



World Premiere
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Mark Taper Forum

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us at the Mark Taper Forum to see *Palestine, New Mexico*, a new play by Richard Montoya for Culture Clash. 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 both Center Theatre Group's Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions: questions about tribes and belonging, questions about war and peace, questions about theatre. Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *Palestine, New Mexico* 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 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.



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre
Mark Taper Forum
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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.

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 *Palestine, New Mexico*. 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 *Palestine, New Mexico*!

About *Palestine, New Mexico*

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Modern military spin and ancient mysticism collide in the world premiere of *Palestine, New Mexico*, a riveting new drama written by Richard Montoya for Culture Clash. U.S. Army Captain Catherine Siler journeys to the New Mexico reservation home of Private First Class Raymond Birdsong on a search for answers. The questionable circumstances surrounding Ray's death in Afghanistan create a crisis of conscience for the captain giving her no choice but to re-examine her own life along the way.

Palestine, New Mexico weaves comedy and pathos into a poetic tale of loss and discovery that spans centuries and explores the meaning of right, wrong, fact, fiction, religion, family, tribes and homeland.

Palestine, New Mexico is the fifth Culture Clash project produced by Center Theatre Group. Previously, at the Mark Taper Forum, Center Theatre Group has presented Culture Clash's *Water & Power* (world premiere), *Chavez Ravine* (world premiere), *Carpa Clash* and *Culture Clash in Bordertown*.

Since 1984, Culture Clash – Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas, and Herbert Siguenza – has continually redefined the boundaries of theatre and broken down the divisions between cultures. Culture Clash has performed all over the country at major resident theatres and performing arts centers, and, for television, wrote, executive-produced, and starred in 30 episodes of the first ever Latino-themed sketch comedy show, *Culture Clash the T.V. Show* for Fox Broadcasting.

Synopsis

Set in the fictitious Indian reservation town of Palestine, the play begins with two undisclosed figures hunching over a small fire. As the scene progresses, one figure is revealed as Raymond Birdsong (Ray) — not the real Ray but a vision of him — and the other figure is U.S. Army Captain Catherine Siler. She is exhausted, dehydrated, and suffering from withdrawals from an undisclosed narcotic. As her conversation with the vision of Ray comes to a close, several men with rifles approach her. Their leader Bronson speaks to Captain Siler and lets her know she is trespassing on Indian land. The reservation is preparing to bury the body of the Chief's son, Raymond Birdsong. Siler reveals that the Chief's son, was under her command in Afghanistan.

Siler refuses to leave. Top Hat, a 1/100th Apache by blood and the tribes' Information Officer, interrupts. His arrival causes Bronson to verbally insult Siler, to which she responds by shooting a Jackrabbit. All are impressed and she gives the gun to Bronson as a gift and informs them about a letter from Ray for the Chief. During the conversation between the men and Siler, the name Suarez is uttered, as well as the fact that Siler was with Ray when he died and that a Koran was found in Ray's duffle bag after his death. Suddenly the scene is transported to Siler's flashback of a battlefield in Afghanistan.

Coming out of the flashback, a beat-up golf cart with Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) logo appears. Out of the cart come Farmer, a by-the-book lawman of the Rez, and Maria 15, a gold-toothed woman who is the Elder Trickster Lady of the Rez. She begins her work as medicine woman, giving Siler cheat-grass root to chew, covering her sunburned skin with a mixture of Sweetwater and red clay, and providing her with some corn water to drink. Maria 15 takes Siler's dead Blackberry and calls it an even trade. During this

exchange we learn where we are: Palestine, New Mexico.

Top Hat is sent for sage and red clay. On his way out, he has an exchange with Farmer who calls him a "half-breed." Farmer pulls Bronson aside to explain why he let Siler on the Rez. Bronson continues to try to get Siler off the Rez, but is told that she has the "heat spell real bad" and that she is not going anywhere. Maria 15 says she will sponsor Siler to stay on the Rez. Maria 15 then sends Farmer out for food, and as he exits with Bronson, Farmer privately confides in Siler that he is half-white, Evangelical Christian, and circumcised.

Now alone, Maria 15 and Siler go back to the task of healing. Siler brings up the name of the man Ray told her to look for, Suarez. Maria 15 pretends that she has never heard the name, but eventually reveals that the Suarez tribe lives down the road, and that they are the sworn enemy of her tribe. She tells the story of Conquistadors landing in Morelia Mexico, in "1640-something" with Jewish slaves, prisoners, and servants. According to Maria 15, the cross-breeding between the Jewish and Native tribes was hidden by the Tribal Elders because they feared the Catholic Church in Santa Fe telling the U.S. Government that they were not a pure tribe. The elders, fearing the loss of their land, water rights, and even their "Indian-ness", rejected the "Jew tribe down the road." This was the norm until, Ray's grandmother left her tribe to live with a Suarez Man.

Three Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) members interrupt the women's conversation to prepare for the arrival of Ray's body. The men rehearse their ceremony and then demonstrate their skill at the art of code talking.

Farmer and Top Hat enter and start to set up a pup tent for Siler. Siler brings up the Suarez tribe, and this emboldens Top Hat to show her a Rosary with the Star of David at the end. Farmer and Top Hat then get into a heated discussion about why the Palestine tribe hides their Jewish roots. Top Hat exits and Farmer breaks down in front of Siler over how much he misses Ray. He tells her how it was he who recruited Ray and Suarez to join the Army.

