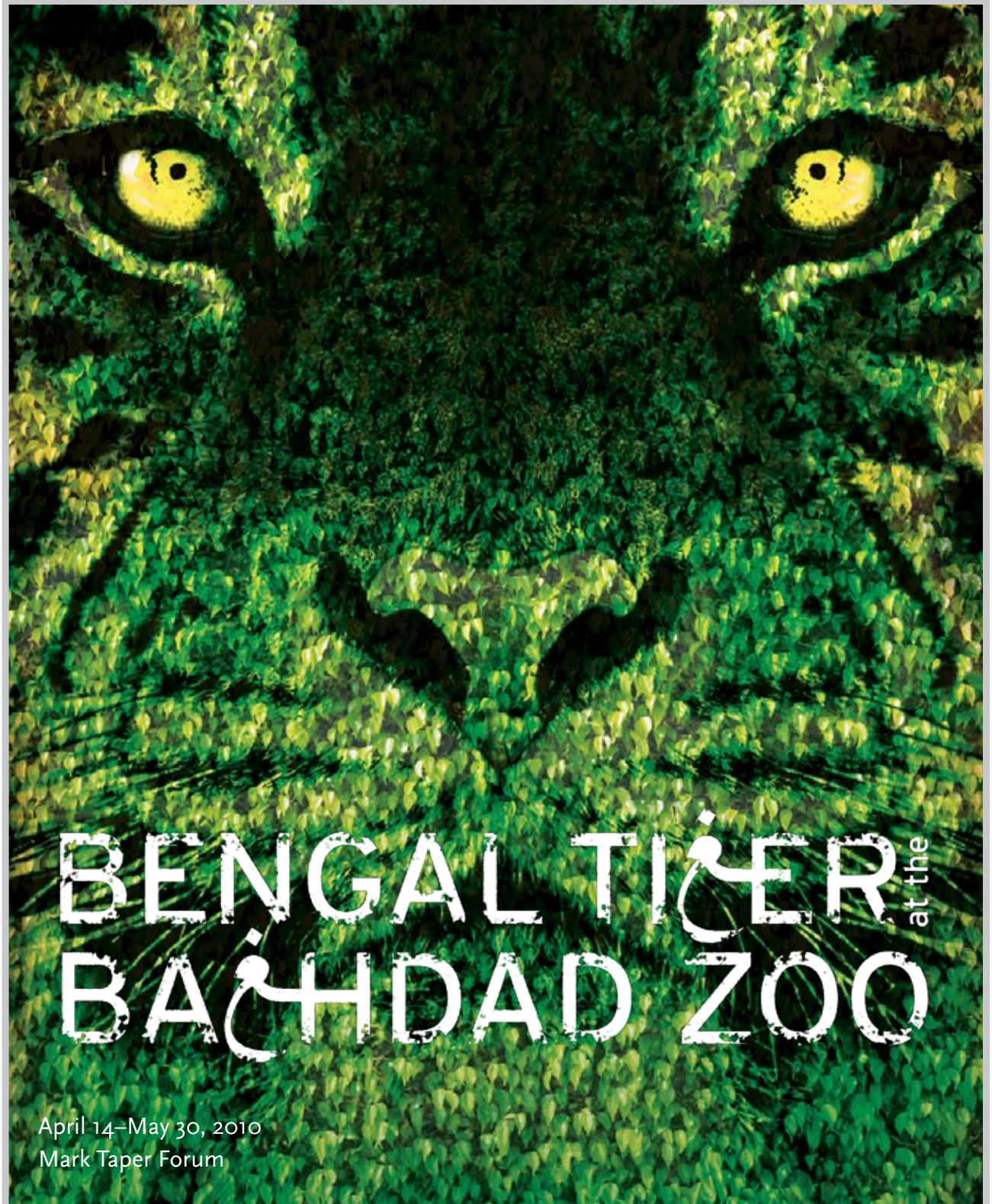




# Educator Resources



# Welcome

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us at *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* by Rajiv Joseph.

A great play raises questions about the human condition and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers. To that end the material in Center Theatre Group's Student Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions: questions about war and violence, questions about language, questions about the assumptions we make about people and nations. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

The Educator Resources and Student Discovery Guide are companion pieces, designed to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow-up the performance with options for discussion, reflection and creativity.

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

## Student Discovery Guide

The Student Discovery Guide provides students with background information about the play and the subject matter, as well as questions for individual reflection. Written to be student-driven, the Discovery Guide helps prepare your students for the performance.

## About This Play

This section includes a scene-by-scene synopsis of the play to provide you with detailed information about the content and form of the play.

## Comprehension

This section includes background information about the setting and subject matter of the play. We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. For *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, this includes information about Iraq and Baghdad, Saddam Hussein, Iraqi interpreters, the U.S. military and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre  
Mark Taper Forum  
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the Student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

## Connection

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

## Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

We know the hard work and dedication that it takes to bring students to see theatre. These materials are designed to support you in making the most of that experience. We applaud your passion for sharing theatre with your students and thank you for sharing your students with all of us at Center Theatre Group. We look forward to seeing you at *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*.

# About *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*

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A darkly comic and surreal story about Tom and Kev, two misguided young soldiers assigned to guard the Baghdad Zoo during the early days of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. When Tom taunts the sole surviving Bengal Tiger with food, the Tiger bites off his hand, prompting Kev to shoot the animal. The gun he uses to kill the Tiger is not just any gun; it's a gold gun that Tom stole from Uday Hussein, son of dictator Saddam Hussein, during a raid. The ghost of the Tiger starts to wander the streets of war-torn Baghdad, caught in an existential haze. He begins to haunt his killer, Kev, until Kev breaks down and takes his life by severing his own hand. Like the Tiger, Kev becomes a ghost and proceeds to haunt his buddy Tom. Meanwhile, Musa, once Uday Hussein's gardener, is trying to adapt to his new job as interpreter for the occupying American forces. Musa is haunted by the ghost of Uday Hussein, the man who raped and killed his little sister, Hadia. The gold gun binds the men and the Tiger to Baghdad's brutal past and its confused, violent present. The city has transitioned from dictatorship to American occupation, the young soldiers have transformed from kids to killers, the interpreter has turned from gardener to traitor in his own land. No one can make sense of the inhuman acts surrounding him. Ghosts fill the streets of Baghdad, looking for answers in the midst of war, and the Bengal Tiger joins American and Iraqi voices in asking, "Why am I here?"



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## About the Playwright

RAJIV JOSEPH

Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* was originally produced at Center Theatre Group's Kirk Douglas Theatre in 2009 and was named Outstanding New American Play by the National Endowment for the Arts. It was nominated for a 2009 L.A. Stage Alliance Ovation Award for Playwriting for an Original Play. Joseph has won numerous awards, including the 2009 Whiting Writers' Award, a Paula Vogel Award from the Vineyard Theatre, a Kesselring Fellowship for Emerging Artists, a Lark Playwriting Award, and has been a Dramatists Guild fellow. His play *Animals Out of Paper* was produced by the Second Stage Theatre, Boise Contemporary Theatre; will be produced this year at both the Ensemble Theatre in Sydney, Australia, and San Francisco Playhouse; and is published by Dramatists Play Service. His play *Gruesome Playground Injuries* was produced by the Alley Theatre in Houston, and will be produced at Woolly Mammoth this season. Joseph received his BA from Miami University and his MFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He is a founding member of the Fire Department Theater Company and is a lecturer in NYU's Expository Writing Program. Joseph was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, and served for three years in the Peace Corps in Senegal.

## Characters

**Tiger:** Big. (Tiger wears clothes. Nothing feline about him)

**Tom** . . . . . American, early 20's

**Kev** . . . . . American, early 20's

**Musa** . . . . . Iraqi, 30's

**Uday Hussein** . . . 30's

**Hadia/Iraqi Teenager** (Female)

**Iraqi Woman**

## Time

2003

## Place

Baghdad

## Scene Synopsis

### ACT 1

#### SCENE ONE

Night at the Baghdad zoo. The Tiger begins by telling us about the chaos at the zoo since the military invasion by the United States. Eight lions escaped two days ago and were killed within two hours of their newfound freedom. The two soldiers guarding the zoo, Tom and Kev, are bored and irritated that they've been given such a mundane assignment as guarding animals. Tom notices that the Tiger looks hungry. Kev wants more "action," but Tom reminds him that Iraqis have been stealing animals. Peacocks were stolen just two weeks ago. The Tiger explains how he got to the zoo. One day he was minding his own business, enjoying his life in India, and the next thing he knew, he was hit by a dart gun and awoke in a cage in Baghdad, now a "Tiger of the Tigris".

Kev asks to see Tom's gun. Tom tells him to get it out of his bag. Kev excitedly pulls out a gold gun that once belonged to Uday Hussein, Saddam Hussein's son. Tom was part of the raid on the palace, where he shot Uday and stole his gold gun. He also won one of the palace's gold toilet seats in a poker game. He's hidden the toilet seat for safety, but he refuses to tell Kev where. As Kev admires the gold gun and envies the action that Tom has seen, Tom, insisting the Tiger is hungry, pokes a Slim Jim into the Tiger's cage. The Tiger tries to tell him to knock it off. Tom ignores the Tiger's growls, and so the Tiger bites his hand off. Scared, Kev shoots the Tiger with the gold gun and kills him on the spot. Kev calls for help.

The Tiger, now dead, stands outside his body as a ghost looking back at himself. For a moment he gets to really see himself for the first time, to see how others and the world saw him. He says he gets so stupid when

he gets hungry, but he kind of always knew he would end up this way. Still, he would have liked the chance to look around a bit, see what's out there, like the lions before they were killed.

#### SCENE TWO

Interpreter's office. Musa sits, writing on his laptop computer, trying to learn the meaning of a knock-knock joke that centers on the American slang word "bitch." He is confused by the soldiers' use of the word. Kev enters and begins putting on his gear. (It is an extensive process that requires putting on helmet, armor, attaching guns, bullets, etc. and must be put on accurately, according to Army regulations.) Musa asks Kev to explain the word "bitch" to him, and Kev, misunderstanding, resents Musa calling him "bitch." Kev tells Musa to look the word up since he's the "terp." He asks Musa if he speaks "Iraqi." Musa explains that he speaks Arabic, Iraqi-Arabic, not Iraqi. Kev asks Musa if he has a DVD player in his computer and if he has any movies. Musa watches American movies to help him learn English, and he has a copy of "Fast and Furious". Kev likes that movie, and Musa admits he likes it more for the cars than for learning any new slang words. Musa is still confused by the word "bitch", and Kev is no help. Musa wants to know why Kev is dressing in the interpreter's office, and Kev tells him to mind his own business, calling him "Habib." Kev grows defensive and brags about using a gold gun to kill a Tiger that bit off his best friend's hand. He wanted to save the Tiger's skin, but the Army wouldn't let him. Kev shows Musa the gold gun and lies, claiming that he (not Tom) shot the sons of Saddam Hussein at their palace. He even describes all the gold in the palace even though he's never been there, including its gold toilets. He reluctantly lets Musa hold the gun.

Musa, gun in hand, shakes with rage. He wants to hear again that it was Kev who killed them. Kev insists that

it was, and Musa continues to shake with rage as Kev takes back the gun. Musa now wants to be left alone. Musa's reaction to the story makes Kev nervous, and he becomes upset and irrational. Kev admits that he has to dress alone because he needs to concentrate when he's putting on the fifty pounds of gear; Kevlar is complicated equipment, and he needs more time. Kev finally gathers himself, excited about going on a raid, and he asks Musa to give him a high five. After staring at Kev's hand for a moment, Musa finally raises his hand to reluctantly give him five.

### SCENE THREE

The raid. Night. It's chaos as soldiers pound on the door of an Iraqi home. The soldiers have tied a sack around the head of the Man who lives there and have tied his hands behind his back. As Kev and Musa enter the scene, a Woman runs up to the Man, who is her husband. She begins to beg for his safety. Musa and Kev plead with her to get away from the man as this is against Army procedure, and this creates more confusion in an already chaotic event. Kev and Musa insist that the man get down on the ground and that the Woman move away. Neither will budge, though Musa is desperately trying to translate and defuse the situation. Kev asks the Woman to open a trunk in the house, suspicious of what's inside. She tells him it contains only blankets; he can have them. She and her husband just want to be left alone. Kev grows more and more agitated, certain that the trunk holds something threatening. He finally opens the trunk but finds only blankets.

