

## CANDIDE STUDY GUIDE

While *Candide* is without a doubt a farcical, humorous, and far-fetched tale, a seriousness lies beneath its satirical veneer. *Candide* is the story of an innocent young man embarking on a series of adventures during which he discovers much evil in the world. Throughout his journey Candide believes in and adheres to the philosophy of his teacher, Pangloss, that “all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.” This philosophy was prevalent during Voltaire’s day, and *Candide* is Voltaire’s scathing response to what he saw as an absurd belief that for its followers, the Optimists, was an easy way to rationalize evil and suffering. *Candide* was composed mainly as an attack on Gottfried Leibniz, the main proponent of Optimism. *Candide* was also written in opposition to Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*, which espouses that “partial evil” is for the “greater good.” Though he was by no means a pessimist, Voltaire refused to believe that what happens is always for the best.

Voltaire’s vehement response was triggered in part by two catastrophic events: an earthquake in Lima, Peru, in 1746, and an even more devastating earthquake in Lisbon, Spain, that killed fifty thousand people in 1755. Incensed that the Optimists were comforting the earthquake victims by assuring them that this event had happened for “the best,” Voltaire wrote *Poème sur le desastre de Lisbonne* (1756), in which he expresses sympathy for the earthquake victims and lashes out at the Optimists. In the introduction to the poem, Voltaire addresses their callousness by writing: “The heirs of the dead would not come into their fortunes, masons would grow rich in rebuilding the city, beasts would grow fat on corpses buried in the ruins; such is the natural effect of natural causes. So don’t worry about your own particular evil; you are contributing to the general good.” Voltaire again confronted the mockery of this belief in *Candide*, which he wrote three years later in 1759.

*Candide* is rooted in historical events of the time, including the Seven Years’ War, the execution of Admiral Byng in 1747, and the war between England and France for Canadian territory. Furthering this time of political unrest was the beginning of the enlightenment period during which an educated elite called the Philosophes – including Voltaire and other well-known figures such as Denis Diderot – began questioning European beliefs and institutions and speaking out against intolerance and injustice. While extremely popular with the Parisian public, his contemporaries, and even royalty, Voltaire himself was subjected to injustices (particularly his imprisonment in the Bastille for writing a satire about the Regent of France) that are believed to have influenced his writing of *Candide*.

Owing to its scandalous nature, *Candide* was published clandestinely and anonymously, and its exact publication date is unknown. However, in mid-January of 1759, Voltaire’s publisher sent 1,000 copies of *Candide* to Paris, and by late February Voltaire’s identity was revealed. He police were ordered to seize all copies of *Candide* that could be found, but the controversy only served to

further fuel the book's popularity – and by the end of the year, at least seventeen editions of the work had been published.

Religious officials, however, pronounced the book “full of dangerous principles concerning religion and tending to marl depravation.” The critic Madame de Stael remarked that *Candide* was a work of “infernal gaiety” by a writer who laughs “like a demon, or like a monkey at the miseries of this human race with which he has nothing in common.” Nonetheless, the reading public adored *Candide*, and the phrase “Let us eat Jesuit” was spoken repeatedly, and since the late nineteenth century *Candide* has been recognized as a masterpiece. Even Gustave Flaubert admitted that he read *Candide* one hundred times and used it as a model in his own writing.

## **ABOUT VOLTAIRE**

From his birth in Paris in 1694, Voltaire's life was filled with turmoil. He was never on good terms with his father, Francois, or his elder brother, Armand. He believed his real father was an officer and songwriter named Rochebrune. His mother died when he was seven, and after her death he rebelled against his family, and began a close relationship with his godfather, the Abbe de Chateauneuf, a freethinker and epicurean. Voltaire attended the Jesuit college of Louis-le-Grant in Paris, where he grew to love literature and the theater.

At the age of twenty-two, Voltaire was exiled to Sully-sur-Loire for seven months for writing a satire of the Duke of Orleans, the ruling Regent of France. The next year he wrote another satire that resulted in his imprisonment in the Bastille for eleven months. In 1718, he began using the name Voltaire, rejecting the family name he had long detested (Francois-Marie Arouet). That same year his first play, *Oedipe*, was staged, and his epic poem *La Ligue* was published in 1723 to great popularity. Voltaire spent several years as a member of the royal court of Louis XV at Versailles during which time he was also at the height of his success in Paris.