Siler pulls out a map and two photos – one of Ray and the other of Suarez. She lies down and rests Ray's photo on her chest. As she looks up, Dacotah, Raymond Birdsong's widow, appears. She asks, "Why is my husband on your chest?" and demands her letter. Dacotah goes on to explain that Ray's death means that she and her daughter Little Sky are now trapped on the reservation. Dacotah reveals that she and Ray pierced each others' skin as an offering so that he would have good luck in his meeting with a tribe in Afghanistan, but that Ray kept piercing until he passed out. When he came to, he told his wife that he had a vision of his Great Grandmother. When Siler asks Dacotah about Suarez, she denies knowing him, but then admits to having slept with him. As she exits she asks Siler to not use her husband's death and to remember that Dacotah is the widow.

Another vision begins, it is a short vision, and out of it emerges the reality of the Chief. He begins to question Siler about his son's death. Siler reveals that she never sent Ray into the courtyard where he was killed, and then hands the Chief a letter from Ray. As Siler describes her experiences with Ray, a picture emerges of him as a kindhearted, hardheaded peacemaker. Siler relates how Ray bent the rules to accommodate his Muslim prisoners, such as allowing them to pray during transport or stopping to bury a dead dog facing

west. She fears that this contributed to rumors that Ray was a traitor. Siler tells the Chief that as Ray died, one of his last requests was that she find a Rabbi, and pray the Rosary for him. Siler suggests that Suarez may have killed Ray, but the Chief dismisses the idea, saying the rivalry was nothing more than "a little bad blood on the grid iron." Siler confides that Ray saved her life when she overdosed on medication after missing her father's funeral. The Chief then calls to Bronson offstage to drive Siler off the reservation.

Siler drinks from both the pure and peyote water she has been given and goes into her tent where she has another vision – this time of the Chief and Dacotah speaking and singing. A large cactus golem is seen. The events surrounding Ray's death are reenacted. With a defiant curse to her father, Siler awakes back in Palestine, New Mexico. As she comes to, Siler sees Suarez and begins to question him about the events before Ray was killed. Suarez reveals that Ray had a plan to broker peace with the Pashtun Elders and asked him to come along. Suarez, not trusting the Elders, asked for three members of Ray's unit to shadow them, not knowing that they hated Ray. Siler tells Suarez to turn himself in to the military and offers her protection. Suarez explains that you cannot protect someone you do not know, and asks the captain if she knows Suarez' name. She does not, so Dacotah, who arrived on the scene moments before, tells her it is also Raymond. Suarez confides that he and Ray had the same Great Grandmother. Bronson and Farmer enter with their rifles pointed at Suarez.

Maria 15 and the Chief enter and order everyone to put their guns down. The Chief reads the letter from his son. Dacotah picks up a menorah and places it in front of the Chief. He confesses that Ray's Great Grandmother Neftali Suarez was Jewish and that this

makes the Birdsongs and the Suarez members of the same blood line. It was fear about the tribes' lack of purity that led the Chief to promise that he would not reveal the truth. The Chief invites the Suarez tribe to attend Ray's funeral as the flag-draped coffin appears in the background.

Siler approaches the coffin and says her final goodbyes. The Chief extends a personal invitation to stay for the ceremony. Suarez approaches Siler and requests an escort to Fort Bliss. Siler tells the Chief that she may one day want to get married under Ray's Tree to Tyler, her college sweetheart. The Chief voices no objection to this same-sex marriage, and asks that the Shabbat Song be sung as he offers a prayer to heaven.

Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

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Postmodernism

“We were just three vatos trying to lay it down solid, adding our own vibe, our mix to the post modern heap” — Culture Clash

Postmodernism is a name given to a set of changes that happen when many different cultures and ethnicities come together in the same space, on equal or unequal terms, and try to make sense of their world. It is an awareness that we live in a world that finds many places, or no places in particular, to anchor the “meaning of it all.” If the modern era gave us mass production, the map of the world, and Newton’s very predictable physics of the universe, postmodernism says that, despite all of that, we are more disoriented than ever before.

“Postmodern,” in short, means that meaning is no longer stable. We can also think of postmodernism as a movement among artists, thinkers, and activists that embraces this postmodern world and says, “This world is here to stay, so I might as well help people understanding it and navigate it.” Art is very important in this movement because it can help us make sense of things. Some postmodern artists might say the postmodern world creates space for people who are traditionally oppressed to move about freely. Other postmodern artists might say that the postmodern world threatens to turn traditional indigenous cultures into commodities (things that can be bought or sold, like dream catchers at a gas station). Postmodern art also struggles to help us see that we have a kind of blind and often dangerous faith in many things — especially material things like money, commercial products, and other possession — can be unsatisfying, fleeting, or false.

Postmodernism (1) It is a term for a major change in human relations to other humans and the world, a change that happened because, over the last 500 years, many different cultures and ethnicities have come to live closely together; and (2) it is a term for artists, thinkers, and activists who try to describe and make sense of this change. Postmodernism both is the world, and it is also ways of describing and participating in that world.

What is Pastiche?

With so many cultures meeting within a short period of time, certain cultures have had to quickly adopt objects and ways of other cultures in order to survive (Native Americans of the western plains, for example, quickly adopted horse riding), while other cultures have chosen to adopt objects and ways of other cultures that they soon came to depend on (European food cultures, for example, quickly adopted potatoes and corn from Native American cultures). In trying to describe how, in the postmodern world, cultures have come to trade and borrow from each other so freely, artists use a technique called pastiche (pronounced “pass-TEESH”) which, appropriately, mimics the act of trading and borrowing. Pastiche is an element of postmodern art in which different things that, in previous times, would have belonged to different places and times are mixed together. A collage or a video montage, for example, can be examples of pastiche. In *Palestine, New Mexico*, we can see many examples of pastiche.