He is pulling them out one by one when suddenly the Tiger appears. Kev drops his military gun, pulls the gold gun from his uniform and points it at the Tiger. Musa, the Man and Woman are confused, since they can't see the Tiger's ghost; only Kev can. Kev keeps pointing the gold gun at the Tiger, yelling at everyone

to be quiet. Musa tries to reason with Kev, to no avail. The Woman realizes Kev is having a mental breakdown, and Musa finally talks Kev into giving him the gold gun. Kev tells him he didn't want to kill the Tiger. Musa very gingerly takes the gun away from Kev, who collapses to the floor. The Woman curses the war, and calls Musa, who pockets the gold gun, a traitor and a thief. Musa leaves a blubbing Kev behind. Kev, covering himself in blankets, relives the night he killed the Tiger in the zoo. As the Tiger watches Kev huddled on the ground, the stage transforms into a garden in Baghdad, filled with broken and burned topiary animals. Bombs can be heard in the distance.

### SCENE FOUR

The Topiary Garden. More sounds of bombs in the distance. The Tiger has been wandering Baghdad for days. He enters the garden of ruined plants. The bombing is making him anxious, and his death is causing him to reflect on his life. He recently saw some teenage monkeys who had been killed by an IED acting "like morons", but he concludes it is best to die young with your friends rather than wander alone. He looks around and ponders the nature of such a topiary garden. Why turn plants into animals? "First they throw all the animals in a zoo and then they carve up bushes to make it look like we never left." He says that this act adds insult to injury.

Another bomb goes off, and he jumps behind a hedge. He doesn't know why he's scared, considering he's already dead. His existential question has gone from "Why am I here?" to "Why aren't I gone?" He thought that death would mean the end, but this afterlife is alarming. He says that tigers are unabashed atheists, so why would his soul still be here? He feels like Dante in Hades. He is learning all kinds of new things, having all kinds of revelations and he's not sure if it is all floating into him, all this new thought and knowledge,

or if it is he that is floating into it. Either way, he is trapped. He just wants someone to tell him why he is not gone. A Muslim call to prayer can be heard in the distance and the Tiger stops to listen. "Calling out to God in this mess. God. Can you believe it?" He says that when an atheist finds himself walking around after death, he's got some re-evaluating to do. Another bomb goes off, and the Tiger ducks and looks to the sky.

#### SCENE FIVE

Hospital. Kev is in a hospital bed. Tom enters, proudly showing off his new prosthetic hand. He brags he's like Robocop now. Kev asks him why he came back, and Tom tells him he came back for the gold toilet seat and gold gun. Kev quickly changes the subject by asking to see Tom's hand again. He tells Tom he's been in the hospital for a week since he was hit in the face during a raid by a man hiding under a bed. The doctors are still running tests on him. Kev wants to know how America was, whether Tom ate at McDonald's while he was home, and if so, what he ordered. Kev also wants to know if Tom had sex while he was back in the States. Tom replies he had surgery on his hand; he wasn't thinking about sex. Kev brags about shooting the Tiger, which prompts Tom to ask for the return of his gold gun. Kev says he doesn't have the gun with him; it's somewhere safe. He reminds Tom that he should be grateful to him; after all, he saved Tom's life. Tom doesn't care and persists; he wants his gun. Kev tells him it's in his mother's ass, at which point Tom informs Kev that his mother is dead. Kev apologizes; he's hurt because he thought Tom came back just to visit him and catch up. Tom, however, needs the gold gun and toilet seat for his livelihood. He had planned to work for his uncle after the war, but now without his hand he's just a "handicapped jerk." He didn't even get a Purple Heart.

Kev asks Tom if he ever sees or hears the Tiger. He confesses that he has seen the Tiger walking around on his hind legs, and he has heard him speaking. Unseen by Tom, the Tiger enters the hospital room. Tom just wants to get his gun and go. Kev wants to know if he got the letter he sent him while he was back in the States. Kev considers Tom his best friend. Tom tells Kev the truth of his situation: he is in the psych ward, and the staff has him on suicide watch. Kev disagrees. Why would they leave sharp objects around, like the ones hidden under his bed, if he was on suicide watch? Kev tells Tom he's scared, but Tom tells him, "If I don't get the gun back from you, I'm gonna kill you." He leaves.

The Tiger remembers killing two children years ago when he was in his homeland of Bengal. They wandered near him, and despite his natural shyness, his instincts told him to strike and kill the children. "It wasn't cruel. It was lunch." Kev panics at the sight and sound of the Tiger; he told his brother about the Tiger and his brother told him it was just war that was making the Tiger exist in his mind. Kev finds a sharp piece of metal under his mattress and begins cutting his wrist, thinking that if he offers the Tiger his hand, the animal will finally leave him alone. The Tiger pays Kev no attention. He feels guilty for killing the two children and for the misery he caused their parents, but he surmises that surely 12 years caged in a zoo would have allowed him to atone for his "tigerness." If there is a God, and there is a reason he is being punished, clearly he must atone for sins, even if those sins are his nature. He turns to Kev and asks him how he should atone, but Kev keeps cutting at his hand, wanting to give it to the Tiger. The Tiger explains that he doesn't want Kev's hand; he wants his help. But Kev slowly dies from blood loss. The Tiger looks him over and considers the harm he's caused: he's bitten off one soldier's hand, and now another has committed suicide because of him. Atonement is going to be a long road.



#### SCENE SIX

Musa's home. Musa sits at a table staring at the gold gun, exhausted and depressed. The ghost of Uday Hussein enters, joyous and psychotic, riddled with bullet holes, and carrying the severed head of his brother, Qusay. Uday tells Musa, his former gardener, a knock knock joke and notices his gold gun on Musa's table. Uday grabs the gun and points it at Musa's head. Musa begs for his life and Uday relents. He explains he went looking for his brother after he was killed and all he could find was his head. Uday wonders if maybe his brother is walking around with his head. He takes a seat across from Musa at the table and gets comfortable. Uday says people don't like him. They call him an evil torturer. Of course he's tortured people, he admits. He insists that when people wrong you or attempt to kill you or your father or brother, or look at your wife and sisters, or have felt hatred toward you, you too would torture them. Uday explains the methods you use to torture people: tie them up, beat the soles of their feet, break their ribs, break them down just enough and then rape their women in front of them, etc. Musa remains silent as Uday continues his boasting about the deeds of the Hussein family. Uday displays the 26 bullet holes in his body where the Americans shot him, and complains that after the Americans shot him and his brother, they looted his home like piranhas. And he knows piranhas—he had a tank full of them. "They think and eat like greedy Americans."

He accuses Musa of being a traitor, of working for the people who kill and steal the oil of Iraqis. Musa says he doesn't work for the Americans, that he is a different person now. Uday doesn't believe him. He's going to continue roaming around Baghdad, and he will not go away, something Americans could never understand. "Americans! Always thinking that when things die, they go away." Uday offers Musa a Cuban cigar, but Musa

declines. Uday relishes the cigar as much as he relishes the destruction that his existence continues to rain on the city. The Insurrection being fought in the streets of Baghdad? He is that Insurrection.

He asks Musa if he is still angry about the things he did while Musa worked for him, the things he claims he had a right to do as his employer. Musa breaks down and cries and asks him what he wants. Uday says it is not what he wants, but what Musa wants, especially now that he has the gold gun. The gold gun was a gift from a Saudi Sheikh, and Uday says it was the best gift he ever got. It inspired him to have everything in his house turned to gold—including the toilet—like a king. Under his breath, Musa accuses Uday of being like King Midas. Furious that Musa thinks himself to be well-read, Uday reminds Musa that he was educated in Switzerland, and that Musa is merely a peasant from Baghdad. Uday grabs Musa by the hair and slams his face onto the table and then kicks him in the stomach. He doesn't need magical powers to do that. He places the gold gun in Musa's hand and tells him he now has leverage over the Americans who stole it. Musa doesn't want it, but Uday asks what he's going to do with his life. He can't be a gardener since there's nothing left to garden, and the Americans aren't going to employ him as a translator forever. Uday and the gun are all he has. Musa takes the gun. Uday reminisces about Musa's sister, Hadia; he remembers what he loved about her. He says she was as beautiful as one of Musa's topiaries. She was a virgin, and Uday took her as he takes everything. Uday tells Musa he needs to start working again; all his animals have died. Uday leaves Musa alone with his gun.

#### ACT 2

#### SCENE SEVEN

The Garden. The Tiger enters. A Girl appears, standing in silhouette at a distance from him. The Tiger

complains that there are now ghosts everywhere in Baghdad, and they are all asking, "What happened to me? Where am I?" He remembers a recent encounter. He was walking down a street on fire and saw a little girl with half of her face blown off. She proceeded to pepper him with questions: Why did it happen? Why is he a tiger? Would he eat her? The Tiger had no satisfactory answers, and she began to cry from her one eye. In order to distract her, he brought her to the topiary garden, which he now calls "God's garden." As he talks, the topiary garden is lit. His trick worked; she stopped crying when she saw the lion, the camel, the elephant. For a moment both the Tiger and girl felt a sense of hope and she asked, "When will God get here?" The Tiger didn't know what to tell her. All he could do, with the dead girl at his side, was to beg God to "speak, God, speak!"

The garden now transforms into a small office. We find Tom trying to talk in limited Arabic to a teenaged Iraqi Girl in a headscarf. He is clearly asking her for sex (we gather she's a prostitute), but he is also asking her to wait five minutes. The ghost of Kev enters. Holding his severed hand, he describes to Tom how arduous it was to chop off his own. Tom tells him to leave him alone; he is still trying to communicate with the Girl. Kev continues his recitation, describing the complex anatomy of the wrist, listing all its bones and tendons, and marveling at how easily the Tiger was able to tear off Tom's hand with just one bite. The Girl gives her price of \$20, but Tom asks her to wait five more minutes. Kev ends his recitation, telling Tom how glad he is to have met him, his true friend. Tom doesn't want his friendship; he wants to be left alone. Kev exits, and Musa enters, looking exhausted. He quickly realizes Tom ordered him here under the pretense of "conducting interviews." He is not at all interested in facilitating a sexual exchange. Tom threatens to have him fired, and Musa relents. Tom wants Musa to tell

the Girl that he doesn't want sex. Rather he wants her to use her right hand to pleasure him because, since he lost his right hand, the hand that he used to pleasure himself twice a day since he was 11, things haven't been the same. In that area. Musa gamely tries to explain to the Girl in Arabic what Tom is requesting. She wants to know what happened to Tom's hand, and she wants to see it up close. She says it's shiny and smells of milk. Musa sees something in her; she reminds him of someone. He asks her name, but she refuses to give it to him. Tom tries to move the negotiations along to get what he wants and to get Musa out of the room. Finally, with Musa standing off to the side, the Girl starts to fondle Tom. The lights gradually change, though, and the girl, stepping away from Tom, transforms into Hadia, Musa's younger sister, as he recalls a memory of her from years before. Hadia asks Musa to take her to his garden, but Musa refuses to believe she is his sister. She begs him to take her to the garden he has told her so much about, full of his beautiful animals. He finally melts and agrees to let her come to garden, but the moment of joy switches to sorrow as he, in Arabic and English, begs for her forgiveness. The lights shift back to the office, where Tom and the Girl are engaged in the business she has been hired to perform. Musa snaps out of the daydream of his sister, sees what's happening in the room, and quickly leaves. Tom and the Girl finish, and she leaves with the money in her hand. Kev reenters and tells Tom how glad he is that he finally got some sex and how one day Tom will be able to "rub one out southpaw." Tom tells Kev to leave, but Kev just keeps talking. Tom reminds Kev that he didn't have anything to do it with his suicide.

As Kev chides Tom for not confronting his feelings of incompleteness, lights come up on the Tiger roaming through the topiary garden. The Tiger says they're all suffering God's revenge; He's got them all chasing their tails.

As the Tiger ponders why God graced him with the attributes of a tiger only to punish him for his very nature, Kev tells Tom how hurt he was when Tom abandoned him. Both the Tiger and Kev have access to unlimited knowledge in the afterlife, but it offers them hints but little comfort. The Tiger wants to become something else; renounce his Tigerhood, maybe become a topiary plant, something more pleasing to God. Kev posits that all of these hauntings must be part of a relational algebraic equation into which they all factor and solve together. Now that he's a "brainiac," he knows that algebra was invented in Baghdad by Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Musa alKhwarizmi, and it comes from the Arabic word, *al jabr*, which means "a reunion of broken parts".