In 1726, his life changed dramatically when he quarreled with the Chevalier Rohan, a member of one of France's leading families. Voltaire, who was beaten by the chevalier's servants, contemplated calling the Chevalier out for a duel, but he was again imprisoned in the Bastille for being a threat to public order. He was released after a month on the condition that he leave Paris, and he spent the next three years in England.

Upon the publication of *Lettres philosophiques* (1734), Voltaire was condemned by the Parliament of Paris as offensive to politics and religion. A warrant was soon issued for his arrest. He went into hiding at Cirey.

When the War of the Austrian Succession broke out in 1742, Voltaire was sent on a secret mission to rally the King of Prussia to the French cause. This act

restored his favor with Louis XV, and he was appointed court biographer at Versailles. His period of favor at Louis' court ended in 1747 amid indiscretions of his affair with Mme du Chatelet, and the two were forced to flee.

Voltaire faced the greatest crisis of his life when he witnesses Mme du Chatelet's death in childbirth in 1749. Devastated by her death, he accepted the invitation of Frederic of Prussia to join him in Berlin. At Fredericks' court he brawled with a compatriot, Maupertius, on whom he then based a satire which was immediately burned on Frederick's orders. His clashes with Frederick caused Voltaire to leave Berlin in 1753, and he was held under house arrest by Prussian authorities. Louis XV forbade his entrance to Paris, and he eventually settle in Geneva.

Voltaire wrote two major historical studies, *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (1751) and *Essai sur les Moeurs* (1755), which traced the history of the world from the end of the Roman Empire and was designed to show how humanity was slowly heading beyond barbarism. In 1755, the devastating earthquake struck Lisbon, and the next year he published *Poème sur le desastre de Lisbonne*. *Candide* followed in January or February of 1759.

Voltaire spent the last twenty years of his life in Geneva at his estate where he wrote essays, participated in politics, and corresponded with royalty, philosophers, and actors. Voltaire's fame was worldwide: He was called the "Innkeeper of Europe" and welcomed at Ferney such literary figures as Giovanni Casanova, Edward Gibbon, and the Prince de Ligne. Appalled by the barbarism of the French authorities, Voltaire devoted the rest of his life to defending the miscarriages of justice.

## **THE PLAY SET TO MUSIC**

In the 1950s, when Bernstein and the writer Lillian Hellman conceived the idea of a musical *Candide*, they saw strong parallels between the time of Voltaire and the contemporary American scene. In the aftermath of World War II, the USA was supremely confident of its own importance, its political system and its place in the world order, and many of its citizens felt that, in spite of various problems, they were indeed living in 'the best of all possible worlds'.

Yet an evil was lurking - the evil that came to be known as McCarthyism. Scarcely less ominous than the dreaded Spanish Inquisition that *Candide* revisits, McCarthyism resulted in the Hollywood Blacklist, censorship, lost livelihoods, suicides, loss or denial of passports. You only had to be suspected of having once known a suspected Communist to be immediately placed under suspicion. Bernstein was denied a passport by his own government - as Voltaire had been by his. So *Candide* was the vehicle chosen to ridicule and satirize, to create controversy and to stimulate discussion.

*Candide* opened on Broadway in 1956 as a collaboration between Bernstein and Hellman, with the lyricist John LaTouche. There have been various revisions over the years, and notable subsequent contributors in one way or another have been Richard Wilbur, Dorothy Parker, Hugh Wheeler, Hal Prince and Stephen Sondheim. Over the years, *Candide* went through a number of different versions, revisions and productions by different people. Then in December 1989, Bernstein himself brought *Candide* to London, conducting concert performances with the London Symphony at the Barbican Centre.

### Cast of Candide

- **Candide** (tenor)
- **Voltaire/Pangloss** (baritone or tenor; he doubles with several other characters, including the Governor.)
- **Maximilian** (baritone, but can be played by a tenor)
- **Cunegonde** (soprano)
- **Paquette** (alto) Although a major character in Voltaire's novella and all revivals of the show, she is a walk-on part with only one line in the stage version.)
- **Old Woman** (alto)
- **Martin** (baritone)
- **Cacambo** (baritone)

The overture is a brilliantly witty and tuneful orchestral showpiece which is often played on its own as a concert overture.

