

STUDY GUIDE







SISGUNAS

| 311101 313 | |
|--|----|
| PRODUCTION CREDITS | 4 |
| SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY | 5 |
| GLOSSARY | ε |
| RELIGION | 7 |
| PSYCHOLOGY | 8 |
| BLACK HUMOUR | g |
| ANALYZING TEXT | 10 |
| DESIGN | 11 |
| DISCUSSION QUESTIONS | 13 |
| THE PLAYWRIGHT | 14 |
| THE DIRECTOR | 15 |
| REFERENCES | 16 |
| THEATRE ETIQUETTE | 17 |
| FEEDBACK FORM | 18 |



SYNOPSIS *SPOILER ALERT*

KEMP arrives at the decrepit old house of his elderly and estranged aunt **GRACE** in early spring, having quit his job at a bank upon receiving the news that she only has a few days left to live. He immediately begins taking care of the logistics of death, from what she would like done with her body to what he should wear to the funeral. He also addends her will, leaving everything to himself.

As weeks pass, Kemp becomes impatient for Grace's death and his conversation becomes nostalgic and abstract. Meanwhile, Grace begins knitting a sweater. Kemp observes a conspicuous lack of pictures of him in her house and remembers the aunt of his youth as a glamorous phantom who disappointed him by leaving him behind to face the difficult youth of an outsider.

During the summer, Kemp spends much of his time standing at the window of Grace's living room judging the neighborhood children and her elderly neighbour across the street who sits unmoving at her window. Watching the children on his birthday, Kemp remembers his youth and the neglect of the adults in it which he credits with his current misanthropy.

Autumn falls and Kemp is reminded of his brief foray into fanatical Christianity at a boarding school he was sent to when he began cross-dressing. He related to Catholicism in an intensely masochistic way, ultimately getting expelled and returning home to work in his manic-depressive father's magic shop while he received homeschooling from a private tutor.

At Hallowe'en, Grace celebrates by eating candy while Kemp hides from trick-ortreaters and reveals that he is asexual.

Kemp builds a suicide machine and rigs it around Grace's bed. He remembers his mother's death and last-minute conversion to Hare-Krishna. Grace pulls the machine's lever to bash Kemp on Christmas Eve. Christmas energizes Grace while Kemp displays a restrained amount of celebration.

In the new year, Kemp brings Grace poisoned pudding, but with regret, and doesn't allow her to eat it.

** Realizing that he has been with Grace for over a year, Kemp attempts to kill himself. Grace does her best to stop him but is too weak. Instead, his attempt is interrupted by the police at the door. They have come to inform the household that the elderly lady across the street has died—in fact she has been dead for some time. Kemp realizes that the still figure across the street is the aunt he meant to visit a year ago to tend to in her last days, and that Grace is a stranger. Kemp leaves, but cannot stay away, realizing that the past year in each other's company has forged a connection. Grace finishes knitting the sweater she began the year before.

Kemp plans a trip with Grace, but before she can agree to come, she dies in her chair. Kemp puts the too-small sweater on and mourns her death.



PRODUCTION CREDITS

PLAYWRIGHT DIRECTOR

Morris Panych Martin Faucher

CREW

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
FRENCH TRANSLATOR (for Rideau Vert)
SET DESIGNER
COSTUME DESIGNER
LIGHTING DESIGNER
ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER (Segal)
PROPS
WIGS
MAKEUP

Elaine Normandeau Maryse Warda Jonas Bouchard Linda Brunelle Marc Parent Cedric Franc Alain Jenkins Rachel Tremblay Jacques-Lee Pelletier

CAST
KEMP (Segal)
GRACE

Marcel Jeannin Kim Yaroshevskaya



SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

RELATIONSHIPS AND CHANGES OVER TIME

How can an extended separation from someone alter your memories of them?

How does spending a lot of time with someone change your relationship?

How can you reconcile these two statements: Out of sight; out of mind and Absence makes the heart grow fonder?

DEATH AND MEMORY

How can death and dying change the way you feel about people? Why is it that we remember people more fondly when they die? How are memories from your childhood different from memories that you form as an adult?

