



STUDENT
MATINEE
PROGRAM

Discovery Guide



ELLIOT, A SOLDIER'S FUGUE

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DIRECTED BY SHISHIR KURUP

ELLIOT, A SOLDIER'S FUGUE explores the legacy of war through three generations of a Puerto Rican family. Elliot Ortiz is a young soldier, like his Pop was before him, like his *abuelo* before him. But despite the things they share—their love of music, their love of each other, and their experiences of war—they can't communicate, even when they desperately need to.

The play centers around 19-year-old Elliot, recently returned to his North Philadelphia home after being injured in Iraq. He wants to learn the war stories of his father and grandfather who served in Vietnam and Korea to try and make sense of his own time in combat.

Written by Quiara Alegría Hudes, the play is the first in a trilogy of plays inspired by Iraq war veteran Elliot Ruiz, Quiara's cousin. Born and raised in Philadelphia to a Puerto Rican mother and Jewish

father, Quiara writes about the real-life people and places of her community. To create the *Elliot* trilogy (which also includes *Water by the Spoonful* and *The Happiest Song Plays Last*), Quiara interviewed family members and then combined facts with fiction, focusing on “why their stories matter.”

Originally trained as a classical pianist and composer, she imagines her stories with music as the framework. “My first thought is always what kind of music I am going to have in this play. And I base the world, the language of the play, on that type of music,” she explained.

Whose stories from your community need to be told?

Why do their stories matter?

“All I could think was, I have to talk to Pop... He never sat me down and told me what it was like, for real.” –Elliot

THE ORTIZ FAMILY

ELLIOT ORTIZ
serving in Iraq,
1st Marine Division, 19

“Like, here’s who you are, Elliot, and you never even knew.”

POP (George)
Elliot’s father,
served in Vietnam,
3rd Cavalry Division

“You can’t sit around and feel sorry for yourself or you’re gonna die.”

GRANDPOP (also George)
Elliot’s grandfather,
served in Korea, 65th
Infantry Regiment of
Puerto Rico

“All I know is what music I was playing at the time.”

GINNY
Elliot’s mother,
served in Vietnam,
Army Nurse Corps

“You have to plant wild.”

CODE OF SILENCE

Each of the characters we meet in *Elliot* experienced trauma in the military, but they stay silent, keeping the pain of war inside. Because they honor a code of silence, they don’t know how similar their stories and experiences are.

Why do you think the characters in *Elliot* honor a code of silence? Why don’t they share their war experiences with one another?

Do you have family or friends who have served in the military? Do they share their stories?



POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

After combat, veterans may carry visible scars like physical injuries, or they may carry scars that are harder to see. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can happen after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event such as military combat, a natural disaster, serious accident, or act of violence. It’s estimated that 31 percent of Vietnam veterans and 20 percent of Iraq veterans experience some form of PTSD. Symptoms of PTSD include: flashbacks to the event, feelings of guilt or shame, avoidance, anger, emotional outbursts, and drug or alcohol dependence. **If you think that you or someone you know has PTSD, there is help. Please look at the NATIONAL CENTER FOR PTSD website for resources at www.ptsd.va.gov. Veterans can call 1-800-273-8255.**



Fugue
“As I was visualizing the play, before I even started writing it, I just imagined three characters and their lives happening, their stories happening, on top of each other. It just visually felt like a fugue to me.”
—Quiara Alegria Hudes

The structure of *Elliot* is based on a type of classical music called a fugue. Fugues were developed in the Baroque period (ca. 1600–1750) and popularized by musical composer J.S. Bach. A fugue uses interwoven melodies based on a single musical idea or theme. The theme is introduced by one musical part and then repeated by the other parts of the music. Sometimes the theme is repeated exactly. Sometimes there are changes or variations.

In *Elliot*, the voices of Elliot, Ginny, Pop, and Grandpop are different voices expressing the same idea: a personal experience of being at war.

What music tells the story of your life?
Have you ever used music to communicate something you couldn’t put into words?

