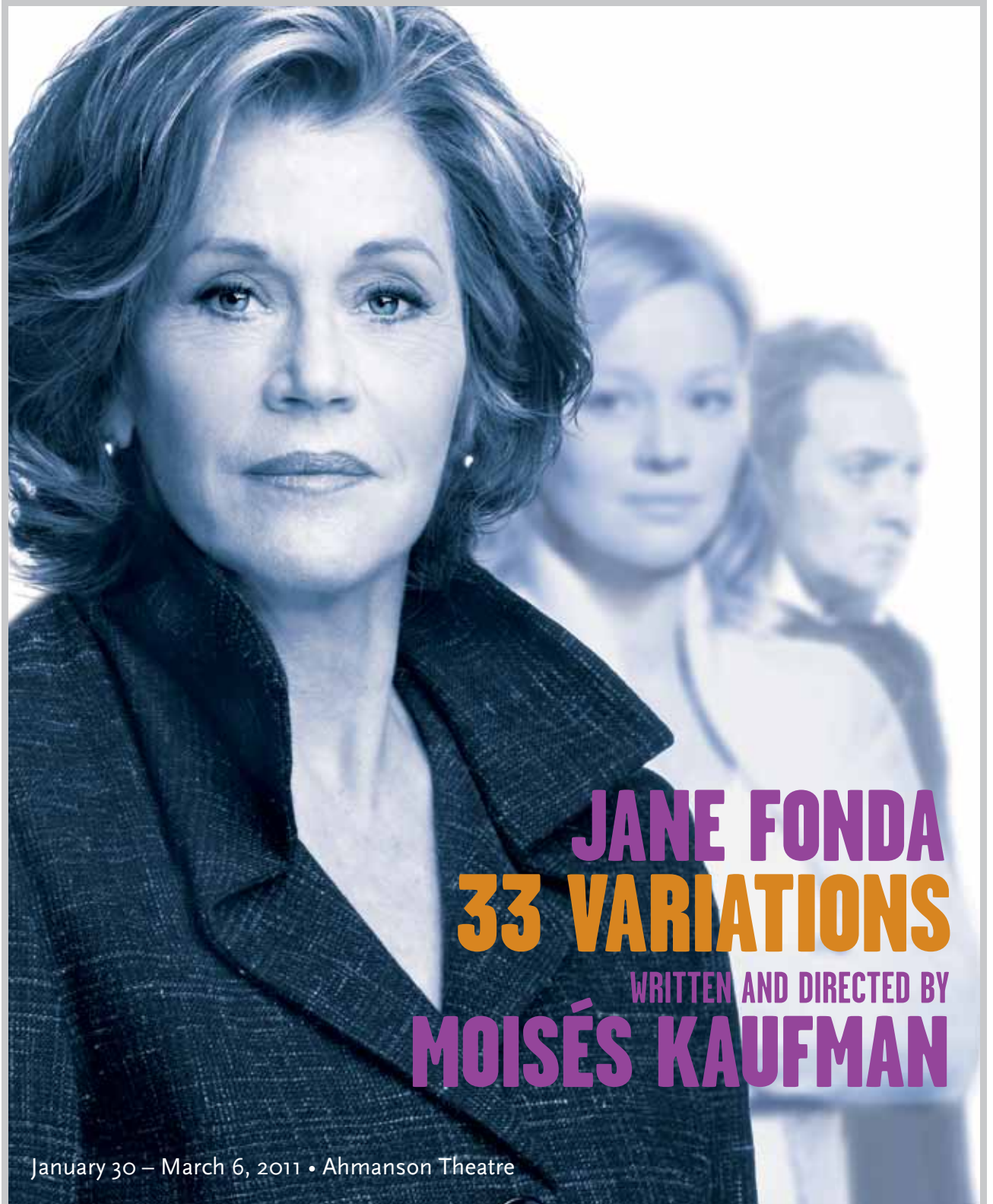




Educator Resources



L-R: Jane Fonda, Samantha Mathis, Zach Grenier. PHOTO BY GREG HEISLER

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Welcome

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us at *33 Variations* created and directed by Moisés Kaufman.

A great play raises questions about the human condition and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers. To that end, the material in Center Theatre Group's student Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions. Questions about art and inspiration, parents and children and the impact of illness on an individual and the people who support them. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *33 Variations* so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

The Educator Resources and student Discovery Guide are companion pieces, designed to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow up the performance with options for discussion, reflection and creativity.

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

Student Discovery Guide

The student Discovery Guide provides students with background information about the play and the subject matter, as well as questions for individual reflection. Written to be student-driven, the Discovery Guide helps prepare your students for the performance.

About This Play

This section includes a scene-by-scene synopsis of the play.



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre
Mark Taper Forum
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Comprehension

This section includes background information about the subject matter of the play. We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the student Discovery Guide, and can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

Connection

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *33 Variations*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

We know the hard work and dedication that it takes to bring students to see theatre. These materials are designed to support you in making the most of that experience. We applaud your passion for sharing theatre with your students and thank you for sharing your students with all of us at Center Theatre Group. We look forward to seeing you at *33 Variations!*

About

33 Variations

Table of Contents

WELCOME	1
ABOUT	
33 VARIATIONS	3
COMPREHENSION ...	7
CONNECTIONS	13
CREATIVITY	17
REFERENCES	43
CREDITS	44

Scene-by-Scene

Act I

1. THEME

Katherine Brandt and her daughter Clara are in a doctor's waiting room; they've been there for two hours. Finally, a nurse – Mike – comes to take Katherine in for her examination. Clara reveals to Mike that her mother is planning to fly to Bonn, Germany in a week and would like him to advise Katherine against it, which Mike won't do. Clara insists she accompany her mother into the examining room, which Mike won't allow. Irritated, Clara asks Mike to speak with her in private. When they leave the room, Katherine shares with the audience her reason for going to Bonn. It is the culmination of her life's work as a musicologist and Beethoven scholar. She has always been baffled by the *Diabelli Variations*. They were inspired by a commission from a music publisher, Anton Diabelli, who had written a short waltz and invited 50 composers to each create one variation, which he would publish as a collection. Forty-nine of them accepted but Beethoven declined – at first. Inexplicably, he changed his mind and composed not one variation but 33! Not only that, but he spent five precious years on them. This is why Katherine must go to Bonn: to see first-hand Beethoven's original sketchbooks and diaries. In them, she hopes the reason for his obsession will be revealed.

2. EAVESDROPPING

Anton Schindler, Beethoven's secretary, is eavesdropping on Beethoven's creative process. Sounds of chaos come from Beethoven's office: bizarre notes on the piano, out-of-tune singing, finally a crash and a bellowing call for Schindler. Beethoven demands paper and ink, completely ignoring Schindler's reminder that the supplier has yet to be paid for the previous order.

3. RESEARCH

Katherine is at home packing for her trip. Clara is there and asks her mother, one more time, to stay. They are both tense. Clara hovers around Katherine. Katherine subtly criticizes Clara. Each changes the subject when the other hits a nerve – Katherine thinks Nurse Mike is interested in Clara, Clara denies it. Clara offers to go with Katherine. Katherine wonders at Clara's inability to choose a career and stick with it. Clara reluctantly accepts the fact that her mother is going to Germany regardless of her concerns and settles for the promise that Katherine will call if her condition gets worse.



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4. NEGOTIATING GENIUS

Schindler visits Diabelli's office to discuss the commission. Diabelli is thrilled to hear that Beethoven has been inspired to compose seven or eight variations on his waltz. His elation is dampened when Schindler reveals Beethoven's terms: 80 ducats in advance (today a value of approximately \$2,100.) Because Beethoven's poor health has kept him from writing anything of significance for years, Diabelli is not willing to take the risk. He offers half up front and the other half upon completion.

5. TWO WORLDS

Clara waits at the computer repair shop for her number to be called. "Sixteen!" She is number 34. Frustrated, she asks the man next to her how long he's been waiting. He responds flirtatiously at first and then is mortified when he realizes Clara doesn't recognize him – it is Mike, the nurse who examined her mother a few days ago. Clara apologizes and lets down her guard. When Mike asks about Katherine, Clara shares that Katherine's been sick for eight months but only told her two weeks ago. Others in Katherine's situation might choose to stay home with their family, however they don't have that kind of relationship. Instead Katherine feels she must finish her research no matter what. Number 17 is called – that's Mike's number. He offers it to Clara, who gratefully accepts.

6. FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS

Katherine is on the airplane and reading a book: Schindler's biography of Beethoven. Simultaneously, Beethoven and Schindler arrive in the countryside – for them it's 1822. Beethoven is relieved to be away from the sounds and smells of the city, which overwhelm him. Here, in the silence and calm, he knows he can compose. Schindler is worried about their expenses and urges Beethoven to stop working on the *Variations* – 12 is more than enough and Diabelli is getting impatient. Beethoven doesn't care. He knows the waltz has more to reveal; he needs more time to tease it out. The voice of the flight attendant grabs Katherine's attention – they have arrived in Bonn.

7. BONN

Katherine emails Clara her first impressions. Bonn invigorates her. She sees great promise in a city that embraces its musical history so completely. Anxiously, she awaits tomorrow and her first glimpse of Beethoven's sketchbooks.