PARENTING AND FAMILIES

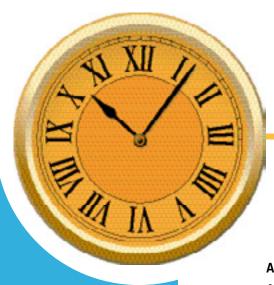
What are some obligations you feel towards relatives? Why do you think you feel them?

What are the most important things a parent or guardian can do to raise a well-adjusted child?

What are the most destructive?

SEXUALITY AND IDENTITY

Do you believe sexual orientation and gender identity can be formed by experiences, or is it something more innate?



GLOSSARY

VIGIL. /vijəl/ n., 1. A devotional watching over, particularily on the eve of a festival or event. 2. The recitation at a nocturnal service for the dead. 3. A night watch, as for guards, also used for the location from which to watch. 4. An occasion of staying awake for a long period of time.

ABSCONDED v. conj., concealed, hid away; eluded.

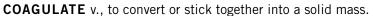
AMARYLLIS n., a Bulbous flowering plant (right).

ANAESTHETIZE v., to render insensible.

ANGUISH n., excruciating or oppressive bodily or mental pain or suffering.

BERSERK adj., out of control with anger or excitement; wild or frenzied.

BLUDGEON n., a short stick or club with one end heavier than the other, used as a weapon. v., to strike with a bludgeon or similar weapon.



CREMATE v., to burn, to consume by fire to reduce (a corpse) to ashes.

EAVESDROPPING v., listening secretly to a private conversation.

EFFEMINATE adj., that has become like a woman; womanish; feeble.

EXCRUCIATING adj., causing intense pain, discomfort, or anguish.

FERVENT adj., hot, burning; ardent, intensely earnest.

FIDUCIARY TRUST n., an economic relationship in which one party is responsible for the assets of another.

HUDDLE v., to crowd together closely and unceremoniously.

INADVERTENTLY adv., without due attention or thought, negligently.

INEXORABLY adj., in a way that will not be persuaded or changed by entreaty, rigidly severe.

INTERMINABLE adj., cannot be bounded or ended; endless; infinite.

MEAGRE adj., deficient or mean in quality, quantity, or size; poor, scanty.

MORTICIAN n., the job title of the person concerned with arranging a funeral, including the peservation of the body; an undertaker.

MUFF n., a covering of fur and cylindrical in shape into which both hands may be put to keep them warm.

MUMPS n., a contagious disease characterized by the swelling of the neck and cheeks.

RANCID adj., having the unpleasant or disagreeable smell or taste of something no longer fresh.

RIGOR MORTIS n., the stiffening of the body following death.

SUPPOSITORIES n. pl., a plug of conical or cylindrical shape to be introduced into the rectum in order to stimulate the bowels into action.

SURVIVED, OUTLIVED, OUTLASTED vs., euphemism. To live longer than; to live through, to live past.

TAXIDERMIST n., a stuffer of dead animals for preservation, and so as present the appearance and countenance of the living animal.

TEAMSTER n., one who drives or owns a team. In the past, a team was a group of horses, such as those pulling a carriage. Today, 'teamster' refers primarily to truck drivers.



RELIGION

" I turned humiliation and prostration into an art form...

...Religion is something in the blood, after all. "

Contrary to the appeal to imagination that one might assume, early analysis of the psychological basis for religious fanaticism in children finds that conformity and rules are the most attractive aspect, and actual reverence and awe among the least*. While Kemp, as it turned out, did not believe in God, the doctrines of Catholocism held a gret deal of appeal to him.

We see this in Kemp's early attraction to Catholicism. He describes his reaction to the emotionally detached aesthetics of his boarding school, "The cruel stone edifice, and those stern, thin-lipped nuns..." as one of comfort, recognition, and bewilderment. Although the catechism is inexplicable to him, he gravitates towards the rituals of "misery and self-loathing."

Kemp engages in **sadomasochistic** behaviour that causes him pain and deprives him of basic human functions, such as a 12-day "vow of paralysis." **Penitence** does not necessitate violence or pain, and can consist of nothing more than an earnest apology. It is not uncommon, however, for non-heterosexual individuals to feel the weight of that sin against God so accutely that violent physical punishment is the only way to reconcile the conscious, learned morality of Catholcism with their unaccepted and perhaps non-traditional desires.