The ways that Native Americans in this play attempt to hold on to the “old” —the established ways of Native American societies (their metaphysics and culture)—and mix it with the “new” (i.e., the adoption of western culture and the changes that went with it) — is an example of pastiche. This play employs pastiche in order to show that there are many desert tribes — and that, in a sense, all of us are in a desert with only each other to depend on.

What’s the difference between pastiche and things that are just randomly thrown together? It’s okay to call something “pastiche” even if it does seem like a random combination. One of the ideas behind pastiche is to make us question what makes something “make sense.” Pastiche generally mixes styles and objects from different times and places in order to call our attention to something or invite us to think about a particular kind of meaning. Often, pastiche is used to make fun of or otherwise destabilize the older, more established forms. Pastiche is especially good for making fun of powerful stereotypes. In this play, for example, some things that many people think are associated with all Native American cultures — like totem poles — are actually exposed as being out of place among southwestern Indians (in *Palestine, New Mexico*, Farmer says, “We don’t have Totem Poles.”). Pastiche is a technique artists use to show us that the old is new, the sacred, profane, and that the people in power are really quite human.

EXAMPLES OF PASTICHE IN HIP HOP

Sampling (the extraction of a particular piece of audio that was previously made and using it as an element of a new audio creation) and mixing (the use of an audio sample in combination with other new or live audio material) are forms of pastiche that have become mainstream in live and recorded hip-hop and dance club music. Hip-hop artists, especially deejays, have become virtuosic at mixing audio samples that combine “old school” musical styles and sentiments with new situations or pay tribute to musical influences. In the play, the cactus golem is a visual example of Pastiche. The golem is borrowed from ancient Jewish folklore and is blended with the form of a cactus, a plant that holds significance in the ancient southwestern cultures of Native Americans. Both of these ancient cultural items are then put into the very modern world of Captain Siler, a female, lesbian Army combat veteran. These are things that, before the massive clashing of cultures 500 years ago, would not have existed in the same space and time. This play is inviting us to see cultures that are ordinarily on opposite sides of the planet — southwestern Native Americans and Arab tribes — or on opposite sides of a wall — Jews and Arabs — as different and yet united tribes of the desert that were pushed from their land by occupying forces. And what’s more, it uses a family story about Jewish refugees from the Spanish Inquisition — itself a pastiche-like clashing of many different cultures — and a white woman’s journey to make herself whole again in order to tell this story. Pastiche is at work in both the content and the structure of *Palestine, New Mexico*.

Criteria for Gaining Federal Recognition as a Tribe

- A Native American group must have been identified as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1900.
- A predominant portion of the group must comprise a distinct community and have existed as a community from historical times to the present.
- They must have maintained political influence or authority over their members as an autonomous entity from historical times until the present.
- The group must submit a copy of the present governing documents, including membership criteria.
- The group's membership must consist of individuals who descended from a historical Indian tribe or from historical Indian tribes that combined and functioned as a single autonomous political entity.
- The membership of the group must be composed primarily of people who are not members of an existing acknowledged North American Indian tribe.
- The tribe must not be the subject of congressional legislation that has terminated or forbidden a federal relationship.

SOURCE: FEDERAL REGULATION 25 CFR PART 83 A–G

Tribal Casinos in California

In the late 1970s, Native American tribes began to operate bingo halls to raise funds for tribal purposes. Tribes in Florida and Wisconsin tried to open high-stakes bingo games on their reservations. Bingo games were legal but subject to restrictions on the size of the jackpot and how often games could be held. The Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin and the Seminole Tribe of Florida took their respective states to court to protest these restrictions, and won. In 1989 the Bay Mills Indian Community in Michigan opened the first Native American gambling hall to offer slots and blackjack games instead of just bingo.

Prior to 2000, California tribes' gambling enterprises were largely limited to bingo halls because state law prohibited the operation of slot machines and other gambling devices and certain card games. California is home to 108 federally recognized tribes—more than a fifth of the total tribes in the U.S. Some of these California Tribes have only a handful of members. California also has more tribal casinos than any other state in the union; its tribal casinos earned nearly \$4.7 billion in 2003.

In 2000, California voters passed Proposition 1A, amending the state constitution to permit Native American tribes to operate lottery games, slot machines, and percentage card games on tribal lands. The constitutionality of the measure was immediately challenged in court but in 1981 the Fifth Circuit Federal Court of Appeals ruled that the tribe could operate a high-stakes bingo parlor. Other tribes also sued, and the issue eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that California could not prohibit a tribe from conducting activities that were legal elsewhere in the state and in August 2002 a U.S. district court ruled that tribal casinos were entitled to operate under Proposition 1A.

In June 2004 Governor Schwarzenegger signed new contracts with five California tribes preserving the tribes' exclusive gaming rights. In exchange, the tribes would pay the state \$1 billion up front and a licensing fee for each new slot machine until 2030.

Vision Quest: The Solitary Search for Guidance

One of the primary ways that native people have been able to connect with the spiritual realm is through a vision quest. In many Native American cultures, a member of a tribe chooses to pursue this quest as a part of a personal mission to find wisdom, guidance and/or protection in the spiritual world. The information and blessings that an individual received, were intended to help the individual, as well as the tribe as a whole.

A vision quest is demanding and arduous. The specific purposes, techniques and protocol used during a vision quest differed from tribe to tribe. But in all cases, quests needed to be undertaken with a spirit of sincerity and clear intention.

A person preparing for a quest receives training from a spiritual leader, usually a medicine man. The medicine man teaches the person how to mentally prepare for the quest; both the challenges that could arise and the need to be receptive to signs and information throughout their quest. Typically, quests are undertaken alone, in an isolated place in nature. In many Native American traditions, the person fasts, prays and waits for a guardian animal to appear, either as a person or in the form of an object (ex. a stone that resembled an animal). The quest continues until the person receives a vision in the form of a hallucination or dream. The participant then returns to the tribe to share and interpret the vision.