The Tiger is still thinking about God, and that if this is His garden, and plants can be bent against their natural inclinations, maybe his stripes are designed to make him part of the plant world. Kev says that if you know the value of  $x$ , and determine the value of  $y$ ...is  $y$  God? The Tiger and Kev agree they are all just "refracted". Tom just wants to be left alone. Kev says they all fell through a prism at the zoo and each part of them began to separate. The Tiger determines to become a plant and cut away the pieces of himself that offend the cosmos so he'll escape his cruel nature. But he is surrounded by cruelty in this ruined garden—he wonders if there is any escape.

In an illustration of that cruelty, Uday enters, followed by Hadia. Uday approaches her and shows her around the topiary garden. In a stylized reenactment of the day Uday killed Hadia, the tyrant finds Musa's large gardening shears, shows them to Hadia, and leads her off-stage to her death.

The lights shift, and we are back in the office with Tom and Musa. A visibly upset Musa argues with Tom that

the girl was too young for him, and Tom contends that she was a prostitute; he gave her money. Musa tells Tom that he was with Kev the night of the raid when Kev lost his mind. Not only does he know the truth about how Tom lost his right hand, but he now has a gold gun. Tom claims the gun is his, and he wants it back.

Musa, remembering Uday's advice, uses the gold gun as leverage. He knows that Tom has no right to the gun. In fact, if Musa were to tell Tom's commanders he'd stolen a gold gun, the soldier would be severely reprimanded. But Musa is willing to strike a deal with Tom: he'll give him the gold gun if Tom provides him with weapons. Lots of weapons. Though Tom wants his gun back, he's not giving Musa weapons. Musa replies that he's not giving something for nothing. That's not capitalism. What will Musa have when the Americans leave? Nothing. He will need guns and bullets to sell. He's tired of "making the same mistake over and over again." He always works for the "wrong people; I always serve the tyrants." He tells Tom it's a simple deal. They both want the same thing.

#### SCENE EIGHT

A bombed-out building in the middle of the desert. Kev enters, praying in Arabic, his arms stretched out to the heavens. Nothing happens, and Kev, switching to English, wonders whether he should say a Hail Mary. He continues to speak to God. He tells Him he never expected to know so much, and that there must be something more important than haunting Tommy. "What happens now, God? What happens now that I'm intelligent and aware and sensitive to the universe?"

The Tiger enters holding a small bloody carcass. The Tiger explains he was hungry; what's God going to do? Punish him more? Kev tells the Tiger he wasn't talking to him. The Tiger argues that since he's the

only one who heard Kev's voice, maybe He's God. Kev knows God isn't a tiger, but just in case he is, he asks the Tiger to tell him what to do, because he wants to stop haunting Tom. The Tiger tells him, "Go fuck yourself" and exits. Kev turns his attention back to the sky, speaks in Arabic again, "Take my hand, heal my severed body, take me from the desert. Let my mind find peace." There's no answer. Kev begs God for a sign to know his voice is being heard, so that "I can haunt You through prayer! I could haunt You, God!"

#### SCENE NINE

The same bombed-out building in the middle of the desert. Musa and Tom enter, yelling at each other. Musa wants to leave; it's the middle of the desert and once the sun goes down, they won't find their way back to the road. Tom wants him to wait. Musa wants to know where the weapons are.

A disfigured Woman enters. She has stumps for hands. Tom greets her with the little bit of Arabic he knows, and she greets him back. Musa wants to know what happened to her hands, and Tom explains she's a leper. This was once a leper colony. Musa turns his attention to the woman and asks her what happened here. It was bombed, she explains. Tom wants to know what happened to everyone else, and she tells Musa that they died. Tom is looking for a bag he left there. He told the residents there he was coming back for it. Musa needs to know what type a bag it was—there are many types and descriptions of bags in Arabic. Tom just wants him to translate. The Woman says there's no bag. Everything is gone; the whole place was destroyed. She offers Tom some water but all Tom wants is the bag, which he reveals contains his toilet seat.

The Woman exits into the ruins. The sun is going down, and Musa, still believing they've come to get his weapons, is ready to leave. Tom tells Musa there

are no weapons. He just needed an interpreter to help him get a toilet seat he hid here with the lepers a while back. Musa is furious that he's been lied to again. Tom brought them out here for a toilet seat? Tom clarifies: It's a gold toilet seat. Now Musa goes haywire. He pulls a gun on Tom, and not just any old gun: the gold gun. Tom is thrilled to see that Musa brought the gold gun, and tells Musa to hand him over. The interpreter, instead, overtaken by rage, shoots Tom in the stomach, takes the keys to the Jeep out of Tom's pocket and exits, leaving Tom to die alone in the desert.

Tom shouts out, begging Musa not to abandon him. The Woman reenters. In Arabic, she asks Tom if he wants a drink of water. She hobbles over to him and asks him again if he wants water. He doesn't understand. Kev enters from the building, carrying a duffel bag. Kev speaks to the woman in Arabic. From the duffel bag, he removes a gold toilet seat and hands it to Tom. Tom asks Kev how he speaks Arabic, and how it is that the Woman can see him. Kev tells him he picked up Arabic in death, and he doesn't know the rules to this whole afterlife thing. The Woman exits and Tom yells at her that he wants some water. She returns with a goatskin bag of water and drops it Tom's lap. Tom thanks her and drinks it. Kev informs Tom that Musa took the jeep, his last way out. Tom wants Kev to ask the Woman if she knows anyone who can help him. She tells Tom, through Kev, that she has a first aid kit. She exits to the burned-out building and returns with a metal box. Tom thanks her. He opens it. The box contains only a single Band-Aid. He begins to cry. "I can't believe I'm going to die here. Out here in the middle of nowhere. I'm from Michigan. It's shaped like a mitten. I was never supposed to die here."

He asks Kev what happens when you die. Kev explains that it's not too bad; it's like fading after drinking all night. Tom doesn't want to die; he wants Kev to tell the

Woman he doesn't want to die. She tells Kev in Arabic that her body has been decaying her whole life and that she's "made of sand." Tom asks Kev to ask her how long she's not had her hands. She tells him they slowly fell off starting at the age of 14. Tom shows her his prosthetic hand. "This what you get now if you lose your hand. It's top of the line. It smells like milk." The Woman goes to Tom. In Arabic she tells him, "There is no God. No heaven, no hell. Death is nothing. It is peaceful."

#### SCENE TEN

The topiary garden. Musa enters, approaches a topiary shrub, and speaks lovingly to it. Uday enters. He is in good spirits. He is proud of Musa for killing the "stupid American kid." He describes to Musa how Tom died slowly in the desert all alone, how he called out for Musa to come back and save him, how he begged for rescue. Musa tells him that wasn't supposed to happen; he didn't mean to kill him. He is not like Uday. "I am not the kind of person who does this. It is not who I am." Uday tells him that sometimes people change. For example, one day you're translating, and another you're shooting people because they annoy you. Musa says that's not why he killed him; he killed him because the sun was going down. This delights Uday even more, and he claims even his father needed better excuses than that the sun was going down.

Musa holds the gold gun out at Uday, and asks him to take it back, since he'll never use it again. Uday won't take it; it is Musa's now. He's earned it. Didn't it feel good, Uday asks? When he realized the bullet hit and caused pain, didn't that make Musa feel relief? Didn't his pain go away? Musa admits that yes, his pain did go away. Uday tells him he is learning about survival. Musa adds that it brought the American to his knees and forced him to pray to God. Musa told him not to pray, that no God would ever hear him. Uday likes this

line. Musa describes how he pressed the gun to the American's head. Uday likes that he let him live so his suffering would be greater.

Musa drops the gun in disgust. He's done with it. Uday picks it up and proffers it to Musa. He reminds him that he's just getting the taste for blood and he'll like it; he'll want it again. Musa spits on the gun in Uday's hand. Uday tells Musa that his problem is that the best things he's ever done in his life are because of him, Uday. He allowed Musa to be more than a petty gardener. He allowed him to be an artist, a topiary artist. He, Uday, provided Musa with thousands of gallons of water in the middle of the desert. Musa claims the garden was his, but Uday corrects him. It was always Uday's garden. The animals are not Musa's; they are his. Even Musa's memory belongs to Uday.

Musa retorts that there is one thing that is truly his own, the memory of his sister. Uday teases him by describing how Hadia's skin burst like a grape when he killed her. Uday holds out the gun to Musa again. This time Musa takes it. Uday tells him he will go out and find someone else to kill tomorrow; it will be easy. Much to Uday's disappointment, however, Musa puts the gun to his own head.

But just then, Hadia enters, strolling through the topiary. In a memory, she asks Musa, "Can I look yet?" He tells her not yet. She wants to see his garden. Musa leaves Uday, and goes to Hadia. She looks at the topiary: a lion, a camel, an elephant, a giraffe. Uday warns Musa not to bring her into this moment; he will take her all over again. Hadia wants to know how Musa makes the garden, and he tells her it's hard to explain. Uday moves toward Hadia, warns Musa that once again this is not going to end well. Musa tells Hadia to leave, but she is still transfixed by the topiary. Uday takes Hadia by the arm to her doom, and then

he casually reveals a terrible irony to Musa: When he killed Tom, he murdered the soldier who dispatched Uday. He thanks Musa for the favor as he takes Hadia off stage.

Musa collapses in grief. He says he will continue to live with Hadia's voice, and he will live with his own hands. These things will always belong to him, not to Uday. His hands have their own memory, and when he puts them on a plant, they create something. He cocks the gun.

The Tiger enters and approaches Musa, asking him if he made the garden. Musa tells him he did. "Are you who I think You are?", the Tiger asks, thinking that at last he's found God, the maker of this garden. Musa says he doesn't know who he is and puts the gun to his own head. The Tiger tells him to hold on, that he needs him. Musa is scared, he doesn't know where he is. The Tiger tells him he's here, in his garden. "You made this place. All these animals." Musa tells him he was the luckiest man in the world, a gardener. The Tiger is disappointed to learn that Musa is just a gardener, not God. He's been looking for God, waiting for him to speak. Musa tells him that God has spoken. "This world. This is what He's said." The Tiger asks him if that's why Musa is going to kill himself, and Musa says he doesn't know what else to do. "I am blind to my own self."

The Tiger understands this feeling. He explains that you go your whole life never knowing how you look, and then you die, "and you get this quick glimpse of how you look, to those around you, to the world. It's never what you thought. And then it's over." He tells Musa he now has a special gift. He knows exactly how many people and creatures this gold gun has killed, including one tiger, himself. Musa hands the Tiger the gun. Though the Tiger doesn't want it, he takes it.

Musa is finished with ghosts, the gun, and the garden. He touches the topiary, and leaves. The Tiger stares at the gun. "Everything I touch, I learn more. This thing. This mechanism. It shakes with fucking sorrow...I hear so much, you know? The plants, the wind, the animal sounds of the city. The hollow echoes of this gun. It's either God's lunatic voice, or His silence. Whichever it is...It makes you wonder what's going on on the other side of the cage."

# Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section includes background information about the setting and subject matter of the play.

We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. For *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* this includes information about Iraq and Baghdad, Saddam Hussein, Iraqi interpreters, the U.S. military and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the Student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

## Baghdad

Baghdad is the capital of Iraq. Its name means “Given by God” in Persian, and is also called “City of Peace”. Its population is currently estimated at between 5 and 7.5 million, and is the largest and most diverse city in Iraq. It is the center of air, road, and rail transport in the country, and the leading manufacturing city. The city extends along both banks of the Tigris River; the east-bank settlement is known as Rusafah, the west-bank is known as al-Karkh. Eleven bridges now connect the two halves of the city. Baghdad was founded in the 8th century following an Arab victory over a larger Persian army, and quickly established itself as a flourishing center of Arab civilization during the 8th and 9th centuries. Baghdad was the seat of the Abbasid rule from the 9th to the 13th centuries, and became the center of Islamic learning and international trade, and was regarded as the intellectual center of the world. The House of Wisdom was an establishment dedicated to the translation of Greek, Persian, and Syriac works, and scholars headed to Baghdad from all over the Abbasid empire, facilitating the introduction of Greek and Indian science into the Arabic and Islamic world. Many of the *One Thousand and One Nights* tales are set in Baghdad during this period. Modern Iraqis proudly look back to this period as the golden age of Islamic civilization. Baghdad was one of the three seats of provincial Ottoman rule, and was maintained as a Sunni buffer against the Shia Safavid Empire in Iran.

