

“LIKE THE GREATEST WORKS OF ART,  
THIS ONE LEAVES YOU FEELING PRIVILEGED  
TO HAVE EXPERIENCED IT—AND EAGER  
TO RE-ENTER ITS WORLD AGAIN VERY SOON.”

CHRISTOPHER KELLY, *THE STAR-LEDGER*



STUDY GUIDE

*Are you ready to make up?*

GREATCOMETBROADWAY.COM Ⓜ IMPERIAL THEATRE · 249 WEST 45<sup>TH</sup> STREET



## WELCOME

Teachers are encouraged to use this guide to elicit student discussion before the show, guide them through aspects of the production, and engage them in activities once they return to the classroom. Our goal is to help teachers utilize the production as a catalyst for student education, collaboration, and inspiration, incorporating these essential concepts:

- Adapting a novel for theatrical performance
- Using immersive theatrical tools to create the world of Russia in 1812
- Utilizing performance and production techniques for storytelling
- Understanding characters' situations, actions, words, and points of view
- Contemplating characters' journeys in concert with personal experience
- Using contemporary music and costumes to bring out the timeless themes in a classic work of literature.

***NATASHA, PIERRE & THE GREAT COMET OF 1812*** explores the great philosophical issues found in the search for meaning in life and a young woman's romantic journey navigating passions and the rules of a society on the brink of war through a unique staging and a score that mixes rock, pop, soul, folk and electronic dance music with classic Broadway. We hope that your students, inspired by the production, can learn from you and from each other through these activities.

Please feel free to copy the materials in this guide to aid you in engaging classroom interest and discussion before and after the performance.

Enjoy the show!

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• Sections of this guide were excerpted and adapted from the American Repertory Theater - BlogKit: <http://greatcometart.blogspot.com/>

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WWW.SHOWSTUDIES.COM





# PRE-SHOW CONSIDERATIONS

## IDEAS FOR STUDENTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW:

- Use the information in this guide and the web resources as a starting point to get to know *NATASHA, PIERRE & THE GREAT COMET OF 1812*. As the Prologue says, “Gonna have to study up a little bit if you wanna keep up with the plot.”
- Learn what you can about theater. How does theater tell a story? How do the scenes work together? How do the technical aspects help? *NATASHA, PIERRE & THE GREAT COMET OF 1812* has a very unique style, setting, and atmosphere. How do you think the story of this production will be told in the unique setting of a Russian supper club?
- Take a peek at the discussion questions in the guide. Give yourself an idea of what issues, ideas, and situations the show deals with. Get a jump start for the class discussion after the show!
- Think about what your expectations of the production are: What will you see on stage? What will the story be like? How will the characters interact with each other? How will it begin and end?

## AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS:

Going to see a Broadway show is an incredibly exciting and entertaining experience. In order to enhance that experience, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **TAKE YOUR SEAT.** Be sure to get to your seat in time to ready yourself for the journey you’ll take with this production.
- **TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE.** The messages and texts can wait until later - get into the world of the show completely!
- **GET READY TO WATCH CAREFULLY.** The wonderful thing about live theater is that it’s happening right there before you! Be sure to soak it all in.
- **LET THE ACTORS DO THE TALKING.** Feel free to laugh at the jokes and be moved by the drama, but save your commentary for the conversation with the class after the show.
- **SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION.** When the show is over, applaud for the actors and wait for the curtain call to be over before leaving your seat. To show them your highest praise, give them a standing ovation.



# CHARACTERS

## NATASHA

Natasha is a charming young woman with a vivacious spirit. Loved by all, she becomes embroiled in a scandalous relationship which, when undone, wreaks havoc on her inner life.

## PIERRE

Pierre is a philosopher to the core. He has a deep sense of humanity and morality, but it is confounded by his inability to connect to people socially.

## ANATOLE

Anatole is a handsome, dashing, notorious rogue who delights in carousing. Although already married, he is infatuated with Natasha.

## ANDREY

Natasha's fiancé who is away fighting the war. He is considered a good match for Natasha as he is the son of Prince Bolkonsky.

## SONYA

Natasha's cousin, she is an incredibly dedicated friend, anticipating and worrying about Natasha's troubles throughout the story.

## HÉLÈNE

Anatole's sister and Pierre's not so loyal wife who enjoys romancing other men and manipulating others for pleasure.



## MARYA D.

Natasha's strict but kind godmother who guides her through Moscow society and tries to help her make the right decisions.

## DOLOKHOV

An excellent marksman, Anatole's friend has a combative personality, and a cozy relationship with Pierre's wife Hélène.

