This packet was prepared for the Actors, Crew and Patrons to further their knowledge of the world in which this show takes place.
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NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMANY

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Germany was not a united country until 1871. Initially it consisted of 34 principalities and four other towns. Together they formed the Germany Alliance (1815). In 1971, Germany became an empire. The emperor was the Kaiser of all Germans and he was always referred to as the King of Prussia. The three emperors were Wilhelm I (1871-1888), Friedrich III (1888) and Wilhelm II (1888-1918). While the Kaiser held power much like a king, the Chancellor held the political power. When Wilhelm II took power he did not see eye to eye with the Chancellor Bismark and because of this, Bismark ended up resigning in 1890 leaving Germany with only a Kaiser as a ruler. Bismark’s decision to step down from office greatly affected the country in the following years. Bismark was responsible for the welfare state, which provided German workers with sickness, maternity, and accident benefits, as well as a national pension scheme and several other perks, all of which began to disintegrate after he left office. Wilhelm II’s foreign policy was reckless and ended up isolating Germany, which eventually led to Germany entering World War I.

ECONOMY AND INDUSTRY

Germany was, much like the rest of the world was beginning to transition into the 20th century at the time Spring Awakening was written. Industry occurred in four different waves over the course of the 19th century: The railway wave (1877-1886), the dye wave (1887-1896), the chemical wave (1897-1902) and the wave of electrical engineering (1903-1918). Spring Awakening takes place during the dye wave, which helped Germany become the forefront for synthetic dyes by the beginning of the 1900’s. This led Germany to becoming a world leader in industrialization, along with Britain and the United States.

Because of the Industrial Revolution, Germany’s middle class began to grow, however they never quite gained political power.
ART

The late 19th Century brought several new forms of art to Germany. Art began moving out of the Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism, and Naturalism periods and into Symbolism[^1], Art Nouveau[^2] and Secession[^3] movements (*pictured right*). While the forms of art that Germany was moving towards were more progressive and free-thinking than previous art forms, the children were more likely educated in older forms of art including the Renaissance period (*pictured left*) because it was much more religious than the newer forms of art that began to take hold.

*The Creation of Adam* by
Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1511

MUSIC

In late 19th Century Germany, the popular style of music was considered Romantic. Viennese waltzes gained popularity; one of the most famous composers was Johann Strauss the Younger (*Pictured right*). Other famous composers were Albert Lortzing, Johannes Brahms, Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, Anton Bruckner, Max Bruch, Richard Strauss, and Gustav Mahler. These composers tended to mix classic and romantic elements.

[^1]: Symbolism artists use not only color and shape to communicate their feelings but also use messages and esoteric references.
[^2]: Also referred to as “New Art”, Art Nouveau artists believed that they should work on everything from architecture to furniture design so that art would become apart of everyday life. Paintings from this period often feature flat, decorative patterns, curved lines and the polymorphic femme fatale.
[^3]: Unlike other movements, there is not one specific style that unites this movement. These artists were concerned with exploring the possibilities of art outside the confines of academic tradition.
LIFESTYLE

Life in a small provincial town in Germany was simple. Towns were either Lutheran or Catholic and it was very rare for both religions to co-exist in the same town. Because there was a large religious presence in Germany, many activities were centered around religion. When children were not at school, they were participating in missionary outings, helping the underprivileged or performing shows for the rest of the town.

While the boys were expected to attend school every day, the girls were allowed to miss for family vacations or other such activities. When they weren’t in school, boys spent time studying and helping their fathers. Girls were taught household work that would help them maintain their own homes when they grew up and got married.

In order to keep themselves entertained when not working or at school, children played games that are very similar to what they play in recess today.
Frank Wedekind

Benjamin Franklin Wedekind was the second of six children, born in Hannover, Germany (Pictured left) on July 24th, 1864 to Friedrich Wilhelm Wedekind, a physician and Emilie Kammerer, a German singer and actress. Although Wedekind was born in Germany, his father moved the family to a castle in Lenzburg, Switzerland (Pictured right) where he spent most of his childhood.