8. THE SKETCHES – PART 1

In Beethoven-Haus – the official Beethoven library – Katherine is escorted by Dr. Gertie Ladenburger, the librarian, to the archives. Gertie explains the significance of the sketchbooks. They reveal Beethoven's creative process in a way that his published works can't. Because he composed on paper, the 200-year-old pencil marks show the directions he explored on any given composition before writing the final draft in pen. Gertie locates the *Diabelli Variations* sketchbook and Katherine gets down to work.

In New York, Clara is worried and calls Mike. She's received an email from Katherine full of typos, something completely out of character. Terrified that her mother is getting worse and frustrated by the lack of answers from doctors, she wonders if Mike can offer an explanation. He can't. Her mother's illness is one that has no cure and no real treatments. Naturally, she is not comforted. Mike offers to meet her in person to talk more. Clara accepts.

9. CLASSICAL MUSIC

Clara and Mike are on their first date – a classical concert. We see the scene twice: once from Clara's point of view, once from Mike's. Both are excited, nervous, self-conscious and awkward. With great emotional effort, they manage to hold hands.

10. THE SKETCHES – PART 2

Diabelli calls on Beethoven to find out why he's taking so long. It's been a year since the original commission and he is desperate to publish 19 variations Beethoven has completed. Beethoven won't let him. It doesn't matter to him how many variations are done; the work is still not finished.

11. BASEBALL

Katherine bumps into Gertie at the train station. She thanks Gertie for her help over the last three months. Gertie notices Katherine's cramped hand and asks if she's in pain. Katherine at first insists it's nothing, then tries to explain. But she doesn't have to – Gertie recognizes the symptoms of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), the illness that ended her aunt's life five years ago.

12. CIRCUS MUSIC

Schindler is alarmed when he finds Diabelli in Beethoven's office looking through the sketches – Beethoven would be furious if he found out. Diabelli is equally alarmed by what he takes to be an insult from Beethoven – he's making a mockery of Diabelli's waltz and accepted variation form. Schindler reminds him that they are only sketches and shouldn't be judged. Rather, Diabelli should be grateful for the immense time and effort Beethoven is putting in – time and effort that would be better spent on more lucrative and important works like the *Mass* or the *Ninth Symphony*. Diabelli is placated.

13. CLARA

Katherine and Gertie are still at the train station, now discussing a theory – Katherine believes Beethoven is mocking Diabelli: he intends to show the world his genius by turning something average into something extraordinary. Gertie realizes that Clara has left yet another message for her mother and wonders why Katherine isn't returning the calls – could it be she doesn't like her daughter? Katherine reveals her feeling that Clara will never amount to anything.

14. DANCING

Clara and Mike enjoy themselves at a nightclub. Mike shows Clara a clipping of the glowing review she received for her costume design work and wonders at her recent talk of changing careers. She explains that she has no interest in doing just one thing her whole life; variety and conquering new challenges are her priority. They kiss. When the kiss becomes

passionate Clara pulls away. She wants to focus on the relationship with her mom and shield him from becoming involved in her mother's illness even though he has the skills, experience and desire to help. Clara reluctantly tells him that Katherine fell in the Beethoven-Haus library and had to be hospitalized for a day. On the phone Katherine insists everything is fine, but Clara is still concerned and offers to go to Bonn. Katherine refuses. Mike reminds Clara that she doesn't need her mother's permission.

15. ACCIDENTS OF FAITH

Schindler rebukes Beethoven for spurning a wealthy Count who could have hired him and solved their money problems. Beethoven isn't concerned. He's committed to finding an ending for the *Variations* and can't be distracted by irritating conversation. A ringing in Beethoven's ears interrupts the argument. He shakes off Schindler's concern and instead shows him two more variations. The ringing in his ears intensifies and the pain is excruciating.

16. THE EXAM

Alone, Katherine enters an examination room and removes her blouse and bra. She is subjected to a series of x-rays that become a barrage of flashing lights and sound. She is overwhelmed by her vulnerability and breaks down. Beethoven, lost in his own thoughts, comes to sit behind her on the gurney. Katherine leans on him, taking comfort in the subject of her obsession.

17. SEPTET

The results of Katherine's tests are in and they are not hopeful. Mike and Clara are in New York, and Gertie and Katherine are in Bonn, all four discuss the implications. The disease is progressing faster than expected; Katherine may only have another year left to live. Despite that, she refuses to return home; she needs more time. At the same time, Beethoven fears he can't find an ending to the *Variations*. He, too, needs more time. Clara fears she's running out of time to heal their relationship. Mike urges her to go to Bonn and insists on coming with her.

Act II

18. HERE BE DRAGONS

Clara and Mike have been in Bonn for two weeks. Katherine's illness is progressing and her hypothesis evolving. She no longer believes Beethoven was scornful of Diabelli's composition. Instead she sees in Beethoven's obsession an effort to transform the waltz into its best self. She is not happy that Clara and Mike are there but the three of them have developed a routine that allows her research to continue.

19. THE CONVERSATION NOTEBOOKS

Beethoven barely survives a major illness that takes him away from the *Variations* for three years. He is now completely deaf. When Diabelli comes to visit he must write his questions in a notebook for Beethoven to read. Despite the illness, Beethoven has made significant progress on his *Mass*, which Diabelli eagerly agrees to publish as soon as it's finished. No mention is made of the *Variations*.

20. PHYSICAL THERAPY

Mike shows Clara how to help Katherine with exercises designed to increase flexibility and strength. At first awkward, the simple movements become a kind of dance that gives Katherine and Clara an opportunity to connect. Mike and Clara help Katherine stand which causes her to laugh uncontrollably but not from happiness. She's experiencing "emotional incontinence," yet another symptom of ALS.

21. JOYFUL SILENCE

Returning to Beethoven's house after being fired, Schindler finds him in a frenzy. Beethoven has returned at long last to Diabelli's commission and is completely consumed. His rooms are in chaos and he is a mess. The illusive ending is still nowhere in sight, but Beethoven now knows why: it isn't time yet. There is still so much in the waltz to be discovered.

22. THE DISCOVERY

Katherine discovers major discrepancies in Schindler's biography of Beethoven. Is it possible, then, that he was also wrong about Beethoven's initial scorn for Diabelli's composition? If so, she is no closer to solving the mystery of his obsession. This realization shakes her, aggravating a new symptom – her tongue is twitching. She is losing control of her speech.

23. CHEESEBURGER

Mike shows Clara how to operate an augmentative speech device that will help Katherine communicate when she can no longer speak. They experiment playfully with the buttons. Mike has preprogrammed one to tell Clara he loves her. Clara is taken off guard but Mike doesn't hold back. He wants to spend the rest of his life with her. Clara is deeply touched.

24. BEAUTY

In Diabelli's office, Schindler begs him not to publish the other composers' variations yet and assures him that Beethoven is creating something worth waiting for. As proof, he shows Diabelli two sketches he has taken without Beethoven's knowledge. Diabelli is amazed at how beautiful and complex they are. Beethoven enters, taking them both by surprise. Schindler hides the stolen sketches behind his back and is grateful to be sent on an errand. Beethoven has learned to read lips, so he and Diabelli are able to speak without a notebook. Beethoven insists he still needs time with the Variations. Diabelli gives him 30 days. As he leaves, Beethoven casually hands Diabelli the finished manuscript of his *Mass*.

25. CAFETERIA FOOD

Gertie, Mike and Clara get food in the hospital cafeteria. Gertie bluntly announces that Katherine needs male companionship – just because she's sick doesn't mean she has no sexual appetite. Clara is startled by how open the normally reserved Katherine must be with Gertie. But realizing that physical intimacy might be good for her mother, Clara agrees. Gertie suggests they hire someone and knows just where to look – the Internet.

26. FUGUE

Beethoven is alone, engrossed in composing a fugue. As he explores his ideas, we hear the music develop, following his every instruction.

27. MORPHINE

Katherine, Clara and Gertie are in a café. Katherine's health is getting worse, but she still manages to share an anecdote that makes them all laugh. Gertie feels compelled to make sure Clara is comfortable with Katherine's plans for the end and is embarrassed to discover that Katherine hasn't told her yet. Angry that Gertie brought it up, Katherine nonetheless allows Gertie to explain: when Katherine becomes incapable of communication she'd like to be allowed to die. Mike has already supplied morphine and Gertie is prepared to administer it. Clara, angry and hurt that Katherine kept this from her despite everything she's done, storms out. It appalls Gertie that Katherine wouldn't tell Clara something so important. Katherine claims to be protecting Clara from having to make painful decisions. Gertie doesn't believe her and also leaves. Katherine tries to go after them but her wheelchair gets stuck. Furious and frustrated, Katherine begins to cough and choke violently.

28. INTIMACY

Mike is already in bed by the time Clara returns to the apartment from the hospital. She undresses and explains that Katherine choked on her own phlegm. The doctors were able to clear her throat and allowed her to come home but only because Katherine absolutely refused to stay. Clara wonders if, without her mother's constant pushing, she'll completely mess up her own life. Mike assures her that won't happen – he sees in her all the strength her mother doesn't see. Comforted, they begin to make love.

