

## **BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES**

As a New Yorker working in California, Marc Wolf witnessed the September 11 attacks in the way that most Americans did: from a distant television. Determined to make meaning out of the catastrophe, he sets out on a journey across the country, which culminates at Ground Zero. Along the way, he interviews people with diverse backgrounds and even more diverse points of view. Some respond to September 11 with anger or despair; others with hope and determination. But while their responses vary, the depth of their emotion does not. The terrorists, Wolf discovers, struck us all. From this shared experience, he creates an opportunity for reflection and re-membering.

### **OBJECTIVES**

Students will:

1. Identify key issues in *The Road Home: Re-Membering America* including:
  - from loss to hope
  - the road trip
  - the margins and the mainstream
  - the healing power of art
2. Relate themes and issues of the play to their own lives.
3. Analyze the themes and issues within the historical and social context of the play.
4. Participate in hands-on activities that enhance understanding of the production.
5. Evaluate the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *The Road Home: Remembering America*.

## PREPARATION FOR *The Road Home: Re-Membering America*

### POST 9/11

As an overview, read aloud “Theatrical Responses to Crisis: The Road Home and 9/11” (P.X.) from the literary guide, which briefly discusses works created in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Then read aloud “The American Road Trip as Literary Genre” (P.X.), also in the literary guide. In groups, ask students to discuss the ways in which writing a play based on an actual historical event or tragedy differs from writing a piece of fiction. When creating a play based on a series of interviews, how does the playwright decide what to keep and what to edit out? Have students draft a well-planned paragraph based on their discussions. Ask students to share their paragraphs with the class. Create a list of any themes or main ideas that emerge.

### KEY ISSUES

#### *From Loss to Hope*

Pervading Wolf’s play is the sense of loss that Americans felt in the wake of September 11. Even those who did not lose someone they knew in the attacks were devastated by the loss of the mighty twin towers as they disintegrated from the New York City skyline. And beyond those tangible losses were the intangible ones: loss of security, loss of respect, loss of faith. But Wolf’s play suggests that we have not lost everything. One man optimistically predicts that the next Martin Luther King, Jr. might even emerge from the emotional wreckage of September 11 to bring about a new movement toward social justice. Where others see loss, he sees reason for hope. This juxtaposition has deep literary roots. One of the most striking contrasts in all of literature is between two epic poems: Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. To Milton, being ejected from Eden and thrust into this imperfect world was a terrifying punishment for humanity. But to Wordsworth, it was an exhilarating opportunity. Consider the ways in which Wolf’s play also depicts the paradise lost on September 11 as a prelude to something better.

#### *The Road Trip*

At the heart of many celebrated works of literature—among them *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and more recently Jack Kerouac’s famous *On the Road*—is a long journey. To understand these journeys as mere shifts in geography would be to miss their important symbolic dimensions. The traveling is mental as much as physical. So it is with Marc Wolf’s road trip across America in the wake of September 11. His journey represents the passage of many Americans during that time: we wanted to make sense of what we had seen, to comfort those who suffered, and to settle upon a new path. How does Wolf’s act of taking a road trip help American citizens move toward accomplishing those goals? Why might it be important to hear what people hundreds of miles away from Ground Zero worried about on September 12?

### *The Margins and the Mainstream*

The terrorists who attacked America on September 11 were young Muslims who perceived themselves as marginalized, both economically and culturally, by Western capitalism. They struck at what they perceived to be the center of the capitalist mainstream, New York City's financial district. But *The Road Home* reveals that the relationship between the margins and the mainstream is an incredibly complex one—perhaps more complex than the terrorists realized. In some ways, the attacks only furthered the marginalization of Muslims and other perceived foreigners. More than one of Wolf's interviewees mentioned racial profiling, for example. One man could not even look at the ubiquitous American flags without being reminded of the infamous Confederate flag that still casts division throughout the South. Yet in other ways, the attacks brought together those in the margins and the mainstream, forcing all Americans to confront a shared reality of suffering and insecurity. The play's references to Dr. King serve as a poignant reminder that the marginalized can make inroads on the mainstream without resorting to violence. How might that goal be accomplished at this moment in history?

### *The Healing Power of Art*

Many plays, books, and movies were inspired by September 11. While ranging from overtly political (for example, *Fahrenheit 9/11*) to more reflective (Wolf's play), most of these works seem to share a common goal: healing the wounds that the attacks created. Can artistic expression help not only the artist, but also the audience, to process a traumatic event? Assuming that art can promote healing, what is the best way of doing so? The coalminer's widow tells Wolf that already "we are forgetting" September 11, which from her perspective is not such a bad thing. But at the end of the play, the architecture critic speaks of "re-membering," which Wolf takes as his subtitle. Which, if any, aspects of September 11 would be best forgotten? Which, if any, aspects need to be remembered in order for the wounds to heal?