Wedekind didn’t always see eye to eye with his father, which escalated to the point where Wedekind physically struck him and ended up leaving home under the assumption that he would not be welcomed back after the altercation.

After leaving home, Wedekind went to school to study law and literature at the University of Lausanne and then later at the University of Munich. He ended up abandoning his studies to work as a publicity agent at Swiss Soup Company, Maggi. He also worked as a journalist and was arrested because of an article he wrote. The article and cartoon insulted Wilhelm II, the German Emperor, and because of that, Wedekind was imprisoned for six months.

Eventually, Wedekind returned to Munich where he attempted to make a living off of acting. He also began to write plays; the first of which was Spring Awakening (1891). There was a large amount of controversy initially surrounding the play, which led to the play being banned. In addition to Spring Awakening, his other works include the “Lulu” plays, Earth Spirit (1895) and Pandora’s Box (1904) among others.

Throughout a large portion of his adult life, Wedekind was very promiscuous and is often times described as a womanizer. He kept a diary detailing his conquests which was only recently

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4 The “Lulu” Plays follow a woman named Lulu through her life. The first play, Earth Spirit focuses on Lulu’s progression through society by using men. After cheating on her third husband, Dr. Schön, she is given a gun and told to kill herself. She ends up killing her husband instead and ends up in prison. Pandora’s Box picks up with Lulu escaping from prison with the aid of Countess Geschwitz and her subsequent career ending in her death at the hands of Jack the Ripper in London.
published by his daughter, entitled *Diary of an Erotic Life*. He didn’t discriminate against size, shape or age; he was simply interested in women, saying “I seek woman, she will be welcome in any shape.” He didn’t worry about disease, adopting the philosophy that “so much the better, then I was safe from it.”

In 1906, Wedekind married actress Tilly Newes. Wedekind was 22 years her senior and became needlessly jealous and fiercely monogamous. This attitude could have contributed to his death; he felt as though he had to be sexually and creatively active to keep his wife’s devotion. There have been several scholars who have actually compared Tilly to Lulu. Tilly’s own father stated “Frank can’t be surprised about anything; he has married Lulu, after all.” In 1917, Tilly attempted to end her own life just months before Wedekind’s death, but was unsuccessful.

On March 9, 1918 Benjamin Franklin Wedekind died. After he had an appendectomy, he ignored orders to rest and went back to acting. Because of this, he developed a hernia that his doctor refused to operate on immediately in order to prevent further complications. Insisting on surgery, Wedekind died of complications. There were many people that attended his funeral including fans and prostitutes.

Despite the fact that Wedekind’s plays focused a large amount on religion, he himself was a non-believer. While he never identified himself as agnostic or as an atheist, he was not a part of any organized religion. Frank Wedekind is also said to have anticipated Expressionism and he was a major influence in the development of Epic Theatre. Although he has been given these credits, at the time he was writing, he didn’t fit into any specific genre of theatre.
Religion

Religion was treated very differently in 19th century Germany than it is today. Back then students received religious instruction at Prussian Gymnasiums, although around 1890, they were given the option of not participating. While they were more prevalent in elementary schools, students were still very much surrounded by religion both at school and at home. Today, religion is supposed to be left out of public education, although that is not always the case. For example, it is primarily religious groups that endorse “abstinence only” sex education in the classroom, despite the research that it is not effective.

Wendla sounds disbelieving at the thought of Melchior not believing in God because the time period Spring Awakening takes place, it was hard to come to terms with the idea of atheism when religion saturated so much of society. The church was responsible for setting the standards by which much of these children’s lives were ruled at home and at school.

Germany was predominantly Protestant and the town Spring Awakening takes place in would have been Protestant. Although Martin Luther was from Germany, there was a great divide between the Catholics and Protestants. Most towns were either one religion or the other, with very little interaction. When they were forced to cohabitate, or even interact with one another, tensions would become very high. Evangelical movements and missionary works also began to rise in 19th century Germany. These required followers to be much more active in the church and spreading the gospel. Missionary work, especially to third world countries, continues to be a focus of many American churches today. The Christingle Chorale is a perfect example of these missionary outreaches. A Christingle Chorale is the same concept as skits in churches today.