Additionally, one of the mechanisms that Kemp uses to cope with the imminent death of a family member is the planning of her funeral. Ritualized **funerary rites** are a basic and universal expression of spiritual impulses. Kemp conceives of two ritualistic actions to memorialize Grace. The first, fertilizing an amaryllis with her cremated remains, symbolizes rebirth or reincarnation. The second, snuffing out a candle, signifies the end of life. Kemp concerns himself early on with what he will wear to the funeral and what the content of his speech will be. Set in this context, this concern with seemingly superficial etiquette speaks to both Kemp's social difficulty and to the formulaic nature of funerary rites.



PSYCHOLOGY

"It's just that the longer you stay alive -I mean-not that you should die, but the more you get to know me, it seems, the worse I get."

(Kemp, Scene 6.)

It is clear that Kemp hates himself. As he is revealed to us through the diatribes he delivers, we begin to understand the origins of this self-loathing.

His parents were absent and withholding. When the **gender identity** that he grew into was opposed to **social norms**, his mother tried to understand it in simpler terms that ultimately just embarassed him; this encouraged a homosexual identity as opposed to an **asexual** transvestite one with which the adult Kemp identifies.

Perhaps the most heartbreaking story from his childhood is the one in which he hides for a day, pretending to have run away. Upon his return, he discovers that his parents had not noticed his absence but had instead mourned the disappearance of the family cat. Kemp talks about people's fondness for their pets, and hypothesizes that being needed gives people a sense of **self-worth**.

Unsurprisingly, following an upbringing that was severly lacking in praise, love, personal connections, or even basic attention, Kemp develops **defense mechanisms**. He engages in **sadomasochism** as a teenager, inventing most of the sins that he punishes himself for. As an adult, these aggressive tendancies turn outward and manifest themselves in his pervasive **misanthropy**.

Grace is lonely by circumstance and Kemp is lonely by choice. The psychological component of *Vigil* is the meeting of these two lonely people. The bond of loneliness between them becomes a human connection that cancels itself out and cannot, ultimately, survive.



BLACK HUMOUR

Also called "Gallows" or "Dark" comedy or humour, this genre fixates on the trivialization of death and of the victims' sufferings, offering humour through the **sympathetic portrayal of the villainous character**.

The term "black humor" (or "I'humour noir") as a literary concept was coined by Andre Breton in 1935 in an anthology that cited dozens of literary excerpts from writers, the earliest of which was Jonathan Swift. It focused largely on **surrealists**, and was banned immediately by the Vichy government. It was reprinted for circulation in 1947 and again in 1966.

In 1965 an American anthology of black humour edited by Bruce Jay Friedman was published. The American history of black humour remembers the 1960s as a heyday, in which writers strove to go a little bit further than simple **satire**. Literary theorist Patrick O'Neill says that black humour depicts a life that "is a labyrinth, multiple, meaningless, and endless, and the black humorist reacts vicariously with...all-embracing endgames."*

The humour of *Vigil* is derived from hyperbole--the heinous turned hilarious through exaggeration. Kemp is not just antisocial but more antisocial than anyone you have ever met. He is straightforward to the point of insult, and changes the subject to the macabre so often and so instantly that there is nothing to do but laugh.

There are elements of slapstick, or physical, humour in *Vigil*. Slapstick humour is often quite dark, because the physicality of it might be quite violent, people might get hurt, and yet the audience laughs. Kemp's exaggerated, bodily reactions stand in contrast to the earnest stories he tells. Grace's actions are the only communication she has for the first hour of the play, empowering her to interact with Kemp, develop a personality, and get her own laughs before she says a word.

^{*} O'Neill, Patrick. "The Comedy of Entropy: The Contexts of Black Humour." *Canadian Review of Comaprative Literature* 10.2 (June 1983): 145-166. Republished in in Bloom, Harold, ed. *Dark Humor.* Infobase Publishing: New York, 2010. (79-104)



ANALYZING TEXT

"That's the thing that always gets me.
People want so much to live."
(Kemp, scene 13.)

PACING

The sentences in this excerpt become increasingly long.