## BOLKONSKY

Andrey's infirm and demented father who disapproves of Natasha.

## MARY

Andrey's shy sister who feels suffocated and trapped caring for her ill and demanding father and thus envies Natasha.

## BALAGA

Anatole's trusted, wild, and reckless sleigh driver.



# SYNOPSIS

## ACT ONE

### PART I

Our story begins with an introduction to the characters who inhabit Moscow (“Prologue”) in the year 1812, just prior to Napoleon’s invasion of Russia and the burning of the city. We meet “Pierre,” a rich, generous, philosophizing and wine-drinking aristocrat who sadly ponders his existence. Natasha, a young and impressionable girl, arrives in “Moscow” with her cousin Sonya where she is introduced to the ways of high society by her strict godmother Marya D. Natasha is waiting patiently for her fiancé, Andrey, to return from the war. Marya D. suggests that Natasha visit her future in-laws, the old, senile Prince Bolkonsky and his daughter Mary (“The Private and Intimate Life of the House”), to smooth over Bolkonsky’s doubts by gaining Mary’s affection and approval. Mary and Natasha’s cold and stilted interaction proves fruitless (“Natasha & Bolkonskys”) and Natasha flees pining for Andrey (“No One Else”).

### PART II

The following evening Natasha has her debut among the Moscow elite at “The Opera.” There she meets and immediately falls for the handsome, dashing, married rogue Anatole (“Natasha & Anatole”). In her new state of infatuation, Natasha contemplates her mixed emotions (“Natasha Lost”).

### PART III

Pierre is convinced to go out drinking by Anatole and his friend Dolokhov. Anatole confesses his feelings for Natasha to his sister Hélène and asks for her aid. Pierre, angered by his wife’s flirtatious behavior and emboldened by too much drink, challenges Dolokhov to a duel which Pierre miraculously survives (“The Duel”). Disgusted with his situation he contemplates his life (“Dust and Ashes”). Natasha looks for clarity at church (“Sunday Morning”). Hélène wily convinces Natasha to attend their party (“Charming”), where Anatole seduces her during “The Ball.”

## ACT TWO

### PART IV

In an exchange of “Letters” we learn that Natasha has called off her engagement and will elope with Anatole. Learning of her plans, Sonya confronts Natasha and threatens to tell all (“Sonya & Natasha”). Sonya decides to do what she must (“Sonya Alone”). After begging money from Pierre, Anatole and Dolokhov concoct plans for the elopement (“Preparations”) and ride brazenly with their wild driver “Balaga” to Natasha’s house. Just as the men set “The Abduction” in motion, it is halted by a bold Marya D. who denies Andrey entrance to her house.

### PART V

Marya D. berates an emotional Natasha (“In My House”) and dispatches “A Call to Pierre” asking her old friend for help. Pierre, now on a mission to “Find Anatole,” confronts him (“Pierre & Anatole”) and expels him from Moscow. In her grief Natasha poisons herself (“Natasha Very Ill”) just as Andrey returns. Pierre tries unsuccessfully to convince Andrey to forgive Natasha’s indiscretion (“Pierre & Andrey”). Pierre comforts Natasha (“Pierre & Natasha”). In an emotional and contemplative state, Pierre sees “The Great Comet of 1812” in the night sky and embraces a new life.