In Spring Awakening, religion exists as a way to control society. Schools and families relied on religion to keep their children out of trouble. Although religion was used as a form of control in 19th century Germany, Churches seem to be reaching out more to young people in a much different way in today’s world. The church understands that they cannot force children to
follow the rules of the church, so instead they attempt to appeal to teens, making it their choice to follow the church and their beliefs.

Although it has been over 100 years since Spring Awakening was written, there has not been a large shift in how religion factors into people’s lives. While many claim that there has been a decline in religion, and believe that faith is not as vital to people’s lives today as it is in the past, that is not the case. Faith plays a large role in deciding what is morally acceptable. For example, Religion supplies the main argument against woman’s reproductive rights, gay marriage, and many other issues. Though atheism is not nearly as shocking today as Wendla considered it, the church remains an institution that is prevalent in dictating the standards by which we live our lives in today’s society.
MALES AND EDUCATION

The German state sponsored education system in the 19th century was considered one of the best in Europe despite its austere portrayal in *Spring Awakening*. Prussia’s illiteracy rate in 1871 was only 12%. German schools imposed a firm attendance policy, making it nearly impossible for students to miss school barring grave illness or death. Although it wasn’t required for students to continue their education after the age of 16, if they opted to complete school, they only had to serve one mandatory year in the German military. Most of the boys in *Spring Awakening* would have continued onto Gymnasium, a secondary school focused on preparing students for college. However, there were not many men that decided to continue on in their education. Only about 8% of German boys went on to further their education. Roughly 1-2% would end up receiving their diploma from schools that prepared students for college. Most students who decided to go onto University were around the age of 20 when they finished secondary school. Because of this, middle and upper-class students didn’t mix with lower classes. If a student failed a class, they could repeat it. It was also common for students, like Mortiz to repeat an entire year. All of these factors helped to shape the German schooling system as one of the main bureaucratic institutions that left little room for personal expression or free thinking.

Despite Wilhelm II’s attempt at making German Schools more scientific orientated, Gymnasiums placed a strong emphasis on classical education, including Latin and Greek. There was also a large amount of memorization. This is clearly seen in *Spring Awakening* during “All That’s Known” when the boys are repeating the Latin poem *The Aeneid*. This was very much how schools were run. There are several accounts from students during that time whom despite being able to quote famous Greek and Latin poems, had no idea of the current history surrounding Germany.
“Later on, there was endless Latin, and even later, Greek. German and gymnastics were equally valued minor subjects. We had two hours of each per week; only in the higher grades was instruction in German allotted somewhat more time. I wrote many Latin verses – about peace, war, the swimming pool, the lyre, the piano – but I wouldn’t have known whether any poets lived in Germany or what kind, if I did not figure it out from the books that my father put on my mother’s desk. I was capable of calculating the surface area of an ellipse, but I did not have even a rough concept of a square kilometer or the salary of a full professor at university. We wrote Greek exams in the form of translations from German originals without a dictionary, which really constituted a particular waste of both Greek and German, because we did not have what it took for such work – basically we could not read Homer. We learned from Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico* about the construction of the bridge that Caesar had built for his legions over the Rhine and could name every brace and fret, but we did not know what the structure of the German Reich looked like according to the constitution. We were more familiar with the Second Messenian War than with the Second Silesian War or the Wars of Liberation [from Napoleon], because our history lessons did not include these late events. The historical and political foundations of our lives remained completely unknown to us. However, this was by no means the teachers’ fault; it had to do with the times, and I knew of no Gymnasium where the situation would have been any different.”