### Act I

Act I opens with a 'scene of sweet simplicity' at a castle in Westphalia (for Westphalia, of course, read USA). Candide is the illegitimate nephew of the Baron and is treated as inferior by the fat Baroness and the incredibly vain and narcissistic son and heir, Maximilian. Candide is deeply in love with Maximilian's sister, the beautiful Cunegonde. The pure and innocent Candide is serenely happy in his world of happiness and love. Even the pretty young servant Paquette is happy with the attentions of her mistress, the Baroness, and the rather different attentions of her master, the Baron.

In this idyll everyone is happy - Maximilian with his good looks, Cunegonde with her wealth and beauty, and Candide with his simple, idle pursuits of horse-riding and reading. They have been taught to be happy by their tutor, the great philosopher Dr Pangloss. In class, Pangloss teaches that this is, indeed, the best of all possible worlds. Even war is a blessing in disguise, as it levels all men, uniting rich and poor, and thus improving human relations. So they all declare:

*We have learned, and understood,  
Everything that is, is good;  
Everything that is, is planned,  
Is wisely planned, is right and good.*

The sight of Dr Pangloss giving Paquette some very private tuition in the bushes inspires Candide and Cunegonde to declare their love for each other and their plans for future happiness, in the duet 'O Happy We'. While Candide dreams of raising chickens and growing cabbages, Cunegonde's dreams are of riches and luxury, yachts and jewels and champagne. They are both so happy.

But the Baron is furious. Candide, his illegitimate nephew, is not a nobleman and ranks far beneath the social standing of the Baron's daughter, Cunegonde. How dare this upstart embrace her and declare his love? Candide is thrown out of the castle, to wander alone and lovelorn. But is he despondent? Of course not! He has been carefully taught that everything is for the best and 'there is a sweetness in every woe'. He knows people will be kind to him.

Candide is forced to join the Bulgarian army. He tries to desert, but is recaptured and severely beaten up by his comrades. By the time he is just able to start to walk again, war is declared. Westphalia is a battle zone. At prayer in their castle, the Baron and his family are attacked, massacred, cut to pieces. Cunegonde is molested before being bayoneted. Candide sings a lament as he searches among the ruins for her corpse and bids it a last farewell.

Time goes by and Candide wanders, alone and starving. He comes across an old man in a truly terrible state - a syphilitic whose extremities are rotting away, and who has to wear a tin nose. There is nevertheless something familiar about him: it is none other than Candide's old philosophy teacher, Dr Pangloss. He has somehow been brought back to life, and cheerfully explains his present condition in the song 'Dear Boy'.

Pangloss explains that he caught syphilis by an entirely natural process: love. And because love is divine, any side-effects can only be for the good. He goes on to point out that if Columbus had not ventured to the New World and brought syphilis back to Europe, life would lack all sorts of luxuries:

*All bitter things conduce to sweet,  
As this example shows;  
Without the little spirochaete  
We'd have no chocolate to eat  
Nor would tobacco's fragrance greet  
The European nose.*

In any case, Pangloss continues, love - the great goddess whom all men worship - knows no boundaries or frontiers, so venereal disease naturally 'rounds the world from bed to bed, as pretty as you please'.

Candide and Pangloss take ship bound for Lisbon. The ship is wrecked in a storm, but they manage to stagger onto the Portuguese shore just as a volcano erupts, killing 30,000 people. They are arrested as heretics and sent off to endure trial by ordeal before the Grand Inquisitor at the Auto-da-fé, which is a great day out for everyone, involving various public tortures, hangings, and burning at the stake, complete with the usual side-shows and all the fun of the fair. The crowds sing joyously:

*What a day, what a day  
For an auto-da-fé!  
It's a lovely day for drinking  
And for watching people fry!  
Hurry, hurry, hurry,  
Watch 'em die!*

The Inquisitors arrive on the scene. Pangloss protests that they can't execute him as he is too sick to die. He launches into a long patter song explaining how he got syphilis, and who passed it on to whom as it travelled right round the world and eventually, as he triumphantly explains, came back to him - thus proving the universal truth that it is love, sweet love, that makes the world go round. The Catholic crowd, however, is adamant:

*When foreigners like this come  
To criticise and spy,  
We chant a pax vobiscum,  
And hang the bastard high!*

Pangloss is hanged. Candide is flogged, but still believes that Pangloss was right. In his pitiful state Candide decides that if the world appears cruel it must be because he cannot see the kindness and goodness that must be there. 'It must be me,' he concludes.

