

"Effervescent with wit
and intelligence.
Urgent & unmissable!"
- THE TIMES OF LONDON

**This Curriculum Guide was written by Kevin G. Dunn
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Freedom of (Offensive) Speech:

First Amendment Issues Then, Now, and Later

Written by Alexandra Truppi

STANDARDS

Student Matinee performances and pre-show workshops provide unique opportunities for experiential learning and support various combinations of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. They may also support standards in other subject areas such as Social Studies and History, depending on the individual play's subject matter.

Activities are also included in this Curriculum Guide and in our pre-show workshops that support several of the Massachusetts state standards in Theatre. Other arts areas may also be addressed depending on the individual play's subject matter.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading Literature

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 3. — Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision (**Grade 8**). Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the themes (**Grades 9-10**). Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop related elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed) (**Grades 11-12**).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 5. — Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style (**Grade 8**). Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks), create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise (**Grades 9-10**). Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact (**Grades 11-12**).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 6. — Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor (**Grade 8**). Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature (**Grades**

9-10). Analyze a case in which grasping point of view required distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) **(Grades 11-12).**

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7. — Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors **(Grade 8)**. Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.) **(Grades 9-12).**

Theatre

Acting 1.7 — Create and sustain a believable character throughout a scripted or improvised scene **(Grade 8)**.

Acting 1.12 — Describe and analyze, in written and oral form, characters' wants, needs, objectives, and personality characteristics **(Grade 8)**.

Acting 1.13 — In rehearsal and performance situations, perform as a productive and responsible member of an acting ensemble (i.e., demonstrate personal responsibility and commitment to a collaborative process) **(Grade 8)**.

Acting 1.14 — Create complex and believable characters through the integration of physical, vocal, and emotional choices **(Grades 9-12)**.

Acting 1.15 — Demonstrate an understanding of a dramatic work by developing a character analysis **(Grades 9-12)**.

Acting 1.17 — Demonstrate increased ability to work effectively alone and collaboratively with a partner or in an ensemble **(Grades 9-12)**.

Reading and Writing Scripts 2.7 — Read plays and stories from a variety of cultures and historical periods and identify the characters, setting, plot, theme, and conflict **(Grade 8)**.

Reading and Writing Scripts 2.8 — Improvise characters, dialogue, and actions that focus on the development and resolution of dramatic conflicts **(Grade 8)**.

Reading and Writing Scripts 2.11 — Read plays from a variety of genres and styles; compare and contrast the structure of plays to the structures of other forms of literature **(Grades 9-12)**.

Technical Theatre 4.6 — Draw renderings, floor plans, and/or build models of sets for a dramatic work and explain choices in using visual elements (line, shape/form, texture, color, space) and visual principals (unity, variety, harmony, balance, rhythm) **(Grade 8)**.

Technical Theatre 4.13 — Conduct research to inform the design of sets, costumes, sound, and lighting for a dramatic production **(Grades 9-12)**.

Connections Strand 6: Purposes and Meanings in the Arts — Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings **(Grades PreK-12)**.

Connections Strand 10: Interdisciplinary Connections — Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering **(Grades PreK-12)**

BACKGROUND

It is election night 2008 in a hotel room in a southern city. John, the son of the Democratic candidate for President of the United States, waits with a friend for the election results to roll in. Despite his father's long history in the public spotlight, John is more interested in life as a private citizen, away from the glare of the media, but when you are a member of a political family, every word and action is subject to scrutiny. When photos of John at a college party dressed as the Muslim prophet Muhammad surface online, campaign staff members go into crisis mode. Before the night is over, John unwillingly finds himself at the center of a controversy that could derail his father's administration before it even begins.

Should there be limits to free speech? And if so, what should those limits be? Who should decide what those limits are? How do you maintain your personal identity and principles when others pressure you to change? *Now or Later* presents a timely examination of the challenges and cultural implications of a fundamental American freedom.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Learn proper audience etiquette before attending the performance
2. Study the context of the American electoral system
3. Explore *Now or Later's* themes and motifs, including:
 - a. Father-son relationships and their literary precedents
 - b. The complex ties between the media and politics
 - c. Religion & cultural relativism
 - d. Free expression & personal responsibility
4. Consider some of the political issues referenced in the play
5. Participate in hands-on activities that will enhance their understanding of the play
6. Improve their writing and critical reasoning exercises through open response questions and a critique of the Huntington's production.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits. To ensure that all audience members are able to enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following audience etiquette topics with your students before you come to the Huntington.