Rudolf Binding’s first-hand account is very similar to what students experienced in *Spring Awakening*. There are journals filled with first-hand accounts where students discuss their antagonistic relationships with their teachers. Thomas Mann, an author, wrote of his time in the German school system: “I detested school. I despised it as a place, criticized the manners of its authorities and found myself in a kind of literary opposition to its spirit, its discipline, its methods of training.” These are the same feelings that Melchior, along with many other children most likely felt; an all-consuming abhorrence for a place where adolescents spent most of their life. The school system, along with religion was used to control students’ lives.

Academic pressure was not only put on students within the classroom, but followed them home as well. Students who failed class were often treated as dunce by their parents and were made to feel as though they were bring shame onto the family. It is not difficult to fathom how Mortiz was driven to thoughts about suicide considering the disappointment combined with the stifling bureaucratic nature of the school system. Mortiz’s thoughts about suicide were not uncommon; German schools were faced with an epidemic of suicides at the time of *Spring Awakening*. Despite accounts of a horrendous experience in the German school system, many American Scholars studied the German system of education during that time and declared it superior to American education in nearly every way.
FEMALES AND EDUCATION

While the boys are mostly seen in the classroom, the girls in Spring Awakening are never seen in school. They are seen talking about boys: their crushes and potential husbands. Although girls did attend school, there was not nearly as much value put on educating girls. They were expected to prepare a household for their husband and children while the boys prepared for their careers. While the boys were taking classes to help them towards their career goals, the girls were learning about religion and social skills. There were no state mandated exams to see their progression through school and the attendance policy was not nearly as strict. Discipline was also not nearly as harsh. Girls were allowed to miss school for family holidays and other similar occasions. School did not play a large factor in girls’ lives or have a lasting effect. Even when looking at journals from girls in the 19th century, school did not seem to be a big topic of discussion.

GAMES

WENDENDEN (HIT THE POT)

This is a traditional German game small children play. Hide a pot containing a small present or piece of chocolate. The child who is "it" closes his eyes or is blindfolded and is given a wooden stick. He crawls on the floor, banging the spoon on the floor until he finds the pot. Spectators can help by shouting "hot" or "cold." When he finds the pot, he gets to keep what is inside. The pot can be hidden again and the game replayed for remaining children.

KATZ UND MAUS (CAT AND MOUSE)

This game is played by larger groups, typically on the playground. One player is Katz and the other is Maus. The rest of the children form a circle and hold hands. The cat tries to catch (touch) the mouse. The mouse can run anywhere, including into or out of the circle. The circle helps the mouse by raising their arms to let the mouse through, or lowering their arms to try to block the mouse.
SARDINES

Sardines is a German game of tag. One child is "it" and has to hide from the others. Whoever finds the hidden child also hides. Eventually, all the children will be hidden except for one, who then is "it" in the next round.

FAMILIAR GAMES

German children also play familiar playground games such as hide and seek ("Verstecken"), kick the can ("Dosenfussball"), tag ("Fangen"), and hopscotch ("Hupfspiel").

PLAYGROUND GAMES

ZUCKER UND SALT (SUGAR AND SALT)

All children stand in a line. One child (the leader of the game) stands about ten metres away from the others. He covers his eyes with his hands and turns around himself shouting "sugar and salt". At the same time the other children try to reach him by running towards him. When he opens his eyes the children aren't allowed to move. They have to stand still. Those who still move have to go back to the starting point. The child who has reached the leader first is the winner of the game and becomes the leader himself.

DER PLUMSACK GEHT UM (THE PLUMSACK GOES AROUND)

All children stand in a big circle. One child runs around the circle behind the backs of the children with a stone or a little ball in his hands. (Formerly it was a little sack with rice. That’s why it’s called plumsack) While the child is running around the others are singing "The plumsack goes around". They are not allowed to look behind their backs. Secretly the child outside the circle drops the “plumsack” behind the back of another child. He has to seize the “plumsack” and run after the other child who has dropped it. They both run around the circle. If he doesn’t catch him before the other reaches the vacant position in the circle he has to take over. The he has to take the “plumsack”.