The scene now shifts to Paris, where a mysterious beauty has become the paramour of both a rich Jew and the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, who share her favors on alternate days. The mysterious beauty turns out to be Cunegonde, who sings an operatic *tour de force*, 'Glitter and Be Gay', a sure-fire showstopper. She begins by bemoaning her fate, lamenting about how she is forced to sell her body and her purity in such a sordid way. Yet at the same time she confesses that she loves all the trappings of wealth, the jewels, the clothes, the champagne, the social status. So she decides to carry on living the high life, while asking us to note how brave she is in hiding the deep and bitter shame she says she feels. Oh yeah?

By a strange coincidence Candide arrives in Paris and recognizes Cunegonde, his long-lost love. They sing a duet - 'You Were Dead, You Know' - as they rejoice in their happy reunion. But both the rich Jew and the Archbishop are approaching. Candide 'accidentally' stabs and kills them both. The Archbishop's final resting-place is in a great cathedral, the Jew is disposed of in the sewers.

Cunegonde has with her a companion, an old lady known only as the Old Lady, who now recounts her life story. The daughter of a Polish Pope, she has survived rape, riots, slavery and cannibalism (one of her buttocks has been sliced off and eaten). She sings the Old Lady's Tango, 'I Am Easily Assimilated'. This very catchy number is partly in English and partly in Spanish, and was obviously personal to Bernstein in view of his father's immigrant origins. Bernstein spoke (in all apparent seriousness, but definitely with a certain amount of tongue in cheek) about the line 'My father came from Rovno-Guberniya'. He explained that he had long wanted to include it, but was unable to find a rhyme for it until, late one night, he awoke his Chilean-born wife Felicia Montealegre, who came up with the Spanish line '*me muero, me sale una hernia*' ('I'm dying, I'm growing a hernia'), which fits perfectly. He said that all the Spanish lines in this number are by Felicia.

Wanted in Paris for the double murder, Candide accepts an offer to go and fight for the Jesuits in South America, and together with Cunegonde and the Old Lady takes ship for the New World and, they hope, a new life.

## **Act II**

Act II opens with everyone still convinced that everything is for the best in this wonderful world. Candide and his two female companions arrive in Buenos Aires where, unknown to them, both Maximilian and Paquette (miraculously restored to life) arrive, both disguised as slave-girls. The Governor of Buenos Aires falls in love with Maximilian then, realising his mistake, falls in love with Cunegonde instead, and proposes to her. She protests her purity and insists on marriage before sex.

Maximilian goes off with an amorous Jesuit father, and Candide goes off into the jungle, having been persuaded by the Old Lady that the police are still after him. After further bizarre encounters and experiences Candide arrives at a Jesuit mission, where they urge him to join their flock. There, deep in the jungle, he amazingly encounters Maximilian once more, and once more declares his love for Cunegonde and his intention to marry her. Maximilian (now a Jesuit Father Superior) is outraged, as Candide is socially inferior. Candide unfortunately stabs Maximilian and kills him, then flees into the jungle once more.

Eventually, lost and starving after further incredible adventures, they come into the fabulous land of Eldorado. Here all is perfect, yet Candide is still pining for his love, Cunegonde, and decides to leave. The happy people of Eldorado cannot

understand why, but nevertheless kindly send him on his way laden with gold and jewels as a parting gift.

Candide arrives in Surinam, where he meets Martin, a professional Pessimist. Martin believes that everything is absurd in this, the worst of all possible worlds. Candide refuses to believe this, especially when he is offered a fine sailing ship bound for Venice, where he hopes to meet Cunegonde once more. He pays a lot of gold for the ship, but has of course been conned, as it is a rotten hulk and soon sinks.