1. How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?
2. Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience can affect what kind of performance the actors give. No two audiences are exactly the same and no two performances are exactly the same—this is part of what makes theatre so special! Students' behavior should reflect the level of performance they wish to see.
3. Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. It is absolutely all right to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Talking and calling out during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be? Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently!
4. Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to make sure their cell phones are turned off (or better yet, left at home or at school!). Texting, photography, and video recording are prohibited. Food and gum should not be brought into the theatre.
5. Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun.



PREPARATION FOR *NOW OR LATER*

The 2008 Presidential Election

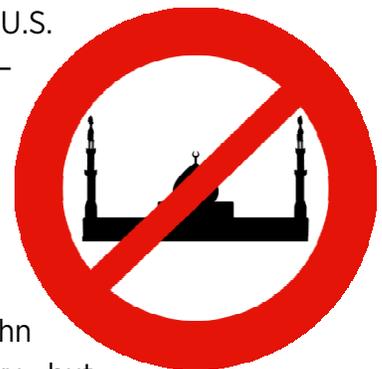
Now or Later takes place in 2008, in a fictional presidential election. The play was originally produced in England, the same year as the election. With respect to the Huntington's 2012 production of *Now or Later*, Christopher Shinn, the playwright, has said that it "is now a 'history play' more than it is a 'current events' play. Looking back at 2008 from 2012 allows us to think about the then, the now, and the future — whereas I think four years ago the play was more about that unfolding moment."

1. How is your perspective on the play's themes different in 2012 than it would have been if you had seen it in 2008?
2. We are at the height of the 2012 presidential race right now, and you will see *Now or Later* just three days after Election Day. How does this reflection on the American electoral process inform your understanding of the current election?
3. **Group Project:** In teams, investigate the central issues in the 2008 and 2012 elections. How have the issues changed in four years? Which have remained the same? Why do you think that is? Do you see any traces of the issues that were important in 2008 in the text of *Now or Later*?

Islamophobia

The action of *Now or Later* centers around the controversial decision of John—the president-elect's son—to attend a party dressed as the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Many Muslims consider it immoral even to draw an image of their prophet; for a non-Muslim to dress up as him as a joke is often considered extremely offensive. As the son of the President-elect, John makes a bolder statement than he intends to, and his decision could have major implications for the United States' political and strategic positions abroad.

Although Muslims make up a very small percentage of the U.S. population (0.8%), many Americans—including some politicians — stereotype them as a threat to national security. This is a form of **Islamophobia**, an irrational hatred or fear of Muslims. Islamophobia in America has skyrocketed since the attacks of September 11, 2001, and often drowns out the legitimate debate about the freedoms of religion and speech in the United States. It is important to recognize that in *Now or Later's* back story, John does not dress as Muhammad as a deliberate act of bigotry, but



because he is frustrated because he believes that this debate is overshadowed by polemics.

Since 9/11, there have been numerous controversies regarding Islam in the United States, many of which were arguably driven by Islamophobia rather than by sound reasoning. Research these events online, and draw your own conclusions: were some of these debates more bigoted than others? Were there any legitimate issues at play that the media ignored?

1. The (so-called) "Ground Zero Mosque"
2. The University of Michigan-Dearborn Footbaths controversy
3. The Oklahoma Sharia Law Amendment
4. The 2012 film *The Innocence of Muslims*
5. Pastor Terry Jones' 2010 threat to burn 200 Qur'ans

Children of Power

Playwright Christopher Shinn has said that when he was outlining *Now or Later*, "I began to build up a story from what I imagined to be the immense pressure of being a politician's child. As soon as I realized that at a certain age a child's actions could easily have a political impact, the links between the political and the personal became very clear. All political issues have a personal component and vice versa. That some people don't see this connection is one of the things that upsets John, Sr." Early in the play John vents his frustration at being the President-elect's son to his mother: "I won't be forced into becoming a media figure over three blurry pictures just because some hyperbolic political advisor needs to cover his ass. I want a normal life! I want to not live in a bubble of insanity."

Politicians' children have often had strained relationships with their parents: Teddy Roosevelt's daughter once said of her father that he "wants to be the corpse at every funeral, the bride at every wedding, and the baby at every christening." How could this quip apply to John's relationship with his political father? Research the lives of the following children of political families. How did they generate controversy or negative press for their political parents?