## OPEN RESPONSE AND WRITING

### Open Response Assessment

Instructions to the students: Please answer the following as thoroughly as possible in a well-planned and carefully written essay. Remember to use topic sentences and examples from the text.

1. The play is entitled *The Road Home: Re-Membering America*. What does “re-membering” mean, and why did this word become such an important part of Marc Wolf’s project?
2. Why did Wolf include the reactions of foreign citizens in his play?
3. Consider how the play flows from one scene to the next. For example, one scene ends with a prediction that September 11 might produce the next Martin Luther King, Jr., and the following scene takes place at a museum dedicated to Dr. King. Which other connections did you notice in Wolf’s transitions from scene to scene?
4. Why do you think did being outside New York City on September 11 exacerbated the pain for those who lost friends and relatives on that day? Why was Wolf desperate to return to the city?
5. If you were to write a play about September 11, using interviews as your starting point, would you create a solo performance piece? How does creating a one-person show affect the execution of the play?

### Writing Assignments

1. Do you think *The Road Home: Re-Membering America* is a political play? Why or why not?
2. Considering the interviews as a whole, do you think these people are caught up with “the little things” or does their perspective seem reasonable given the shock of September 11?
3. Use one of the following lines from *The Road Home: Re-Membering America* as a topic for a short essay:

“Banishment is worse than death.”

“The religion of our time is Capitalism. And the symbol was ... The World Trade Center.”

“Because people in New York think there’s only New York!”

“...Like Islam got hijacked that night—or that day.”

“There’s a dismemberment, and then there’s some kind of re-member, re-memberment, uh or re-membering ... remembering ... that happens and this cycle is necessary for the continuity of life.”

4. Choose one of the interviewees in *The Road Home: Re-Membering America*, and write a journal entry from the point of view of this character, expanding on what we already know about him or her. Imagine how September 11 might affect them one, five or ten years later.
5. In the play’s first interview, a man from the Pacific Northwest laments that suburban Americans are unwilling to reduce their oil consumption, which he blames for September 11. What, if anything, have Americans sacrificed in hopes of preventing more attacks? In your opinion, should they do more?
6. Write a critical review of the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of *The Road Home: Re-Membering America* and submit it for publication in your school newspaper. Be sure to send the Huntington a copy!

## MASTERY ASSESSMENT

1. In the first scene, where is the interviewer going? What does he hope to accomplish during his trip?
2. According to Peter, what must suburban Americans do to put an end to the hostilities that caused September 11?
3. What story had the daughter, Eartha, heard about a September 11 survivor?
4. What story did her father tell her, leading her to offer beans from her garden to the interviewer?
5. Why does Lara have “more respect for all those old white men who [she] couldn’t stand before”? Why does she feel like she can relate to the people who personally suffered on September 11?
6. Why does Judy distrust the government? Describe her conspiracy theory.
7. Why, according to the German hitchhiker, is America “behind”? What things does he like and dislike about America?
8. Why, according to Adriana, is New York City a place where a foreigner would not feel “judged”? How does she think the city might have changed after September 11?
9. What symbolism does Raja, the Malaysian man from the healing center, attach to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center? Whose “Temple” were the twin towers?
10. How does the traveling salesman feel about the sale of American flags after September 11? What does he think the continued use of the confederate flag reveals about people in the South?
11. Why was the storeowner called by his middle name, Israel?
12. Why is it uncomfortable for the dentist to travel by airplane?
13. The dentist hopes that September 11 will produce the modern-day equivalent of one of America’s greatest men. Who is that man?
14. From what reality was the museum visitor shielded? How would a parent “teach hate”?
15. In his final speech right before he was assassinated, Dr. Martin Luther King recalled the only letter that he read and remembered after being stabbed and

nearly dying in New York City a few years before. Why did this letter make such an impression on him?

16. According to the coalminer's widow, why are the lawsuits after a coalmining accident difficult for the families?
17. What famous play is Jack reading? Who wrote it?
18. Why does Grace believe New York City became the target of a major terror attack?
19. Why did Sal feel like he could not go to work at the hair salon? Describe the client who insisted on keeping her appointment.
20. Why did Sal get into a fight with his boss? How was it resolved?
21. What is the architecture critic's theory about the cycle of life?
22. What does the interviewer envision himself "throwing . . . into the void at Ground Zero"? Answer the question from the final line, "In our dismembered American ground . . . what will we grow?"

