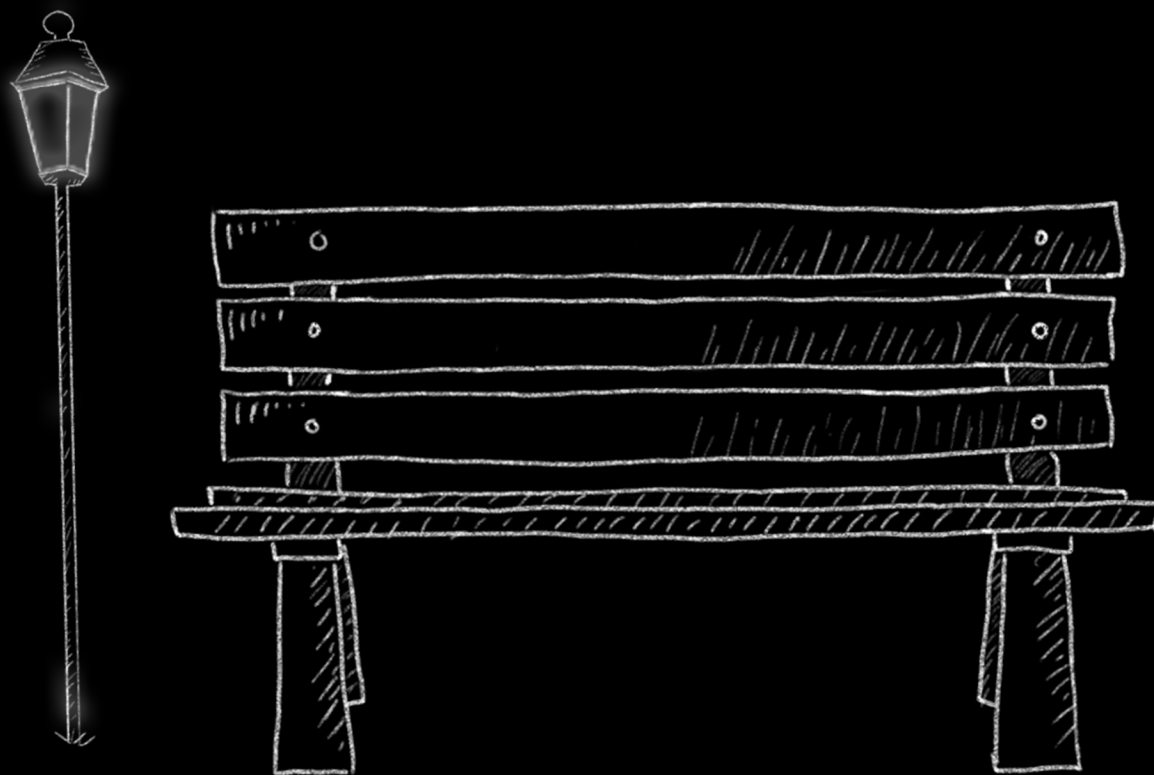


IRONBOUND

by MARTYNA MAJOK

Directed by JESSICA HOLT



STUDY GUIDE

Livestream dates: Sept 26–Oct 2, 2020

On-Demand viewing: Oct 9–Oct 16, 2020

WELCOME TO A.C.T.

Welcome to Pulitzer Prize—winning playwright Martyna Majok's *Ironbound*!

This is Darja's play. She is a Polish immigrant to the U.S. living in ex-urban, industrial New Jersey. The play time travels, as scenes in memory provide Darja with choices and opportunities—those American Dream buzzwords—but also expose only in retrospect what are maybe mistakes. The story accumulates beautifully, revealing relationships with a lover, an ex-husband, and a young stranger as well as her relationship to a factory and work, more generally. We, the audience, are on a nonlinear journey, but always we see Darja waiting at the same bus stop. Her world is fluid and stuck.

Director Mike Nichols frequently stated that characters (and maybe people offstage too?) have really just three modes of action. They can fight, negotiate, or seduce. This feels pointedly true in *Ironbound*. We can feel Darja's hope and determination and also know that her fatigue and regret are side effects of her world—not her. Martyna Majok starts her play with an epigram from Robert Pinsky's *Jersey Rain*: "Now near the end of the middle stretch of road/What have I learned? Some earthly wiles. An art./That often I cannot tell good fortune from bad,/ That once had seemed so easy to tell apart." In the opening scene, Darja tells her cheating boyfriend that she will take him back if he pays her \$3000. "I need figures. Numbers. Money. You are not my great love, OK?" A negotiation that, won or lost, will have consequences. The world is messy. The tone is a mix of humor, love, need, and anger.