1. Patti Davis (born Patricia Ann Reagan), daughter of President Ronald Reagan
2. Jenna and Barbara Bush, daughters of President George W. Bush
3. Ashley Biden, daughter of then-Sentator Joe Biden
4. Noelle Bush, daughter of former Florida Governor Jeb Bush
5. Prince Harry, son of England's Prince Charles
6. Euan Blair, son of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair

KEY ISSUES

Father-Son Relationships

Christopher Shinn introduces *Now or Later* with the epigraph “be bloody, or be nothing,” a quote from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, which suggests that John’s relationship with his father may mirror Hamlet’s with his uncle. John’s conflict with John, Sr. is clear, but less easily recognizable is the way it reflects John, Sr.’s relationship with his own father, whom we never see on stage. More revealing is the point in the play at which Tracy tells John, “you really are like your Dad.”

John’s relationship with his father has bearing on several of the play’s other issues, though he doesn’t always acknowledge it: for instance, being gay, John interprets his father’s opposition to gay marriage as a slight against himself. However, this strained relationship also affects the way that John, Sr. views the meaning of John’s actions: in the final scene, he implies that his son dressed as Muhammad deliberately in order to cause difficulties for the campaign, rather than to prove a point about freedom of speech.

1. How does Shinn revisit the character of Hamlet in John? Does John only resemble Hamlet in his over-analysis and self-pity, or are there traces of Shakespeare’s work in the play as a whole?
2. How are the frustrations that John tackles with his father similar to those faced by any young adult? To what extent are these problems unique to this family’s status as public figures?
3. How does John, Sr.’s relationship with his own father complicate the relationship between himself and his son?
4. How does the father-son relationship in the play embody the Shakespeare quote, “be bloody or be nothing”?

“It’s About the Narrative:” Media & Politics

The driving force in *Now or Later* is the importance of **narrative**—the way that certain events or ideas are packaged and distributed to the public—in the modern political arena. In the play, Matt, a friend of John’s, gives him some examples: “Republicans defined the Democrats in ’92 as soon as the election was over—gays in the military, health care. The mid-term elections were a disaster, Republicans controlled the narrative, and that was it, Contract With America, the end of all hope for progressive legislation for over a decade. The lesson was, stay in control of your narrative.”

In the era of mass media and social networking, control of the narrative has had a much greater influence on both local and national elections. If John had dressed as Muhammad a generation earlier, news of his actions would have spread much more slowly, and it would have been extremely unlikely that the incident would affect the election. In 2008, however, a video of the party is posted on a blog, and within days John, Sr.'s carefully crafted narrative is in danger.



1. Matt raises three issues in which narrative was important after the 1992 election: gays in the military, health care, and the Contract with America. Research the way that “Republicans controlled the narrative” with respect to these issues and the impact on the 1994 midterm elections.
2. How do political campaigns utilize social media to get their message out?
3. How is the immediacy of online communication a useful tool in politics? How can it backfire?
4. Imagine you work for the campaign of John, Sr.'s Republican opponent. How would you use the photos of John to shape the media narrative about John, Sr.?
5. Name an entertainment or sports figure whose privacy was compromised by social media. How did they react to the situation?

Religion and Moral Relativism

Relativism is a theory that states that no moral or philosophical belief is objectively right or wrong, but only the product of the culture in which it originated. According to this theory, all beliefs are equally valid and so no one from one culture has the right to criticize the actions of a member of a different culture, even when those actions strike her as radically unethical.

This is the theory which Tracy—one of John, Sr.'s advisors—and Matt use to criticize John's decision to dress as the prophet Muhammad. As Tracy says, “You can't hold another culture to the standards you hold your own culture to. You have to compromise and see things their way a little, you have to acknowledge and respect that their culture is different than yours.” John responds by arguing that in practice, relativism doesn't work: “At a certain level there really is just one standard, whatever the cultural differences. If a fundamentalist Muslim tries to hang me for being gay—how do I compromise with that?”

1. Research the laws of countries controlled by Islamic governments. What lifestyles and activities that are legal in the West are illegal in these societies?

2. Research the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (1948). Why was this document developed? What values does it promote?
3. In *Now or Later*, John, Jr. reports that one of his classmates referred to him as a "cultural imperialist." What does this term mean?