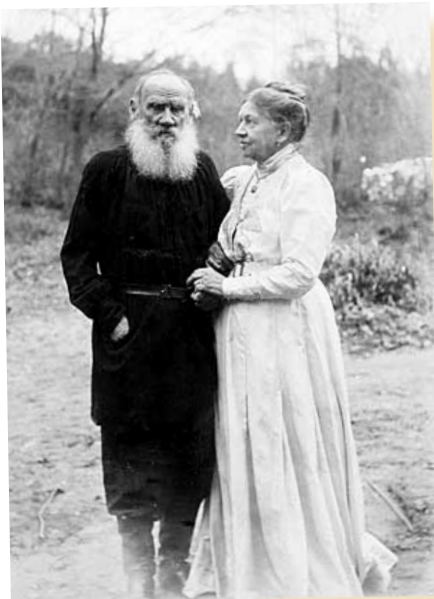


# TOLSTOY & WAR AND PEACE

Composer and lyricist Dave Malloy drew inspiration from many sources when he wrote *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*, not least of all the novel *War and Peace* by the eminent Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy: “I first read *War and Peace* while working on a cruise ship, playing piano in the show band, as a way for my landlocked girlfriend and I to stay connected. I remember being so enthralled by the scope of Tolstoy’s vision; the book was a trashy romance novel, a family drama, a hilarious farce, a military thriller, a philosophical scripture, a treatise on history, all wrapped into one giant, messy, nearly unmanageable tome. And then there was that section. Volume 2, Book 5. I think I read the whole 70-page slice in one sitting, staying up til 5 a.m. with the delirious obsession I usually reserved for Stephen King or Harry Potter. Up to this point, *Natasha* had been so mirthful and pure that her downfall seemed to come screaming out of nowhere . . . and then *Pierre*, his sudden righteous action, his heart finally alive, his simple kindness, the comet . . . it all happened so quickly. At the end of it, as I read the last words “into a new life” with tears streaming down my face, I had the weirdest and clearest epiphany: that this was the perfect story for a musical.”

Tolstoy's own dramatic life experiences provided material and insight for his writing:

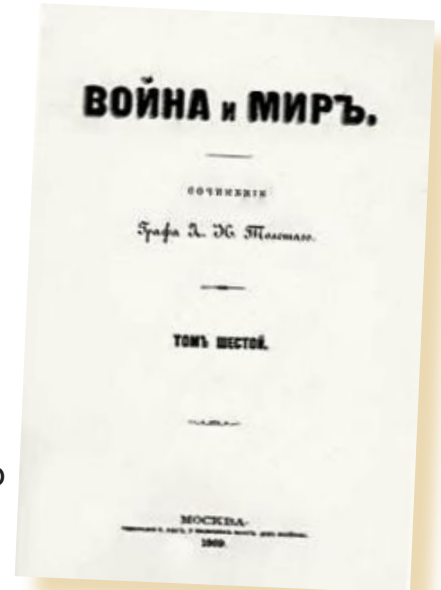
**YOUTH** As a young man, Leo Tolstoy would probably have loved to visit a dance club like the one portrayed in *The Great Comet*. Tolstoy was a drunken, lascivious roustabout, almost a completely different person from the man he would become in older age. A household of serfs served him hand and foot, and Tolstoy was not the most grateful recipient. He drank to numb his constant moral pain and he gambled away half of his house. Collectors came and literally carried pieces of his estate away on large carts.



Leo Tolstoy and his wife, Sofya  
Image: [A.R.T. Blogkit](#)

**SOLDIER** A change of tides comes about when Tolstoy joins the army. He begins to write in his journal, and does not speak warmly about army life: “[War is] not as a beautiful, orderly, and gleaming formation, with music and beaten drums, streaming banners and generals on prancing horses, but war in its authentic expression—as blood, suffering and death,” Tolstoy writes in his 1855-1856 *Sevastopol Stories*.

**LOVER** Tolstoy found love with 18-year-old doctor’s daughter Sofya Bers, also known as Sonya, a charming and innocent singer and writer. Sonya was somewhat shocked to hear of Tolstoy’s many sexual liaisons. Despite her feelings toward him, Sonya’s parents saw Tolstoy as a good match and the couple’s engagement lasted only a week before they were married. Sonya had thirteen children. Tolstoy had nothing but deep, heartfelt affection for his wife, reflecting his (albeit one-sided) marital bliss in the pages of *War and Peace* where he touts domestic happiness as the cure to immense suffering and the pathway to a contented life.



The title page from the first edition of *War and Peace* • 1869  
Image: [Wikipedia Commons](#)



# CREATING THE PRODUCTION

**WRITER & COMPOSER  
DAVE MALLOY**

“The great experiment of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* specifically was to put a novel on stage; to not just tell the story, but to embrace the formal structure and language of the novel, melodizing Tolstoy’s incredible narrative voice and rhetorical style. To that end, rhymes are few and far between (though they are employed, when the music seems to demand it), and the characters often narrate their actions, sometimes speaking about themselves in the third person. So much of the brilliance of Tolstoy comes

from the vivid detailing of his characters’ rich inner lives: every small social interaction is micro-processed, so that every glance, stare, kiss, blush, and whisper can encompass an entire world of human experience. Dramatizing these moments became a highly intuitive game of show vs. tell, of knowing when to delight in Tolstoy’s text and when to let the music and staging do the work.

Also there is Tolstoy’s deep love for and celebration of humanity, and the vast range of human experiences, from the lowliest troika driver to the Tsar himself...capturing all of these people seemed an essential part of adapting *War and Peace*. By combining the melodrama of Natasha and Anatole with Pierre’s spiritual search, the Bolkonskys’ domestic nightmare, Balaga’s supernatural exuberance and all the rest, a larger picture of what it is to be human is painted, with every outlook complementing and influencing the others, both directly and metaphorically. The music does this too, combining everything from Russian classical to Detroit techno to tell all of these disparate stories as evocatively as possible.