Nevertheless, Candide somehow makes it to Venice, where it is carnival time - greed and corruption at the gaming tables are rife, and everyone is ripping everyone else off. Paquette is the chief prostitute of Venice, Maximilian (miraculously re-restored to life) is the corrupt Chief of Police, Cunegonde is there to attract gamblers to the roulette wheel, and the Old Lady is there to fix the way the wheel spins.

Cunegonde and the Old Lady, unrecognized by Candide behind their carnival masks, give him some sob-story and get Candide to promise them a large handout. Somehow, Pangloss is there too, apparently enjoying a whole bevy of ladies of the night.

But the masks fall, and Candide realizes the truth. Has he endured all his hardship and exhausting travels in search of Cunegonde, only to discover that she is really a greedy and conniving virago? Candide is in deep shock. For many days he does not speak.

Between them they manage to scrape enough money together to buy a small farm outside Venice. Cunegonde's nagging goes from bad to worse. So does the Old Lady's. Pangloss longs for a German university. Paquette continues in the oldest profession, but no longer makes any money. Gradually they come to realize that 'Life is neither good nor bad, life is life, and all we know'.

Eventually Candide speaks again. They have all changed, and everything is different now. They have been foolish and short-sighted, but have learned their lesson now. As Candide asks Cunegonde to marry him, they all acknowledge:

*We're neither pure nor wise nor good,  
We'll do the best we know.  
We'll build our house, and chop our wood,  
And make our garden grow.*

## **THE COMPOSER LEONARD BERNSTEIN**

*I don't want to spend my life, as Toscanini did, studying and restudying the same fifty pieces of music. It would bore me to death. I want to conduct. I want to play*

*the piano. I want to write for Hollywood. I want to keep on trying to be, in the full sense of that wonderful word, a musician.*

- Leonard Bernstein, quoted in the *New York Times*

Leonard Bernstein was a major figure in 20th Century music and brought to its many facets his considerable verve and dramatic exuberance.

As a conductor he led the New York Philharmonic for many years, producing outstanding live performances and recordings. He was also in great demand around the world from many other world-class orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic and the London Symphony.

As a presenter and educator he made classical music accessible to large numbers of people of all backgrounds and abilities, often for the first time in their lives. He enormously expanded the global audience for classical music, popularizing it without ever compromising artistry.

He was also a brilliant concert pianist and a champion of American composers, particularly Aaron Copland, whose *Piano Variations* Bernstein often performed as a young pianist.

But it is as a composer that Bernstein is perhaps best known. His compositions encompass a wide variety of forms, styles and genres. In addition to works for musical theatre such as *West Side Story*, *Candide*, *On The Town* and *Wonderful Town*, there are symphonies, operas, ballets, songs, choral works and much else besides.

## **THE EARLY YEARS**

His father, Sam Bernstein, came to America from Eastern Europe at the age of 16. Sam, a rabbi's son, got a job as a fish cleaner on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, working a 72-hour week for a few dollars. From there he graduated to sweeping the floor in his uncle's barber shop in Hartford, Connecticut, and gradually worked his way up to become a reasonably well-to-do businessman.

The only musicians Sam had known in his boyhood had been klezmers - poor itinerants who would play at weddings and bar mitzvahs. Sam didn't want his son to be a musician.

Louis Bernstein was born on 25 August 1918 in Lawrence, Massachusetts. There being another Louis in the family, however, he soon came to be known by everybody as Leonard. His father always hoped that Leonard would pursue a business career.

Leonard showed early musicality, however, and as well as playing the piano he showed great interest in the theatre, and during his teens adapted and produced shows such as *The Mikado*, and even played the female title role in *Carmen*.

## **INFLUENCES**

As his remarkable talents emerged, Leonard Bernstein went on to study at Harvard with Walter Piston, then at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia with Fritz Reiner and Randall Thompson, then with Serge Koussevitsky at the Berkshire Music Institute at Tanglewood.