Free Expression and Personal Responsibility

The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees every American the right to free expression. However, this right comes with the unwritten obligation to use it responsibly: racist or incendiary comments are legal, but they abuse a system, which was designed to facilitate a mature and intelligent exchange of ideas.

It is the notion of "responsible" speech that John and John, Sr. debate in *Now or Later*. John criticizes his father for making public appearances with a homophobic minister and argues that by doing so, he "conveyed that what this man stands for and preaches is okay." Later, when John defends his decision to dress as Muhammad as an exercise of his freedom of expression, John, Sr. turns his argument against him: "You're saying that my appearing with Pastor Bob sends people the message that the Democrats think it's okay to not respect gay people, which will lead to *their* deciding it's okay to not respect gay people. Now if you argue that, then you have to also argue that your dressing up as Muhammad sends people a very clear message that it's okay for them to not respect Muslims as well." John tries to use free speech as an ideological justification for his decision to dress as Muhammad, but just because a mode of expression is legally permitted does not mean it is the most responsible method.

1. Research the application of the First Amendment to controversial speech. What is "incitement" and why is it not covered by the First Amendment?
2. What are the criteria for determining if an expression qualifies as hate speech?
3. Reflect on our national discourse of the last several years. Brainstorm some examples of public figures making controversial statements. What was the impact of these statements and the reaction to them? Would you describe these statements as irresponsible speech? Why or why not?

MASTERY ASSESSMENT

1. Where does *Now or Later* take place?
2. Who is Marc?
3. Why does Marc want to put out an apology in John's name?
4. What was the editorial that John wrote in September about?
5. Why did John and his father go to joint therapy when John was in high school?
6. What kind of party did John go to dressed as Muhammad?
7. Who is Robbie?
8. Why did Robbie break up with John?
9. Who is Tracy?
10. Why does Tracy think that John should apologize for dressing like Muhammad?
11. Who is Matt? What does he study at Harvard?
12. How does Matt say that religion in the Islamic world differs from the western view on religion?
13. According to Tracy, how is John like his father?
14. What political stance does John, Sr. hold that he feels obligated to justify to John?
15. Who is Pastor Bob?
16. How does John, Sr. justify publicly meeting with Pastor Bob?
17. Why does John, Sr. begin attacking his son?
18. Why does John finally consent to releasing an apology?
19. Who does John talk to on the phone at the end of the play?

OPEN RESPONSE

1. At several important moments in the play, Matt provides a voice of reason. When are these moments? What distinguishes Matt's way of debating from John's, Jessica's, or John, Sr.'s? The audience never learns much about Matt's character or personal life. Why do you think the playwright, Christopher Shinn, made this choice? What effect does it have on Matt's arguments? What do we know about Matt's family background that informs his character?
2. The following issues are discussed tangentially in *Now or Later*. How are they related to the events of the play? Research the debates surrounding these issues. To what extent were they important topics in the 2012 presidential election?
 - a. Gay Marriage
 - b. The Conflict between Israel and Palestine
 - c. Religious Fundamentalism
 - d. Hate Speech
3. *Now or Later* depicts a fictional election taking place in 2008. Research the story of the real 2008 presidential election. In what ways was it similar to the election in the play? In what ways was it different? Were any of the issues raised in the play debated in the real election?
4. Consider John's relationship with his mother, Jessica. Is it a crucial relationship in the play, or is it only important relative to the play's other relationships? Does John interact with his mother differently than he interacts with the play's other characters?
5. Consider the final moments of the play. Why do you think that Shinn chose to end the play in this way?
 - a. Is the ending patriotic? Why or why not?
 - b. This play was originally produced in England. How do you think the nationality of the audience (and their opinion of the United States) impacts their interpretation of the play's ending?
6. Symbolic actions are an important motif in *Now or Later*. For example, John dressed up as Muhammad and John, Sr. meet with Pastor Bob. What are some other examples of symbolic actions from the play, other literary works, or your

own experience? Are symbolic actions more important or less important than real actions?

7. One of the conflicts between John and John, Sr. is that their disagreement over compromises and convictions. John believes that “it’s important to have convictions no matter what the circumstances are,” whereas John, Sr. believes that, in order to have any real impact, you need to be willing to “work with and be comfortable around all kinds of people,” including people whose beliefs you disagree with.
 - a. Do you agree with one of these perspectives? Why?
 - b. What would the world look like if everyone acted only based on convictions? What would the world look like if everyone always compromised on everything?
 - c. Can you think of an experience in your own life where you had to choose between a compromise and a conviction?