The Abbasid caliphs’ power subsequently weakened, and in 1258, Baghdad was overrun by Mongolian conquerors under Hulagu Khan, who killed the last Caliph, massacred Baghdad’s population, and destroyed the city and countryside. In 1401, the Mongol leader Tamerlane conquered Baghdad and massacred many of its inhabitants. By the beginning of the 16th century, Baghdad’s irrigation system was in disrepair and the population was reduced to 150,000. Iraq became a land of small kingdoms. The Ottomans maintained Iraq as a Sunni-controlled buffer state. A provincial capital under the Ottoman Empire, Baghdad regained prominence only when it became the capital of Iraq in 1920; over the next half century, the city grew prodigiously and took on all the characteristics of a modern metropolis.

At the end of World War I, the League of Nations gave Great Britain a mandate to administer Iraq until it established its own government. The British placed a member of the Hashemite family, Faisal ibn Husayn, on the throne as King Faisal I in 1921. Oil reserves in Iraq began to be developed in 1931 under an



agreement signed by the Iraqi government and a number of international oil companies. Full independence was achieved in 1932, when the British Mandate was officially terminated. Iraq was a constitutional monarchy until 1958, when a group of army officers overthrew the government. In 1963, the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party, known as the Ba'ath party, seized power. The oil boom of the 1970s brought much wealth to Baghdad, and the city was quickly developed. In 1978, Saddam Hussein became president, leader, and dictator, until 2003. Baghdad was heavily damaged by aerial bombing during the First Gulf War from 1990-91, and again by air and ground operations during the start of the Second Gulf War in 2003. Ancient buildings were destroyed. During the interwar period the city's services and infrastructure deteriorated badly because of fiscal constraints resulting from economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations. While Baghdad locals have an affinity for gardens and family recreation, traditional patterns of recreation for city residents have been disrupted by war and economic hardship. In the past, weekends in the city's restaurants, cafés, and public parks have been filled with people. Recreational centers include islands in the Tigris that have swimming pools and cafés, a Lunar Amusement Park, Al-Zawra Public Park and the Baghdad Zoo.

## Baghdad Zoo

The Baghdad Zoo once contained 600 animals and was the largest zoo in the Middle East, occupying roughly 200 acres in central Baghdad. Saddam Hussein closed the zoo for renovation in 2002, intending to reopen it April 2003 after a \$50 million improvement. However, on March 19, 2003 during fighting between the Iraqi and American forces in the area, heavy mortar rounds and tanks released or killed many of the animals. Out of the original 600 animals in the zoo, only 35 had survived to the eighth day of the invasion, and these tended to be some of the larger animals. Several lions escaped from the damaged zoo and were rounded up by American soldiers; however, three were shot when they would not return to their cages.

During the destruction of the grounds and absence of zoo staff, cages were torn open and hundreds of animals and exotic birds were released or stolen by looters. Zoo staff claimed many of the birds and game animals were taken for food as pre-war food shortages in Baghdad were intensified by the invasion. The remaining animals were found in critical condition, dying of thirst and starving. Many animals were found roaming the zoo grounds. In mid-April 2003, a conservationist from South Africa and two assistants from

Kuwait arrived to help bring relief and stability to the damaged zoo. Working with the zoo directors and a few returning staff, they cared for and fed the remaining animals, restored hygiene standards, and made repairs. As of May 2003, there were about 50 animals, mostly big cats and carnivores that were from private and public animal collections from around the city. American civil affairs soldiers and engineers helped rebuild the zoo, and many former zoo employees have since returned to their jobs.

The zoo reopened in July 2003, and now falls into what is known as the Green Zone in Baghdad, an area that contains most of Saddam Hussein's city palaces and government departments, and is under heavy U.S. security. Today, the zoo has almost 1,070 animals and has become a popular destination for families from all over Iraq. Animals at the zoo now include lions, tigers, monkeys, ostriches and an elephant. With the decline in overall violence over the last 18 months and the withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces from the city centers in June 2009, some degree of normalcy has returned to the zoo. The risk of bombings is still a security concern and visitors are frisked for weapons before entry. Government security guards check bags and picnic baskets for explosives and patrol the zoo grounds.

## Iraq

Iraq is a country rich with ancient history. It is believed to be the home of the Garden of Eden. It was Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, where writing, mathematics and the world's legal system began. About the size of California, Iraq is a triangle of mountains, desert, and a fertile river valley, bounded on the east by Iran, on the north by Turkey, on the west by Syria and Jordan, and on the south by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It sits between two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. The country has arid desert land west of the Euphrates, a broad central valley between the Euphrates and the Tigris, and mountains in the northeast.

Iraq is the home of the famous town of Babylon, which was located about 55 miles south of Baghdad. All that remains of the original ancient city is a mound of broken mud-brick. It was first a small town that had sprung up by the beginning of the third millennium BCE, and then flourished and attained prominence and political repute with the rise of the First Babylonian Dynasty. It was the "holy city" of Babylonia by approximately 2300 BCE, and the seat of the Neo-Babylonian Empire from 612 BCE. The famous Hanging Gardens of

Babylon were considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Iraq is predominately an Arab nation, and religion and tribes are of major importance in Arab culture. Most Iraqis are Muslim, and there are two branches of Islam practiced in Iraq: Sunni and Shi'i. The majority of Iraqis are Shi'i, and the Kurds of Northern Iraq are Sunni. (The vast majority of Muslims world-wide are Sunni, and Sunni have historically had more political power.) The division between Sunni and Shi'i occurred in the Islam faith when there was a disagreement over the successor of the Prophet Mohammed. When Mohammed died in 632 CE, Muslims elected a successor to the Prophet called a caliph. At the time the first four caliphs were selected, but only one, Ali, was a blood relative of Mohammed. When Ali eventually died, a man named Mu'awiya became caliph. Here's where the split occurred: Sunni's believed Mu'awiya was a legitimate caliph, and would, like the four caliphs before him, uphold the traditions of Mohammed. The Shi'i believed that only a blood relative of the Prophet Mohammed was endowed with the spiritual powers to lead and uphold the traditions of Islam. Both religions have evolved to distinct difference: Sunnis emphasize conformity and social stability, and the Shi'i, equity, social justice, and the dignity of the individual. The division between Shi'i and Sunni has caused much strife and violence in Iraq, as the minority Sunni has been the ruling political force. (Saddam Hussein was Sunni.) However, many Iraqis still have more allegiance to their tribe than they do to their religion or state. Tribes are alliances of extended families that can extend into the thousands, and go back hundreds of generations. Tribes hold political power and status, and decisions are made in the best interest of the tribe, not the individual or the state.

War is not unfamiliar to Iraq. It has been conquered and claimed by many ambitious leaders and empires throughout history. Mesopotamia was conquered by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 538 BCE and then later by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE. After an Arab conquest from 637-640 CE, Baghdad became the capital of the ruling leader. In 1258, the country was pillaged by the Mongols. During the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, Iraq was the central object of Turkish and Persian competition for power. The Ottoman ruled Mosul, Baghdad, and Basrah, and after 1833, began investing more in the rest of the country, gaining control and expanding the Ottoman empire. When the Ottoman Empire began to collapse at the end of World War I, both the British and French were eager to gain control of the oil fields in Iraq. The British invaded and began to occupy Iraq in 1918. Angry to be occupied once again, the Shi'i and Sunnis united against Britain in 1920, costing thousands of Iraqi

lives. In 1921, Britain finally agreed to compromise with Iraq and signed a peace treaty a year later that recognized a monarch and new king of Iraq, King Faisal, but insured Britain's involvement in Iraq for the next twenty years in domestic and international affairs. In October 1932, after years of frustrations between the two countries, Iraq was finally given independence from Britain, and joined the League of Nations.

In 1963, a rebellion by the Ba'athist Party attempted a coup over the ruling military government. They were successful momentarily, but eventually failed until another coup in 1968 put Hassan al-Bakr into power as President of Iraq. On July 16, 1979, President al-Bakr was succeeded by Saddam Hussein. Hussein saw himself as the leader that would unify the Arab world, and make Iraq the dominant oil-rich nation in the Persian Gulf. To achieve his goals, he would use violence, torture, intimidation and execution against any threat or perceived enemy. Hussein's regime steadily developed an international reputation for repression, human rights abuses, and terrorism. A conflict between Iraq and Iran broke out into a full-scale war on September 20, 1980, when Iraq invaded western Iran. Poison gas was used by both Iran and Iraq. The Kurds of Northern Iraq sided with Iran. As a result, Hussein spent years practicing ethnic cleansing of the Kurds. The eight-year war cost the lives of an estimated 1.5 million people and finally ended when the UN brokered a cease-fire in 1988.

In July 1990, President Hussein asserted territorial claims on Kuwaiti land. An attempt by Arab leaders to mediate the situation failed, and on August 2, 1990, Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait and set up a puppet government. The UN imposed trade sanctions against Iraq to push them to withdraw; the efforts were unsuccessful. President George H.W. Bush began to speak of war, and an American obligation to protect Kuwait. On January 18, 1991, UN forces, under the leadership of U.S. general Norman Schwarzkopf, launched the first Gulf War. It was coined Operation Desert Storm. Despite fears that the Iraq army was a serious threat and might use poison gas, they surrendered quickly and were easily defeated. The United States was successful in liberating Kuwait in less than a week. At the time, a decision was made by the commanders not to push forward and invade Baghdad and seek out Hussein because they felt further engagement in warfare with Iraq could prove long and costly. However, the first Gulf War did little to thwart the power of Hussein. Rebellions by both Shiites and Kurds, encouraged by the U.S., were brutally crushed. In 1991, the UN set up a northern no-fly zone to protect Iraq's Kurdish population and

in 1992, a southern no-fly zone was established as a buffer between Iraq and Kuwait to protect Shiites. The UN imposed economic sanctions on Iraq in hopes of wearing down Saddam Hussein's power. By 2003, the Iraqi people had endured a decade of the sanctions that made survival in Iraq more difficult; however, Saddam Hussein remained unmoved.

### Iraq timeline of Historic Events:

Timeline from *The History of Iraq* by Courtney Hunt, Greenwood Press, 2005

Ca 8000 BCE	Early settlements in Mesopotamia appear
5900-4000 BCE	Ubaid period
4000-3000 BCE	Uruk period
3500 BCE	Sumerian dominance over Mesopotamia
3000-2350 BCE	Early Dynastic period
2350-2150 BCE	Akkadian period
2150-2000 BCE	Neo-Sumerian period
2112 BCE	Beginning of Third dynasty of Ur
2004 BCE	Elamites overthrow Third Dynasty of Ur
2004-1595 BCE	Old Babylonia period
1792-1750 BCE	Hammurabi rules Babylon and eventually takes over Mesopotamia
1595 BCE	The Hittites invade Babylonia, ending the first dynasty of Babylon
1475 BCE	Kassites take over Babylon
1415 BCE	Amarna Age begins
1157 BCE	The Elamites overthrow the Kassites and seize control of Babylonia
1124 BCE	Nebuchadrezzar I drives the Elamites out of Babylonia
883-792 BCE	Neo-Assyrian period
792-595 BCE	Neo-Babylonian period
745 BCE	Assyrian ruler Tiglath-Pileser II overthrows Babylonian king, taking over Babylon
610 BCE	Assyrian Empire Falls
605-562 BCE	Nebuchadrezzar II takes over Babylon
555-539 BCE	Nabonidus rules as the final Chaldean king of Babylon
539 BCE	Cyrus Achaemenes, king of Persia, conquers Babylonia, incorporating it into the Persian Empire
539-330 BCE	Mede and Persian occupation

## Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

331 BCE	Alexander the Great captures Babylonia
331-129 BCE	Macedonian era
312 BCE	Babylon is absorbed into the Seleucid Empire
570	Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam, is born
622	Year one of the Islamic calendar
634-637	Muslim conquest of Mesopotamia
661-750	Umayyad dynasty rules Mesopotamia
750-1258	Abbasid dynasty rules Mesopotamia
762	Baghdad built
1258	Hulagu Khan attacks Baghdad
1258-1334	Mongols rule Mesopotamia
1334-1534	Jalairid dynasty and Turkomans control Mesopotamia
1534-1915	Ottomans rule Mesopotamia
1622	Bekr Agha's revolt; Safavids take Baghdad
1638	Ottoman Empire recaptures Baghdad and controls Mesopotamia again
1895	Committee of Union and Progress, "Young Turks" create a reform movement
1914-1918	World War I
1920	British given mandate over Iraq at the Conference of San Remo; borders of modern Iraq created; insurrection of 1920 challenges British authority
1921	Conference of Cairo names Faisal I as first king of Iraq; start of the Hashemite monarchy
1925	Mosul is incorporated into Iraq; Iraqi National Assembly convenes for the first time
1928	Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) created
1932	Iraq admitted to the League of Nations under the sponsorship of the British; British Mandate over Iraq officially ends
1933	Ghazi I, the second Hashemite monarch, takes the throne
1939	Ghazi I dies in car accident; his son Faisal II takes the throne. A regent is appointed as Faisal is a minor
1941	Rashid Ali al-Gailani leads revolt
1943	Iraq joins in World War II against Axis powers
1945	Iraq becomes a member of the United Nations
1946	Iraq forms the Arab League
1948	Britain and Iraq sign the Portsmouth Treaty, causing the Wathbah Rebellion

1953	First free general elections are held; Faisal II reaches mature age, and takes throne
1955	Iraq enters Baghdad Pact with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey
1958	Free Officers overthrow British-backed monarchy
1960	Iraq joins the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)
1963	Arif and the Ba'athists assume power
1967	Arab-Israeli War
1968	Ba'athists take control of Iraq; Al-Bakr becomes president
1973	Second Arab-Israeli conflict occurs
1978	Egypt and Israel, with the assistance of the United States, enter the Camp David Accords
1979	Saddam Hussein assumes power in Iraq
1980-1988	Iran-Iraq War
Aug 2, 1990	Iraq invades Kuwait
Jan-Feb 1991	Gulf War I
1991-2003	Iraq endures 10 years of UN weapons and economic sanctions
Mar 20, 2003	Operation Iraqi Freedom/Gulf War II begins
Dec 2003	Saddam is captured outside Tikrit
Jan 2005	Iraqis elect a National Assembly to develop a constitution and new democratic government.
Jun 2009	American troops begin to withdraw from Iraq

## Saddam Hussein and family

Saddam Hussein was President of Iraq from July 16, 1979 until April 9, 2003. He was born April 28, 1937 to a poor widow in al-Awja, near the northern town of Tikrit. The name Saddam means “one who confronts.” His mother married his late father’s brother, according to custom, and many have said the cruelty of his stepfather toward young Saddam made a lasting impression, and helped form Saddam’s own capacity for cruelty later in life. Saddam ran away at the age of 10, and lived with his maternal uncle, Khair Allah Talfah. Talfah became the governor of Baghdad in 1950. At the age of 20, Saddam joined the Ba’ath party. He attended the Cairo School of Law and returned to Iraq when the Ba’athists briefly seized control of Iraq in 1963. He was imprisoned in 1964 for his involvement in the Ba’athist coup attempt, and he played a prominent role in the 1968 coup that re-established the party’s control, becoming vice chairman of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council. Just over a decade

later, he emerged as Iraq's absolute ruler, a position he occupied for 23 years. He was known for his ruthless rule as an erratic dictator. As is customary in traditional Iraqi tribal society, Hussein was betrothed to marry his first cousin, Sajida, at an early age. The two reportedly didn't meet until Hussein was 21, and married soon afterward. Sajida bore five children; three daughters, Raghad, Rana and Halan, and two sons, Uday and Qusay.

Uday Hussein was born in Baghdad on June 18, 1964. His mother gave birth while his father was in prison. Uday graduated from high school with good grades, and was enrolled in Baghdad University College of Medicine, however lasted only three days before switching to the College of Engineering. Although his status as Saddam's eldest son made him Saddam's prospective successor, Uday fell out of favor with his father in 1988 when he murdered his father's personal valet and food taster. The valet had recently introduced Saddam to a younger woman, who later became Saddam's second wife. Uday considered his father's relationship with the young woman to be an insult to his own mother. As punishment for the murder, Saddam sentenced Uday to eight years in prison. Uday served only three months. Saddam sent him to Switzerland as the assistant to the Iraqi ambassador, and then later appointed Uday head of the Iraqi Olympic committee. It was rumored that he tortured athletes who didn't win. Eventually Uday became the head of one of Saddam's security organizations. He became known for his lavish lifestyle and excessive spending, cruelty that included torture, rape and abuse of women, and execution. Along with his brother Qusay, Uday successfully helped his father terrorize the people of Iraq. He was proud of his reputation and called himself *abu sarhan*, Arabic for "father of the wolf." In 1996, an assassination attempt was made on Uday. Initially it was feared he was paralyzed, but he eventually recovered, except for a noticeable limp. In the wake of Uday's subsequent disabilities, Saddam gave his younger brother Qusay increasing responsibility and authority, and in 2000, designated him heir apparent.

The reign and terror of Saddam Hussein and his sons ended on April 9, 2003 when U.S. and British forces invaded Iraq, and Hussein went into hiding. Three months later, Uday and Qusay Hussein were killed by American forces in a firefight in Mosul. Saddam was found hiding in a "spider hole" near his hometown of Tikrit on December 14, 2003. He was tried for crimes against humanity and executed on December 30, 2006.



## 9/11

On the morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen members of a terrorist group called al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners leaving airports on the east coast of the United States. At 8:46 A.M., the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, was crashed into New York City's World Trade Center's North Tower, followed by United Airlines Flight 175, which hit the South Tower at 9:03 A.M. The hijackers intentionally crashed the two airliners into the Twin Towers, killing everyone on board and many others working in the buildings. Both buildings collapsed within two hours of impact, destroying nearby buildings and damaging others. Another group of hijackers flew American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon at 9:37 A.M. The fourth flight, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:03 A.M. after the passengers on board engaged in a fight with the hijackers. Its target was thought to be either the Capitol or the White House. There were no survivors from any of the flights. A total of 2,973 victims and 19 hijackers died as a result of the attacks. The majority of casualties were civilians. It was the single largest terrorist attack on American soil, and instantly changed the way Americans viewed their national security. The United States responded to the attacks by launching the War on Terrorism, and invaded Afghanistan to depose of the Taliban, who had harbored al-Qaeda terrorists. The United States government created the new position of Director of Homeland Security, and created a color-coded terrorist threat chart that kept the country on alert for the possibility of future attacks. The United States also enacted the Patriot Act, which increased the ability of law enforcement agencies to search telephone and e-mail communications, as well as medical, financial, and other records. It eased restrictions on foreign intelligence gathering within the United States and expanded the Secretary of the Treasury's authority to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities. And the Act broadened the discretion of law enforcement and immigration authorities in detaining and deporting immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts. Many other countries also strengthened their anti-terrorism legislation and expanded law enforcement powers as a result of the attacks.

## War "Shock and Awe"

Following the terror attacks of 9/11, the Bush Administration declared war on al-Qaeda, who were rooted in Afghanistan. Two years later the Bush Administration told the American people that Saddam Hussein was hiding "weapons of mass destruction" and needed to be stopped in the best interest

of national security. After vigorous debate, Congress approved the funding and the United States went to war with Iraq on March 20, 2003. The United Kingdom, Australia and Poland contributed military forces, forming Coalition Forces against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The invasion was coined Operation Iraqi Freedom. Using a strategy the government called "Shock and Awe", the military would unhinge Hussein's power with a steady stream of bombs on Baghdad, forcing Saddam Hussein to surrender. The "Shock and Awe" campaign paved the way for the United States to seek out the promised weapons of mass destruction, and secure the safety of the free world. President George W. Bush ordered missiles fired at a bunker in Baghdad where he believed that Saddam Hussein was hiding. Three weeks later, U.S. troops were in the middle of Baghdad and the Iraqi government had fallen. Baghdad was in the hands of the Coalition Forces, but Saddam Hussein was still in hiding. On May 1, 2003, on board the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, President Bush announced "Mission Accomplished" in Iraq. Unfortunately, the violence and the war had just begun. For six years the war raged on, with no end in sight, and new methods of warfare emerged to claim lives: the IED (an improvised explosive device hidden in the ground, used on roads to explode trucks and tanks), the car bomb, and the suicide bomber, all took its toll on American and Iraqi lives. An estimated 5,342 Americans were lost, and anywhere from 95,412 to 104,103 Iraqi civilians and military. In June 2009, American forces officially withdrew from Iraqi cities, meeting a deadline for their withdrawal based on an agreement that took effect January, 2009.

## Military

The United States Armed Forces is one of the largest militaries in the world. It is an all-volunteer force, consisting of 1,410,000 active duty service men and women. A draft has been instated in the past in times of both war and peace, but has not been used in the United States since the Vietnam War in 1972. There are many reasons why a person volunteers to join the military. Some enlist because they want to serve their country, or have a family legacy of serving in the military. Others join because they are seeking more economic and career opportunities, and a chance to get a college education. Often people join the military because they are looking for a new direction in their life, discipline and structure, and/or an exit out of poverty. The U.S. military is comprised of four main branches: Army, Air Force, Navy, and the Marine Corps. While they all fit under the term armed forces or "military", each branch has a unique culture, set of skills, and pride particular to its branch. The Army

is the largest, consisting of 547,400 active duty soldiers. The Air Force has 331,700 active duty, the Navy 328,800, and the Marine Corps, the smallest, with 202,100 active duty. The military has a system of ranks that date back to the Revolutionary War, when America first had a need for its own soldiers and sailors. Drawing heavily upon the British system, the rank systems are divided into three categories: Enlisted, Warrant Officers, and Commissioned Officers. Enlisted personnel are essentially the backbone of the military; they perform the jobs, carry out the orders, operate machinery, equipment, and vehicles. They are the infantry soldiers, the cooks, the ordnance loaders, tank drivers, and the maintenance specialists. The ranks with abbreviations for Enlisted are as follows (from lowest to highest):

Private (PVT)  
 Private First Class (PFC)  
 Lance Corporal (LCpl)  
 Corporal (Cpl)  
 Sergeant (Sgt)  
 Staff Sergeant (SSgt)  
 Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt)  
 Master Sergeant (MSgt)  
 First Sergeant (1Sgt)  
 Sergeant Major (SgtMaj)  
 Master Gunnery Sergeant (MGySgt)  
 Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SgtMajMC)

Warrant Officers are ranked as an officer above the senior-most enlisted rank as well as officer cadets and candidates, but below the Commissioned officer grade. Warrant Officers are specialists and experts in a particular field. For example, in the Army, Warrant Officers are often helicopter pilots. Warrant Officers are highly skilled, single-track specialty officers, and while their ranks are authorized by Congress, each branch of military selects, manages, and utilizes Warrant Officers in slightly different ways. Warrant Officers can command detachments, units, activities, vessels, aircraft, and armored vehicles as well as lead, coach, train, and counsel subordinates. However, the Warrant Officer's primary task as a leader is to serve as a technical expert, providing valuable skills, guidance, and expertise to commanders and organizations in their particular field. The ranks of Warrant Officers are as follows (from lowest to highest):

Warrant Officer 1 (WO1)  
Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CWO2)  
Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CWO3)  
Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CWO4)  
Chief Warrant Officer 5 (CWO5)

Commissioned Officers (commonly referred to as simply “officers”) are the leaders of the Armed Forces and have the highest ranks. Unlike Enlisted personnel and Warrant Officers, a four-year college degree is required to become a Commissioned Officer. Officers are the management of the military: the leaders, the commanders, the strategists. They supervise the enlisted personnel and warrant officers, and they direct all of the services. Every officer is commissioned by the President, and then confirmed by the Senate. While the highest-ranking military officers make decisions on behalf of the military, the decision on whether or not to go to war is never theirs. They are under the command of the President of United States, and must follow the orders of their Commander-in-Chief. The ranks are as follows (from lowest to highest):

Second Lieutenant (2Lt)  
First Lieutenant (1Lt)  
Captain (Cpt)  
Major (Maj)  
Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol)  
Colonel (Col)  
Brigadier General (BrigGen)  
Major General (MajGen)  
Lieutenant General (LtGen)  
General (Gen)

## Arabic Language

Arabic is the sixth most widely spoken language in the world, with an estimated 186 million native speakers. It is used widely throughout the Muslim nations, and it is the language of the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam. It belongs to the Semitic group of languages, which includes Hebrew and Amharic, the main language of Ethiopia. There are many Arabic dialects. Classical Arabic—the language of the Qur’an—was originally the dialect of Mecca in what is modern day Saudi Arabia. An adapted form, known as Modern Standard Arabic, is used in books, newspapers, on television and radio, in the mosques, and in conversation between educated Arabs from different countries.

