

# SPRING AWAKENING



# Study Guide



## **Content & Trigger Warning**

Spring Awakening contains mention of abortion and abuse, as well as depictions of suicide, partial nudity, rape, and sexual content.

# Synopsis

*Spring Awakening* is the revolutionary, Tony Award-winning, best musical that took the world by storm. In 1891 Germany, repressed adolescent students stumble into adulthood as clumsily as they do into each other's arms. With obstinate parents unwilling to guide them, young Melchior and Wendla explore their desires for each other, while Melchior's dear friend Moritz fumbles dangerously through his own coming-of-age. This generation-defining musical is a rock anthem to all the "guilty ones," poignantly exploring the dark, passionate, and twisting journey from adolescence to adulthood.

## About East West Players



Founded in 1965, East West Players is committed to raising the visibility of the Asian American experience by presenting inventive world-class theatrical productions, developing artists of color, and providing impactful youth education programs.

$$\begin{array}{r} x-2 \\ \hline 1 \times 3 \end{array}$$



$$= 22$$

$$= \ln$$

$$= 30$$



$$= 2x^1$$

$$= 1$$



$$= 10$$

$$= \frac{1}{2}$$

$$= 2$$

# Production History

Benjamin Franklin Wedekind, the original playwright of *Spring Awakening*, wrote the play during the 1890s and drew from his adolescence. Because the play includes abortion, abuse, adolescent suicide, and teenage sexual fantasies, *Spring Awakening* was heavily censored. It did not premiere on-stage until about a decade after it was written. It remained relatively unknown until its 2006 adaptation into a successful Broadway musical.



Winner of 8  
TONY Awards



First preview Nov. 16 2006

Opening date Dec. 10 2006

Closing date Jan. 18 2009

28 previews

859 performances

Deaf West's revival of *Spring Awakening* opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on September 27, 2015. The production, directed by Tony Award nominee Michael Arden, would play 23 previews and 135 performances before closing on January 24, 2016. It garnered three Tony Award nominations, including Best Revival of a Musical - re-imagined and performed simultaneously in English and American Sign Language.

# The Banned Play

## Spring Awakening's History of Censorship

Spring's Awakening was banned from being performed in Germany until 1906.

When the play was put on privately by the English Stage Society for two nights in 1963, it was heavily censored by the Lord Chamberlain.

It continued to be censored until in 1974, the National Theatre finally produces the first uncensored version in British history.



## Censorship Today: Banned Books

Censorship occurs, "whenever people succeed in imposing their political or moral values on others by suppressing words, images, or ideas that they find offensive."

(Natalie Clare, *DRAMATICS*)

**The 15 most banned books in America this school year - Los Angeles Times**



**The 15 most banned books in America this school year**

Actor, author and 'Reading Rainbow' founder Levar Burton joins the L.A. Times Book Club to discuss the



# Censorship in the Classroom from a Current High School Student

Written by Dylan Briones, Expanding Horizons Institute Intern  
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Throughout my experience in school, I have read various books and studied different subjects.

## **Many of these topics are banned.**

As a person who is part of this new generation, knowing that these exciting books and topics are banned in other states makes me concerned for the future of the next. With educational exposure to these sensitive topics, people can learn about them comfortably and safely.

One of the books I read in my Honors English class in high school was *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman. It was eye-opening to the effects of the holocaust and informative about the gruesome tragedy that occurred at that time. Learning that this book was banned left me confused as to why, as it was more educational than obscene. Sure, this book deals with different topics that would deem it graphic, but without that, it would not teach people what truly happened. In another class, my teacher showed us a video of what happened between Latin America and the United States around the long history of bananas. I wondered how this could be inappropriate for students to learn. Was it because we were discussing monopolies, colonialism, and corporate greed - a subject that is considered "too advanced" for a teenager like myself?

My teachers acknowledge how censorship affects students, which fuels their need to educate us on what transpired instead of just using the base curriculum. I am glad to be at a school where we can discuss the whole truth, but many students aren't so lucky. Many teachers even risk losing their occupation for simply teaching students.

I want students to experience the books that I have read and to gain the knowledge they give them to make better decisions and have a different perspective on life. I want teachers to be free and confident in teaching these books or lessons that provide students with helpful information. **These topics cannot be avoided by restricting students...as long as these books and teachings exist, we will find a way to learn the truth.** Either it will be taught to us passively, or we will learn it another way. Knowledge itself should not and cannot be restricted.