ARTS ASSESSMENT

Characterization

Choose a character from *Now or Later* to portray as if you were preparing for rehearsal. Consider your character's age, gender, ethnicity, etc. and how these factors influence his or her actions in the play. Then, as your character, answer the following questions:

1. What do I want? What is my overall objective?
2. What stands in the way of what I want? What or who are my obstacles in the way of achieving my objective? Does what I want change throughout the course of the play? How?
3. How, if at all, does my character change during the course of the play?
4. Are there any contradictions inherent in my character?

Role Playing

Improvise an important moment from *Now or Later*. Test the effects of changing something about the performance—tone of voice, a character trait, or a vital remark. How does such a change affect the selected moment? How does the pacing or posturing of an actor affect the timing of the piece? Is it possible that a change in the tone of voice can turn a serious moment into a humorous one?

Improvise a scene that is mentioned in the play but is not performed, e.g. Robbie breaking up with John, Jessica at dinner with Marc, John's class criticizing him for his position on the anti-Muslim cartoons, or John, Sr. giving his acceptance speech.

Choose one character at a particularly defining moment in his or her life, prior to or subsequent to the events of *Now or Later*. Individually create a monologue, or in pairs create a dialogue, which portrays this moment. How does what you learn about the character from the play inform the way that you portray him or her at this moment?

Costume

Imagine that you have been asked to design the costumes for the play. For each scene, write down what each character is wearing. Then draw the costumes or provide pictures from magazines or the internet as a visual aid for your plan.

Set

Now or Later takes place on the night of the 2008 presidential election, in “a hotel room in a Southern state.” The playwright, Christopher Shinn, wrote that “the play will be most effective with a spartan design in all areas.”

Imagine that you are the scenic and lighting designer. Write a detailed description of the play’s set or make a detailed drawing. How big is the hotel room? Where are the door and the closet? What furniture is there, and how is it arranged? Where on the set will the characters be at crucial moments in the scene?

After attending the production, compare your description, the description at the end of the play, and the Huntington Theatre Company’s set. How successfully did the scenic designer’s choices embody the playwright’s vision? How similar to and different from each other were the actual set and your interpretation?

VOCABULARY EXERCISE

The following terms are taken from the text of *Now or Later*. Match the word's number with its definition.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. Patriarchy | a. Exceeding the limit of social acceptability__ |
| 2. Xenophobia | b. A society in which most positions of power are held by men__ |
| 3. Homophobia | c. Intolerance, especially of other races or religions__ |
| 4. Misogyny | d. The holy book of Islam__ |
| 5. Hijab | e. A subject derived from another; an implication__ |
| 6. Bigotry | f. A person or institution's right to make its own decisions__ |
| 7. Fundamentalism | g. Strict adherence to doctrine, without concession to modernity__ |
| 8. Conspicuous | h. Clearly visible or easy to notice__ |
| 9. Latent | i. Hidden; present, but not exhibited or developed__ |
| 10. Ramification | j. A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women |
| 11. Connotation | k. A spoken or written discussion of a subject__ |
| 12. Discourse | l. Removed from the mainstream of the dominant social group__ |
| 13. Literalism | m. Exempt from punishment__ |
| 14. Qur'an | n. A Committed relationship with only one person__ |
| 15. Autonomy | o. Unrestrained or excessive self-indulgence__ |
| 16. Marginalized | p. Unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners__ |
| 17. Transgressive | q. Adherence to the literal, uninterpreted meaning of a text__ |
| 18. Impunity | r. The association of a second meaning with a word or expression__ |
| 19. Monogamy | s. Unreasoning fear or hatred of homosexuals__ |
| 20. Decadent | t. Hatred, dislike, or mistrust of women__ |

IMPORTANT QUOTES

Choose one of the quotes below and analyze it in paragraph form.

“For us religion is a kind of escape from society, but in the Muslim world, it’s like religion brings all these different facets of life together, so it’s a bigger deal to make fun of it...for us, no matter how pious our leaders are, church and state are separate, so making fun of religion has a different connotation. But over there it’s all a lot closer together...it’s like you’re saying that their entire society and feelings about oppression aren’t legitimate.”

“I’m surrounded by these privileged kids who attack everything American, who have nothing critical to say about any culture they think we oppress. I’m sick of it, I’m sick of, I mean I’m critical of America, too, but I’m sick of this decadent, these people who say America is bad but feel no responsibility to make it better, they just go off on it and get wasted and throw naked parties.”