Christian missionaries heavily discouraged vision quests and the colonial governments during the 19th and 20th centuries outlawed them, but participation in vision quests continued. Today, quests remain an important cultural practice for many Native American tribes.

The Spanish Inquisition and Jewish Diaspora

In 1492, King Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain petitioned the Pope for permission to begin an Inquisition in Spain. They then issued a law that all Jews who would not convert to Catholicism would be driven out of the kingdom and all its territories in four months.

The Spanish Inquisition was not the first time “Conversos” or “Secret Jews” would be persecuted for their faith but it would become one of the deadliest inquisitions in history. Nearly 200,000 people were expelled from Spain, and more than 40,000 were killed or died while trying to flee to safety. Some lost their lives at sea and then were dumped overboard. Others died because of rumors that fleeing Jews had swallowed gold and diamonds. The Spanish Inquisition would continue until the late 18th century.

The Spanish Inquisition was first headed by Tomas de Torquemada, who believed, that as long as the Jews remained in Spain, they would encourage Jewish converts to continue practicing Judaism. He started by arresting Conversos in Seville. More than 700 Conversos were burned at the stake and 5,000 repented. Those accused of being Secret Jews were sentenced to an “Act of Faith,” through which clergymen would deliver punishments. Punishments included imprisonment and torture. If a person confessed he or she was still punished and strangled before being burned. Those who never confessed were burned alive.

The Spanish Inquisition contributed to the Jewish Diaspora (which means sent out into the world). Many Jews fled Spain, and ended up in Turkey, North Africa, and throughout Europe. After the expulsion, Jews imposed an informal ban forbidding Jews from ever again living in Spain. Of the many expulsions directed against Jews throughout history, the one from Spain remains infamous.

The Pashtun People

Pashtuns are the dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan. There are an estimated 60 major Pashtun tribes and more than 400 sub-clans. Pashtun society consists of many tribes and clans, that were united in 1747 during the Durrani Empire. Pashtuns are also characterized by an ancient traditional code of conduct and honor called Pashtunwali. In recent times, the Pashtuns gained worldwide attention after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 when they were recognized as being the main ethnic contingent in the Taliban movement. Pashtuns are also an important community in Pakistan, where they are prominently represented in the military and are the second-largest ethnic group.

The Pashtuns are predominantly a tribal people; however, increasing numbers now dwell in cities and urban settlements. Many still identify themselves with various clans. There are several levels of organization: The tabar tribe is subdivided into kinship groups that are called khels. The khel is composed of smaller groups, of extended families or kahols. The Pashtuns today are a diverse population with widely varying lifestyles and perspectives. Many Pashtuns remain tribal and illiterate, but others have become urbanized and highly educated. The ravages of the Soviet occupation, the ongoing war against terrorism and the rise and fall of the Taliban have caused the Pashtun great suffering.

There are many conflicting theories about the origins of the Pashtun people among historians, anthropologists, and the Pashtuns themselves. The generally accepted academic view is that Pashtuns are an eastern Iranian people who are speakers of the Pashto language. However, it is important to note that today several Jewish Afghan histories are circulating. Several Afghan tribes including the Durrani, Yussafzai, Afridi believe they are decedents of King Saul who later converted to Islam. They call themselves Bani-Israel, similar to the Hebrew, B'nai Israel, meaning the children of Israel. Research into DNA has emerged as a new tool to explore the genetic make-up of various Pashtun populations and it has largely debunked the Bani-Israel theory.

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.

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War and Peace

Afghanistan has been filling the news in the past year and especially in recent weeks. During his campaign for the presidency, Barack Obama argued that the war in Afghanistan should be the highest military priority of the United States. President Obama and his advisors are currently reassessing the United States policies in Afghanistan.

In *Palestine, New Mexico*, we meet Raymond Birdsong and Ray Suarez, two young Native American soldiers fighting in Afghanistan.

- What do you know about the current situation in Afghanistan? Why do you think the United States is in Afghanistan? What are we fighting for? What do you think is the best policy for the United States involvement in Afghanistan? What choice would you advise President Obama to make?
- Why do you think that Raymond Birdsong choose to go to Afghanistan? What do you think that Captain Siler was fighting for?
- What or who would you fight for? Would you join the military to fight for that cause or those people? How else might you fight for what you believe in? Can change happen without fighting?

We see images of war on the news, in movies and in theatre. We seldom see images of peace, or if we do, we don't recognize them as such.

- What does peace look like? What does peace mean to you? Can we achieve peace if we don't have a clear image of what it looks like?
- Pick a young person in your life, a younger sibling or child you know. Write a letter to them describing the peaceful world that you wish for them. What does it look like, feel like, sound like? How do we treat each other in this world? Is this world possible? What will it take to achieve this vision?

In *Palestine, New Mexico*, Raymond Birdsong brings members of different tribes together to try to achieve peace. He loses his life in the process, but his efforts eventually bring peace and reconciliation for the two warring tribes in New Mexico.

Discuss the courage needed to make peace.

Is it the same type of courage it takes to fight wars? What is the difference?

Why is peacemaking often dangerous? Why is peacemaking vital?

What are some active steps needed for peacemaking?

Who is a peacemaker you admire in your own life? In history?

How can we, as ordinary individuals, begin peacemaking in our own lives?

Tribes and Belonging

Playwright Richard Montoya weaves the theme of tribes throughout *Palestine, New Mexico*. The story is set on an imagined Native American reservation and features indigenous tribal people in the United States, as well as Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan, hidden Jewish tribes fleeing persecution and tribes of choice such as the military. Each of these tribes has rankings (such as chiefs and captains), codes of honor, behavior and beliefs. Many characters identify with one specific tribe and consider themselves separate, or even the enemy of, the other tribes.