Above all, with *The Great Comet* and all of my adaptations, the most important thing for me is to ensure that the text is being honored faithfully; while I delight in anachronism and accenting some of the more endearing and quaint period elements of the text, in the end these tales are deserving of our most reverent attention. Too often for my tastes, adaptation can rely too heavily on trite ironic distance and parody; for me, the more rewarding choice is always to take these tales at face value, and work to unlock their secrets for contemporary audiences in ways that are joyful, surprising, and ultimately cathartic.”

**DIRECTOR  
RACHEL  
CHAVKIN**

**You’re staging *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* in a proscenium arch theater, but you’re using the space in a different way. Could you explain how and why?**

“Typically the proscenium arch is the dividing line between the fiction of the play and the reality from which the audience is watching. In this production, there is no proscenium arch, so that dividing line doesn’t exist at all. The action unfolds around the audience in 360 degrees. It is in front of them, behind them, on all sides. Actors wander past them singing songs. This helps the audience enter the melodrama and romance of one of the principal characters, Natasha. The experience is different for the actors, too.

They are playing two things at once; both themselves and the character they are portraying. They might have to navigate where an audience member has placed their chair while also playing a scene in the fiction that’s happening all around.”

**The musicians are vital in the storytelling of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*. How are they incorporated into the performance?**

“The design is deeply influenced by an experience Dave [Malloy] had one night when he stumbled through an invisible door and into an underground club in Moscow. It was a tiny club packed with people drinking vodka and eating black bread and pelmeni [Russian dumplings]. A string trio was scattered throughout the club. Dave ended up sitting very close to the viola player, and he had an incredibly intimate experience with the viola while watching the violinist and cellist play across the room. We took this image of the musicians spread all over the space and put it in our production.”





# CREATING THE PRODUCTION

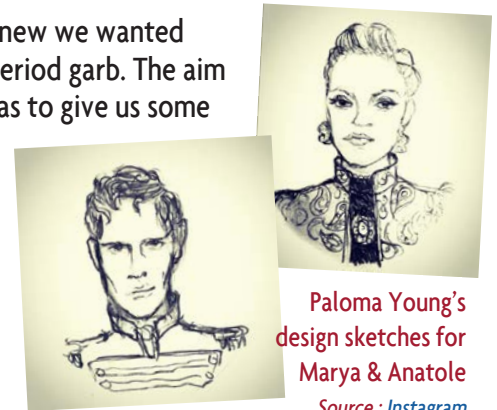
**SCENIC  
DESIGNER  
MIMI  
LIEN**

“In a traditional set design in a theater, the audience is usually sitting on one side of the room, and the performers and the set are on the other side, behind a frame. Given the impetus of Dave [Malloy’s] Moscow adventure, we set about designing *The Great Comet* in a way that would create an experience for the audience similar to that of the back-alley Moscow bar, as well as the journey that led there—not a stage, but an environment. The first thing that I decided would be imperative for this particular design was for the performers to be everywhere—right beside you, behind you, or across the room. The most important thing is to feel that you are not merely watching something happening, but part of something happening. When the performers are circling around you and sitting down at your table, you are no longer a passive audience member but are engaging with the piece in a different way.”

**COSTUME  
DESIGNER  
PALOMA  
YOUNG**

“When Rachel and I first started talking about costumes, she knew we wanted our principals (major characters, as opposed to ensemble) in period garb. The aim was to ground those characters in the source material as well as to give us some distance on Natasha, so as not to judge her too quickly through a contemporary lens. Our goal was to bridge the space between the audience and our glittering 1812 jewel box world. If we’ve done our job right, an audience coming in looking for a couture costume drama will feel absolutely

fulfilled, but also the astute superfan—seeing the show for the twentieth time and looking for anachronistic Easter eggs—should leave with her basket full.”



Paloma Young’s design sketches for Marya & Anatole  
Source: [Instagram](#)

**MUSIC  
DIRECTOR  
OR  
MATIAS**



Dave Malloy and Or Matias work on “Dust and Ashes”  
Source: [Instagram](#)

“The music of *The Great Comet* draws from an eclectic array of folk, hip-hop, EDM, rock, modern extended techniques, traditional Russian music, and contemporary musical theater. Dave Malloy’s score explores endless musical possibilities while masterfully maintaining a cohesive sound throughout the show. Completely sung through, it honors the opera tradition of aria and recitative in contemporary musical language. Pierre and Natasha

have the most complex musical material. Drawing from the aria-writing of Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Rodgers, and Sondheim, these pivotal songs find a sweet balance of homing in on an emotional crux while always advancing the plot.”