“You’re talking about my autonomy like it’s something we can negotiate in terms of how it impacts you—it’s not just ‘important,’ it’s my life!”

“I don’t think we should give up our values to find common ground. Then it’s not common ground, it’s their ground and we’re just standing on it.”

“Say what you will, America is this hope, this beacon. And now it’s our turn to make her better. Not just for us, but for everybody, for the world. Even for the people who hate us. What other country on earth can say that.”

CRITIQUE

After attending the production of *Now or Later* at the Huntington Theatre Company, write a two-page review of the production. Try to critique the artistic and technical aspects of the play — the set, lighting, etc. — as well as the play in general. How well did the Huntington bring Shinn’s play to life?

LESSON PLANS

Two Day Lesson Plan

Day One – Introducing the Play

1. Please review *Audience Etiquette* with your class.
2. Vocabulary
3. If time allows, discuss some of the political and social issues that the play raises.

Day Two – The Production

Four Day Lesson Plan

Day One – Introducing the Play

1. Same as above; complete before seeing the production.

Day Two – The Production

Day Three – Follow-up Discussion

1. Answer any questions students may have about the production.
2. Discuss one or more of the items from *Themes*.
3. Homework: Students should prepare for a test on the material, which will include vocabulary, quotes, and an open-ended question.

Day Four – Test

1. Individual Assessment: Have students define the terms from the *Vocabulary* section. Choose several *Important Quotes*, and have students identify their speaker and their significance in the play. Choose three prompts from *Open Response and Writing*, and have students respond to one in a well-reasoned, thesis-driven essay.
2. Homework: Have students complete a three page, double-spaced response to one of the *Open Response and Writing* prompts.

Six Day Lesson Plan

Day One – Introducing the Play

1. Same as above.
2. Homework: Read the play and answer the corresponding *Mastery Assessment* questions. Students do not have to write out the answers to the questions, but

there may be a quiz. Distribute the *Vocabulary* sheet and tell students that several of these words will appear on the test.

Day Two

1. Address any questions that the students may have on the reading or the questions.
2. Discuss the play, using prompts from *Themes*.

Day Three

1. Again, please review *Audience Etiquette* with your class.
2. If you doubt that your students are doing the reading, give a quiz with either your own questions or those in the *Mastery Assessment* section.
3. Address any questions that the students may have on the reading or the questions.

Day Four – The Production

Day Five – Group Work

1. Ask if students have any questions about the production.
2. Break students into groups, and have them do one of the group projects from the *Themes* or any of the activities from the *Arts Assessment*.
3. Homework: Students study for a test the following day, which will include vocabulary, quotes, and an open-ended question.

Day Six – Test

1. Individual Assessment: Have students define several words from *Vocabulary*. Choose several *Important Quotes* and have students identify their speaker and their significance in the play. Choose three prompts from *Open Response and Writing*, and have students respond to one in a well-reasoned, thesis-driven essay.
2. Homework: Have students complete a three page, double-spaced response to one of the *Open Response and Writing* prompts that did not appear on the test.

SUPPLEMENT

Freedom of (Offensive) Speech: First Amendment Issues Then, Now, and Later

When asked to explain why he chose *Now or Later* for the title of his play, playwright Christopher Shinn gives a straightforward, clear-cut answer: “I wanted to signal to the audience on some subliminal level that if the events of the play were not in the news now, they will be later.” Written in 2007 and set on Election Night 2008, Shinn’s play is a political thriller that explores cultural values and judgments — issues that, unlike the play’s title, are anything but straightforward and clear-cut. As we find ourselves in the midst of the 2012 campaign, it is logical to take the opportunity to reflect on the near-past to determine how we arrived at where we are today. The arts have long served as a vital tool in this process; to produce theatre, as Shakespeare astutely observed, is “to hold as ’twere, the mirror up to nature.” Remarkably, those sentiments are ringing truer now than anyone, except for maybe the playwright himself, could have predicted. The Huntington Theatre Company’s decision to produce *Now or Later*, five years removed from its writing and four years from its setting, was just the first step in transforming it into what Shinn describes as “more of a history play than a current events play.”