- What groups or tribes do you belong to? What do you gain from being part of a tribe?

- What are the joys of being part of a tribe? What are the dangers of being part of a tribe?

In *Palestine, New Mexico*, certain characters have particular ranking. There is an Indian Chief, an Army Captain, a Private First Class, and a Medicine Man.

- Is there a “pecking order,” or hierarchy, in the groups you belong to? Or do the members of the group exist as equals?

What is your role in each of these groups? What roles do others play?

There is an aspect of belonging, or not belonging, that is associated with the idea of tribes. The protagonist Siler is told that she cannot attend the sacred ceremony honoring one of the fallen men under her command because she is not a member of his Native American tribe. She is ordered off of the reservation and threatened with guns because she is not a member. Are there any ceremonies or events that are exclusive to members of your tribe? Is there a value to the exclusivity?

- What would happen if the event was open to all groups?
- Are there events that happen in another tribe that you don’t feel welcome to attend? What would it take to bridge that gap?

In *Palestine, New Mexico*, derogatory terms are often used to describe a person or group that is seen as “other”: Christ-Killers, Gringo-Lovers, Half-Breeds, Hook-Noses, Japs, Jerrys.

- What does the word “slur” mean? Do you know which group each slur above refers to? What is the story behind each term? What is the intention of using this type of speech?
- What other slurs have you heard? Have they been used to describe you? Have you used them to describe others?

- For each group that you belong to, who is seen as “the other,” or the type of person who doesn’t belong to that group? Why are they viewed this way?

Family secrets play a part in the lives of many of the characters in *Palestine, New Mexico*. Imagine that your family had a secret and that you discovered you were not the ethnicity, religion or culture that you had always assumed you were.

- Would that discovery change your identity? Would it change your sense of yourself? Would it change who you are in the outside world?
- What if you found out you were part of a group that you had been taught to hate? What would you do and how do you imagine you would feel when you learned the secret?

Through today’s sophisticated systems of travel and communication, groups from around the world are able to come into closer contact with each other.

- Do you think it is important to find ways for different groups to weave together and live as one? Or is it more important for groups to protect their culture, heritage, rituals, and way of life so they do not disappear? Is it possible to have it both ways?

Place and Setting

The title of *Palestine, New Mexico* is the setting — the place where the story occurs. It is a tale of two deserts — a fictional American Indian reservation in New Mexico and battlefields in war-torn Afghanistan.

- Why do you think Richard Montoya choose to title his play after the setting? Why is place important in telling this story? Could this story happen in another setting?
- What images or ideas come to mind when you think about New Mexico or Afghanistan? What stories do you imagine happening in those locations? Have you ever been to either place?
- What is the connection between land and war? Why are so many wars fought over turf? Is land a limited commodity on our planet or is there enough for all?
- What if you had to leave or evacuate your homeland? What would you (or do you) miss the most? Compare the Jewish Diaspora with the history of Native Americans. What is similar and what is different about these two stories?

ROLE OF PLACE IN RELIGION

Religions often use geography as a powerful metaphor for life. Like Captain Siler in *Palestine, New Mexico*, humans can get lost in life in the same way that they can wander astray in their travels. In this metaphor, religion serves as both a *map* that helps them pinpoint their position in space and a *compass* that guides them in the right direction. As a result, religions all over the world attach spiritual significance to the concept of *place*, a specific site where something with spiritual meaning occurred, and *direction*, where one is in relation to that place, regardless of where one moves in the world.

The following scene from *Palestine* New Mexico illustrates this idea:

Siler: *Chief, about six months ago — we were escorting a group of suspected enemy combatants when we heard the call to prayer...Ray allows the enemy to stop and pray in the direction of Mecca....Ray does this Indian thing to the east, west, north...*

Chief: *The Four Directions.*

Raymond Birdsong recognized a connection between his faith and Judaism and Islam. All three religions acknowledge the significance of the direction one is facing while praying: east, west, north or south. Islam and Judaism, like Christianity, regard a number of sacred sites in the Middle East as holy. The Apache and many other Native American nations acknowledge a number of sacred sites as well, but many of these sites are specific to a local clan of their nation. From a young age, many Native Americans learn that the wisdom of the ancestors is situated in specific places.

In the related scene above, Ray is intervening in a very delicate geographic activity—transporting a potentially dangerous adversary from the battlefield to a holding cell—out of deference to what he considers the more important activity—facing and acknowledging a higher power.

- Is there a specific place that is significant in your religious or spiritual practice? Does direction play a role in your beliefs?
- Is there a physical place that has a special meaning or resonance for you? Where? Why is this place important to you? Do you need to be physically present in this place to feel its meaning or does it remain a touchstone for you no matter how far away you go?

Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

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

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 *Palestine, New Mexico*. 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 Palestine, New Mexico and begin to reflect on the play.

EXERCISE

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 “north” group all likes pizza and are the oldest in their families.)

Repeat activity using other divisions:

Oldest, middle, youngest, or only child.

Speak one language, two languages, etc.

Consider their family, friends, religion, culture, or school to be their primary tribe or place of belonging.

Quotes from *Palestine, New Mexico*: 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?

New Mexico's a good place for secrets

Could not feel. Did not feel. Would not feel. I was nothing in the void of flag draped coffins.

We were one tribe. Split in two.

To all our relations.

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 explore Palestine, New Mexico through a physical exploration of its themes.

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

Repeat with the themes of **war**, **peace**, **tribes**, **belonging**, and/or **prayer**.

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 *Palestine, New Mexico*. Are they similar or very different?