**SOUND  
DESIGNER  
NICHOLAS  
POPE**

“This show has more in common with opera than with a traditional musical, because the entirety of the show is sung. Therefore, I was not looking to fill empty spaces in the world, but rather to find an acoustical environment for the music to live within. I wanted this

environment to have a connection with reality, for this would provide an opportunity for the audience to connect with the characters more easily. As this world is established in the show and the audience has been brought into it, the fun begins.”

**LIGHTING DESIGNER  
BRADLEY KING**

“As we move to the Imperial, we’re once again scaling up. Hundreds of bulbs dot the sky, and some of

them now have the ability to move up and down (mostly to preserve sight lines from our second level of seating). There are more table lamps, more picture lights, and more chandeliers. The types of lights we use are bigger and brighter. But if I’ve done my job correctly, as Pierre gazes up at the great comet, the feeling of joy and hope that first washed over me in a tiny room with a few light bulbs will remain exactly the same.”



# WHAT ABOUT PIERRE? INTERVIEW WITH JOSH GROBAN

## What sparked your interest in the production and the role of Pierre in *THE GREAT COMET*?

"I saw the production in NY and, from the first accordion note of the show, I felt that the music was up there with some of the greatest shows I'd ever seen. The buzz and energy that I felt from the people around me, from the other actors that were so close to me, was an experience like no other I had ever had in the theater. So as a fan of the show, I'm thrilled to be a part of the 'family' in this new production with many of the cast members I saw in that first exciting experience."

## Are there any aspects of your personality that you're incorporating into Pierre?

"I love the role, I love the character. Pierre is such a great character, both in the book and in the show, because we all see a part of ourselves in him. We all have those dichotomies within us, and it's just a matter of, how we turn, what buttons we decide to push. But it's a nuanced and beautiful role that I've been just loving, and learning a lot about it that I hadn't previously thought was there."

## The song "Dust and Ashes" was created for this Broadway production. What do you think the song reveals about Pierre's character?

"'Dust and Ashes' is such a wonderful 'connect-the-dots' song for Pierre's arc, because it gives the audience and gives me the opportunity to take the journey, to open his character up a little and look at the questions he has about life. Right before the song, there's a moment where he almost commits suicide through a duel. So he ponders these profound questions of mortality and existence. In addition to its powerful meaning, it's also a wonderful aria of a song which is fun to sing."

## What are the challenges of moving from a concert setting to a Broadway stage?

"In both settings you're telling stories. You're connecting with people musically in a way you can't in your everyday life. In working with Pierre, coming from a performance world where I've had to be so careful so much of the time, it's freeing to leave



certain things at the door to play a character who is tripping over his own life. The thing that I love about theater is the chance to embrace that character fully, and to live in that world."

## What would you like student audiences to experience through seeing *THE GREAT COMET*?

"I think there is something in all of these characters that we can all relate to in the present day. With Pierre, it's his tendency to over-think and to not live in the moment. We all have dark times and we can relate to those times where we don't feel we're a part of the party. I would hope that student audiences will feel a connection to the characters, enjoy the energetic performances surrounding them, and be in the moment with us."

## What inspired you to start your Find Your Light Foundation?

"I believe that exposure to the arts in children's and young adults' lives help shape and change them for the better. I can speak from personal experience, and when I look around and recognize the sobering reality that these are the exact programs that are being cut from our schools and disappearing from our communities at a drastic rate, I am more determined than ever to drive my philanthropic efforts in this direction. I am honored and privileged to be able to give back in this way, and I look forward to the journey ahead as we work to help give so many the chance to find their light."



# PRESSING QUESTIONS

1. What aspects of Russian society did you notice as the show unfolded? How do you think this impacts the stories of Natasha and Pierre?

2. What elements and themes from the stories that are told in *THE GREAT COMET* are still relevant today?

3. What do you think of the way that Pierre engages with the world? Would you want a friend like Pierre? Why or why not?

4. What do you think of the challenges that Natasha faces? Do you agree with her decisions? What would you have done in her situation?

5. Which one of the characters could you relate to the most? Why?

6. What messages will you take from the story of Natasha and Pierre?

7. All of the characters in *THE GREAT COMET* have to negotiate a variety of social interactions as our story progresses. What kinds of social interactions do people have to navigate today?