Short, clipped phrases at the beginning emphasize the comedy of the monologue and force a slower pace when the lines are spoken.

As Kemp turns nostalgic, his thoughts become longer and more meandering, and begin with conjunctions, granting the actor more choice of how he will deliver each thought.

Read this passage aloud to observe how punctuation can determine the pacing of a play.

What might a writer do differently for a text that was intended to be read rather than spoken?

Look at her. Still sitting there. Who's her taxidermist, I wonder. (Pause) My God it's Spring. (Watching below) You ought to see this poor man limping through the slush. (He laughs a little, turning back into the room) Spring. (Pause) I used to love this season when I was a kid. I didn't have to skate anymore. You can't imagine what I looked like. I had a pair of white lace-ups. And a little white muff. I was so unhappy. Not because I looked like a girl. But because I wasn't one. I won't explain that. I never skated, of course. I just skidded around like Bambi. Or stood at the side, with the snow coming down all around, watching these parents push their precious children along the ice, and wishing it would all just...melt. "

Scene 9

people...before ...real they shrivel away and die that is, exude a kind of sickening... mist from their pores. Carbon dioxide, mixed with desperation. I can often smell it on an elevator. Disguised under all that rancid cologne, and stale cigarette smoke. Desperation. Lining crowding in. Pushing. People wanting. Desperately. To go. To pass. To cross. To enter. To live. To live! That's the thing that always gets me. People want to much to live. "

Scene 13

SYNTAX

Note the adjectives in this passage, such as "sickening" and "rancid." The contrast between Kemp's dismissive attitude about death and his intense hyperbolic feelings about life are at the core of Kemp's misanthropy, and are fundamental to the humour of the play. By describing a quotidian experience, such as riding a crowded elevator, in these severe terms, Kemp is rendered at once sociopathic and also, oddly likable.

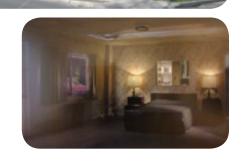
By including a list of synonyms, the audience is encouraged to think along these lines as they watch the play in real time.

What images come to mind as you read this passage?



DESIGN: COMING UP WITH A CONCEPT







Jonas Bouchard started his set design for *Vigil* by looking at simple stock images of real spaces that fulfilled the requirements of the script.

The set has to do more than fulfil requirements, it also has to express the atmosphere of the piece. Bouchard drew inspiration from the photographs of Gregory Crewdson.









DESIGN: FROM CONCEPT TO STAGE

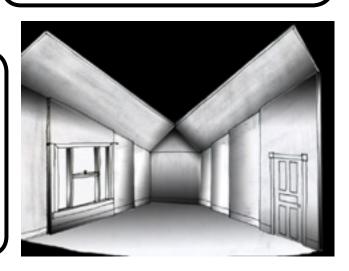
He asks himself, what is it that makes those images so haunting, and how can that be applied to a stage set? Compare the angles and composition of Crewdson's work with these sketches by Bouchard.





Note how the archetypal stock images on the previous pages combine with the fine-art photography. A theatre designer has the obligation to represent a space in a way that can be understood easily and instantly, but also to evoke the abstract emotions of the text as well as the director's vision of it. Additionally, he must constantly bear in mind the fundamental role of a set: to provide the actors a place to move so that the audience can see them. Together with the lighting, props, and paint, a literal space is described that evokes the themes, emotion, and passage of time that the text requires.

Remember also that this stage set was installed at Théâtre du Rideau Vert first, which is an entirely different space from the Segal Centre. Sight-lines must be considered as well as the technical cababilites of both theatres.







How did the set, lighting, props, costumes, music, and sound add to the play? Describe the atmosphere of the theatre and of the stage.

In the absence of any evidence that Grace is wealthy, why does Kemp rush to her side?

When Grace's health begins to improve, why does Kemp stay?

Discuss the dichotomy of disrespect (what he says) and reverence (what he does). How do you reconcile this?

Why is Kemp's suitcase empty? Why doesn't Kemp buy more clothes?

Grace is almost entirely silent during this play. Initially, this silence is a result of her being frightened by a strange man in her bedroom.

What does Grace's initial fear and subsequent acceptance tell us about her character?

Is the audience meant to understand that she is mute in the reality of the play as well?