Game: The Big Chief

OBJECTIVES:

Students will practice working together as an ensemble through physical movement.

Students will physically explore the concept of an outsider coming into a group or tribe.

Students will connect the activity with the theme of tribes and belonging in Palestine, New Mexico.

Everyone in the group forms a circle. One person leaves the room. The group chooses the “big chief,” or leader, who will initiate all the changes in the rhythm and all the rhythmic movements in the circle. The person outside the room is invited back into the room, comes to the center of the circle, and must try to work out who the big chief is. The chief is leading the other players through different motions such as moving hands, tapping feet, and nodding heads. The leader may change motions at any time, sometimes even when the center player is looking directly at the leader. Other members of the circle try not to make direct eye contact with the leader so as not to give away who it is.

Once the big chief is found out, he or she is next to go out of the room and a new ‘big chief’ is chosen.

DISCUSS:

How did it feel to be a part of the group and to be in on knowing who the big chief was?

Were you rooting for the person trying to figure it out, or was there power in knowing something he or she didn’t know?

How did it feel to be the person who didn’t belong, who had to figure out who the chief was?

When you hear the words “big chief”, what images come to mind? Is this person a man or a woman? Does he or she belong to a certain time period or culture? Is this term offensive to you at all? Do you think someone else may find it offensive? The game is also known as “Who started the movement?”

How does that title affect your thoughts about the activity?

Across Time and Space

OBJECTIVES:

Students will use tableaux, pantomime, monologue, and improvisational scenes to explore coming to America.

Students will examine the theatrical choice of characters speaking to one another across time and space as used in Palestine, New Mexico.

Students will explore how juxtaposition was used in Palestine, New Mexico and how using juxtaposition in a scene impacts their dramatic choices.

Ask your students to think of the first person in their family that came to this country or what they know of their early ancestors' lives in America. Why did they come to America? Did they come willingly or were they coerced? Are there any Native American students in the class? What do they know of their early ancestors' lives, customs, or traditions?

Have each participant create a tableau (frozen picture) of this family member living in or arriving in America. Have each student share one thought or feeling that they imagine this person had about their life in the U.S. at that time.

Monologue: Have each participant write a journal entry as this family member. Describe their daily life in the U.S. and/or how and why they came to this country. Share their hopes and fears.

In character, have participants share their monologues.

Put the participants in pairs. Have each share the story of his or her relative from the above activity.

Next have the pair of participants imagine that both of their relatives were to meet. What would they say to each other? What might they have in common, and what differences would they have? Are they in the same time period or very different time periods? How does the time period that the person is from contribute to their speech, movement, costume, and opinions?

Have each pair create a short scene about the hypothetical meeting between their two relatives. Have each character stay true to the historical time period in which he or she lived. How does the juxtaposition of time periods contribute theatrically to the scene?

Breaking The Code

“No code. No rules. No faith. No tribes. No God.”— Palestine/New Mexico

OBJECTIVES:

Students will explore body language.

Students will practice observation skills.

Students will explore the effect of group behavior on an individual.

Students will reflect on the above skills as they relate to daily life and the creation of characters.

EXERCISE:

Divide the students into groups of four or five. One person from each group leaves the room. The others think of something physical they will all do when having a discussion (or performing some other agreed activity) in front of the person who is at present outside the room.

The outsider re-enters the room and starts a careful observation of the group, who are performing the selected behavior. When the outsider feels he or she has “broken the code,” the outsider should start to use the code as well and interact with the rest of the group. If the outsider is correct, the group will accept him or her as one of their own; if the outsider is mistaken, he or she must continue observing until the outsider figures out the correct code and gains acceptance by the group.

Another group member can now have a turn. The group can make the code more difficult and sophisticated every time they repeat the exercise.

An example of a verbal code might be: all sentences spoken have to begin with a word starting with “w.” An example of a physical code might be: all group members must make eye contact with the appointed group leader before they speak to any other member.

DISCUSSION:

How did the outsider feel? What did he or she discover when trying to crack the code? How did the group members feel during the exercise? How does this process relate to what happens in everyday interaction? Do the students have any observations and comments on body language in general? Ask the students if they related to anything any of their classmates shared.

Outsiders

OBJECTIVES:

Students will explore how we react to experiences of rejection.

Students will examine what it feels like to belong to a group.

Students will reflect on the above ideas as they relate to daily life and the creation of characters.

EXERCISE:

Ask a volunteer to leave the room. Divide the remaining students into groups according to some agreed criterion – for example, hairstyle, eye color, type of clothing, height, accent, etc.

The outsider is called in and guesses which group he or she belongs to. The outsider must state why he or she believes this is the appropriate group. If the reason is wrong, the outsider may not join even if he or she has picked the correct group.

Repeat with as many volunteers as possible.

(This exercise would be interesting and effective when preceded by a Cultural Mapping exercise. The students would find connections and commonalities amongst each other through Cultural Mapping, and then the Outsiders exercise would encourage them to discover disconnection and separation from the group.)

DISCUSSION:

How do we behave when we belong to a group? Is it easy to reject outsiders? What makes us want to exclude others? Is it enjoyable? What is it like to witness someone else being excluded? Do we empathize with the outsider or stick up for them to correct the situation, or do we enjoy our power?

Discuss the importance of belonging. Identify groups you belong to and discuss how important it is to belong to these groups. What if this group didn't exist? How would you feel? Is there a group or activity that doesn't exist at your school? Would you be willing to start it? Why or why not? How would you feel if others joined your group? How would you feel if no one joined your group?

This exercise links well to the prior one, "Breaking The Code," but here the focus is on feelings and experiences of being rejected rather than communication. It can be used to introduce a discussion about prejudice and how we react to belonging or not belonging.