29. A PEACE OFFERING

Katherine and Gertie examine sketches in the apartment kitchen. Clara enters and is surprised to see a sketchbook out of the library. It's Gertie's peace offering. When Clara hums Diabelli's waltz both Katherine and Gertie are curious as to why. Clara thinks it's pretty and likes the rhythm. Gertie realizes

that Clara has made an important observation about the real nature of the waltz – Diabelli didn't write a bad concert waltz, he wrote a good beer-hall waltz. Katherine begins to see her daughter in a different light. The moment is interrupted when Katherine again begins to cough and choke.

30. NOT A HUMAN BEING

Beethoven is very sick. He has not left his study in days, is decrepit and completely lost in his own head. When he urinates on the floor, Schindler rushes to his side, pleading with him to rest. Beethoven rants, insisting his abilities make him an instrument of God. Schindler tries to comfort him while Katherine is given an MRI. In the hospital waiting room, Mike and Gertie offer Clara their support. She is exhausted and frightened. Schindler tends to Beethoven, Katherine endures yet another frightening test and Clara tries to cope with the reality that awaits her mother. Seeking solace, they all sing a portion of Beethoven's *Mass* together.

31. LIMBO

Katherine and Beethoven are finally face-to-face. Beethoven reminds her that it took 25 years for him to lose his hearing. When it was finally gone he actually felt relieved. Freed from the dramatic swings between hope and despair, he was able to create music he never would have otherwise. Beethoven asks about Clara and Katherine begins to cry – she desperately wants her daughter to be happy. Beethoven wonders why Katherine thinks she isn't? With ceremony, Diabelli enters and presents the completed book of Beethoven's *Variations*.

32. BREAKFAST

In Katherine's hospital room, she, Gertie and Clara proofread her book.

Mike sleeps in a chair and Gertie takes the finished chapters to the post office, leaving Katherine and Clara alone. They discuss Clara and Mike's relationship – they are in love but when Mike returns to New York next week, Clara plans to stay in Bonn with Katherine.

33. VARIATION #33

Katherine presents the results of her research at a musicology conference. She acknowledges the original hypothesis that Beethoven wanted to prove he could create a masterwork out of a grain of sand was incorrect. After examining the sketchbooks, she now believes that he saw tremendous potential in Diabelli's theme. Clara takes the stage with the pages of Katherine's lecture and continues speaking when Katherine stops. Clara is in front of her mother's peers, delivering the lecture three weeks after her mother's passing.

Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section includes background information about the subject matter of the play.

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Glossary: Musical Forms and Terms

Commission: To appoint or assign an artistic task in exchange for pay.

Fugue: A composition that repeats a principal theme and imitates it in counterpoint. It is symmetrical, formal and intricate.

March: Originally designed to facilitate military marching. It has an even $2/4$ or $4/4$ meter, often begins with strong first beats, and often consists of an initial theme alternating with contrasting sections.

Minuet: From the French, “small.” A slow, partner dance involving highly stylized bows and curtseys, and intricately choreographed floor patterns, often in figure 8’s or Z’s. It is done in $3/4$ or $3/8$ time with two sections. Typically, the third part of a string quartet or symphony is a minuet.

Musicologist: Someone who studies the field of music.

Sonata: From the Italian “sounded,” originally used to refer to any non-vocal music, now refers to a composition of three or four movements in contrasting forms and keys.

Theme: The melody of a composition or movement.

Variation Form: From the Latin, “change,” a composition in which a theme (either made up by the composer or given by someone else) is altered and adapted in a series of different versions.

Waltz: From the German, “to revolve,” a dance done in $3/4$ time requiring couples to spin and revolve around other couples. Whether the waltz is slow or fast, pairs must embrace, staying in contact at all times. This caused quite a scandal on the dance floors of the 18th Century.

Modern forms of “Variation”

Mash-up: Also called a “blend,” a mash-up is created by blending two or more different songs. Ideally, the overlaying of vocal and instrumental tracks is seamless.

Mix: Combining a number of elements into one continuous track by a DJ. Traditionally composed using a mixer and a variety of external sound sources – everything from turntables, to digital audio players, to sound effect units. DJs have had success recording and selling their mixes but the art of mixing is best showcased live where they can improvise based on the responses of an audience.

Sampling: Taking a portion of a song, such as a break or chorus, and using it in another song. A technique first perfected by the early hip-hop movement, sampling can be heard in all genres of popular music.

Glossary: Medical Terms

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS): A progressive and invariably fatal disease that attacks the nerves responsible for voluntary muscle activity. As the nerves degenerate they stop sending information to the muscles, which weaken, atrophy and twitch. The brain eventually loses its ability to stop, start or control voluntary movements altogether.

Synonym: Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Bleeding: The most common medical treatment throughout antiquity and into the late 19th Century. It involved the removal of varying quantities of blood to either cure or prevent illness. The process was supported by the ancient medical belief that proper balance of bodily fluids, or “humors,” was key to maintaining good health. If ill health occurred it was because the fluids were out of balance and bleeding was believed to return the body to normal.

Synonym: bloodletting.

Calcification: A build-up of calcium that causes body tissue to harden. It occurs when a disorder interferes with the body's ability to break down calcium. It most commonly affects the joints but can occur in the organs. Calcium deposits can be seen on an x-ray.

Emotional Incontinence: A medical syndrome characterized by uncontrollable and exaggerated facial expressions, laughter or crying. Usually the patient is not feeling depressed or happy when the outburst occurs and if they are, the expression is dramatically out of proportion to the actual emotion. It occurs when the brain system that deals with emotion malfunctions due to an injury or illness.

Synonym: Pseudobulbar Affect.

Euthanasia: Ending the life of someone suffering from a terminal or incurable condition by either administering a lethal dose of medication or withholding life-prolonging medical treatments.

Forced Vital Capacity (FVC): The amount of air that can be forcibly exhaled after taking the deepest breath possible. Measuring FVC is helpful in detecting and monitoring the progress of illnesses that cause the lungs to exhale less air and at a slower rate than normal.

Gout: Deposits of uric acid in or around the joints that cause sudden and severe inflammation, swelling and pain. Gout occurs when the body produces too much uric acid or the kidneys are not breaking down enough. Typically gout is found in the big toes but it can also affect the joints of the knees, elbows, wrists and fingers. In extremely rare cases the joints in the chest may be involved.

Jaundice: A yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes. Jaundice occurs when the body's natural process for breaking down and removing dead red blood cells is disrupted. Not dangerous in itself, jaundice can be a symptom of other serious conditions.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): A non-invasive test that uses radio waves to make a computerized image of the inside of the body. The test involves lying on an examining table that moves into the center of a large tube surrounded by a magnet. During the test, the mechanisms necessary to power and move the magnet produce loud thumping and humming sounds. When the magnet is active, the patient must stay completely still. The technician administering the test is in another room but can hear and see the patient as well as give instructions through an intercom.

Motor Neurons: Neurons, or nerve cells, are the information centers of the nervous system. They receive, process and direct information throughout the body and have specialized responsibilities. Motor neurons send information from the brain to the muscles and are responsible for voluntary muscle activity such as walking, talking, breathing and swallowing.

Muscle Elasticity: The muscle's unique ability to return to its resting length after stretching or movement.
Muscle Strength: The amount of force a contracted muscle can exert at one time.

Physiotherapy: The manipulation of muscles, joints, tendons and connective tissues that have been affected by illness or injury. It can involve stretching, strength training, supervised exercise, massage and heat treatments. Physiotherapy plays a key role in managing symptoms of illness as well as helping the patient develop strategies to deal with any loss of physical ability. *Synonym: Physical Therapy.*

X-ray: A test that produces a picture of the body's internal structures. A camera-like machine sends x-rays through the body to a large film. The rays are absorbed in different amounts depending on the density of what they pass through. Bones, having the greatest density, appear white and are the most visible on the film while the air in the lungs appears black. An x-ray is non-invasive, very fast and painless.

Connections

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the student's lives and the world we live in.

Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

Seeing Each Other

In *33 Variations*, the mother-daughter relationship between Katherine and Clara has its challenges. Katherine, the mother, has very specific expectations of her daughter, Clara. She has trouble accepting certain aspects of Clara that differ from these expectations. Clara feels like a mystery to Katherine much of the time.

On the other hand, Clara wants her mother to accept her for who she is. She also wants to be more involved in her mother's life but Katherine keeps her at a distance.

Katherine's illness changes their relationship dynamics. It forces them to let go of certain expectations and to see each other in a different light. The lenses through which they view each other change.

- Is a parent able to see his/her child clearly?
- Is a child able to see his/her parent clearly?
- How do you think your parents, or others in your family, see you? From your perspective, what are they right about? What are they wrong about?
- How would you like them to see you?
- How would you like to see your parents/guardians? How do you want them to be? How does this differ from who they really are?
- What might get in the way of seeing your parents/guardians for who they truly are?
- What might get in your parents'/guardians' way of seeing you for who you truly are?
- What kind of lens do you view your parents through? Imagine changing that lens. What do they look like to you now?

- How do our expectations of someone, especially a loved one, influence how we view her or him?
- Is it possible to change your view of someone? What might happen to create that kind of change? What might you consciously do to create that kind of change?
- How do we strike a balance between our parents'/guardians' expectations for us and what we want for ourselves?
- Do your parents'/guardians' expectations of you influence what you do and how you see yourself? If so, how?
- Take the above questions and apply them to other relationships (siblings, teachers, friends, etc.)

Support

PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:

Katherine is offered support both with her research by Gertie and with her declining health by Mike and Clara. Both she and Beethoven need support and sometimes rail against it. They cannot always receive the help that is being offered.