In *Now or Later*, John is the college age son of a Democratic presidential candidate. He comes under fire from his father’s campaign staff when photos surface online of him attending a party costumed as the Muslim prophet Muhammad. Concerned with the potential legislative and diplomatic ramifications, staff members weigh the pros and cons of issuing an apology. Further complicating the decision is the existence of a somewhat infamous op-ed John authored in his school’s newspaper defending the university’s free speech policy. When cartoons criticizing Islam’s treatment of women were anonymously posted on campus, the Muslim Student Association viewed them as hate speech that could incite violence against Muslims, and demanded that the university censor them (“fighting words” and other speech deliberately intended to incite violent acts are not covered by the First Amendment, a cause-and-effect connection that can be difficult to prove). John explains to a campaign staffer that in his op-ed, he did not “defend the content of the cartoons . . . [he] focused on the right to freedom of expression, regardless of whether people find the expression offensive or not.”

With this statement, John articulates the debate at the core of *Now or Later*, drawing the first of many vivid parallels between the play and real life events surrounding controversial free speech. Islamic tradition bans any depiction of the prophet Muhammad

at all, let alone ones that could be considered critical or offensive. On September 30, 2005, Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a series of cartoons that included satirical depictions of Muhammad. The resulting protests in the Islamic world escalated quickly and the embassies of Denmark and other Western nations were attacked in Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, leaving more than 100 people dead. Debate raged as critics asserted that the cartoons were deliberately intended to insult and bait the Muslim minority in Denmark and that the Danish newspaper that originally published them (and other international media outlets that reprinted them) should have refrained from doing so. Supporters countered that this would amount to censorship of free speech and that there was no specific targeting of Muslims because it is not uncommon for critiques of other religions and their leaders to be printed.

Although the Danish cartoons were published more than seven years ago, the incident would certainly fit right into the current news cycle. As Director Michael Wilson stated at the first rehearsal of the Huntington's production of *Now or Later*, the play's essential questions could not be more relevant:

“What happens when [freedom of speech] allows for an expression that provokes a violent and murderous response? Should there be limits to our sacred freedom of speech? And if so, what should those limits be? Who should decide what those limits are . . . and if there are not to be limits to our freedom of speech, how do we resolve the conflict when one religion's fundamentalist sect does not share the same ideology of our founding fathers?” (Michael Wilson, 9/19/12)

In early September 2012, just as preparations for *Now or Later* rehearsals were beginning, protests and attacks on American embassies occurred throughout northern Africa and the Middle East. In Egypt, they began as reactions to excerpts of an incendiary film, titled *The Innocence of Muslims*, which were posted on YouTube, and in Benghazi, Libya, the protests ended with acts of terrorism leading to the death of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. It was not long before history threatened to repeat itself when a satirical French magazine published caricatures of Muhammad, prompting France to close 20 of its embassies out of concern that they would be the target of the same violent protests that followed the 2005 Danish cartoons and the American film just days prior.

All of these events have prompted debate in the West regarding the boundaries of free speech when it comes to faith- and culture-based criticism. But the question of whether offensive speech should be censored is a deeper conflict in the United States, and many audience members viewing *Now or Later* in 2012 and beyond may hear John's reasoning behind his op-ed as the echo of an argument that raged in the media during the spring of

2012. In February, Georgetown law student and women's rights activist Sandra Fluke was denied the opportunity to speak to the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee about Conscience Clause exceptions in health coverage, which would allow employers and health care providers to cite their own religious reasons for denying certain types of coverage or care (most often, Conscience Clauses are enacted in connection to abortion and reproductive health issues). The controversy exploded days later when conservative radio commentator Rush Limbaugh slammed Fluke on the air for her advocacy of contraception coverage without co-pay and labeled her a "slut" and a "prostitute." Following Limbaugh's offensive attacks, many of which became quite personal, his show lost dozens of advertisers and many affiliates pulled the show from their schedules. Some groups even argued for Clear Channel Communication to take Limbaugh off the air entirely.