ELLIOT, A SOLDIER'S FUGUE

THE KOREAN WAR

(June 25, 1950 – July 27, 1953)

- World War II divided Korea into a Communist northern half and a non-Communist southern half.
- On June 25, 1950, North Korea—led by Kim Il-sung, the grandfather of North Korea's current leader, Kim Jong-Un—invaded South Korea with the support of the Soviet Union.
- The United States, anxious about the spread of communism, convinced the United Nations to intervene as a “police action,” sending forces into South Korea to halt the North Korean invasion. The US-led troops swiftly pushed North Korea out of the South.
- Rather than ending the conflict, the US decided to invade North Korea to eliminate communism. This threatened Korea's Communist neighbor, The People's Republic of China, who sent an army to fight with North Korea against the US.
- The US forces were no match for the Chinese Communist Army and North Koreans in the mountains of the North. For the first time in their military history, the US Marines retreated. Korea returned to a divided North and South, the same as before the war.
- No peace treaty has been signed, and the two Koreas are technically still at war.
- Over 36,000 Americans lost their lives in Korea and 7,747 are still missing. It is estimated that over 1.5 million Korean and Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed during the Korean War between 1950 and 1953.
- It's known as the “forgotten war” because it received so little public attention. Upon returning home in 1953, Korean War veterans struggled with feeling invisible, lacking the support that veterans received after the end of World War II, just eight years earlier.

THE VIETNAM WAR

(November 1, 1955 – April 30, 1975)

- In 1954, Vietnam was divided into a Communist North (supported by countries such as The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union) and an anti-Communist South (supported primarily by the United States).
- The North Vietnamese fought to make North and South Vietnam one Communist nation.
- Fearing the spread of communism, the United States sent military advisors to South Vietnam. Eventually over 600,000 American troops would serve in Vietnam.





- Many South Vietnamese, known as the Viet Cong, fought on behalf of the Communist North and their leader, Ho Chi Minh.
- Like in the Korean War, conventional American-style warfare couldn't match the guerrilla-style tactics of the Viet Cong, who used surprise attacks and their knowledge of the land to win battles in the jungles of Vietnam.
- On April 30, 1975, after over 58,000 American deaths, the last Americans left South Vietnam as the war continued between the North and South.
- The war also gave rise to a vast anti-war movement across America that tore families apart. Many young people didn't believe that it was America's moral responsibility to fight and didn't want to be drafted to fight a war they didn't believe in.
- Americans could not ignore the Vietnam War as they had the Korean War. The Vietnam War was the first in US history to be broadcast on television.
- Many Americans began to grow bitter and mistrust the US government, who claimed that the US was winning the war.
- If veterans returning from the Korean War were ignored, veterans from Vietnam experienced hatred. Many Americans took the anger they had at the government and placed it on the veterans who served.

THE IRAQ WAR

(March 20, 2003 – December 18, 2011)

- The United States wanted to overthrow Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein because he was thought to have weapons of mass destruction. The government feared that he would use these weapons against the US or give them to Al-Qaeda, a radical anti-western organization in Afghanistan responsible for the 9/11 attacks. (Weapons of mass destruction are nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons that can cause widespread harm.)
- On March 20, 2003, the US, with the support of the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland, invaded Iraq. Many members of the United Nations, including France and Germany, opposed the invasion.
- By the end of 2003, the US had defeated the Iraqi army, captured Hussein, and occupied Iraq.
- The war erupted into violence between different ethnic groups (Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds) as the US-led occupation tried to stabilize and rebuild Iraq.
- Over 4,000 American soldiers were killed and 32,222 were injured in Iraq. An estimated 500,000 Iraqis (civilians and soldiers) were killed.
- The alleged weapons of mass destruction did not exist.
- Most Americans were indifferent to the war in Iraq. It was not a popular war, but it did not incite daily marches and civil protests as there had been against the Vietnam War. Many Americans, even if they disagreed with the war, just went on with their lives.
- While many soldiers returning home from Iraq were treated like heroes, returning soldiers still experienced feelings of depression, shame, and anger. Approximately 20 percent of Iraq War veterans have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- America still has more than 5,200 troops stationed in Iraq.



**“A SEED
IS A CONTRACT
WITH THE FUTURE.”**

—GINNY

Written by Emily Alpren

Special Thanks

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