8. In *THE GREAT COMET*, the horrors of war and the opulence of peace in Moscow are kept separate. What relationship do you sense between “war” and “peace” in the world today?

9. The characters in this musical sing through their conversations. How can a song be like a conversation? What does it add to have music and movement with the words?

10. Director Rachel Chavkin and her creative team focused on creating the feeling that you were immersed in this production. What elements of the production helped you feel a part of the show? Why do you think this added to your experience?

11. There is a mix of Russia of the 1800’s and the modern in many aspects of the production material and creative design. What mix of old and new did you notice? How did that add to your experience?

12. If you had the opportunity to speak to one of the characters in *THE GREAT COMET*, who would it be and what would you want to tell them?



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** In the song “Letters,” characters sing through letters they write to each other expressing their feelings. Write a letter from one character of *THE GREAT COMET* to another. This letter should express some important thoughts that the first character wants to express to the other. You’ll be expressing that character’s point of view on a particular event that happened in the production. It may be a friendly greeting, an apology, a question that needs answering, or something you think they’d need to share or speak about. Read your letter to the class—compare messages and meanings.

Which character would you choose to write the letter? Why?

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Which character would you write the letter to? Why?

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Outline below what the main points of your letter will be. Just what do you have to say?

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Now that you’ve outlined what you have to say, write the letter. Be sure to use the proper letter format with an opening greeting and a final message and signature. Organize your ideas paragraph by paragraph so they develop smoothly and flow from one idea to the next. Try to use the character’s “voice” as you write as much as possible.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Writing 9-12: 3, 4, 5, 6 • Language 9-12: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 • Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** The song “Dust and Ashes” was created for the Broadway production as a way of adding what *THE GREAT COMET* Writer & Composer Dave Malloy calls a “missing part to Pierre’s arc.” Use the excerpt from the song and the lyric video of the song available through the production website [www.greatcometbroadway.com](http://www.greatcometbroadway.com) or directly at (<http://tinyurl.com/dust-ashes>) to dive into the deeper characterization for Pierre created with this new addition.

PIERRE

Is this how I die?  
Ridiculed and laughed at  
Wearing clown shoes  
Is this how I die?  
Furious and reckless  
Sick with booze

What impression do the dual questions about death and living reveal about the internal conflict Pierre is facing in this song?

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How is a person supposed to live according to Pierre?

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How did I live?  
I taste every wasted minute  
Every time I turned away  
From the things that might have healed me  
How long have I been sleeping?

What does the figurative language “I taste every wasted minute” suggest about Pierre’s regrets?

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Is this how I die?  
Frightened like a child  
Lazy and numb  
Is this how I die?  
Pretending and preposterous  
And dumb

What do you think the phrase “They say we are asleep until we fall in love” means?

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How did I live?  
Was I kind enough and good enough?  
Did I love enough?  
Did I ever look up  
And see the moon  
And the stars  
And the sky?  
Oh why have I been sleeping?

They say we are asleep  
Until we fall in love  
We are children of dust and ashes

STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Writing 9-12: 2, 4, 5, 6 • Language 9-12: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 • Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** Throughout *THE GREAT COMET*, characters have had intersecting relationships and personal conflicts that Writer & Composer Dave Malloy has captured in a variety of relationship songs: “Natasha & Anatole,” “Sonya & Natasha,” “Pierre & Anatole,” “Pierre & Andre.” Use the excerpt below from “Pierre & Natasha” to explore the relationship between the two titular characters.

PIERRE  
Stop, stop, stop!  
You have your whole life before you-

NATASHA  
Before me? No, all is over for me!

PIERRE  
All over?  
(Music stops)  
If I were not myself,  
But the brightest, handsomest,  
Best man on earth,  
And if I were free—  
I would get down on my knees this minute  
And ask you for your hand  
And for your love.  
(Music resumes)

NATASHA  
And for the first time in many days  
I weep tears of gratitude  
Tears of tenderness  
Tears of thanks  
And glancing at Pierre  
O Pierre  
I leave the room smiling

PIERRE  
And restraining tears of tenderness  
Tears of joy that choke me  
I throw my fur coat on my shoulders  
Unable to find the sleeves  
Outside, my great broad chest  
Breathes in deep the air with joy  
Despite the ten degrees of frost  
And I get my sleigh

Why do you think Pierre makes the offer to Natasha for her hand saying, “if I were not myself”?

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Explain what the “tears of gratitude,” “tears of tenderness” and “tears of thanks” Natasha weeps are:

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Why do these characters profess feelings and then depart? What is happening in their relationship?