WIE WEIT DARF ICH GEHEN (HOW FAR MAY I GO?)

The children stand in a line with one child (the leader of the game) facing them. One child asks “How many steps may I take?” The leader of the game may say, “Three big steps, two small steps, and one step back.” The child has to say, “May I?” and the leader of the game either says “yes” or “no”. If he says “yes” the child can go the number of steps towards the leader. If he forgets to ask “May I” before he starts to move he has to go back. All the other children do the same. The child who reaches the leader first can take his position.
GERMAN NAMES

Meanings

Fräulein: “Little Miss”
Frau: Mrs.
Herr: Mr.

Fräulein Knuppeldick: To wield a big stick
Fräulein Grossebustenhalter: Miss Over-the-Shoulder-Boulder-Holder (Or Big-Bra)
Herr Sonnenstich: Heatstroke/Sunstroke
Herr Knochenbruch: Fracture or Bone Breaking

Pronunciation

Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wendla</td>
<td>Vend-La; Wen-lah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Mahr-tə</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thea</td>
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<td>Anna</td>
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<td>Melchior</td>
<td>MEL-kyawr</td>
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<td>MO-rits</td>
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<td>Hanschen</td>
<td>Han-Chen</td>
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<td>Georg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rupert</td>
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<td>Reinhold</td>
<td>rahyn-hohld</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dieter</td>
<td>DEE-ter</td>
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<td>Ulbrecht</td>
<td>ool-brekt</td>
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Adult Names

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fräulein</td>
<td>frɔylain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herr</td>
<td>heṛ</td>
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<td>Frau Bergman</td>
<td>burg-muhrn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fräulein Knuppeldick</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frau Gabor</td>
<td>gä’bɔr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frau Bessell</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herr Sonnenstich</td>
<td>zo-nən-fliːf</td>
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<td>Headmaster Knochenbruch</td>
<td>knn-kən-broʊx</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herr Neumann</td>
<td>noo-muhrn</td>
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<td>Herr Rilow</td>
<td>ki-lo</td>
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<td>Herr Stiefel</td>
<td>ʃti-fe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Halbach</td>
<td>hal-bach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctor Von Brausepulver</td>
<td>bʁau-ze-pol-və</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herr Gabor</td>
<td>ga-bor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schmidt</td>
<td>shmit</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Fräulein Grossebustenhalter: gROs–bʊ-stn-halτe
GLOSSARY

Latin Translations
The first 5 lines that the boys are reciting in Act 1 Scene 2 are from Virgil’s epic poem *The Aeneid* written in the first century (29-19 BCE). The poem follows the journey of Aeneas after the fall of Troy. They translate as:

I sing of arms and the hero who sailed from Troy to Italy, washed up on the Lavinian shore a refugee-- / Destined to endure blows on land and on sea / By the gods’ decree but also savage Juno’s rage / Even after pains suffered in war-until he builds a city.

Servius (Pg. 7)
In the 4th century, Servius wrote a commentary on Virgil.

Aulus Gellius (Pg. 7)
Gellius was a classic Roman author who wrote *Attic Nights*. The book showed the daily life of the Roman intellectual.

Claudius Donatus (Pg. 7)
Author of a twelve volume commentary on Virgil’s *Aeneid*

Virgil (Pg. 7)
Virgil was a first century Roman poet who wrote *The Aeneid* (Pictured left)

Homer (Pg. 13)
Homer was the author of several epics of Greek Literature including *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Achilles and Patroclus (Pg. 13)
Characters in *The Iliad* who were good friends and are often thought to be lovers.

Johann Sebastian Bach (Pg. 13)
Bach was a German composer in the 18th Century who composed many different works including the *Brandenburg Concertos, Mass in B Minor, The Well-Tempered Clavier* and *Prelude in C Minor* (See Pg. 18).
**Quadratic Equation (Pg. 13)**

Having

\[ ax^2 + bx + c = 0, \]

the roots are given by the quadratic formula:

\[ x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}, \]

**Neurasthenic (Pg. 15)**

Neurasthenic is a condition where the symptoms include fatigue, anxiety, headache, neuralgia, and depression. It was once considered a genuine medical disorder. The term was coined by physician George Miller Beard in 1896.