- How do you express support for the people in your life? To whom do you offer support: friends, siblings or parents? How is your support received? Have you ever had to support someone through an illness or emotional challenge? Who supports you? What form does their support take? How do you feel about their support? Are you always able to receive it?

ARTISTIC SUPPORT:

DIABELLI: *We both love beauty, we both can recognize it. But neither of us can make it.*

SCHINDLER: *And that makes us both slaves to others.*
—From *33 Variations* by Moisés Kaufman

Schindler and Diabelli “serve” Beethoven’s art – one with physical support, the other with financial.

- Do you think it is important to support art or artists? Why? What do you think is the best way to support art or artists? How do you show your support for a particular artists or art form?

Finding Beauty in the Mundane

***We start with a beer hall waltz and end with a delicate, spiritual dance.
Variations on a dance should end with a dance.
What an elegant idea – and so elegantly articulated by the Master.
This from a man who could not dance.***

—From Dr. Katherine Brandt’s final lecture in *33 Variations*
by Moisés Kaufman

- What does the word “mundane” mean?
- How would you define “beauty”?
- Have you ever thought about the mundane being beautiful? (Mundane objects, images, experiences, etc.)
- Have you, or has someone you know, ever transformed something ordinary into something extraordinary?
- What in your life right now seems mundane but has potential beauty in it?
- Where and how do you experience beauty in your life?
- Where and how do you create beauty in your life?

Transfiguration

KATHERINE: *(to the audience)*

***The IDEA of transfiguration. Transforming one thing into something better.
Moving from the banal to the exalted.***

What if Beethoven is transfiguring Diabelli’s waltz?

If that is the case, the large set of variations is not an exercise in making something out of nothing as I had previously thought. But instead, a study in transforming the waltz into its better self. Or rather, transfiguring it into its better self.

—Opening of Act II in *33 Variations* by Moisés Kaufman

Definition:

Transfigure: to change in outward form or appearance
(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/transfigure>)

Transfigure: to give a new and typically exalted or spiritual appearance to; transform outwardly and usually for the better
(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transfigure>)

The process of transfiguration is portrayed throughout

Moisés Kaufman's 33 Variations:

- A single piece of music transformed into 33 more.
- Healthy bodies transfigured by illness.
- Relationships changed due to life events.
- Perspectives altered due to life experiences.

Many forces cause the process of transfiguration to occur:

- Sometimes, the force is seemingly random, as in the cases of Katherine's disease and Beethoven's deafness.
- At other times, change is due to conscious effort by an individual.
- Beethoven utilized his creative genius to transform Diabelli's waltz into 33 unique and beautiful musical creations.
- Often, transformation occurs through a combination of forces. Clara's effort and Katherine's illness combine to transfigure a troubled mother/daughter relationship. Clara's insistence on being involved in her mother's life and Katherine's increasing physical vulnerability, break down walls between the two women. Their interaction during this time of crisis brings understanding and connection. This, in turn, forges a more loving relationship between the two of them.

WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Name a time in your life when transfiguration was caused by:
 - An unexpected event or situation
 - A conscious choice followed by action
 - A combination of forces
- Write about a moment when unexpected events or circumstances forced a change in your life. What caused the change? How did you react to it? What kind of transformation took place? If the results were negative, did anything good come out of the situation? Was anyone else involved in this situation? What role did they play?

- Write about a time when you caused change in your life. What kind of change occurred for you? Why did you feel the need to make the change? Was it easy to go through the transformation or did you encounter challenging moments? Was anyone there to help you or did you make the transformation on your own?
- Write about a moment when circumstances combined to cause a transformation in your life. This could be a transformation that you have experienced, or one that you witnessed. It could be a change that took place in your personal life or one that took place in your home, city, state, country or world.

Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express.

Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *33 Variations*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

Cultural Mapping

Objectives

- Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.
- Students will be introduced to *33 Variations* and begin to reflect on the play.

Exercise

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle. Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify Los Angeles in the space. Have students who were born in Los Angeles gather in that place. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south or west of Los Angeles). Each group must determine two additional things that they have in common. Report back to the whole class. (Example: The members of the “north” group all like pizza and are the oldest in their families.) Repeat activity using other divisions: Oldest, middle, youngest, only child. Speak one language, two languages, etc. Ask each student to stand by the quote that most intrigues them. Discuss in the group why they chose that quote. What intrigues them about it?

I wish I knew more about what I'm listening to. It all sounds like “classical” music to me.”

HERE BE DRAGONS!

This music will free people from all the misery and all the indignities that shackle other human beings.

Variation form allows Beethoven to do the miraculous and slow down time, to pierce the waltz and enter the minutia that life, in its haste, robs us of.

*Let us begin with the primary cause of things.
Let us begin with how something came about.
Why it came about in that particular way
and became what it is.*

Tableau/Frozen Picture

Objectives

- *Students will practice using their bodies to communicate an idea or theme.*
- *Students will reflect on the varied interpretations of the theme.*
- *Students will reflect on 33 Variations through a physical exploration of its themes.*

Divide students into pairs. Student A is the artist. Student B is the sculpture. Have student A create a statue out of B on the theme of the “future”. Examples: Flying cars, world peace, destroying the environment, graduating from college. Statues can be realistic or symbolic, personal or global. Have each student title their statue and present to the class. Repeat exercise with B as the artist and A as the sculpture.

Repeat with the themes of creativity, time, parent/child relationship, illness, music. Have each student sculpt an image that represents one of these themes. Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant in *33 Variations*. Are they similar or very different?

Cover the Space/Slowing Down Time:

Objectives

- *Students will explore how time and speed impacts their perception and ability to observe.*
- *Students will compare this experience to the theme of time in 33 Variations.*

Find a large space such as a gym or auditorium. Ask your students to begin to “cover the space” moving neutrally throughout the room. This is a non-verbal activity. Ask them to observe the room as they cover the space. Does anything intrigue them? Does anything strike them as beautiful? Ask them to continue to observe the room as they speed up their pace, walking briskly through the room. Continue to increase the pace, while side-coaching them to continue observing and to be careful of running into one another. Increase the pace until everyone is running, if you feel that it is safe to do so.

Begin to slow down the pace, going from fast back to neutral. Continue to ask the students to look for items in the room that intrigue them or strike them as beautiful. Slow down the pace in increments until the students are moving in slow motion. Finally bring them to a freeze. Ask them to breathe slowly and deeply and moving only their eyes and head ask them to find one thing in the room that they find beautiful. Ask them to observe it quietly and slowly for a few moments. End the activity by asking if anyone wants to share what they found beautiful or intriguing.

Share the following quote from *33 Variations*:

“Variation form allows Beethoven to do the miraculous and slow down time, to pierce the waltz and enter the minutia that life, in its haste, robs us of.”

Discuss this quote in relationship to the activity they just experienced. What was it like to speed up time and to slow down time? How did the different speeds impact your ability to observe or notice what was happening around you? Which pace felt best to you: fast, slow or neutral? Why? What is your relationship to time in your own life? When does time slow down for you? What speeds up time?

Across Time and Space:

Objectives

- *Participants will juxtapose individual historical figures in different time periods as well as with contemporary life through improvisation, writing and discussion.*
- *Students will explore how time and place are theatrically juxtaposed in 33 Variations.*

Ask each student to think of a person in history that they are curious about. Have them research a little about that person and jot down some facts about the person’s life. For example where and when they lived, how they dressed, what they are remembered for.

Next have students imagine what this historical figure was most passionate about. This may be in the research or may be invented.

Divide the participants into pairs and share information about their historical figure. Have them discuss what these two people might say to each other. What might they have in common or what differences would they have? Are they in the same time period or very different time periods? How does the time period contribute to the person’s speech, movement, clothing and opinions?

Have each pair create a short scene in which these two people meet. Have each character stay true to the historical period in which they live. How does the juxtaposition of time period contribute to the scene? Share scenes.

Variation: Have each student select a contemporary person who intrigues them. This could be someone in the public domain or someone they know outside of school. Have them research a little about that person and jot down some facts about the person's life. Where they live, how they dress, what are they do for a living, what they are known for.

Next have students imagine what this person is most passionate about. This may be in the research, the student may know from personal connection or it may be invented.

Pair students up and have them create a scene between one contemporary character and one historical character. What might these two people say to each other? What might they have in common, what differences would they have? Have each character stay true to the historical period in which they live. How does the juxtaposition of past and present contribute to the scene? Share scenes.

Discuss the play *33 Variations* and how past and present were theatrically presented. Why do you think the playwright Moisés Kaufman chose to juxtapose these two time periods? How did the past help illuminate the present and vice-versa?

Primary Text Performance

In this exercise, students choose a short excerpt (3-5 lines) from a primary text in a subject they are currently studying in another class. The students create three tableaux that illustrate the excerpt they've chosen. The students share the three tableaux with transitions in a shared performance.

YOU'LL NEED:

A selection of interesting primary texts from other classes. Ask fellow teachers what they are teaching right now and if they would lend you materials from their class like books, Xerox copies, PDF files or artwork to project on a screen. Examples of primary texts could be The Bill of Rights from a U.S. History class, Newton's Laws of Motion from a science class, or even something interesting

from a math class—like the letters written by the mathematician Leonhard Euler in *Letters of Euler on Different Subjects in Natural Philosophy Addressed to a German Princess*.

