

Fiddler on the Roof, based on Sholom Aleichem's short story "Tevye's Daughters," set in a world of persecution and poverty, is essentially about the struggle to hold on to one's beliefs and traditions in the midst of a hostile and chaotic environment.

Set in 1905 in Anatevka, a small Ukrainian Jewish village in Russia, Fiddler on the Roof tells the story of Tevye, a milkman, and his attempts to preserve his family's traditions in the face of a changing world ("Tradition"). Tevye, a religious man who frequently converses with God, refers to the "fiddler on the roof" as all the people of Anatevka--"trying to scratch out a simple tune without breaking their necks".

Despite the larger problems arising between the Russian cossacks (soldiers) and the Jewish villagers, Tevye is concerned with his stern yet loving wife, Golde and their five daughters for whom he must find husbands. This is done with the help of Yente, the Matchmaker ("Matchmaker, Matchmaker"). This proves to be difficult as he cannot provide a dowry for his daughters ("If I Were A Rich Man"). Tzeitel, the eldest, begs to marry a poor tailor, Motel Kamzoil, rather than the aging butcher, Lazar Wolf, to whom Tevye has already committed her. Forced to choose between his daughter's happiness and the customs of their tiny village, Tevye honors his daughter's request ("Miracle of Miracles"). In order to get Golde, his wife, to agree, Tevye pretends that Lazar Wolf's first wife, Fruma Sarah, came to him in a dream and instructed him to stop Tzeitel from marrying the butcher ("The Dream"). The wedding takes place ("Sunrise, Sunset") but is cut short when Russian soldiers break up the celebration ("Wedding Dance").

After the wedding, Hodel, the second, asks for her father's blessing to marry her true love, Perchik, a revolutionary student. Perchik is arrested, and Hodel travels to Siberia to await his release ("Far From The Home I Love"). Chava, the third daughter, requests her father's permission to marry Fyedka, a non-Jewish Russian soldier. Although Tevye refuses, she disobeys and secretly marries him. When Chava begs acceptance from her father, he clings fast to the tradition that has led him throughout his life and disowns her ("Chaveleh").

The townspeople are evicted from their homes and are forced to leave the village. Tevye, his two youngest daughters, and Golde leave the village for a brighter future in America (“Anatevka”). They are followed closely behind by the fiddler, as he plays his one and only theme ...