**Jupiter and Io (Pg. 18)**

Correggio was a late Italian Renaissance who was responsible for some of the most sensuous works in the 16th century. Jupiter and Io is a part of a series known as Jupiter’s Loves. Jupiter and Io was painted from 1532-1533 and is currently on display in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria. The image depicts the pagan god seducing the enraptured mortal Io. Jupiter appears in the form of a vaporous fog, clasping Io’s pliant, naked body. In the myth, Io is seduced by Jupiter behind dunes in order to hide from his wife, Juno. (Pictured right)

**Desdemona (Pg. 18)**

Desdemona is the heroine in Shakespeare’s Othello. Desdemona is extremely loyal to her husband, Othello. Othello murders Desdemona by smothering her with their wedding sheets because he believes that she was having an affair. After discovering that he had been set up by his ensign, Iago, he kills himself.

**Christ in Gethsemane (Pg. 22)**

Gethsemane is the garden where Christ prayed through the night before he was taken by Roman soldiers to be crucified.

**Consumption (Pg. 22)**

This was a common name for tuberculosis which was a deadly infectious disease all too common in the 19th century in Germany.
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust* (Pg. 22)

Goethe was a German writer and author of *Faust* which was a play in two parts. Part one was published in 1808 and two was published in 1832, the same year of his death. Part one has a lurid plot where the title character sells his soul to the devil, Mephistopheles. Faust then falls in love with a country girl named Gretchen. Mephistopheles convinces Faust to have sex with her and because of it, she ends up pregnant. She then accidentally poisons her own mother with a potion that Faust gave her. Because of this, Gretchen drowns her child in a fit of despair. Due to Faust’s remorse, Gretchen is saved from prison and achieves salvation in heaven.

**May Wine** (Pg. 28)

May Wine (Maiwein) is made from steeping sweet woodruff in a white German wine. It is traditionally served in the spring on May Day.

**Woodruff** (Pg. 28)

Woodruff is also known as wild baby’s breath and can be poisonous, so great care was taken when making Maiwein. (*Pictured left*)

**Aphasic** (Pg. 33)

An aphasic is someone suffering from aphasia, which is an impairment of the language ability. This disorder can range from people having difficulty remembering words to being completely unable to speak, write, or read.

**Medicine Ball** (Pg. 34)

The medicine ball (or exercise ball) was a weighted leather ball that was used to strengthen abdominal muscles. Schoolchildren used to pass it around a circle for fitness. (*Pictured right*)

**Missionary Society** (Pg. 46)

Christian groups that were founded in the 18th and 19th century in order to convert non-Christians

**Christingle Chorale** (Pg. 51)

A Christmas musical program
Martin Luther *(Pg. 57)*

Luther was a major figure in the Protestant Reformation. Luther challenged the Catholic Church by teaching that the Bible was the only source of divinely revealed knowledge. He translated the bible into the vernacular in order to make it more accessible to people. His translation helped to create the standard version of the German language. Martin Luther’s efforts also helped to create a branch of the Protestant church called Lutheranism. *(Pictured left)*

**Priapia** *(Pg. 61)*

The Greek and Roman God of gardens and regenerative potency. Priapia is typically depicted holding a huge, erect phallus.

**The Habsburgs** *(Pg. 63)*

The Hapsburgs were one of the longest lasting European families to hold a monarchy. They ruled from 1282-1918 over Germany-Austria. They were also considered the ruler of the Holy Empire. *(Crest pictured right.)*

**Pyrmont** *(Also known as Bad Prymtont) (Pg. 74)*

A German city in Lower Saxony that was a popular spa resort in the 17th and 18th century that was considered fashionable. *(Map pictured right.)*

**C’est tout** *(Pg. 74)*

“That’s it” in French.