On-the-record support for Limbaugh himself was minimal and practically nonexistent for the content of his speech. However, progressive comedian and talk-show host Bill Maher came to Limbaugh's defense, saying that while he disapproved of the specific content of Limbaugh's comments, he strongly supported Limbaugh's right to make them. As sponsors pulled their advertising from Limbaugh's show in protest, Maher spoke out on his HBO series, *Real Time With Bill Maher*, with an argument that mirrors John's defense of his op-ed and choice of costume in *Now or Later*:

"I don't like it that people are made to disappear when they say something, or people try to make them disappear when they say something you don't like. That's America. Sometimes you're made to feel uncomfortable, okay? I mean, can we put this in perspective: no one died. A guy made a bad joke. A bad joke because A, it was a disgusting sentiment that he was evoking, and also because it wasn't even a joke . . . I'm not defending him. I'm defending living in a country where people don't have to be afraid that they might go out of the bounds . . . do we all want to be talking like White House spokesmen?" (*Real Time With Bill Maher*, HBO, 3/9/12)

Maher's opinion was the result of personal experience; he had been a target of attempted censorship when he made sympathetic remarks about the 9/11 hijackers on his ABC show, *Politically Incorrect*, in late September 2011. Advertisers pulled their support and some ABC affiliates refused to broadcast the show, creating a clear parallel to what would happen to Limbaugh eleven years later.

Pressure from all corners of the media prompted Limbaugh to issue an apology for his statements about Sandra Fluke. To some, Limbaugh's words put a satisfactory end to the controversy. For others, who considered it a disingenuous attempt at luring back sponsors, it only added fuel to the fire. In *Now or Later*, campaign operative Marc tries to

persuade John to agree to put out “a really simple, basic statement that will put this thing to bed.” Tracy, the campaign manager, agrees and asks John to go along with the apology, even if he does not really mean it. “Who knows what they’ll do whether you apologize or not,” she tells John. “But you might as well just apologize so you can say you did your part, and if they start rioting and killing people, that’s their own doing.”

In 2000, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) issued a statement titled, *Defending the Free Speech of Unpopular Organizations*. This statement reads in part: “It is easy to defend freedom of speech when the message is something many people find at least reasonable. But the defense of freedom of speech is most critical when the message is one most people find repulsive.” Other than Maher, Rush Limbaugh benefited from few defenders. In the face of pressure from his father’s campaign, *Now or Later*, John defends himself. “My apology can be interpreted by them as an acknowledgement that their value system is legitimate,” he explains. “And if I submit to it then I’m betraying all those people who are oppressed by that system.” On September 25, 2012, United States President Barack Obama made a speech to the members of the United Nations in which he condemned both the content of *The Innocence of Muslims* and the violent reactions to it, while defending America’s value of free speech. “The strongest weapon against hateful speech,” he said, “is not repression, it is more speech. There is no speech that justifies mindless violence.”

Sometimes, the question of how to react can be just as polarizing as the inflammatory speech itself.

Questions:

- How do you react when you hear a statement or see an image that is offensive to you due to your religion, gender, ethnicity, or some other aspect of your cultural identity?
- Read the text of the First Amendment. Does John’s decision to wear a Muhammad costume to a college party qualify as free speech? What about the cartoons posted on his school’s campus? Why or why not? Should all speech be permitted, even if it is offensive?
- John is the son of a presidential candidate. He is not a politician himself and states repeatedly in *Now or Later* that he is not in the public spotlight by choice. How is John’s freedom to speak his mind affected by his father’s public role? How and why do the private words and actions of politicians’ family members become the subject of public scrutiny?

- How was American free speech impacted by 9/11, both in the immediate aftermath as well as the long-term? Would the reactions to John's op-ed and costume have been different if they had happened prior to the events of 9/11?
- Although *Now or Later* was written in 2007, there are many parallels between the events it depicts and what is happening in the world in 2012. How does the play's timeliness support playwright Christopher Shinn's statement that it is a "history play" rather than a "current events play"?
- How do free speech protections apply to creative works such as film, visual art, and music? What works of art have been the subjects of protest? What aspects of these works were considered offensive? What were the protesters' goals? Were they successful? Why or why not?
- Do you agree or disagree with the ACLU's stance that the "defense of freedom is most critical when the message is one most people find repulsive"? Why?
- Read the following quote from Arianna Huffington's article, *The Fatwa Against Bill Maher*, posted on *Salon.com* on September 24, 2001:

"To the extent that we give up our fundamental freedoms of expression and dissent, then, yes, 'they' have clearly won . . . One of those battles is going on right now. It involves Bill Maher, who has been excoriated for what he said on *Politically Incorrect* last week. But excoriation—a valuable form of free speech—is not a problem. Censorship is."

What does Huffington mean when she says that "'they have won" when "we give up our fundamental freedoms of expression and dissent"? What is she trying to say with the title of her piece? What other instances can you find in which an individual or a group was censored or otherwise silenced because what they said was considered offensive or unpopular?