Is Kemp obessed with death, or simply practical about it?

How is the vow of paralysis Kemp took as a teenager like an **imitation** of death?

Do you believe that Kemp's biography contains the origin of his sexuality as he describes it? Or do you believe that it is a defense mechanism and further evidence of his misanthropy?

What is the relevance of Kemp's sexuality to Vigil as a work?

What are the specific changes and realizations caused by Kemp's year with Grace that make him want to travel?

76543 MO

THE PLAYWRIGHT

46 I sense that to illustrate through theatre a multiplicity of truths, is to allow the audience to begin to reclaim truths of its own. To look at a play and say, 'this a pretence invented out of nothing. These characters are trapped inside problems that don't even exist,' and vet to remain committed to that reality for a time just for the hell of it, to begin to understand what the power of theatre is. Not to mention life. The power to question. . .

-Morris Panych, Canadian Theatre Review 76 [1993]:58-59 **MORRIS PANYCH** was born in Edmonton, Alberta, and has university degrees in both Radio and Television Arts and Creative Writing. He also attended the East 15 acting school in London, England. He is based in Vancouver and Toronto.

His first play, Last Call - A Postnuclear Cabaret was produced in 1982, and his most recent, In Absentia, premiered in 2012 at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal. SideMart Theatrical Grocery premiered Gordon at the Segal Centre in 2010

Panych's plays are known for their tender handling of the human spirit within extraordinarily macabre situations, as well as for their humour. His themes are existential and call on the traditions of the Theatre of the Absurd. His locations are generic and his characters are trapped in them by problems of their own creation.

SELECTED WORK:

In Absentia (2012)
Gordon (2010)
The Trespassers (2009)
What Lies Before Us (2007)
The Dishwashers (2007)
Girl in the Goldfish Bowl (2002)
Earshot (2001)
Lawrence and Holloman (1998)
The Overcoat (1998)
Vigil (1995)
Life Science (1993)
The Ends of the Earth (1992)
2B WUT UR (1992)

2B WUT UR (1992)
The Necassary Steps (1991)

Cost of Living (1990)

7 Stories (1989)

Simple Folk, Songs of a Generation (1987)* Cheap Sentiment (1985)*

Contagious (1984)*

Last Call - A Postnuclear Cabaret (1982)*

*With Ken MacDonald



THE DIRECTOR

46 With Vigil, Morris Panych gives us a story that is deceptively cruel and cynical, where disgust gives way to reconciliation and tenderness. Vigil is the story of flowers that have been trampled and flowers that bloom; and of a child of uncertain age, who asks only to flourish, despite the devestation that others could make him suffer.

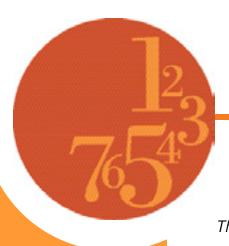
-Martin Faucher, for Théâtre du Rideau Vert, 2012. (trans. L.L.) Beginning as an actor with the Option Theatre of Cégep Sainte-Hyacinthe in 1982, **MARTIN FAUCHER** began directing in 1988 when he adapted a number of works by the Quebecois novelist Réjean Ducharme. The piece, titled À quelle heure on meurt?, won the "révélation de l'année" prize from the Quebec Association of Theatre Critics. Now, with over 30 local and international productions under his directorial belt, Faucher has garnered a reputation for his emphasis on text and lyric. He was president of the



Conseil Québécois du théâtre from 2005 to 2009 and has been artistic consultant for the festival de théâtre TransAmériques since 2006.

He was last welcomed at the Segal Centre in 2010 when he directed *Old Wicked Songs* in another co-production with Théâtre du Rideau Vert. He is currently working on three other projects as well.

SELECTED WORK:



WORK REFERENCED & FURTHER READING

The Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1971.

RELIGION

Bendann, Effie. *Death Customs: An Analytical Study of Burial Rites*. Knopf, New York: 1930. (reprint Kessinger Pub.: 2003)

Charmé, Stuart L. "Religion and the Theory of Masochism." *Journal of Religion and Health*. Vol. 22, No. 3 (Fall 1983): (221-233).