**Gartenstrasse** *(Pg. 82)*

“Garden street” in German.
WEDEKIND’S INFLUENCE

While *Spring Awakening* clearly depicts what life was like for children growing up in 19th century Germany, almost every scene was based on actual events from Wedekind’s life or of his friends. Suicide was not uncommon for children who didn’t live up to their parents’ expectations; two of Wedekind’s friends took their own lives as well.

Wedekind had his own share of childhood angst. His father wanted him to become a lawyer, which was not something that Wedekind desired to follow as a career. This difference in opinion on Wedekind’s future ultimately led to him being banished from his own home, although he and his parents later reconciled. Wedekind was very similar to Melchior in that they shared a desire to challenge the status quo. Additionally, they both had a lack of faith and aimed to educate those close to them by writing essays and reading forbidden texts. While Melchior was yearning for truth, Wedekind was trying to expose the lack of communication taking place.

REACTION TO *SPRING AWAKENING*

When *Spring Awakening* was first written, the world was not quite ready for that amount of honesty to be put before them. It is a show filled with controversial subject matter including puberty, sexuality, rape, child abuse, homosexuality, suicide and abortion.

Wedekind did not have a plan when he first began writing *Spring Awakening*. He described the process as “merely aiming to set down whatever appeared to me. The plan emerged after the third scene was compiled from my own personal experiences or the experiences of my class-mates.”

*Spring Awakening* was banned in Germany so Wedekind decided to publish it himself in Switzerland. Despite the fact that it was banned, there were many people who still enjoyed it. People recognized many of the aspects that the censors took issue with. *Spring Awakening* remained banned until 1908, 12 years later. It was also censored in the U.S. because people found the subject matter too offensive for the public to hear. The only non-censored version of *Spring’s Awakening* was performed in German. It remained uncensored because no one spoke enough German to know what they were discussing onstage.
DEVELOPMENT INTO A MUSICAL

In 1999, Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater were drawn together by their mutual like-mindedness in Buddhism and through various discussions they decided to write a musical. In the wake of the Columbine shooting and the reactions that followed the need to develop *Spring Awakening* into a musical became even stronger. Throughout the eight years that Spring Awakening was being developed into a musical, it went through many different revisions. Sater and Sheik strived to stay true to the text but they wanted to show more of the kids’ struggle to come to terms with their adolescence.

There were many other changes that the musical underwent, one of the largest being the rearranging of the story and the expansion on certain aspects that Sheik and Sater felt were imperative to the story. *Mama Who Bore Me* is the opening in the musical, before Wendla learns about Martha’s abuse or really gets to know Melchior. In the play, however, the monologue that *Mama Who Bore Me* is derived from takes place later in the play, Act 2, after Wendla has already met Melchior and had already been beaten by him.

Among the other changes that they made from the original text was the Masked Man. He appears in the graveyard with Melchior after he discovers that Wendla died and convinces Melchior not to take his own life. The decision to cut the Masked Man from the musical was made after the Lincoln Center workshop. Initially the Masked Man appeared in all the scenes behind the children and it seemed as though they were being empowered by the Masked Man instead of by themselves. When the Masked Man was cut it made the kids’ story much stronger because they were being empowered by themselves and not by an adult lording over them.

Another major change that was made from the original text was the sex scene between Melchior and Wendla. In the original text, Melchior date rapes Wendla in the hayloft. The scene is short and does not really give the characters time to process
everything. Sater and Sheik “worked hard to flesh out a fuller scene between them, let our would-be lovers struggle to make sense of what they have so brutally done – to offer one another forgiveness, before they fall into each other’s arms.”

In order to get *Spring Awakening* to where it is today, they had to go through many different versions of the script and produce workshops. Although Sater and Sheik did not set out to win any awards, it is clear from the response they received that *Spring Awakening* was a huge success. Sater and Sheik set out to tell a story that they were passionate about and ended up creating a musical that resonates with people of all ages throughout the world.
SOURCES