The teacher can help students make appropriate and simple selections that aren't too long.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In the show *33 Variations*, we meet a musicologist who wants to learn more about Beethoven. So, in the play, she travels to Germany to a library to look at some of his original letters and sheet music. She's then able to tell a story about the famous composer.

Playwright Moisés Kaufman took the same journey. He also traveled to that library in Germany, in real life, to get ideas for his play. He studied Beethoven's original sheet music, letters and sketches that we learn about in the play.

People, like Kaufman, who want to write a fiction or non-fiction story about an event in the past often first read, study and research primary texts.

Definition:

What is a primary text?

The original material that is closest to the person, information, period or idea being studied. For example, letters, notes, messages, original documents or stories.

The teacher divides the class into groups of three to five students.

The teacher presents the students with the choices for primary texts from the other classes at the school: history, science, math, art, social studies, English, foreign language, etc.

In the small groups, the students vote to select which text they will work with. The groups select a three to five line excerpt from the text.

The groups create three tableaux that demonstrate what the three to five line excerpt describes.

A good rule of thumb is for each group to create one tableau for each sentence. Any extra sentences just give us more information about the story.

For example, if the group selects an excerpt from Sir Isaac Newton describing his Three Laws of Motion, the group can create a tableau for each law.

Tableau 1:

The first law says that an object at rest tends to stay at rest, and an object in motion tends to stay in motion, with the same direction and speed.

Tableau 2:

Newton's second law says that the force needed to accelerate an object equals the mass of the object multiplied by its acceleration.

Tableau 3:

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Once the students are all ready, the teacher can moderate a sharing of the different trilogy tableaux for the full class. In the sharing, the groups share first and then the class can guess which primary text inspired the performance.

Discuss.

Make-A-Waltz Activity

In this exercise, students work together as a small music ensemble to create simple songs using similar music notes from Diabelli's original theme in *33 Variations*, just as Beethoven did.

YOU'LL NEED:

Student xylophones, wind recorders or simple tone blocks borrowed from the music teacher. Sheet music paper. A projection of Diabelli's original sheet music.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In the show, *33 Variations*, we learn that Beethoven starts to create different versions or variations of one song—Diabelli’s *Thema*. Diabelli, as we learn in the play, focused on repeating some simple notes. In one version, Beethoven repeats the notes C, A and B-flat over and over. It’s a very simple idea.

In this activity, you’ll get to try taking three music notes and working together as a group to create a simple song to share with the class.

First a quick music lesson.



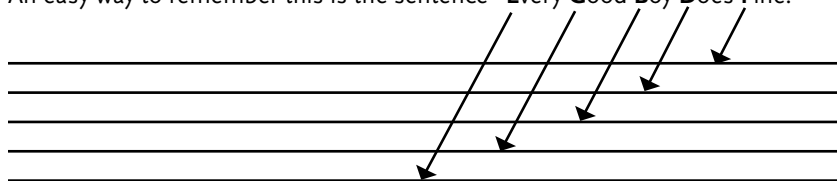
This is an excerpt from one of Beethoven’s *33 variations*. The top set of lines is the treble clef. It has five lines and four spaces.



When you read music, you start at the bottom line. The bottom line is the music note “E.” The next line is “G.” The third line is “B.” The fourth line is “D.” And the top line is “F.”

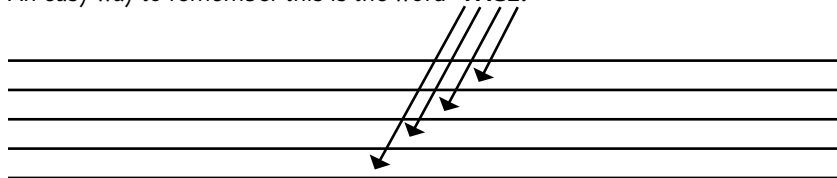


An easy way to remember this is the sentence "Every Good Boy Does Fine."



Each space between the line also represents a music note. Starting from the bottom, the first music note is "F." The second is "A." The third is "C." And the top space is "E."

An easy way to remember this is the word "FACE."



Now you can read music!

As a group, see if you can identify the music notes on the page, now that you know the basics of reading sheet music. You'll notice that the notes C-E-G get repeated a lot in this section of music. Those are the three notes you will work with in your groups.

On the music, what do you think the straight vertical bars represent? They are "measures." And every waltz has three beats in a measure.

Teacher leads the class in clapping out a simple waltz rhythm.
1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3.

Music examples can be played while students try to clap along to the waltz rhythm.

Then the teacher passes out sheet music and tone blocks/xylophones with the notes C-E-G. Each student in the group is assigned one note to play.

Student groups will collaborate to write six measures of music, three notes in each measure using only C-E-G.

Students can either write the music down with the letters on a sheet of paper, or for more advanced students, they can try writing the notes down on sheet music paper.

The students then practice and play their simple song in the group. When the students feel comfortable, the groups share their songs with the class.

IF TIME ALLOWS:

The teacher can pair up one of the music groups with an ensemble group from the Primary Text activity. While one group from the Primary Text recreates their three tableaux, one of the music waltz trios can play along to accompany the actors.

The Primary Cause of Things (Exploration and Creation)

Let us begin with the primary cause of things.

Let us begin with how something came about.

*Why it came about in that particular way
and became what it is.*

—Dr. Katherine Brandt, opening monologue of *33 Variations*

In order for students to understand the type of work that Beethoven was undertaking when creating the *Diabelli Variations*, students will study small portions of the composition. Initially, they will listen to and explore Diabelli’s waltz, the “theme” of the work. Next they will engage selected variations on this theme composed by Beethoven. After their exploration, they will create their own “variations” on a chosen subject.

Part I: Exploration

Definitions:

Variation: In music, variation is a formal technique where material is repeated in an altered form. The changes may involve harmony, melody, counterpoint, rhythm, timbre, orchestration or any combination of these.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variation_\(music\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variation_(music)))

Theme: In music, a theme is the initial or primary melody.

([http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Theme_\(music\)](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Theme_(music)))

Beethoven created his 33 separate pieces of music based upon a single piece composed by Anton Diabelli, a contemporary of his who published and composed music. Have students listen to Diabelli's composition, which is the springboard, or "theme," of the work. Ask them to create awareness of images, thoughts, feelings, or even stories that come to mind while listening. Play the piece a few times so students become familiar with it.

Teacher plays a recorded version of Diabelli's piece, which is less than a minute long. Recordings can be found in your local library, school library, music store, or online (for free) at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diabelli_Variations#The_variations.

After listening, conduct class discussion:

- What comes to mind when you hear this piece? What images do you see?
- What does it make you feel? What does it make you think about?
- Do you prefer to use words or sounds in your descriptions?
- Does this music feel familiar or unfamiliar to you? If familiar, where do you think you have heard it before?

Deep Listening and Variation Exploration

Now students will explore variations that Beethoven wrote on Diabelli's waltz. Project and/or read aloud with students the following excerpt from *33 Variations* by Moisés Kaufman (from the scene "Accidents of Fate"):

BEETHOVEN: *Here's the first trill in Diabelli's Waltz, yes?*

(Trill plays)

SCHINDLER: *Yes*

BEETHOVEN: *Now look at what I've done. I've taken these four notes (four notes play) and used them in this variation.*

(Beethoven shows Schindler different sketches he's been working on.

The pianist plays part of Variation #11)

And in this one.

(The pianist plays part of Variation #16) *and in this one.*

(The pianist plays part of Variation #6 and continues to end of scene).

And that's all with four notes. Now, you can have that music,

or you can have me talking with the count.

(Ringing, distorted sound occurs again, but louder. Beethoven holds his ears. The pain is great; the loud ringing sound tormenting. Then, the pianist plays Variation # 20.)

Definition:

Trill: The trill (or shake, as it was known from the 16th the 19th century) is a musical ornament consisting of a rapid alternation between two adjacent notes ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trill_\(music\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trill_(music)))

Project the *Diabelli Variations* sheet music and show them where the trill exists on the page. (The four notes referenced in the scene above are the first four notes of Diabelli's waltz. The trill is not officially marked, but is implied.) Play the trill for them on a piano or sing it for them if you dare! The sheet music can be found online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diabelli_Variations.

Play a recording of the variations mentioned in the scene above (Variations #6, #11, #16, #20). It might be nice to insert Diabelli's composition in between each variation so students can compare and contrast. Ask them to listen for the notes of the trill in the variations. (If time is limited, utilize just one variation. Compare and contrast it with Diabelli's piece.) Venn Diagrams might work nicely in helping students to organize their thoughts when describing each piece of music.

Discussion takes place after each new variation is introduced (or have students complete Venn Diagrams while considering the following questions):

- Can you hear the relationship between this particular variation by Beethoven and Diabelli's piece? How do they relate? What do you hear? Sound it out or pound it out rhythmically.
- Do you want to use words or sounds when describing the music? If using sounds, translate them into words and/or phrases describing the musical selections. If using words, what sounds would you make to describe what you hear?
- How is this variation different from the Diabelli waltz? What words would you use to describe it? What images come to mind? What feelings are evoked? What colors do you think of? Does it make you think of particular people, places, or things? Do you begin to think of a particular story?