## **MEDIA ASSESSMENT**

The following exercises are interactive, hands-on challenges in Drama, Music, Visual Arts, and Design. They aim to give students a better understanding of the many kinds of tasks that contribute to a theatrical production.

### *Drama*

Ask each student to choose a character to portray. As if they were preparing for the role in rehearsal, ask them to answer the following questions:

- a. How does an actor's body language affect the performance?
- b. How does the tone of voice change the meaning of what an actor says?
- c. How does the timing of a line affect how it is received?

### *Creating Character*

In addition to the questions above, ask students to think about how they will shape their character portrayal by considering the following questions:

- a. What do I want to express to the interviewer?
- b. What, if anything, do I want to hide from the interviewer?
- c. Does my character have a change of heart or an epiphany during the interview?
- d. What are the contradictions inherent in my character?

### *Music*

Ask each student to choose a song that reflects the themes of *The Road Home: Re-Membering America*. In groups of three or four, select one song. Each student should then create a gesture or pose representing the musical choice. Linking the gestures and poses together, ask students to create a short piece of choreography. Students should be given time to rehearse their dance before sharing it with the class.

### *Visual Art*

After reading *The Road Home: Re-Membering America*, ask students to create a symbolic piece that reflects the message of the play, and encourage them to keep the key ideas in mind. Students should craft their work from the materials they find in their bags, lockers and in the classroom. After students have completed this task, they should display their "found art" on their desks. As if taking a tour of museum, students should circulate through the classroom, asking the artists questions about their work and how it relates to the play.

## *Design*

If you were given the task of choosing the design for the buildings to replace the twin towers, what would it look like? Ask students to research the professional design proposals and select their favorite. (They can begin their search by looking at the following website: [http://www.lowermanhattan.info/rebuild/new\\_design\\_plans/](http://www.lowermanhattan.info/rebuild/new_design_plans/)). What should this new structure represent, and how should it fit into the New York City skyline? (Some families of the September 11 victims have voiced disapproval of the planned memorial. Briefly research the controversy and its merits. Offer a design solution to resolve this problem for extra credit)

## FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

1. *The Road Home* briefly mentions the last speech ever given by Martin Luther King, Jr., entitled “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” Locate the speech online and read it. Focus on the following passage: “Another reason that I’m happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we’re going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demand didn’t force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it’s nonviolence or nonexistence . . . [I]f something isn’t done, and in a hurry to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed.” Are the same things true today? What similarities and differences in politics, economics, social and cultural lifestyles do you see in the almost-forty years since this speech was delivered?
2. In August 2005, a very different kind of tragedy befell America: Hurricane Katrina. Unlike the September 11 attacks, which targeted one of the wealthiest areas in the country, Hurricane Katrina damaged the homes and lives of those in less affluent areas throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. By all accounts, the U.S. government responded slowly and inadequately to the crisis. How was the U.S. government’s response to September 11 different from its response to Hurricane Katrina? How was your own response different? Which of those differences were justified, and which were not?
3. A daughter and father were interviewed on Marc Wolf’s journey home. The young girl had heard a story about a survivor of the World Trade Center attacks. Why do you think this rumor spread among school-aged children? How and why are these stories born? How might they help individuals cope with the harsh realities of life? Were you aware of any improbably stories/miracles told regarding September 11<sup>th</sup> or any other tragedy?
4. Earlier this year, after a Danish newspaper printed cartoons depicting controversial images of the prophet Muhammad, angry Muslims took to the streets with violent protests. Do you think it is inappropriate to satirize religion, or should freedom of speech and freedom of the press trump the personal preferences of religious people? Do you think it was a good decision for most American news outlets to avoid printing the cartoons, or did the violent protesters block freedom of expression through fear and intimidation?

## **VOCABULARY**

Propaganda

Embargo

Taliban

Pompous

Surreal

Comrades

Munitions

Metropolitan

Pilgrimage

Incense

Citadel

Pentecostal

Flamboyant

Banishment

Purgatory

Pretentious

Curt

Modus operandus

Totem

Pagan

Mausoleum

Cacophony

## HANDOUT 2

### PORTRAITURE: Creating a Picture through Words

Portraiture is often described as both an art and science, blending scientific analysis with personal reflection. Through regular interviewing and observation, a writer obtains the necessary information to portray her subject accurately, but also creatively, through a written work.

You will create a written portrait by selecting a subject and then interviewing the individuals close to it. The possibilities are endless! For example, you may choose to capture a pivotal moment in your family history, or a winning season for your athletic team. The idea is to choose an event, person, or institution that can be preserved through your writing.