Compared to English, where there are many words that resemble those in other European languages, the root system of Arabic is an unfamiliar concept. Arabic words are constructed from three-letter “roots” which convey the basic idea. For example, *k-t-b* conveys the idea of writing. Addition of other letters before, between and after the root letters produces many associated words: not only “write” but also “book”, “office”, “library”, and “author”. Arabic has very few irregular verbs and does not use “is” or “are” in the present tense: subtle alterations in the basic meaning of a verb are made by adding to the root. There are 28 consonants and three vowels—*a, i, u*—which can be short or long. Some of the sounds are unique to Arabic. The normal word order of a sentence is verb/subject/object. The function of nouns in a sentence can also be distinguished by case-endings (marks above the last letter of a word) but these are usually found only in the Qur’an or school textbooks

## Interpreters

It is estimated that since the second Gulf War began in 2003, more than 20,000 Iraqis have worked as interpreters for the American military and private security firms. According to the Department of Defense, some 5,490 Iraqis were employed as interpreters. Their job is to create the important bridge between the military and the local community, paving the way for better communication in the hopes of a peaceful exchange between the two cultures. While an interpreter job provides new opportunities for Iraqis, the risks can often outweigh the gains of employment. Working for the United States government is viewed by the majority of the Iraqi people as working for the occupiers, and interpreters are often viewed as traitors. Many interpreters find their lives threatened. Recently across the United States, veterans of the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan are taking up the cause of their interpreters. Veterans are creating a network of aid groups and becoming personally involved as advocates in the immigration process, a process that can often take more than a year to complete. At the beginning of 2008, nearly 2,000 interpreters in Iraq and Afghanistan had applied to the State Department for a Special Immigrant Visa, which would allow them to enter the United States. This visa was created specifically for those Iraqi and Afghan nationals whose lives have been threatened because of their work for United States forces. Since the special visa for interpreters was created, 1,735 of these cases have been approved, though it is unclear how many have actually come to the United States.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an emotional illness that develops as a result of extremely dangerous, frightening, life-threatening, traumatic, or unsafe experiences. PTSD sufferers re-experience the traumatic event or events in some way. They may have recurrent nightmares, or flashbacks when a noise or vision sparks a memory. They may avoid places, people, or other things that remind them of the traumatic event, and are extremely sensitive to normal life experiences. PTSD sufferers often have trouble concentrating, or staying on task at work. PTSD sufferers often turn to alcohol or drug abuse to self-medicate when they don't seek counseling for their condition. Although this condition has likely existed since human beings have endured trauma, PTSD has only been recognized as a formal diagnosis since 1980. However, it was called by different names as early as the American Civil War, when combat veterans were referred to as suffering from "soldier's heart." In World War I, symptoms that were generally consistent with this syndrome were referred to as "combat fatigue." Soldiers who developed such symptoms in World War II were said to be suffering from "gross stress reaction," and many troops in Vietnam who had symptoms of what is now called PTSD were assessed as having "post-Vietnam syndrome." PTSD has also been called "nostalgia", "battle fatigue" and "shell shock." With the onslaught of new veterans returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the increase in PTSD in the military since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 has been overwhelming. Although PTSD is now recognized by the military community as a serious, psychological condition in need of long-term medical attention, old stigmas around the condition still exist - many soldiers worry that admitting they are suffering psychologically will be viewed as a weakness and hurt their careers. This worry can prevent them from seeking the help they need.

Statistics regarding this illness indicate that approximately 7%–8% of people in the United States will likely develop PTSD in their lifetime, with the lifetime occurrence in combat veterans and rape victims ranging from 10% to as high as 30%. Somewhat higher rates of this disorder have been found to occur in African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans compared to Caucasians in the U.S. The higher rates may be the result of increased exposure to combat at younger ages for minority groups, or the tendency of minority groups to blame themselves, seek less social support, or the perception of racism and lack of desire to draw attention to themselves or their problems. It is estimated that 5 million people suffer from PTSD at any one time in the United States, and women are twice as likely as men to develop PTSD.

## Topiary

Topiary is the art of trimming living trees and shrubs into decorative shapes. The best trees and shrubs for topiary art are box trees: cypress and yew, rosemary shrubs, holly and box honey-suckle. Topiary was practiced as early as the 1st century CE. The art is thought to have evolved from the natural and necessary trimming, pruning, and training of trees. The earliest topiary was probably the simple shaping of dwarf-box edging and the development of cones, columns, and spires of box trees to give simple accent to a garden scene. This architectural use gave way early to more elaborate designs; shrubs were shaped into ships, huntsmen, and animals. In the 18th century, topiary was called the art of the tree barber, but its practitioners say it is the art of the tree mason and leafage sculptor. It has always been of limited application in places where sculpture in stone was cheap or expense was no object; the best examples were seen not in Italy or the princely gardens of France but rather in England and the Netherlands, where suitable plants flourished and where stonework was costly. The fashion reached its height in England in the late 17th and early 18th centuries but was displaced with the rise of the natural garden. Recently, topiary is making a comeback in Baghdad.

# Connections

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives, and the world we live in.

Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.



## The Search for Answers

- There are many questions asked in this play by all the characters: “Where am I?”, “Why am I still here?”, “Why am I not gone?” Do you think there is one big question at the center of the story that the playwright is asking with this play? What is he asking?
- Did any of the characters receive answers to their questions during this play? Do you believe there are answers to their questions like “What happens now, God? ” or “Why am I here?” What happens to humans when we cannot find an answer or when it seems that there are no answers? How do we move forward despite the lack of answers?
- Why do you think the playwright chose to use theatre to explore these questions? What if Rajiv Joseph had written a novel or created a film? Would he have asked different questions? Would the questions have a different impact? Why?

## War and Occupation

- How is *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* different from other images you have seen or stories you have heard about the war in Iraq? How is the play similar to those images and stories?
- Does this play confirm or challenge your ideas about war? In what ways?
- Does this play confirm or challenge your ideas about the military? In what ways?
- Do you know anyone in the military who has fought in Iraq? (Or any war?)
- What, if anything, were they able to share about their experience with you?

When the United States invaded Iraq, the American soldiers became occupiers in Baghdad.

- What does it mean to occupy a country?
- Imagine an occupation of the United States. How would our lives be different? What do you think might remain the same? How would it feel to have soldiers from another country patrolling your home, school, neighborhood? What opinions would you have about these soldiers? What would you be curious to ask them? What would you need them to know about life in the United States?

Kev, Tom and the Tiger are all far from their homes during this play. Musa is at home but his homeland is filled with violence, destruction and occupied by strangers.

- Have you ever been a stranger in a strange land? How did that make you feel?
- What do you remember most about being away from home?
- How did that experience change you?

There are many ways the soldiers distance themselves from the Iraqis during *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. Through language: Kev and Tom refer to Musa as “Habib” rather than his name, they call Iraqis “towel heads”. Through force: abusing their power during the raid, using their weapons to frighten the Man and Woman. Since this is not their homeland, do you think that the soldiers have an obligation to respect or care for Baghdad or its people?

- Is it possible to truly care about places that we don’t belong to?
- Is it important to care about people who are not part of our lives? Why? Why not?
- How do we learn to care about people who seem very different than we are?
- How can we show them that we care?

## Violence

Many of the characters are involved in brutal, extreme, and violent situations. Tom has his hand bitten off by a tiger. Kev is haunted by the ghost of the tiger and loses his mind and his life. The gardener's sister is tortured and killed by Uday.

- Does the violence in the play create a deeper understanding for you of the consequences of violence? If so, does it make you want to take action to stop it? If it doesn't create a deeper understanding for you, why not?
- How does watching the onstage violence in the play deepen your understanding of the impact of war?
- Do you think it is/was necessary to show such explicit violence in order to tell the story well? What kind of impact would the play have if the violence was eliminated or only happened offstage?
- Much cruelty, death, and loss exists in the play. Is there a difference between cruelty and violence? What is the difference for you? What makes one capable of cruelty? Is it innate, or is it learned? Or both? Do beauty and love exist in the world of this play? If so, where do you see it happening?

## Ghost

In *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, one of the major characters (the Tiger) is a ghost during most of the action. Several other characters appear as ghosts as well. Other playwrights have used this theatrical device. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the ghost of Hamlet's father plays a key part in the telling of the story, inspiring Hamlet to avenge his death. In Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*, the ghosts represent taboo topics in society.

- Why do you think Rajiv Joseph chose ghosts to tell the story of *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*?

- Ghosts in this play don't find peace, but they do gain knowledge in the afterlife. What do you think this has to say about life before death? What other plays, movies, or stories use ghosts as integral parts of the story?
- Do you see anyone in your life as having 'ghosts'? What 'ghosts' do you have in your life? What form do you imagine these 'ghosts' taking?
- Can peace be made with these 'ghosts' in life? How?

In addition to ghosts, Rajiv Joseph also chose to present an animal as the lead character in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*.

- Who/What does the Tiger represent?
- Who/What do the lions represent?
- Do you think that the U.S. soldiers and the Hussein brothers are animalistic in their behavior? What about the other characters? What kind of animals are they similar to?

## Gardens

In the creation story from the Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve discovered knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden.

- What kind of knowledge is discovered in the topiary garden of *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*?
- What other stories or myths do you know that take place in a garden? What are their similarities and differences?

A topiary garden is made up of plants that have been clipped or trimmed into fantastic shapes.

- Have you ever seen a real topiary garden? What is magical about a topiary garden or the idea of one? Why do you think that Rajiv Joseph chose to set the story of the artist and his sister in a topiary garden?
- If you were given the chance to create or design a topiary garden, what would you include? Would you use animals only, or would you use other shapes as well? Draw or describe your topiary garden.  
Musa is proud of being a gardener because of the opportunity it gives him to create beauty in a violent world. Where do you notice beauty in your world? Is it in music, art, your friendships, nature, gardens? Is there a way in which you contribute beauty to your world? Is there a way that you would like to?

## Language and Translation

In *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, Iraqis and U.S. soldiers struggle to understand one another. Iraqi interpreters, or “terps,” who work for the U.S. army do their best to translate body language and customs as well as words. The word interpret has several meanings including “to give or provide the meaning of; explain”, “to translate what is said in a foreign language, to translate orally.” The origin of the word derives from the word “interpres” which means “explainer.”

In *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, the character of Musa is an interpreter who is trying to learn American slang so that he can better understand what the soldiers are saying around him, both for his own safety and that of his fellow Iraqis. Musa’s attempt to learn these new words is often confusing and frustrating, and he is met with disrespect by Kev and Tom. Musa is caught between the two cultures, trying to use language as a bridge to understanding and clarity in an atmosphere of mistrust and violence.

- Have you ever had to be an interpreter in your life?
- What was it like to be the person between two languages, two cultures? What sort of responsibility did you feel? In addition to translating the language, did you need to translate the body language or customs? How did you do that?

- Is there a difference between translation and interpretation? What is the difference?
- Language is not the only barrier to communication. Have you experienced difficulty in communicating with someone who speaks your same language? What made it hard for you to understand each other? What sort of “interpretation” would have made you better able to communicate?
- Have you ever managed to communicate with someone who did not speak the same language as you? How did you make your thoughts and feelings known?
- How can knowing another language help you understand a person or a community? Do you think American soldiers should be required to learn Arabic? Why or why not? If the soldiers in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* had been able to speak directly to the Iraqi people how might the experience have been different?
- Do you think all Americans should learn Arabic? How might our understanding of Iraq and other Arab countries deepen if we spoke their language? How can language be a bridge to bring different groups closer together?
- What does the saying “lost in translation” mean to you? What gets lost in translation in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*?