- What mood, feelings, thoughts and images are created within you when you listen to:
 - Variation 6?
Why do you think it has been titled “Allegro Vivace”? (**allegro**: cheerful or brisk; but commonly interpreted as lively, fast; **vivace**: a moderately quick tempo; **allegretto vivace**: very lively, up-tempo)
 - Variation 11?
Why do you think it has been titled “Allegretto”? (**allegretto**: a little lively, moderately fast)
 - Variation 16?
Why do you think it has been titled “Allegro”? (**allegro**: cheerful or brisk; but commonly interpreted as lively, fast)
 - Variation 20?
Why do you think it has been titled “Andante”? (**andante**: at a walking pace; i.e., at a moderate tempo)

Part II: Creation – Circus Music or Joyful Silence?

Students will now choose a subject and create their own variations on it. The structure of Moisés Kaufman’s *33 Variations* script mirrors that of Beethoven’s work. Kaufman begins with a scene entitled “Theme.” This scene contains all of the major characters, plot lines and topics of the story. Every scene afterward is a creation based on the initial scene. Kauffman even gave titles to each of the 32 other scenes. These are listed below:

- Eavesdropping
- Research
- Negotiating Genius
- Two Worlds
- Fasten Your Seatbelts
- Bonn
- The Sketches – Part 1
- Classical Music
- Sketches – Part 2
- Baseball
- Circus Music
- Clara
- Dancing
- Accidents of Fate
- The Exam

- Septet
- Here Be Dragons
- The Conversation Notebooks
- Physical Therapy
- Joyful Silence
- The Discovery
- Cheeseburger
- Beauty
- Cafeteria Food
- Fugue
- Morphine
- Intimacy
- A Peace Offering
- Not A Human Being,
- Limbo
- Breakfast
- Variation #33

Students select one of the above titles. It might be nice to read the titles aloud to students and have them meditate on each for a moment or two before making their choices. Or randomly assign titles to students. Having them work with a word that is a surprise to them might get the creative juices flowing. This will be their “theme” from which to create something new.

Students are asked to create three different pieces based on the word or phrase from the play titles. These creations do not have to be of great size or length. However, they must address the theme/topic/title from various points of view. These creations can take on forms that most inspire students:

- Songs
- Instrumental pieces
- Poems
- Written paragraphs
- Drawings
- Collages (using images pulled from magazines, the internet, photos, etc.)
- If working in groups, students can:
 - Create theatrical “sculptures” or tableaux/frozen pictures with fellow classmates.
 - Write short scenes and perform them for the class
- Any other form students and teacher may come up with

The three pieces may take the same form (three poems) or different forms (a song, a poem, collage). Students will share their work with the class. Discussion will follow each piece.

- Students in the audience will be asked about what they see in the work.
- The student artist will have a chance to explain what they desired to express within their work.
- **Questions to ask students about their experiences:**
 - Why did you choose that particular theme?
 - Did you discover more than three variations?
 - Was it difficult to come up with three?
 - Which variation was your favorite? Why? Does your choice have to do with the process of creating it or with the result?

Finding Beauty in the Mundane (or Finding the Extraordinary in the Ordinary)

Transfiguration is an interesting idea... Transforming one thing into something better. Moving from the banal to the exalted.

—Dr. Katherine Brandt, opening line of Act II in *33 Variations*

Writing or Discussion Prompts:

- What does the word “mundane” mean? The word “banal”?
- How would you define “beauty”? “Exalted”?
- Have you ever thought about the mundane being beautiful? (Mundane objects, images, experiences, etc.)
- Have you, or someone you know, ever transformed something ordinary into something extraordinary?
- What in your life right now seems mundane, but has potential beauty in it?
- Where and how do you experience beauty in your life?
- Where and how do you create beauty in your life?

Beer Hall Waltz/Spiritual Dance

We start with a beer hall waltz and end with a delicate, spiritual dance.

Variations on a dance should end with a dance.

What an elegant idea – and so elegantly articulated by the Master.

This from a man who could not dance.

—From Dr. Katherine Brandt’s final lecture in *33 Variations*

A beer hall waltz can be viewed as a fairly ordinary event, whereas a delicate, spiritual dance expresses something sublime. In this passage, Moisés Kaufman used dance imagery to depict the transformation of Diabelli's unremarkable composition into an object of beauty. (He also used it to point out the irony of Beethoven's musical genius existing alongside his inability to move his body to music!)

The following exercise combines the metaphor of dance with an exploration of beauty in the mundane. Students will utilize seemingly ordinary aspects of their environment to create a movement piece.

- Students are to find three shapes in their environment that interest them. These shapes may come from any source—patterns in the floor, pictures in the room, items on their desks, objects that they see outside of the window (trees, buildings, cars, etc.) These shapes may be familiar (a star) or abstract (a curving line in the tile design).
- When students have found all three shapes, the teacher will ask them to find an area in the space to work in. The following instructions are given:
 - Begin in a neutral stance. Feet hip width apart. Hands by your sides. Look straight ahead. Relax.
 - Close your eyes and imagine the first shape.
 - Open your eyes and re-create that shape with your body. (Side-coaching: Think about how your body would like to utilize the space. Think of height, width, depth. Are you looking up, down, or straight ahead? Commit to the pose. Use your body fully, etc.)
 - Remember this pose.
 - Return to your neutral position.
 - **Close your eyes and imagine the second shape.**
 - Open your eyes and re-create the second shape with your body. (Use side-coaching mentioned above for the first pose.)
 - Now transition slowly into the first shape.
 - Move back slowly into the second shape. (Students may go back and forth a few times.)
 - Return to neutral.

- **With eyes closed, imagine the third shape.**
 - Open your eyes and re-create the shape with your body.
 - Transition to the first shape, and hold the pose.
 - Move on to the second shape and hold for a moment.
 - Find the third shape and hold. (Use side-coaching.)
- Students are then guided to move through these three shapes/poses with different tempos and approaches (slow, fast, timid, lovingly, etc.) They can transition from one to another smoothly, without stopping. Encourage students to be playful and to express fully.
 - Play selections from the *Diabelli Variations* and have students move to the music with the poses they have just created. Use selections that have a great amount of contrast so that their movement experience has dimension. Students may interact with others or remain solitary in their movement.
 - Divide the class. Half becomes the audience and the other half performs. Have them switch places.
 - Discussion takes place about what the students experienced.

(Above exercise adapted from work in Corky Dominguez's Mask and Movement Workshop conducted during the 2010 California Educational Theater Association conference.)

Creating Theatrical Variations

In *33 Variations*, Moisés Kaufman examines Beethoven's process of taking a very simple kernel of an idea and expanding it in every conceivable direction. Why does one do this? Where do the ideas come from? What is the point? To create the *Diabelli Variations*, Beethoven dissected the central elements of the original waltz he was presented with and then reconstructed them in 33 different styles. In the process, he created a masterpiece. However, the inspiration for each of the 33 variations was the original waltz he was given by Diabelli.

The fact that one of Beethoven's greatest works takes its origins from someone other than Beethoven himself is an interesting idea to explore. It begs the question: Is an artist entitled to take an existing piece, change it in critical but

derivative ways and then call it his or her own? Shakespeare certainly thought so; virtually all of his work has a deep connection to Greek mythology and other epic poetry or plays. Likewise, Andy Warhol and a host of other pop cultural artists created their best work through an unabashed “borrowing” from cultural icons of industry and consumerism.

It is often said that the best way to truly solve a problem is by coming at it from as many different angles as possible. Though, ultimately, one may be looking for a single solution, there may, in fact, be many to choose from, and the process of discovering each of them allows the seeker a much more complete understanding of the original subject in the end.

The same may be said for the job of an actor or director in the theater. The characters in a play are created to be real, living, breathing people. Just as the people in our real lives are not simple to break down and discover, the characters in a play are complex and have many facets to them. So, the actor has the responsibility and the opportunity to explore as many of those aspects as possible. Through any given performance or rehearsal, the actor may focus on different elements of the character and, in this way, continue to discover new things about them throughout the run of the play (for example, one night the actor playing Katherine in *33 Variations* may choose to focus on Katherine’s arthritis, allowing the physical obstacle of a constant ache in the hands to affect the rest of her performance).

The following exercises are designed to allow your students to explore the idea of what it means to really take something apart and examine it from every angle in order to fully understand it. In this case, we are particularly interested in the journey to discovery and inspiration. In the end, one direction may be settled on, but that process of discovery is at the heart of a full understanding of the complexity of the subject.

Deconstruction:

Basic description: Students will use the information generated from an improvised two-person scene to inspire spin-off scenes.

- Ask for two volunteers and have them sit opposite each other on stage or at the front of the classroom.
- Explain that the volunteers will simply have a conversation while the rest of the class takes note of the details that come up from within the discussion.

Note: *To make it easier for them, the topic of conversation should be something both volunteers care about and perhaps even have opposing views on.*

- Explain that during the conversation, the volunteers should try to provide as much information as possible by speaking with as much detail about their experience, opinion and environment as they can.

For example, rather than simply saying, “I hate the Red Sox,” a student who understands their job as a source of information might say, “I have hated the Red Sox ever since the night my dad took me to a game when I was seven and a guy with a mustache knocked my ice cream cone out of my hand while he was trying to catch a foul ball.” In this second example, the student has opened up the world of the scene to include more than just the Red Sox. Some things that might jump out are ice cream, fathers, mustaches, foul balls, baseball parks, Boston, etc.