Exploring Peacemaking through Writing and Theatre:

OBJECTIVES:

Students will reflect on peacemaking through writing and theatre activities.

Students will use imagination and physical expression to explore peacemaking and conflict resolution.

Students will examine what peacemaking means to them as individuals and to the class as a whole.

One can take sides in a conflict situation and not use violence. This has been a very effective strategy in many cases. Sometimes, however, this is very difficult to do, as in *Palestine, New Mexico*, in which we see both violent resolution and non-violent resolution in response to a character taking a side.

In *Palestine, New Mexico*, whose side are you on? Which character do you relate to most?

Some believe that to achieve reconciliation you should take on the role of a peacemaker, who avoids taking sides and tries to bring two opposing forces together. The peacemaker is fair, listens to both sides, and believes that by talking we can overcome our misunderstandings and difficulties. In this play, Ray Birdsong was killed for trying to bring together Afghanistan tribal members.

WHY IS MAKING PEACE DANGEROUS?

Take the next seven minutes to write down your first thoughts about this question – wherever your instincts want to take you.

CONFLICT: Sometimes there is conflict because of personal disagreements– differing opinions and ways of seeing a particular situation. Sometimes there is conflict because of structural injustice, such as when the structure of a society or organization is unjust or favors only one group of people. Which is the source

of conflict in *Palestine, New Mexico* — personal disagreements or structural injustice? Or is it both? Is one type of conflict more difficult or more dangerous to negotiate than the other? As in the above writing prompt, take the next seven minutes to write down your initial thoughts about these questions.

DISCUSSION: Ask students to share their findings with the group. Ask the students to identify points of negotiation between the characters in the play; such as between Siler and the Chief, Siler and Dacotah, Siler and Maria 15, Ray Birdsong and Suarez, or any other characters.

THEATRE ACTIVITY: Divide the students into small groups of three or four. Based on your discussion, ask the groups to collaborate to create tableaux of the characters in conflict. Give the groups only three to four minutes to create their tableau.

These freeze-framed statues of characters should depict the relationships of the statues/characters and their situations in the play. The group should identify their tableau as either a personal disagreement or a structural injustice. After forming their tableaux, ask the other students to examine them. See if the students can guess the characters, the situation, and whether the tableau is a personal disagreement or a structural injustice. The tableau group then unfreezes, and the instructor can facilitate a discussion regarding what the examining students saw versus what the tableau students had intended to create.

Creating Pastiche in Your Classroom

Look at the ways that sound is used in *Palestine, New Mexico*. All of the sounds are in some way connected to the themes of the show—to desert, nature, war, prayer. There are wind sounds, voices from a different place, animal sounds, and war sounds. What do you notice about the various sounds in the play? Are they sustained or are they brief units of sound like a bird screeching? Now think about when they occur during the play. Do they happen when a certain character appears? When a certain thing is mentioned? Do they crescendo/decelerate?

Soundscape.

Create a pastiche of sound.

Divide into groups of five people each.

Assign the students a common “sound theme.” (For example: “What was the first sound/piece of music you heard this morning?” “What does your neighborhood sound like on a Sunday morning?” etc.)

Each group member should then come up with a sound that he or she can perform—by singing or patting on their bodies or playing it on a rubber band or tapping on the floor—however they choose to perform it. Have them try different things with that sound. (For example, make the sound like it was on an LP record and a deejay was skipping that record, or try warping or Dopplerizing the sound as though it were coming out of a car that is speeding by you, or maybe try singing the sound like an opera singer or like Macy Gray.)

Then, put it all together as a group. You can designate one group member to be the conductor/mixer of the soundscape, who will tell each piece when to come in, how loud to be, when to skip or fade out. The group can also improvise what sounds best, without the guidance of a conductor.

A soundscape doesn’t need to be a song with any kind of rhythmic time signature, but it can be.

VARIATIONS: Choose sounds from the play as the theme. Or, if you want to create an “imagescape,” you can use a large sheet of butcher paper to put all the images together. You don’t need to draw the images. You can write descriptions in prose or poetry. You can cut and paste pictures from your program or even from old magazines that show things that are related to the play.

Telling Your Tribe's Story

OBJECTIVES:

Students will explore the idea of tribe through discussion and theatre.

Students will determine what elements are most needed to create their ideal tribe.

DISCUSS:

In the play, we learn about different groups of people, or tribes.

How many tribes or communities can you identify in *Palestine, New Mexico*?

What exactly is a “tribe?”

DEFINITION

Function: noun

Etymology: Middle English, from Latin *tribus*, a division of the Roman people, tribe

Date: 13th century

1a : a social group comprising numerous families, clans, or generations together with slaves, dependents, or adopted strangers

1b : a political division of the Roman people originally representing one of the three original tribes of ancient Rome

2 : a group of persons having a common character, occupation, or interest

Are you part of a “tribe?” How many can you identify? What kinds of power do you have because you are part of a tribe?

Why did your tribe form? Who is the leader of your tribe? What would life be like if you were the leader of your tribe?

Using theatre and imagination, we will investigate why tribes form, both the ones in the play and your own tribes.

INSTRUCTIONS:

“Please take a seat in the large circle. Adjust your chair if you need to so you can see everyone in the circle. Silently, please take a moment to look at each person seated in our circle. In theatre, before actors start rehearsing a play, they usually start by sitting all together in a circle like ours.

Q: Any ideas why?

A: To get to know each other and make decisions about how we will work together to tell a story. We will do that today.

DO WE FORM A TRIBE IN THIS ROOM?