## Naming

Names are powerful symbols. In many societies, the name given to a person is thought to have special, spiritual significance for that person’s destiny. Naming is not just for people and other living beings. If we can name something, we can befriend it, appropriate it, destroy it, deal with it. People often feel a sense of relief when a physical or emotional “problem” they have can be named and catalogued, since that suggests that it might be treatable or curable. Genealogy and demography need names to tell stories about ancestry. People often change their names to avoid persecution. (During World War One, many German Americans changed their names from Schmidt to Smith.) The first thing a person must have when born—or immigrating to a country—is a proof

of her/his name. Throughout North and South America, almost all people of significant African descent and many of the descendants of Native Americans bear names derived from Western Europe. Women who live in patrilineal societies either must or generally do take the surnames of their husbands and fathers. During previous wars against Spain, Germany, Japan, North Korea, and North Vietnam, racist epithets for the enemy nations were in wide circulation in the United States, making it easier for American soldiers to justify the violent acts they were ordered to do.

*Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* deals a lot with how we are named. The Americans call the Iraqis “Habib,” Musa (an Iraqi who is also named Mansour) calls the Americans “Johnny,” and the Tiger says that all of the lions in the zoo are named “Leo.”

### “I am...”

- What do names say about us? How separate are we from our names? What do they do to us? Do they free us? Do they enslave us? Do they make us confident? What are some of the ways we name ourselves or are named by others? What are some of the ways that we might create new names?
- Think about your own name. Where did it come from? What does it mean?
- How well does your name “fit” you?
- The name Saddam means “one who confronts.” Baghdad means “Given by God” in Persian, and is also called “City of Peace”. Does knowing the meaning of Saddam Hussein’s and Baghdad’s names change, confirm or deepen your understanding of them? How? Did it make you more curious about them? Do you think that their names contributed to their destiny? How?

## Naming Activity

1. Take a sheet of paper and a writing utensil, and in five minutes, try to list every name that could possibly be given to you. This will require some creative thinking because we are used to thinking of ourselves as having a first name (or given name), a surname (or family name), and perhaps a nickname. Those are all great and you should feel free to include them on your list. Be creative! Your sports jersey number names you. The language you speak names you. The road you take to get to school names you. You will also have to think of how you relate to other people, even if that relationship is very brief. For example, I am the person who sat next to Gregory on the bus yesterday. I am the person who ate a bowl of Cheerios this morning. Try to generate as long a list as possible.
2. The teacher will call one of the students at a time to read one “name” from the list. (For example, a name might be “I am a fan of the *Twilight* book series.”) That student will then go stand in a corner. She/he will invite others who have the same or similar “names” to come stand in the same corner. The teacher will then call on another student to read one “name” from the list. (For example: I traveled on the number 60 bus to get to school today.) That student will go stand in another corner and then invite others who have that or a similar “name.”

What we find is how we create and are created by community. We look around and see people we have things in common with, communities we might not have known existed. One might find oneself on opposite corners of the room from someone one moment and grouped with that same person (and nobody else!) in another corner at another moment.



# Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express.

Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

## Cultural Mapping

### OBJECTIVES:

- Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.
- Students will be introduced to *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* and begin to reflect on the play.

### EXERCISE:

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle. Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify Los Angeles in the space. Have students who were born in Los Angeles gather in that place. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south or west of Los Angeles). Each group must determine two additional things that they have in common. Report back to the whole class. (Example: The members of the “north” group all like pizza and are the oldest in their families.)

Repeat activity using other divisions:

Oldest, middle, youngest, only child.

Speak one language, two languages etc.

Ask each student to stand by the quote that most intrigues them. Discuss in the group why they chose that quote. What intrigues them about it?

### QUOTES FROM *BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO*:

***“I’m not the kind of person who does this. It is not who I am.”***

***“I’m from Michigan. It’s shaped like a mitten. I was never supposed to die here.”***

***“It makes you wonder what’s going on, on the other side of the cage.”***

***“What happens now, God? What happens now that I’m intelligent and aware and sensitive to the universe?”***

***“My hands belong to me. And my hands have their own memory. And when I put them on a plant, they create something. They will create something.”***

## Tableau/Frozen Picture

### OBJECTIVES:

- Students will practice using their bodies to communicate an idea or theme.
- Students will reflect on the varied interpretations of the theme.
- Students will reflect on *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* through a physical exploration of its themes.

### EXERCISE:

Divide students into pairs. Student A is the artist. Student B is the sculpture. Have student A create a statue out of B on the theme of the “future”.

Examples: Flying cars, world peace, destroying the environment, graduating from college. Statues can be realistic or symbolic, personal or global.

Have each student title their statue and present to the class.

Repeat exercise with B as the artist and A as the sculpture.

Repeat with the themes of war, peace, violence, gardens, afterlife. Have each student sculpt an image that represents one of these themes.

Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant to the characters in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. Are they similar or very different?

## Pictures to Life

### OBJECTIVES:

- Students will reflect on the story and the person behind the picture by analyzing a photograph.
- Students will communicate the character’s thoughts, feelings and activities through tableau and writing.
- Students will personalize Iraq by reflecting on photographs of Iraqi people, places or creatures.
- Students will discuss and emulate the creative inspiration that prompted Rajiv Joseph to write *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*.

Ask students to collect a variety of pictures from Iraq: people and animals, wartime images and peacetime images, modern and historic. Share the images in your classroom.

Ask each student to find an image that intrigues them. Have each participant freeze in the image in their picture. If the picture only shows the face, have them imagine the physicality of the body.

Ask students to think about: What is the story in these pictures? What is this person/animal thinking or feeling at this moment? If they spoke, what would they say?

Share student reflections.

One at a time, ask each participant to share something that his or her character is thinking or feeling. Ask the other participants to listen for the beginning of stories in the thoughts and feelings.

Have each participant fill out a character biography including the character's name, habitat (where and when), family, greatest desire, greatest fear, job and most peaceful place.

If the character is an ordinary person or an animal, the writer will use their imagination and observation to answer the questions. If the person is a historical figure, stress that the profile involves research as well as observation and imagination.

Ask for volunteers to share their profiles as if they are the character.

## Writing Activities from the Character Biography

Write a day in the life of your character before the Iraq War.

Write a day in the life of your character during the Iraq War and occupation.

Write a day in the life of your character in Iraq today.

Write a letter detailing your character's thoughts about their homeland.

What do they love the most about their country? What do they hope will change in Iraq?

Other writing activities could include a letter from the character to his/her mother or best friend, a diary entry or a political document that s/he authored.

Share the writing.

Discuss whether or not focusing on one person or one animal helped make Iraq and the conflict shown in the play feel more immediate. Why? Why not?

## Newspaper Articles

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will apply character development tools to current event topics.
- Students will learn how to discover inspiration for their own work through research.

Rajiv Joseph was inspired to write *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* after reading a newspaper article about the real life event. Refer to the newspaper headline in the Student Discovery Guide.

Read the newspaper article. What do you imagine the soldiers were thinking or feeling during this incident? What do you imagine the Tiger was thinking or feeling?

What do you imagine happened right before this incident? What do you imagine will happen right after the newspaper article ends? What do you need or want to know more about?

Have students write a monologue or a scene based on the article about the Baghdad Zoo. Compare their characters and choices to Rajiv Joseph's play.

Next, have students find an article that intrigues them from a present day newspaper. What do you imagine or know about the people or animals based on the reporter's story? Repeat the above activities with this article.

This activity could extend into writing one-act plays inspired by each student's newspaper article. Discuss style and genre. Rajiv Joseph chose a heightened theatricality to tell his story. What style is needed to bring your story powerfully to life?

## Heightened Theatricality: Theater of the Absurd/ Surrealism/Magical Realism

Talking tigers. Tiger as human. Ghosts. Golden toilets and golden guns. Rajiv Joseph's play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* is based on real-life events, but he has used poetic license to spin a tale full of surreal elements.

### Absurdism

The genre (or style of writing and production) in which a play is written gives us some clues about what we might learn from it. *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* borrows greatly from a genre of drama known as absurdist drama. In brief, absurdist plays attempt to show a world in which life is without any preordained meaning, in which life doesn't have any predestined path, in which each of us must face the overwhelming reality of freedom. The first lines of the play typify the sentiment:

Tiger: ***"The lions escaped two days ago. Predictably, they got killed in about 2 hours."*** —*Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*

Even the majestic King of Beasts gets cut down in a matter of a minute and its death is very predictable. The Tiger, on the other hand, stays safely in his cage, where he is killed a few minutes into the play anyway. Absurdism observes that the only thing predictable about life is the fact of its end. We cannot even predict its manner of ending.

This may sound depressing, but it is also a liberating thought. Soren Kierkegaard, a 19th-century Danish theologian whom many call the first existential thinker, used the word "angst" to describe the feeling of dread we get when we discover that by our actions each of us chooses the meaning of her/his life. Even if we live a life in fear of what may happen to us, we are making a choice. Even if we surrender ourselves to being taken care of by a spouse, parent or a boss or a political party, we are making a choice.

Not surprisingly, absurdism in drama tends to emerge when pointless carnage and the constant possibility of complete annihilation is in recent memory. Absurdism emerged within modern Western drama after World War II and during the age of nuclear proliferation and genocidal fascist and Communist

dictators. We can see it at work in the plays of Fernando Arrabal (*Picnic on the Battlefield*), Eugene Ionesco (*The Chairs*), and, of course, Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*). The playwright abstracts the conditions of an absurd life and, through a sort of distillation process, concentrates them all in one place. As the audience, we know that these things probably wouldn't all happen at the same time. We accept that the absurdist play is using abstraction to make a larger point that rings true.

It is hard to call *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* a pure absurdist drama, however, because it doesn't maintain the cynicism about life's purpose throughout. To be sure, there is a lot of absurdism in the play, but it is balanced against a kind of optimism and ultimate possibility for redemption. Such as we see for Musa in his journey in relation to Uday's cursed gun; a journey of cutting the losses. Perhaps just as importantly, there's the harrowing fact that much of what we might think of as elements of absurdism are actually elements of realism. War is, after all, really absurd at the same time as it is awfully real.

## Real or Absurd?

*Realism and Naturalism were movements among 19th-century European playwrights like August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen, and Anton Chekhov to create plays that showed characters in true-to-life circumstances. The audience is meant to observe the action on stage and forget that they are watching a play. This movement had a significant impact on American cinema.*

For each of the quotes from the play, choose whether you think it is realist or absurdist. Write your reasons for thinking so in the columns.

Quotes from the play	Realist?	Absurdist?
<p>Tiger  <i>"But I guess I was always going to die here. I guess that was my fate, from the start.            But I would have thought maybe I'd have one good day. A day like the Leos had. A brief foray out into the great wide open."</i></p>		
<p>Kev  <i>"We are here to help you!"</i></p>		
<p>Tiger  <i>"When an atheist suddenly finds himself walking around after death, he has got some serious re-evaluating to do."</i></p>		
<p>Kev  <i>"A livelihood?"</i>            Tom  <i>"Yeah, that's like what the meaning of your life is."</i>            Kev  <i>"So what, your livelihood's gonna be having a gold toilet seat and a gold gun?"</i></p>		
<p>Tiger  <i>"At first it's pretty cool: The limitless fruit of knowledge hanging low in your path. Then you realize it's the only thing to eat around here."</i></p>		



## Animal Acting Activity

(The following is an adaptation of an exercise entitled “Animals” from Augusto Boal’s *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.)

The instructor gives each student a piece of paper bearing the name of an animal. The students find individual spaces in the classroom/theater. The instructor asks all the students to start playing their animals at the same time. They begin to create an image of their animal which can be realistic, surrealistic, symbolic, poetic, etc. It is emphasized that the students should not limit themselves to a single informing detail, and that as their animal develops, they should try to find as many details as possible—tail, wings, head movements, fast or slow ways of walking, sitting, hanging, etc. After a few minutes, the instructor asks the students to freeze into statues of their animals and to remember these poses. Then the instructor goes on to suggest a number of activities:

The animals are hungry. The students must show how their animals eat. Greedily? Slowly? Secretly? In a stationary position? On the move?  
The animals are thirsty. How do they drink? In great gulps or little sips? With their mind on other things or with total concentration?  
The animals fight among themselves. The students must show how each animal manifests its rage, its aggression, its violence, its hatred.  
The animals play and peacefully co-exist. How do they play games? Dance? Sing? Relax? Are they more solitary or more social?  
The animals are tired and go to sleep. How? Standing, sitting, lying down? On a branch?