- The other students in the class listen to the conversation, looking for details they find interesting or particularly important and make note of them.
- When the conversation has gone on for about three to five minutes, call “cut” and congratulate the volunteers.
- Ask the rest of the class about the details they saw or heard, listing them on the board (they should start with big ideas and get more and more specific, pulling out the minutiae of the scene with as much detail as possible).
- Partner the students. In pairs, students examine the list and choose one item from the list they think might make a good scene.
- Each pair of students writes their chosen scene together as a team (using the example from above, one might create a scene about a mustache or an ice cream shop, the Boston Tea Party or playing baseball).
- Explain that there are no rules about the direction the inspiration takes the new scenes. Scenes can be as short or as long as students wish, as long as they are clear and inspired by some facet of the original conversation.
- Have the students share back their scenes with the rest of the class (reading them aloud).
- Ask the class to guess which part of the original conversation might have been the inspiration for the scene.
- Discuss the process and how sometimes breaking something down to its essential core elements allows for a new understanding and sometimes a whole new idea.

Note: Again, the content is less important than the experience of pulling information out and taking it in a new direction, just the way Beethoven did with the original waltz, which in and of itself was not considered a great work, but when deconstructed and rebuilt in 33 variations led to a masterpiece!

Four-Line Scenes

Basic Description: Groups of four students will each create and perform their own version of the same four-line script.

- Create a simple script with your students by asking for one line of dialogue at a time until you have four lines (the lines do not have to be connected or linear in content).
- In groups of four, students create a short performance, using only the four lines created by the group
- Students should devise a specific style they are working in (i.e., drama, comedy, melodrama, action, etc.).
- Students must use all four lines, but they do not have to each say a line.
- To get started, students should be able to answer the following questions about their characters:
 - **Who are you?** (e.g., I am Mike, a nurse)
 - **Where are you?** (e.g., I am in an examination room in a New York City hospital)
 - **What is your objective in the scene?** (e.g., I want to impress Clara)
 - **What obstacle is preventing you from achieving your objective?** (e.g., The fact that Clara's mother is in the room makes it hard to speak openly)
- When each group is ready, share the scenes and discuss the different approaches and techniques used by each group and how they helped to define each performance.

The Human Puzzle

Most of us have accentuated different aspects of ourselves depending on whom we are with. The same is true within the world of a play. In *33 Variations*, Clara behaves differently with her mother than she does with Mike. Actors must deal with this kind of subtle shift in characterization from interaction to interaction. One way they handle it is to recognize the very definite power of the words they say and, perhaps more importantly, how they say them.

The following exercises use drama to explore the ways in which people highlight different sides of themselves and how actors use these differences to help explore a character more fully.

Inflection Translation:

- Write the following line of dialogue on the board:
“No, I didn’t steal the money.”
- Ask different students to read the text aloud, each one stressing a different word in the sentence. Discuss how the different emphasis creates a totally different meaning for the sentence.
 - Start by asking a student to read the line neutrally
 - Have another read the sentence again with emphasis the word “No.”
 - Here the person is making a flat denial.
 - Have another student emphasize the word “I.”
 - Here the idea is planted that though I didn’t steal the money, someone else may have...
 - Have another student emphasize the word “Steal.”
 - Here the person may be implying that they saw the money as a loan...
 - Have a final student emphasize the word “money.”
 - Now the possibility exists that there may be something else that was stolen...
 - Notice how emphasis on each word totally changes the message of the line.

Three Lines, Three Ways:

Basic Explanation: Students will deliver the same line of dialogue in three different ways, depending on whom they are talking to.

- Start by asking students to create a list of all the different people they interact with throughout the day (parents, friends, teachers, siblings, school administrators, coaches, sales people, bus drivers, homeless people, etc.)
- Point out that we are all many different people at once.
- As a class, ask students to create an authentic set of three sentences they might say to anyone they meet on a day-to-day basis. For example,
 1. How’s it going?
 2. Can you believe this weather?
 3. Well, I have to be going now.

These lines are non-specific and could apply just as easily to your best friend as the bus driver.

- Ask students to examine their lists of people they interact with and choose three without telling anyone else who they chosen.
- Students should rehearse how they might say the three lines to each person they have selected, paying particular attention to their own inflection and the attitude and status they invoke to speak to different people.
- Invite students to share at least one performance they have prepared, and have the rest of the class guess who the performer might be talking to.

Note: *The students may not be able to guess the exact person, but they should make some assumptions about the person based on the delivery. Ask them to consider the status of the person, if they are very close to the speaker, how the speaker might secretly feel about this person, etc.*

Writing Prompt - Character Profile:

The universal theme of the relationship between mothers and daughters (or parents and children) is prominent in *33 Variations*. Relationships with parents are complicated and multi-faceted. The following writing exercise is designed to help students explore this theme of the play and explore their own creative impulses through writing.

- Ask students to choose a parent to write about and write that person's name and their relationship to them at the top of the page.
- Ask students to consider how the specific gender details of the relationship might make it unique or different.
- Have students create a list of all the details they can think of about this person. They may start with physical attributes then move into lifestyle specifics (job, home, etc.) and finally include all the person's likes, dislikes, aspirations, fears, etc. that they can think of.
- Now, ask students to consider what they don't know about the person and create a new list of details.
- Imagine some of the person's secrets—What would they be doing now if they were not your mom or dad? Where would they be?
Who would they be?
 - Finally, ask the students to write a letter or a monologue in the chosen parent's voice addressing them (the student). The topic of this letter might be to tell their child something that they've never told anyone before.

- Ask students to share their work if they feel comfortable.
- Discuss the process. Did they learn anything new about the person or themselves?

The Private Moment

Moisés Kaufman, the director and writer of *33 Variations*, utilizes a technique called “moment work.” These are moments he and the actors create to illuminate, for the audience, who the characters are, their behaviors, and their conditions and surroundings. In an interview with the first assistant director and the script coordinator at Arena Stage they ask Moisés Kaufman about “moment work.” He shares that he encourages actors to see themselves as theatre makers and he uses “moment work” to encourage them to experiment and make moments about what they understand about their characters. The following is an excerpt from a feature article in *American Theatre* magazine describing “moment work” in the rehearsals of *33 Variations*. The actors collaborated, discovered, revealed character and a theatrical style that eventually informed the theatricality of the show.

“Grant James Varjas, the actor playing the biographer Schindler...set up his “moment work” scene with a bowl, several lamps, a projection of the cover of Beethoven’s...sketchbook, and a projection of a single page from the composer’s own sketchbook without any musical notes indicated...Then Varjas announced, ‘We begin...’ Beethoven, played by James Gale, worked silently with pen and paper, and Schindler peered over his book at the composer. Then Schindler stood and removed Beethoven’s working materials. He bound Beethoven’s strained eyes and brought him a bowl of soup. Schindler spoon-fed Beethoven the soup as the composer faced blankly ahead. Suddenly, notes began to appear on the screen on the vacant bars of Beethoven’s Sketchbook. They materialized as ghostly figures, creeping note-by-note across the bars, passing soup stains on the manuscript. All the while pianist, Ning Yu, played the notes as we realized Beethoven was composing in his head before us.”

From “**Variations On An Obsession**” by Mark Bly; in *American Theatre Magazine*, March 2009.

This is perhaps, a variation of a well-known exercise actors have used called a “private moment.” As some of you may know, Stanislavski and Uta Hagen both created private moment exercises. The purpose of these private moment and object exercises is to re-create in detail through your five senses (sight, taste, touch, smell, hearing) an activity which you ordinarily do alone—one that

reflects “real life.” The challenge is one of focus, what Stanislavski calls the “small circle of attention or concentration,” in which an actor’s commitment to the task is complete and truthful, even though eventually the actor is being observed by an audience. Stanislavski explains this concept in his book, *An Actor Prepares*, and Uta Hagen in her book, *Respect for Acting*.

Private Moment:

Aim: To offer a solid and basic actor technique to students to bring them into the world of the play, *33 Variations*. To develop the students’ concentration skills. To develop the students’ powers of observation. To build ensemble as students learn about each other while watching each other’s private moments.

This exercise can be offered in a number of ways:

1. Students can be given the assignment of going home and observing himself/herself doing an activity when they are alone. They should choose two minutes of their chosen activity. This should be an activity they can re-create in class.
2. Laying down guidelines regarding activities that do not involve lewd or crude behavior might be appropriate. You know your students best. Or you might offer examples of what is appropriate by having the students practice the assignment simultaneously with the other students in the classroom to begin to get a feel for the exercise before going home to work on the assignment.
3. In a group setting, offer a common activity like “doing your homework” or “reading a book” or “eating a snack” or “cleaning out my book bag.” Offer examples of the types of activities the students might choose while observing their activities outside of class.
4. Instruct the students to engage in their activity and encourage them to notice the activities, the tasks, how they accomplish them, what items they utilize and how they feel. Have them notice their five senses, taste, touch, hearing, sight, and smell, while experiencing and practicing their activity. If they can incorporate each of these in their activity it would be a plus.
5. They should notice what time of day it is and what they were doing before, during and after their activity to create context for themselves in order to re-create their activity.
6. Ask them to dare to be boring. They do not have to force or create a highly dramatic two minutes. Encourage them to find a routine activity for them and to be as truthful as possible about the way they execute their activity.