Step One: Choose the Subject (*Why is this subject worthy of a portrait?*)

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Step Two: Select the Interviewees (*Why are they crucial to the subject matter?*)

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Step Three: The Interview (*Create a series of at least ten questions you are prepared to ask your interviewee.*) Be sure to take detailed notes or record your interviews.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Step Four: Writing

After careful analysis of your interviews and observation of your subject, begin writing. Remember that the portrait you create will be not only a reflection of your subject, but also a piece of art that you create. Your impressions are an important part of the portrait.

Step Five: Sharing

A masterpiece should never be hidden in a drawer! After revising your initial draft, share your work with the class by creating a presentation or finding a place on the classroom wall for display. The people you interviewed will enjoy seeing a work-in-progress and a finished product.

\*For an additional resource, consult *The Art and Science of Portraiture* by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (2002).

## LESSON PLANS

Teachers' Note: Choose activities that are appropriate for your classroom period. All assignments are suggestions. Only a teacher knows his or her class well enough to determine the level and depth to which any piece of literature may be examined.

ONE-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the context and major themes of the production.

### DAY ONE – Introducing the Play

1. Distribute **Mastery Assessment** (P. X) *The Road Home: Re-Membering America* for students to read before, and to review again after attending the performance.

Optional: Distribute Vocabulary Handout and ask students to define each word. A vocabulary test could be administered after viewing the play.

2. Read the **Synopsis** (P.X) of the play. Discuss other works students have studied with similar themes and issues.
3. If time allows, discuss further pages from the literary guide, narrating highlights for students.
4. Ask students to begin Worksheet #2, the “Portraiture: Creating a Picture Through Words,” for homework.

FOUR-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the production and then, after viewing the performance, asks them to think more critically about what they have seen. Includes time for class discussion and individual assessment.

### DAY ONE – Introducing the Production

Same as Day One above; complete before seeing the production.

### DAY TWO – The Production

Attend the performance at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Homework: Students should answer the **Mastery Assessment** questions.

### DAY THREE – Follow-up Discussion

Discuss **Mastery Assessment** answers in class.

### DAY FOUR – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the **Open Response** or one question from **Writing Assignments** (P.X) for students to answer in one class period.

Optional: Students may choose one of the **For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** tasks to complete for extra credit.

SEVEN-DAY LESSON PLAN completely integrates *The Road Home: Re-Membering America* into your schedule. Within seven school days, you can introduce the play, assign reading and vocabulary, and assess your students on both a group and individual level. Students will ideally view the play after completing **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY ONE – Introducing the play

Same as Day One above.

Optional: Distribute Vocabulary Handout due on Day Four.

Homework: Read part one (first nine scenes) and answer corresponding **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY TWO – Part One

Discuss to the first part of the play and answers to **Mastery Assessment** questions. Homework: Read part two (final eight scenes) and answer corresponding **Mastery Assessment** questions.

DAY THREE – Part Two

Discuss the final scenes of the play and answers to **Mastery Assessment** questions. Optional: Complete Vocabulary Handout for homework.

DAY FOUR – Attend Performance

*Optional: Vocabulary Handout due!*

DAY FIVE – Group Work

Divide students into groups. Ask students to research the history of Pacific Northwest Totem Poles. Schedule library time if necessary. Each group will create their own totem pole, drawing it on a piece of large paper (other supplies may be used if available). Students will use their totem pole to represent the events of September 11. Discuss how symbols and simple images can capture a larger story or history.

DAY SIX – Presentations

Have the groups present their totem poles to the class. Each group should discuss the meaning of their piece and their creative process. How does this exercise relate to Marc Wolf's process when writing *The Road Home: Re-Membering America*? Students should be given an opportunity to answer questions from their classmates.

Homework: Students should prepare for the test on the following day.

#### DAY SEVEN – Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the **Open Response** or one question from the **Writing Assignments** for students to answer in one class period.

*Optional: Students may choose to complete one of the **For Further Exploration** or **Media Assessment** tasks for extra credit.*

## **RELATED WORKS AND RESOURCES**

You might explore the following resources with similar themes and related ideas as supplements to this literary and curriculum guide.

### **PLAYS**

*Recent Tragic Events* by Craig Wright (2004)  
*Sonia Flew* by Melinda Lopez (2004)  
*The Mercy Seat* by Neil Labute (2003)  
*Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* by Anna Deveare-Smith (1994)

### **FILMS**

*Crash* directed by Paul Haggis (2005)  
*Fahrenheit 9/11* directed by Michael Moore (2004)  
*The Guys* directed by Jim Simpson (2002)

### **BOOKS**

*On the Road* by Jack Kerouac (1957)  
*Travels with Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck (1962)  
*Blue Highways: A Journey into America* by William Least Heat-Moon (1982)