“As your teacher, I’ve already established rules for our class, our community, our tribe. For today only, you get a chance to start from scratch. Imagine we are doing a play about a group of people who find themselves stranded in a desert. You all will play the parts of the people stranded together. First, you will have to figure out how to survive together. Then, we’ll create tableaux that show what life in the desert is like, and then we’ll bring them to life.”

Make Your Tribe

“As a group, you will decide the rules and laws of your desert tribe together. You can decide who leads your group and how. Will you have a king, a queen, a president, a chief, or something totally different? You decide what happens if someone breaks the rules. You decide what language (or languages) your group speaks, what foods you will eat, where you will live, what you call your tribe – everything.”

“The only rules of the game are you must stay inside this circle of chairs and everyone must treat each other with respect. Once the timer starts, you are free to roam around the circle to work together or you may choose to talk seated together as a group. It’s up to you.”

“But you must find a way to make final decisions on your choices as a group by the time the alarm rings. (I’ll set the timer for 35 minutes from now). Then you must, as a group, pick some people from the tribe to describe the new tribe you have created together.”

“You can use these large sheets of paper and markers however you wish. But one sheet must be used as a flag for your new tribe. You as a group, will need to design a flag to represent your tribe.”

CLAN PRESENTATION:

At the end of the allotted time, students will share and describe the elements of their newly formed tribe. How did you decide who would lead the group?

What made you decide to play the role you did in your new tribe?

MORNING, NOON, AND NIGHT

“Please return to your chairs in the circle. We are going to form three small groups. Instead of counting off 1-2-3, we’ll count off saying ‘morning, noon, night.’ Now, please find your group and sit together. You’ve created your tribe and figured out what role you play. Now, with your group, you will create a tableaux or frozen picture to show a snapshot of what is happening in this desert. The morning group shows what’s happening at the beginning of the day. The Noon group shows us what is happening at lunchtime. And the Night group shows us what is happening as people are getting ready for bed.”

[Groups get 10 minutes to create tableaux and then they share.]

“Next, return to your group. Get back into your tableaux and slowly start to bring it to life. In 10 minutes we’ll share them with each other. [Groups get 10 minutes to bring their tableaux to life with movement and sound.]

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

The three groups share their living tableaux back to back without interruption. Morning, noon, then night.

QUESTIONS

What roles were people playing in these short stories? Who was in charge?

Who were they leaders? Teachers? Healers? Rule-breakers?

Who plays these roles in *Palestine, New Mexico*?

Double Casting

In *Palestine, New Mexico*, two of the roles are double cast. This means that one actor will play two different roles in the play.

- What kinds of challenges might a performer face when creating two completely different roles?
- What methods might an actor use to create two different characters? What aspects of the characters might need to be completely different (voice, posture, walk, etc)?

The character of Raymond Birdsong and the character of Ray Suarez will be played by the same actor. They are cousins that come from different Native American tribes. All of their lives, they have been taught to hate each other. Ironically, they end up serving in the military together.

- Since the characters are cousins, would it be most effective to portray them in a similar way, or would that be confusing to an audience member?
- Did seeing the same actor playing Raymond and Ray enhance your understanding of their familial connection? What were the differences between the portrayal of Raymond Birdsong and the portrayal of Ray Suarez? What specifically did the actor do to delineate between the two characters?

The characters of Siler's father and the Chief (Raymond Birdsong's father) will be played by the same actor. Both of them are portrayed as having difficult relationships with their children.

- By having one actor play both father figures, what might *Culture Clash* be saying about fatherhood? What do you think the choice expresses about fatherhood?
- Why do you think that the father was double cast? Was this an artistic choice or an economic one? Should the actor playing both fathers attempt to make them physically different, or should he portray them in a similar way? Why?

ACTING EXERCISE:

The characters that are double cast have extremely strong connections. Raymond and Ray are cousins. The other two characters are fathers.

- The class forms a circle. From where students are standing, ask them to close their eyes and think of someone in their lives that is very similar to them, someone they strongly identify with, someone they have a strong connection to. This person could be from any group: family, neighborhood, friends, church, work, etc. Perhaps they are not from a particular group. Ask students to think about what they have in common with this person.
- Now, ask students to think about what makes them different from this person. (How do you differ physically? Mentally? Emotionally? How do your beliefs differ? How do your interests differ?)

- Students are instructed to get on their feet and walk around the space in their own manner. Ask them to become aware of how they walk. Do they walk fast or slow? Small steps or large strides? What is their posture like? Are they slouching, walking tall, or somewhere in between?
- Ask students to freeze. Have them close their eyes and, once again, envision the person who is similar to them.
- When it is time to open their eyes, they will now walk around the room as the person they have been thinking about. How is that person's walk different from their own? Where is the center? What is the rhythm? What kind of posture do they have? If they can't remember exactly how the person walks, imagine how they might walk. There are no right and wrong ways to do this.
- Students come back into a circle.
- Going around the circle, each student shares one thing they have in common with this person and one area where they are different. They do not have to say who the person is, or anything else about the person at all.

VARIATIONS:

- One at a time, have students enter a room as themselves, then as the person they are similar to. They can actually enter the classroom, or there can be an imaginary doorway that the students walk through.

AND/OR

- Have students freeze into statues of the person they are thinking about.
- From that position, have them begin an activity as that person (fixing a meal, fighting an enemy, gardening, putting on a coat, etc)
- Have them freeze into a final statue.
- One at a time, have the students unfreeze and share with the class one thing they have in common with this character, and one thing that is different about them.

AND/OR

Instead of choosing someone they are similar to, students choose a character to create from a list of characters in the play:

Female Army captain

Elder Trickster woman

Native American Private First Class

A Native American police officer

Modern-day Native American chief

A Native American widow and mother in her 20's.

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Credits

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH

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