Once the animals are asleep, the instructor asks the students to think of their animals as humans. How might this person walk, talk, think, move, or interact with others?

The animals wake up, little by little, but come to life as the people they were imagining. The instructor asks the students to walk around the room and interact with the others in the group as humans. If there is time, the students can go through some of the above activities again (eating, drinking, fighting, playing).

The students are asked to freeze where they are and to slowly move into the pose/statue of the animal that they created earlier. The audience members are asked to guess what kind of animal each student was portraying. The students talk about their experiences creating the animals, and the differences/similarities in portraying the animals and the humans.

## Truth Object Exercise

Kev: ***“You swear to God this was really Saddam’s kid’s gun?...”***  
Tom: ***“Yes it was his gun. Who else has a gold-plated gun?...We raided the mansion. I was there, man. Two-day standoff...”***  
—*Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*

Objects, also known as props in the theater, are wonderful tools for actors. They help create the world of the play and often help us define our characters as well.

Endowing an object with meaning is one of the skills at the heart of acting and character building. If we can convince our audience that the object carries the meaning we give it, we have begun to bring them into the story and the world of the play.

### OBJECTIVE:

To practice endowing an object with meaning and a context, a story, in order to build believability as an actor.

### EXERCISE:

A day before the exercise, assign the students to choose and bring an object. The student should build a story around this object. The story should be either completely true or completely false. Whether true or false, the object of the game is for the student to be believable to the point that when asked if their fellow student’s story is true, they will vote true.

All students have an object and a story to go with the object. Have the students sit in a circle with their objects. Choose an student to go first. He/she will begin to share their story and within the story, they should present their object. They should tell the story (whether completely true or false) so that all of the other participants want to vote that the story is true. Encourage the students

to keep their stories to around three minutes. Share with the students that nothing is sacred. They can tell the story in whatever way they need to in order to be believable. They can entertain, use emotion, gestures, etc.

When the student is finished telling his/her story and presenting the object, ask each participant to vote true or false. Keep score; how many trues and how many falses. Move to the next person taking a turn and eventually rotate around the circle so everyone has the opportunity to tell their story and present their object.

Discuss who had the greatest number of “true” votes and whether the person was telling a true story or a false story. If you can get everyone to believe you, you have believability. You win! There can be more than one winner!

Discuss why one story was more believable than another. Is it the amount of detail? The tone in the voice? The logic of the story or the action that added up or didn't add up? Was the student emotional or relaxed in the telling of their story? All of these observations are great in noticing why some stories are more believable than others. They also help us to distinguish good storytelling and the components that help us to experience good storytelling.

## Dialect and Accent Work

Language and its sounds offer the audience another way into the play, the characters, and its sense of place. In *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, our experience listening to the language of the characters Musa, Uday, Hadia, the Iraqi Teenager, and Iraqi Woman help us feel that we are in Iraq.

The exercises in this section are excerpts from a speech approach called Experiencing Speech. This approach was developed by Actors/Professors of University of California, Irvine, Dudley Knight and Philip Thompson.

### OBJECTIVE:

Through this articulator workout and warm up, we get in touch with all areas of our mouth, tongue, and lips. This workout reminds us we have all the sounds of the world in our mouth.

Another goal of this workout/warm up is to prepare, explore and even master the jibberish language of Omnish for the following exercise Omnish Poet Laureate.

Omnish is the official fictitious language of Omnia invented and developed by Dudley Knight. This language was developed to offer a way to practice the verbal sounds of the world instead of only the targeted sounds of our first languages or languages we speak primarily in our daily lives. These exercises keep actors prepared, open and flexible to take on dialects and accents for an audition or part.

**EXERCISE:**

Begin by making sounds with just the lips. Be creative, there is no right or wrong, explore. Create friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords, breathing in and breathing out (ingressing and egressing). Be sure to support your sounds with plenty of breath so as not to strain your voice and to keep your throat relaxed.

Add on making sounds with the lips and teeth. Again, be creative, there is no right or wrong, explore. Create sounds with friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords, and ingressing and egressing.

Add on making sounds by adding the tip of the tongue. Be creative and explore with the tip of the tongue coming in contact with the lips, teeth and just behind the gum ridge of the upper and lower teeth. Add tapping the tip of the tongue behind the teeth to your exploration. Again, be sure to use plenty of breath to support your sound making.

Now add on making sounds and using the middle of the tongue coming in contact with the lips, teeth, behind the gum ridge and into the upper middle of the roof of the mouth (hard palate). Remember there is no right or wrong. Continue to explore using friction, fluttering, voicing with vibration of the vocal cords, and clicking.

Next add on making sounds while using the back of the tongue coming in contact with the soft palate (back of the roof of the mouth). Also add using friction and tapping and clicking in the glottal area.

Continue to breathe and support your sounds with plenty of breath. Continue to mix it up moving from one end of the mouth with two lips to the back of the tongue clicking and using friction at the middle and back of the tongue. Continue to explore ingressing and egressing with all of the various positions.

***“You now have a full repertoire of the distinct vocal sounds that are used in language...now begin to explore the feel of these sound-actions when used in combination. This is play, pure and simple, and like all the best forms of play it will inform as well as entertain.” —Dudley Knight***

Using these sounds, turn to another actor and begin to talk in the jibberish language called Omnish. Stress that this is really just jibberish. There is no right or wrong, only continued exploration.

Most of these sounds are called obstruents. They obstruct the air flow in creating their sound. These sounds are also known to be consonants in English. With a relaxed open jaw, begin to speak obstruents or consonant and vowel combinations using the sounds you discovered in the warm up. This is Omnish. Find a partner and carry on a conversation. Allow gestures, the sounds, the intentions underneath the Omnish to emerge. Play with volume and intensity. What happens to your breathing? Perhaps tell a secret in Omnish to your partner. Try proclaiming a statement you’re passionate about and then see what your partner feels about this. Most important, have fun!

## The Omnish Poet Laureate: A Translation Exercise

(from Philip Thompson)

Musa is a powerful character in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. In many ways, he is the glue of the play being able to translate between different worlds. Does he have status because he is a translator? How is it an advantage to know more than one language? Is it an advantage to be able to translate for your adversaries and your allies?

### OBJECTIVE:

To develop listening, improvisation, and articulation skills. The students also practice acquiring a sense of connection to their fellow student. The students have the opportunity to develop trust in their inner voice and creative impulse and instincts.

### EXERCISE:

This is an exercise for two persons working together. One person plays the role of a famous Omnian poet visiting an English-speaking country. The other person is the poet’s translator.

The translator conducts the proceedings and begins with an introduction of the poet in English. The poet then begins reciting a poem in Omnish (all improvised jibberish). After a line or two, the poet pauses as the translator provides a translation into English (all improvised). This continues throughout the rest of the poem.

Under no circumstances should this exercise be rehearsed in advance. Encourage the students to think and say “yes” to the offers the other student is giving in order to keep the creative process alive and moving forward. The instructor might need to encourage this notion of yes and accepting the offer throughout the exercise.

Eventually, the instructor asks them to find an ending to the poem and leads the audience to applause. Rotate and bring another pair of students up to work and translate an Omnian poem. Pairing up the students and having them try this all together is another way to get everyone working if time is of the essence or if your group is shy and needs practice first.

One of the many virtues of this exercise is that the translator and also the poet will be encouraged by the form of the performance to listen to each other closely and to pick up cues from the other person as to the progress of the poem. These cues will relate primarily to the sounds employed, but will also be found in intonation patterns, timing and gestural signals.

If your classroom make up is, for example, primarily Spanish speaking, feel free to use a Spanish translator with an Omnish Poet. The translator role’s language can be substituted with the primary language of your students.

## More Advanced Dialect and Accent Work

If you and/or your students want to work further/deeper or are more advanced and/or have a specific need to learn an accent for the school play or drama project, here is a resource and a way to acquire the sounds you need to make. Go to this website:

**IDEA: International Dialects of English Archive Exercise**

Internet address: [web.ku.edu/~idea/](http://web.ku.edu/~idea/)

Explore the Iraqi accent used in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* by the character “Musa” the translator in the story. Go to this website and along the right hand side click on “Middle East.”

Next, click on “Iraq”. This page provides information regarding the Iraq dialects and accents. Scroll down further and see an audio sample to click on and a text sample as well. Click on the audio sample and follow the instructions below. Experiencing this Iraqi accent in this exercise will give your students an even deeper preparation for seeing the play. Because they have already explored his accent, when they hear the “Musa” character, the translator in the play, they may “experience” him in a deeper way.

Exploring language and sound-making is getting to the essence of a character for both the actor and the audience members.

#### WORKING ON A SPECIFIC PLAY OR CHARACTER:

Click on the country or region you are looking for. From there you will find accents and dialects that inhabit that region. You will find further links to hear samples of various people of different genders, ages and class ranges speaking this accent.

Locate an accent you want to target; listen to it several times. Then, begin to try making the same sounds (Omnish style) along with the recording. Play the sample over and over if needed to begin to feel in your mouth the various sounds and the oral posture of this accent. This means noticing where the tongue strikes the roof of the mouth, the teeth, the side teeth, the glottal area, etc. Work through your lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, the glottal area just as in the warm ups. For example, do you have an oral posture of a “stiff upper lip” as they say the British have?

#### FINDING THE ORAL POSTURE:

How are the articulators working to achieve these sounds? Notice where the jaw is positioned and where it feels the sound is being placed. Is the sound nasal or perhaps feels like it is in the back of the mouth? Is the jaw dropped for an open sound or somewhat closed for smaller uses of the tongue and articulators? Begin to notice how you need to match these sounds. What is consistent to achieve these sounds? Is there a consistent way of using the tongue or a way of holding the jaw? These consistent movements and positions are the development of your oral posture for this accent.

Are there any gestures that want to emerge as you play with the sounds? Do you want to hold a particular body posture as you continue to explore? These are all ways to connect to a character consistently. This is a wonderful way to

build a character for the play or drama project and develop what we call in the music and drama fields, ear training.

Once you think you have the feeling of these sounds in your mouth, ear, and body, try applying them to your text, the lines your character speaks. Return to the sample as often as you need to keep acquiring the feel and sounds of this accent.

THE LIVE VERSION:

**If you have students who speak different languages, you can use a student with another language to be the live version of the samples you would find on the website.**

Have the student with the other language, now in the role of the teacher, speak the phrase “Welcome to my language,” to their partner in their language. The student, who is now the learner, listens as the teacher speaks the phrase several times.

The teacher puts their hand up and offers the learner to have contact and mirror the teacher’s hand. The teacher speaks the phrase again and the learner begins to make the sounds of the teacher’s language.

The teacher takes the learner’s hand to her/his own voice box area so the learner can feel the vibration. Then, the teacher guides the learner’s hand to their cheeks to feel the articulators at work. The learner continues to repeat the sounds, with the help of their teacher, eventually mastering the phrase. Then, switch partners and repeat the exercise with the learner becoming the teacher and speaking the phrase in their primary language.

Include a discussion afterwards offering the partners to share about their experience and acquiring a new phrase from another language. Can experiencing each other’s sound-making bring our worlds together in more vibrant harmonious ways?



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#### *BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO*

*Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* has been selected as an NEA Outstanding New American Play as part of the NEA New Play Development Program, hosted by Arena Stage. It is also a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award.

Performing for Los Angeles Youth (P.L.A.Y.) receives generous support from the Center Theatre Group Affiliates, a volunteer organization dedicated to bringing innovative theatre and creative education to the young people of Los Angeles.

Major support is also provided by The William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

Additional support for P.L.A.Y. is provided by The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation, the Employees Community Fund of Boeing California, The Sascha Brastoff Foundation, the Brotman Foundation of California, the James A. Doolittle Foundation, the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, the Lawrence P. Frank Foundation, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Education Endowment, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the MetLife Foundation, the Music Center Fund for the Performing Arts, the Kenneth T. & Eileen L. Norris Foundation, Laura & James Rosenwald & Orinocco Trust, The Simon Strauss Foundation, the Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation, and the Weingart Foundation.

