why do you think the playwright has Leo reveal everything to someone who cannot hear him well? What is the effect on the audience?
10. Leo is also dealing with the loss of his relationship with Bec. How is his response to his broken relationship similar to his response to Micah’s death? How is his response different?
11. Vera left her first husband, a womanizer, after compromising and accepting his behavior for years. In her description of him to Bec, she seems open and unhurt by his behavior. Do you think she always felt this way? What might have caused her to reach this stage in her memory of him? And why do you think she reveals this information to Bec instead of to Leo?

CONTINUED...

### CONTINUED

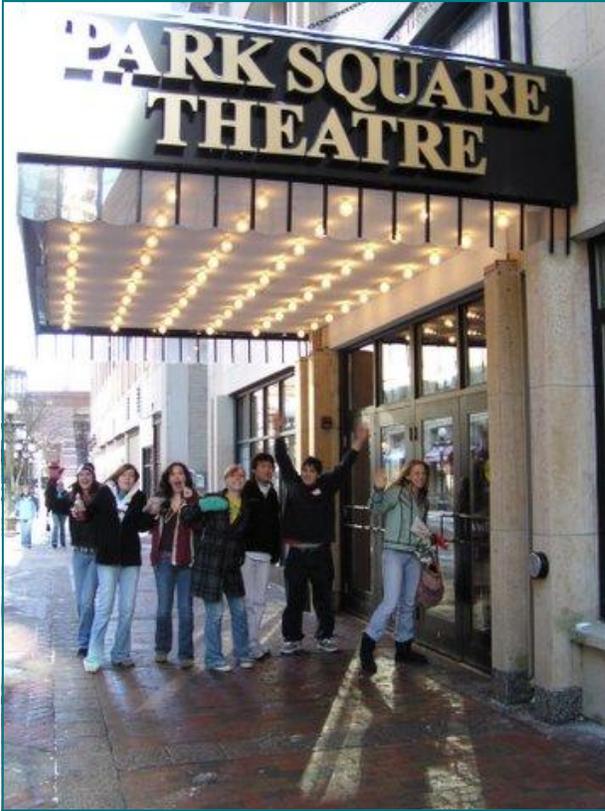
12. Did you notice the differences in the way Leo and Vera spoke? Leo uses slang like “cool,” “dude,” and the occasional curse word, whereas Vera refers to the George Washington Bridge as the “GW” and many other things as “whaddayacallits.” Can you think of phrases you use that your older relatives might not understand? How about phrases they use that don’t make sense to you?
13. What do older generations—such as those of your parents, your teachers, or others—get wrong about your generation? What do you wish they would understand? Do we see this conflict happen between Leo and Vera?
14. The playwright states that the characters and conversations that occur in *4000 Miles* are inspired by her own family. Based on the way she portrays Vera and Leo, do you think she is celebrating or criticizing her family members and their beliefs and behavior? How can you tell? If you were to write a story based on your relatives, do you think they would be excited or embarrassed? Why?
15. What factors do you think are shaping you as you grow up in today’s society? How are you influenced by your parents? Your teachers or coaches? Social media? Your peers? Other factors?

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**By Marcia Aubineau**

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, RETIRED

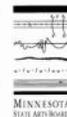
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