At the age of 19 Bernstein went to hear the Boston Symphony conducted by Dmitri Mitropoulos and was completely captivated. Mitropoulos, in his turn, was so impressed on hearing Bernstein play a piano sonata at a reception the next day that he invited Bernstein to come to his rehearsals and concerts. During that period Bernstein became hooked on conducting. Mitropoulos later sent Bernstein some money to come and spend the next winter vacation with him in Minneapolis, and Sam Bernstein later recalled that this was a turning-point in his son's life.

Another important influence on Bernstein's multi-faceted musicianship was George Gershwin. Gershwin had achieved fame and success as a brilliant pianist, as an enormously successful and popular Broadway composer, and also as a composer of 'serious' music such as his piano concerto and the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

Indeed, the thesis that Bernstein produced at Harvard had much to say about the way Gershwin crossed the cultural divide between classical and popular music and brought the jazz idiom and the symphony orchestra together in an entirely natural way. Gershwin's sudden death in 1937 came as a great shock to Bernstein.

The composer Aaron Copland was also a major figure in Bernstein's life. Copland, too, brought the traditional and folk elements of American music to bear upon the Classical and Romantic European styles, and created works that, to many people, seem to sum up what it is to be American.

Copland's taking Bernstein under his wing boded well for Bernstein's future success, and later Bernstein was in turn to become a passionate advocate of Copland's compositions. Bernstein's amazingly vital performances of Copland's works contributed greatly to their appreciation and success.

In the late 1930s the Russian-born Serge Koussevitsky, Music Director of the Boston Symphony, was probably the most highly acclaimed American conductor. In 1940 Koussevitsky launched the enduringly successful Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, a symposium of the finest composers and performers working

with the most promising students during the summer season. The highlight was a masterclass in conducting led by Koussevitsky himself. Bernstein was one of only five students chosen to participate. He became Koussevitsky's star pupil, and was groomed to become his eventual successor.

## **BERNSTEIN AS A CONDUCTOR**

After completing his studies Bernstein was out of work, taking such odd musical jobs as he could find in New York. But Koussevitsky recommended Bernstein for the job of Assistant Conductor at the New York Philharmonic. This was not as grand as it might sound. Apart from conducting the occasional concert, which both press and public routinely ignored, the job of the Assistant Conductor was mainly to understudy the Principal Conductor so that he could take over if needed. This was most unlikely and hadn't happened for many years.

In November, 1943 the great conductor Bruno Walter was to conduct a concert. It would be the highlight of the whole season and Bernstein had brought his parents to New York to attend the concert. But Walter fell ill and the chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic, Artur Rodzinsky, was called upon to substitute. Rodzinsky told them to call Bernstein, at 9am, for a concert to be broadcast live to millions that same afternoon on national radio.

The concert program was a difficult one, but one that the orchestra had already played several times under Bruno Walter and knew well. Bernstein could fairly easily have coasted along, following this highly experienced orchestra and no doubt producing a satisfactory performance.

But that is not what happened. Bernstein created something entirely fresh and new. Those diehard musicians of the New York Philharmonic stood and cheered. The audience went wild. The tremendous ovation seemed never-ending. The occasion was front page news in the next day's *New York Times*.

The event proved to be the start of Bernstein's long and illustrious career as a conductor and recording artist. Having become the youngest person ever to conduct a Philharmonic subscription concert, this 25-year-old American was well on the way to dominating a scene which until then had been very much the preserve of old men from Europe. Sam Bernstein later wryly observed, 'How could I have known that my son would grow up to be Leonard Bernstein?'

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The original title of *Candide* was *Candide, ou l'optimisme* (*Candide, or Optimism*). How does Voltaire deal with the question of optimism in *Candide*?
2. Voltaire considered himself an historian; in 1731 he wrote *History of Charles XII, King of Sweden*, and in 1751 he published a cultural history, *The Age of Louis XIV*. Is *Candide* also an historical work? Did Voltaire intend it to be so?
3. How is religion satirized in *Candide*? Who does Voltaire show as the one "good Christian" in *Candide*?
4. What are Voltaire's views of good and bad governments?
5. How does *Candide* reflect the concerns of the Enlightenment, including humanism, secularism, freedom, morality, and education?
6. For whom did Voltaire write *Candide*? What was his intended audience?
7. How does Voltaire view human nature?
8. What is Voltaire's view of the natural world in *Candide*?