7. Have them practice their two minute activity so they can re-create it in class with their fellow students as their audience. They should bring whatever items they need to re-create their activity.

On the day their private moments are due, organize your classroom so there is an area where the students can share/perform their private moment. When everyone has shared/performed their private moment, facilitate a discussion regarding their process of completing this assignment. What was their experience preparing and sharing/performing their private moment? What did they experience watching other classmates share/perform their private moment? Did they learn anything new? Did their powers of observation develop? How might you build scenes from these moments?

The next step would be to build scenes inspired from these moments. Juxtaposing one student's private moment with another student's can also be a very interesting way to begin to build a dramatic piece with your class. Students will witness this type of juxtaposition of moments in *33 Variations*. Got to this link to listen to the brief interview with Moisés Kaufman: http://blog.arenastage.org/arena_stage_blogs/2007/08/audio-feature-m.html

Mindmapping to Capture Your Creativity

Whether playing at the piano and notating on music paper or working on a computer and printing on copy paper, Ludwig van Beethoven and Dr. Katherine Brandt, the two major characters in *33 Variations*, brainstormed, captured and worked at honing their creativity to bring it alive and make it a reality.

**“Let us begin with the primary cause of things.
Let us begin with how something came about.
Why it came about in that particular way and became what it is.”**

Beethoven is inside that room, unseen by us, composing Variation #1. Strange sounds are coming out of the room in addition to the piano. As he composes he shouting the tunes out of key, or humming loudly.

Beethoven (off stage): I need more paper.

Schindler: Master, Herr Offenheimer says he won't give us any more paper. We owe him too much

Beethoven: And when you're there get more ink.

Schindler: Yes, Master!

Beethoven: And Schindler. Open the shutters! It's too dark in here.

Excerpts from *33 Variations* by Moisés Kaufman

Everyone, even Beethoven, has to begin somewhere. And the starting point might be chaotic, frustrating, confusing to us as well as to those around us. Ultimately, like Beethoven, it is worth muddling through to get started.

Mindmapping is a wonderful way to get started brainstorming and capturing our creative ideas. Allowing ourselves a process to experiment with our ideas to create variations in order to hone and bring our ideas into reality is also empowering.

Beethoven is a wonderful model of this process. Whether on music paper with staves, big sheets of blank newsprint paper or a black board, getting your ideas from your imagination to the paper is the first step to discovering your creativity.

The sequence of exercises below teach you how to mindmap. Mindmapping can start with a general question or idea and you can continue to mindmap on the same sheet or new sheets of paper to continue to hone in and get more specific with your creative idea.

NEEDED:

1. Take out a blank piece of paper. Copy paper will do or if you have larger blank newsprint paper, even better.
2. A pencil. You may change your mind or want to erase and begin a thought or image over again. Feel free to use colored pens or pencils as well.
3. A timer or clock to monitor the time allotted for this exercise.
4. The time needed for this first Mindmap is 10 minutes. Increase the time by five minute increments if you would like to extend the creative session.
5. Optional: Allow time for a five minute free-write to journal about what you expressed in your mindmap and/or the experience of creating your mindmap after the creative session.

Mindmapping was invented by Joyce Wycoff, Co-founder of InnovationNetwork and author of *Mindmapping: Your Personal Guide To Exploring Creativity and Problem Solving*. Joyce Wycoff instructs us to start in the center. Years of school training has taught us to start in the upper left-hand corner of lined

paper. The brain actually works from the center out. So, we begin by flowing with the natural inclination of the brain and the creative process.

Blank copy paper or large newsprint is used because Ms. Wycoff reassures us the larger the paper, the more ideas will flow. Larger writing and drawing surfaces will signal to the brain more creativity and inventiveness can be expressed.

Ms. Wycoff shares with us, “Mindmapping is simply a brain dumping process that helps stimulate new ideas and connections. Start with an open, playful attitude...Free associate. Put down all ideas without judgment or evaluation... keep your hand moving...it keeps the ideas flowing...there is time to organize later.”

Mindmapping is writing anywhere you feel the impulse to write. And yes, perhaps you see an image or a word or phrase. Sketch it or jot it down. Let your intuition guide you—where to draw, where to write.

Perhaps you see a connection to two or three items and you would like to draw a line from one to the other, circle it, or create some kind of connective tissue or image—feel free. Branch out and make offshoots if something is related to a word or image you have written or drawn.

Most important, there is no wrong—only your correctness—your process.

Do not edit yourself. If you think of an item is unrelated, put it down anyway or your brain will be stuck on it until you address it. This will bring your creative flow to a screeching halt. With the practice of turning off the editing switch, you will let it flow and may be surprised. You will see things you never realized were in you. Connections, not obvious to you before, will present themselves with new energy.

*Please feel free to create your own Mindmapping topic for your students if more applicable.

Part I - Mindmap: Who Am I?

On the large newsprint provided, brainstorm with the question in mind:
Who Am I?

Include who you are in relation to your world—your family, friends, job, profession, church, temple, community group, neighborhood, etc. Who are you to yourself? How do you see yourself?

Now add to this mindmap all of your strengths, talents and what you love. Remember to express everything with no judgment. For example, you may be a good listener, typist, cook, reader, organizer, friend, sister, brother. For example, you may be good at communicating or making music or drawing or writing stories.

Even if you think an attribute or quality is negative, find what is positive about this part of you and express it on your mindmap. For example, some call you a complainer. You have a meter and it detects injustice. It tends to go off when something isn't fair. You have no problem speaking up and voicing your opinion. So, in actuality, you discover you are courageous when it comes to communicating and standing up for the underdog. You might want to draw or express your courage on your mindmap somehow.

So really express everything, even if you're not sure if an attribute or quality should be included. Be sure to express everything that you hope to do as well. Perhaps you would like to dance or create music or study a particular subject that really interests you—include all of this on your mindmap.

Sharing Your Mindmap

When you have mindmapped for 10 minutes (or more if you extended the time), take a step back and look at your mindmap. Notice the connections and discoveries you have drawn out of yourself.

Lay out all of the mindmaps and take the time to look at each one as though you are in an art gallery.

Appreciate the creativity and expression unique to each mindmap. Mindmaps are a work of art. If the artist cares to, give each person a five minute turn to talk about their mindmap. Share with the group your thoughts and feelings

in creating your mindmap. You might tell the story of how your mindmap developed—describe the meaning of each image, thought and connection between different items on the mindmap.

Sharing your mindmaps with your group is a choice. If you choose not to have your mindmap viewed by your group, simply fold up your mindmap and tuck it away for your own private viewing later. Let your group know you would rather not show your mindmap at this time.

Part II - Mindmap: Focusing your mindmapping on one of your passions.

Schindler: The first composition he undertook there was the variations on Diabelli's waltz, which had taken his fancy in a curious way.... In no time he had composed five variations, then five more, then two more. Every morning before dawn he was at his desk. The variations kept piling up and he kept saying:

Beethoven: That is not all... there are more variations in here.

Excerpts from *33 Variations* by Moisés Kaufman

In *33 Variations*, Beethoven begins to write and sketch his variations and he discovers his passion for creating the *Diabelli Variations*. This time, support the students to explore and capture an idea that they are excited or passionate about. Encourage them to know they have unlimited creativity, “That is not all...there are more variations in here.” This next mindmapping session can be done before or after the session above. See what you think will resonate best for you, your students, and the projects you are creating.

NEEDED:

1. Another 10-minute creative session. If you need more time, add to the creative session in five minute increments.
2. Allow for a five minute free-write at the completion of this creative session.
3. Utilize the same copy paper or newsprint sheet from Part I-Mindmapping.
4. Again, utilize a pencil, colored pens/pencils.

The subject of this mindmap can be “What do I care deeply about? What am I passionate about? If I didn’t have to worry about limitations, what would I dream of? Is there something I’ve always wanted to do or try?” As you did above, begin to express thoughts, images, words regarding these questions. As before, trust yourself and your creativity as to where and what you want to express on your mindmap.

Turn over the copy paper or newsprint from above and mindmap around this question: **What do I care deeply about?** What do I want? Getting to remember our heart's desires is empowering. This step connects our heart to the project we decide to create. We cannot "put our heart into it," or "wholeheartedly commit to a creative process," if we haven't looked inside our hearts.

Sharing What You Care Deeply About—Your Passion

Again, when you have mindmapped for 10 minutes (or more if you extended the time), take a step back and look at your mindmap. Notice the connections and discoveries you have drawn out of yourself.

Lay out all of the mindmaps and take the time to look at each one as though you are in an art gallery.

Appreciate the creativity and expression unique to each mindmap. Your mindmaps are truly works of art. If the artist cares to, give each person a five minute turn to talk about their mindmap. Share, with the group or your partner, your thoughts and feelings in creating your mindmap. You might tell the story of how your mindmap developed—describe the meaning of each image, thought, and connection between different items on the mindmap.

Sharing your mindmaps with your group is a choice. If you choose not to have your mindmap viewed by your group, simply fold up your mindmap and tuck it away for your own private viewing later. Let your group know you would rather not show your mindmap at this time.

Reminder: *Take a five minute free-write.* Journal about any new realizations you have discovered regarding the subject you chose and/or your process of creating your mindmap.

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