Evans, Amie M. "Fragments from a Catholic School Girl's Memory." Evans, Amie M., and Healy, Trebor, eds. *Queer and Catholic*. Routledge, New York: 2008.

PSYCHOLOGY

Starbuck, Edwin D. *Contributions to the Psychology of Religion*. The American Journal of Psychology. Vol. 9, No. 1 (Oct. 1897).

COMEDY

Wikepedia Contributors. "Black Comedy." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia.* 23 Feb 2012. Web 24 February 2012.

O'Neill, Patrick. "The Comedy of Entropy: The Contexts of Black Humour." *Canadian Review of Comaprative Literature* 10.2 (June 1983): 145-166. Republished in in Bloom, Harold, ed. *Dark Humor.* Infobase Publishing: New York, 2010.

Sonowal, Kabita. "How to identify some Gallows Humour." *BookChums*. Web. 22 Feb. 2012.

PRODUCTION

Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia. www.canadiantheatre.com

Donnelly, Pat. "Keeping watch over translation of Panych." The Gazette 11 Feb 2012. Web 13 Feb. 2012.

Pineo, Barry. "Vigil: Shining Through." *The Austin Chronicle*. 13 Sep. 2002. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Rizzo, Frank. "Vigil." Variety. 3 Mar. 2008. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Smith, Janet. "Panych returns to stage after long hiatus." *Straight.com.* 11 Jan. 2007. Web 9 Feb. 2012.

Many thanks to M. Jonas Bouchard for sharing his design images (pages 11-12).



THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Please take a moment to prepare your students or group for their visit to the Segal Centre. Explain to them what is meant by good theatre etiquette and why a few simple courtesies will enhance the enjoyment of the play for all audience members.

- 1. Vigil will be performed in the main theatre of the Segal Centre. Performances at the Segal are for both groups and the general public. It is important that everyone be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance, so that others do not lose their immersion in the "world of the play". Please do not unwrap candy, or play with zippers or with your programme.
- 2. Do not put your feet on the back of the seat in front of you and please do not climb over seats.
- 3. If you plan to take notes on the play for the purpose of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance. Seeing you do this can be distracting for the actors. Please wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections.
- 4. Use of phones or cameras is strictly prohibited inside the theatre. Absolutely no photos or video may be taken without the express consent of management. Composing or reading text messages is forbidden.
- 5. Use of cell phones, iPods, tablets, or other self-illuminating electronics is strictly prohibited in the theatre. The light from these devices is visible from the stage and in the audience. It is extremely distracting to the artists on stage and inconsiderate to your fellow audience members.
- 6. Your seat is only guaranteed until the moment the theatre doors close. Late entry is very disruptive; if a patron is tardy we ask that they please follow the instructions of our front-of-house staff.
- 7. ENJOY THE SHOW!



THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

| It wou | ld be a pleasure to he | ear about y | our expe | rience (| of bringi | ng yo | ur group to the play |
|--------|---|-------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| 1. | How would you rat Extremely positive | | erience? 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Extremely stressfu |
| 2. | How much do you Very much | feel your g 1 | group ber 2 | nefited 3 | from the | expe 5 | erience? Very Little |
| 3. | Would you recomm Wholeheartedly | nend the ex | xperienc 2 | e to oth 3 | er group 4 | lead 5 | ders? Never |
| 4. | Will you consider b Wholeheartedly | oringing a g 1 | group to to | the thea | atre agai 4 | n? 5 | Never |
| 5. | What did you enjoy | / most abo | ut comin | g to see | e the pla | ıy? | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| 6. | What aspect of cor | ning to the | theatre | did you | find pro | blen | natic? |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| We we | elcome all additional | comments | i. | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | D 1 1 |

Reply to: Lucie Lederhendler, Educational Outreach and Group Sales Coordinator Segal Centre for Performing Arts Ilederhendler@segalcentre.org Tel: 514.739.2301 ext. 8360

Fax: 514.739.9340



5170 chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine Montréal (Québec) H3W 1M7

www.segalcentre.org

For inquiries, please contact
Lucie Lederhendler
Educational Outreach and Group Sales Coordinator
Ilederhendler@segalcentre.org
tel: 514.739.2301 #8360
fax: 514.739.9340