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STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Writing 9-12: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 • Language 9-12: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 • Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** Look at the quotation below from Natasha and think about what it means. Then use your interpretation to write an essay in which you agree or disagree with Natasha's decision. Be sure to use specific examples to support your opinion in a well organized essay.

NATASHA

And without a moment's reflection  
I wrote the answer to Princess Mary  
I'd been unable to write all morning

All our misunderstandings are at an end  
Forget everything and forgive me  
But I can't be Andrey's wife

Use the space below to break down what you believe led Natasha to decide not to wed Andrey:

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Do you agree or disagree with her decision? \_\_\_\_\_

Think clearly and carefully about why you agree or disagree with her fateful decision. What evidence or examples could you use to convey your point of view? Be sure to be as specific as possible in your explanations of your ideas so the reader can understand why you feel as you do.

Use a clear opening paragraph to introduce the reader to your main thesis and give a brief overview of what you'll say in the essay. Organize each of the body paragraphs around a single idea. Make sure your ideas and paragraphs flow smoothly from one to the next. Use the final paragraph to summarize your ideas and leave the reader with a final impression.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Writing 9-12: 1, 4, 5, 6, 8 • Language 9-12: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 • Speaking & Listening 6-12: 1, 3, 4, 6



# GLOBAL STUDIES

**YOUR TASK:** Writer & Composer Dave Malloy described Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, his inspiration for *THE GREAT COMET*, as a "treatise on history." The events of the novel unfold, as do the events of the musical, against the backdrop of Russian history in the early 1800's. Refer to your textbook, your teacher, and appropriate resources on the Internet to research the following major historical elements to add context to the events, society and situations in the production. Explain how your research aids in a deeper understanding of the show.

**RULER: EMPEROR ALEXANDER I** \_\_\_\_\_

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**CONTEXT FOR THE GREAT COMET:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**EVENT: NAPOLEONIC WARS** \_\_\_\_\_

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**CONTEXT FOR THE GREAT COMET:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**EVENT: GREAT FIRE OF MOSCOW** \_\_\_\_\_

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**CONTEXT FOR THE GREAT COMET:** \_\_\_\_\_

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STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Literacy in History/Social Studies Writing 9-12: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9





# GLOBAL STUDIES

**YOUR TASK:** In the song “The Private and Intimate Life of the House” we get a deeper portrayal of life at the Bolkonsky house that reveals something about the social classes in Russia in 1812. Use the selection below and your own research to analyze and understand the society presented in *THE GREAT COMET*.

**BOLKONSKY**

I come in for tea in my old-fashioned coat and powdered wig  
And I tell stories  
And utter scathing critiques

Look at the first lines that Bolkonsky says. What does his description of his attire suggest about his status? Why is he “A relic of the past century”?

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And this stern, shrewd old man  
A relic of the past century  
With his gentle daughter  
Such a majestic and agreeable spectacle

**MARY**

But besides the couple hours during which we have guests  
There are also twenty-two hours in the day  
During which the private and intimate life of the house continues

What social practice involves “hours during which [they] have guests”? Explore/explain this custom:

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**BOLKONSKY**

Bring me my slippers

**MARY**

Yes, father, yes, father

**BOLKONSKY**

Bring me my wine

What about the social customs of the time and of the Bolkonsky house make Natasha’s love life so complicated?

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**MARY**

Yes, father, yes, father

**BOLKONSKY**

If you’re not too busy  
Fiddling with your incense and icons?

STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Literacy in History/Social Studies Writing 9-12: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9



# GLOBAL STUDIES

**YOUR TASK:** In the final song of the production, “The Great Comet of 1812,” Pierre sings: “The comet said to portend / Untold horrors / And the end of the world / But for me / The comet brings no fear / No, I gaze joyfully.” Many civilizations have thought that cosmic events could predict or portend historical happenings. Look into events in Russia in 1812 and then look at 2 other cosmic occurrences to see if there are other coincidences or connections.

## COSMIC EVENT

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## HISTORICAL EVENT

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## COSMIC EVENT

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## HISTORICAL EVENT

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STANDARDS ADDRESSED - CCSS Literacy in History/Social Studies Writing 9-12: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9



# THEATER ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** Musical theater songs can be approached in the same way that monologues in plays can be approached. Use the section from “Sonya Alone” below and the prompts to analyze the text as you would for a character in a play. Try speaking the text as a monologue to see what you discover.