# Schooling + Religion



- At the time of writing *Spring Awakening*, the German educational system was taken **very seriously** and left no room for personal expression.
- Traditionally, female education was to teach girls about religion and to build social skills rather than prepare for a career, like for boys.
- Part of what shaped the German education system was the ongoing tension between Germans and the Catholic Church. Because the Church was weakening, they became more involved in secular areas of marriage, family, and education.
- Schools instilled a strong sense of religion and morals in the German children, which helped to further reinforce the ideas of  
**good behavior, discipline,  
and authority**





# Sex Education



- Social attitudes towards sex were complicated in 19th-century Germany. People were divided and thought that sex is either shameful or a natural, pleasurable thing in life.
- Today, sex education in the US looks different everywhere, and the debate to include it is ongoing. Ultimately, school districts decide their inclusions of sex education. **Some schools decide to leave out sex education in their curriculums entirely.**



According to UNESCO,

**71%**

of youth aged 15-24 sought sexuality education and information online, because it was not offered in school.

**The condemnation of sex combined with the absence of sex exploration leaves adolescents un-equipped with the knowledge they need for growth and adulthood.**



# Abortion

In 1875, abortion was incorporated in sections 218–220 of the Penal Code for the German Reich. Abortion in Germany today is illegal and punishable unless you meet certain conditions.

## Abortion in the US

In 2022, the Supreme Court overturned **Roe v. Wade (1973)**, which guaranteed a constitutional right to abortion. Only some state constitutions, like California, independently protect abortion rights. Planned Parenthood has been helping the fight for reproductive health, access, and rights.



## Abuse

*Spring Awakening* depicts child, emotional, and sexual abuse. *The Dark I Know Well* is an emotional song by Martha and Isle with sexual abuse allusions. In 19th century Germany, people chose to ignore this behavior. **This attitude towards abuse continues today, and many incidents go unreported.**

"I don't scream.  
Though I know  
it's wrong. I just  
play along. I lie  
there and  
breathe"

The Dark I Know Well





# Navigating Adolescence + Mental health



Adolescence was not recognized in 19th century Germany as a legitimate part of one's life. *Adolescents were thought of as children.* This meant that questions regarding sexuality, puberty, sexual angst, interpersonal relationships were hardly talked about. *Spring Awakening* was one of the first of a trend of German plays that sympathized with the youth and explored their problems.

*Spring Awakening* explores conflict between adolescent desires and adult expectations. Parental pressures about school and careers could manifest into stress for adolescents. In many cases, the stress can be overwhelming on your mental health.

## A Gentle Reminder

It is important to check-in with yourself and your friends every now and then. It can be easy to avoid taking care of your mental health. Moritz's death is unfortunately a reality for many. Moreover, knowing and having support and resources will benefit your life and overall health in the long run.



# Suicidalality

*"The talks you never had. The Saturdays you never spent. All the grown-up places ...You never went"*

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students were reported to commit suicide between **1883-1889** in Prussia

- Adolescent suicide became one of the leading topics of creative writing, like plays and novels, in Germany as a result
- School reformers, scientists, and authors all began investigating the cause of the increase in suicides among young people. They disagreed on whether **the school system, the rapid increase in industrialization, or predisposition** were to blame.



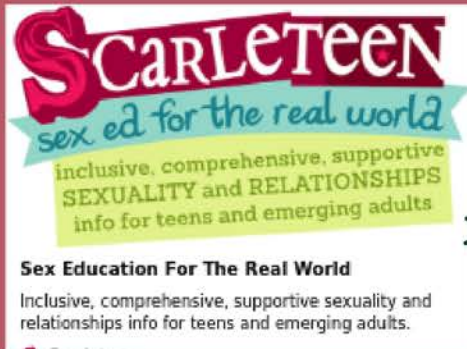
*"The teacher who surrenders to a sudden burst of anger and administers cruel and degrading punishments is **guilty of complicity** in any suicide that results."*

-Gustav Siegert in 1893



# Resources

## Sex Education for Teens and Emerging Adults:



**Scarleteen**  
sex ed for the real world  
inclusive, comprehensive, supportive  
SEXUALITY and RELATIONSHIPS  
info for teens and emerging adults

**Sex Education For The Real World**  
Inclusive, comprehensive, supportive sexuality and relationships info for teens and emerging adults.



ONLINE  
SEX  
EDUCATION  
amaze

## LGBTQ+ Services in Los Angeles:



### **A Safe Welcoming Space for LGBTQ+**

The Los Angeles LGBT Center is a safe and welcoming place where the LGBTQ+ community finds help, hope, and support when it is needed the most.

## For survivors of sexual and domestic violence:



**CENTER FOR THE PACIFIC ASIAN FAMILY**  
NURTURING CHANGE TOGETHER

**CPAF**  
We are committed to ending domestic and sexual violence in Asian Pacific Islander (API) communities by breaking through language, cultural, and institution...



## Suicide Prevention and LGBTQ+ Inclusivity:



**For Young LGBTQ Lives**  
The Trevor Project provides 24/7 crisis support services to LGBTQ young people. Text, chat, o...  
thetrevorproject.org

24/7 Crisis text line  
text HOME to  
741-741

A Warmline is a peer-run hotline that offers callers emotional support and is staffed by volunteers who are in recovery themselves.



**NAMI**  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Warmline Directory



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