SONYA:

I will stand in the dark for you

I will hold you back by force

I will stand here right outside your door

I won't see you disgraced

I will protect your name and your heart

Because I miss my friend

I know you've forgotten me

I know you so well my friend

I know you might just throw yourself over

But I won't let you

I won't let you

It's all on me

And I remember this family

I remember their kindness

And if I never sleep again

I will stand in the dark for you

I will hold you back by force

I will stand here right outside your door

I won't see you disgraced

I will protect your name and your heart

Because I miss my friend

Because I miss my friend

Because I miss you, my friend

Who is Sonya speaking to in this song?

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What are the main ideas she is trying to work through in this piece?

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What do you think is the subtext present in what she's saying/singing?

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What is the change in her character from the beginning of this piece to the end?

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# THEATER ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** It is important to understand the interpersonal dynamics, the give and take between two partners in a scene, in order to play it correctly. Writer & Composer Dave Malloy often allows characters to speak their inner thoughts directly. Look at the exchange between Pierre and Anatole from the song “Pierre & Anatole” below, analyze each character separately, and then examine how they relate to one another in ways that make the scene work.

**PIERRE**

After all, you must understand  
That besides your pleasure  
There is such a thing as other people, and their  
happiness and peace  
And that you are ruining a whole life  
For the sake of amusing yourself!

Amuse yourself with women like my wife  
With them you're within your rights  
But to promise a young girl to marry her  
To deceive, to kidnap  
Why don't you understand that that's as cruel  
as beating an old man or a child?!

**ANATOLE**

Well I don't know about that, eh?  
I don't know that and I don't want to  
But you have used such words to me  
“Scoundrel” and so on  
Which as a man of honor, I will not allow  
anyone to use

**PIERRE**

Is it satisfaction you want?

**ANATOLE**

You could at least take back your words, eh?  
If you want me to do as you wish?

Look carefully at Pierre’s dialogue in the song. What lines offer insight into his character’s motivation? How does he express his relationship to Anatole (ex: “There is such a thing as other people”)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Look carefully at Anatole’s dialogue in the song. What lines offer insight into his character (ex: “as a man of honor”)? How does he express his relationship to Pierre? \_\_\_\_\_

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On the back of this paper, reflect on what you think motivates these characters throughout the story. How does the relationship change between Pierre & Anatole throughout the course of the production? What dramatic conflict ends their relationship in the song referenced above?



# THEATER ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** The production team from *THE GREAT COMET* took Writer & Composer Dave Malloy’s experiences in an intimate Russian tavern and utilized them as inspiration for creating the immersive theatrical experience for the production. Acting so close to audience members can be a unique challenge for performers. View the short interview with Josh Groban about the unique seating and its opportunities for actors and audiences, then answer the questions using the interview and your own experiences as actor and audience member.



Access the “Conversation with Josh Groban” video through the production website [www.greatcometbroadway.com](http://www.greatcometbroadway.com) or get direct access by simply typing <http://tinyurl.com/intimate-acting> into your Internet browser.

Josh Groban talks about the opportunity with the unique seating arrangements to “feel that audience energy.” Why is that important to a performer? \_\_\_\_\_

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Think about your experiences as an audience member for *THE GREAT COMET*. What effect did having the action and actors in the audience have on you as a spectator? What does this add to the experience of the show? \_\_\_\_\_

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Envision a production you are in as an actor. What is the staging like? What possibilities could you think of for creating an intimate staging for that production? How would the staging help tell the story of the play? \_\_\_\_\_

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STANDARDS ADDRESSED - NYCDOE Blueprint for the Arts - Theater Grades 8, 12 • Theater Making: Acting, Designing, Directing



# RESOURCES

## THE PRODUCTION

### WEB

OFFICIAL BROADWAY SITE: <http://greatcometbroadway.com/>

### VIDEO

YOUTUBE CHANNEL: <http://tinyurl.com/youtube-GreatCometBway>

### SOCIAL MEDIA

TWITTER: <https://twitter.com/GreatCometBway>

INSTAGRAM: <https://www.instagram.com/greatcometbway/>

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/GreatCometBway/>

## FURTHER CONNECTIONS

WRITER & COMPOSER DAVE MALLOY: <http://davemalloy.com/>

JOSH GROBAN OFFICIAL SITE: <http://www.joshgroban.com/>

JOSH GROBAN'S FIND YOUR LIGHT FOUNDATION: <http://fylf.org/>

Josh Groban's Find Your Light Foundation is dedicated to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to experience a quality arts education. We believe that is best achieved through direct support of exceptional arts programs combined with education, advocacy and outreach. We focus support where the need is greatest to inform and inspire others in recognizing arts education as a critical component of a young person's development.