I am excited to share this play on Zoom, a rough but intimate medium, where we can notice a welling of tears, or a blush below the skin, or feel a yearning to be recognized and understood. I know director Jessica Holt, a valued member of the A.C.T. family and Bay Area new play scene, will make this memorable. Jessica directed a spot-on production of *The Wolves* for the Young Conservatory in 2019 with a large cast of 15- to 18-year-old girls, bringing a soccer team to life. She is also developing for A.C.T.'s YC, a musical *The Code* with the theatrical rock band The Kilbanes. I am so sorry that her production of *The Comedy of Errors* at Cal Shakes was shut down due to COVID-19, but am thrilled to have her working with MFA third-year actors Eliza Kaye, Zahan F. Mehta, Chris Stevens, and Clint Bidwell, whose creative energy, craft, curiosity, and dedication are a perfect match for this story and this moment.



Pam MacKinnon (she/her)
Artistic Director

Hello everyone,

Welcome to our fall season!

We are pleased at the ingenuity and resilience of the team at A.C.T. As a producing theater we are driven to create. While many theaters are not producing theater right now, we are bringing you numerous creations virtually until we can be together in person.

We have found a way to keep artists working and to profile the talents of our MFA students as part of our mainstage season. You are witnessing some of the top actors in this country at the beginning of their careers. It is inspirational to experience their learning and growth at the same time that they are pioneering live virtual theater for the field.

As part of our commitment to **equity, diversity, and inclusion**, we are in the process of building a meaningful, continual relationship with the local Indigenous theater community. As part of this we begin by honoring the lands upon which we do our work. We would be proud to offer deep gratitude to the tribal band of Ramaytush Ohlone peoples and their lands that cover Northern California and down the Pacific coastline. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish in the 1700s, the Ramaytush Ohlone numbered approximately 1500 persons, and made their life on the sacred lands. Due to the invasion and the establishment of Franciscan Missions throughout California, only a few families survived and still remain. Those descendants make up the membership of the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone (ARO) today. We honor the Ohlone as a people, their resilience, and all they have done and continue to do in maintaining sacred and ancestral lands, ceremony, and communities to this day.

Thank you for being a part of this season. As a season pass holder, you have access to all virtual performances through June 2021. We plan on adding more events along the way, and those will all become a part of your package at no extra cost! If you're coming to us by way of single tickets to this production, I hope you'll check out the others we have to offer this fall. You can read more about them **here**. Then, stick around in December for our very first *A Christmas Carol: On Air*—a radio play adapted from our beloved holiday tradition.

One of the best ways you can help theaters navigate this time is to continue your commitment as a ticket buyer, as a donor, and to spread the word to your networks. Thank you for your participation. Enjoy the show!

With appreciation,



Jennifer Bielstein (she/her)
Executive Director

IRONBOUND

by **MARTYNA MAJOK**

Directed by **JESSICA HOLT**

THE CAST

DARJA **ELIZA KAYE**
TOMMY **CHRIS STEVENS**
MAKS **ZAHAN F. MEHTA**
VIC **CLINT BIDWELL**

All cast members are students in A.C.T.'s Master of Fine Arts class of 2021.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

STAGE MANAGER **MIRANDA ERIN CAMPBELL**

CREATIVE TEAM

VISUAL DESIGNER **MORGAN BADILLO**
COSTUME DESIGNER **JESSIE AMOROSO**
SOUND DESIGNER **ELTON BRADMAN**
FACULTY VOICE & DIALECT COACH **LISA ANNE PORTER**
FACULTY MOVEMENT COACH **DANYON DAVIS**
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR **ASH MALLOY**

PRODUCING TEAM

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER **KEN SAVAGE**
CONSERVATORY PRODUCTION MANAGER **MIKE ANDERBURG**
PRODUCTION MANAGER **JACK HORTON**
VIDEO CONTENT PRODUCER **BERYL BAKER**

SPECIAL THANKS

LEANNA KEYES, CHRIS STEVENS

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

IRONBOUND was commissioned by a grant from the National New Play Network, with funding from the Smith Prize for New Plays, and was the winner of the 2014 David Calicchio Emerging American Playwright Prize at Marin Theatre Company, Mill Valley, CA (Jasson Minadakis, Artistic Director; Michael Barker, Managing Director).

IRONBOUND was developed by Steppenwolf Theatre Company through its New Play Initiative, and was presented as part of its First Look Repertory of New Work at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, IL (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director).

Originally produced at Round House Theatre Company (Ryan Rilette, Producing Artistic Director).

The New York Premiere of IRONBOUND was produced in 2016 by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater and Women's Project Theater ©2020. This Video recording was produced by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service and [Author]. All rights reserved. This performance is authorized for non-commercial use only. By accepting this license, you agree not to authorize or permit the Video to be recorded, copied, distributed, broadcast, telecast or otherwise exploited, in whole or in part, in any media now known or hereafter developed.

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SUMMARY

Polish immigrant Darja wants love and money, but none of the men in her life can afford her both. At a bus stop in New Jersey, over the course of two decades and three relationships, Darja must choose between the men she loves and the security she needs as she fights to find her place in America. From Pulitzer Prize winner Martyna Majok, *Ironbound* is a funny, intimate, and moving portrayal of a woman who never gives up.

This production contains strong language and mature themes. For additional context about this production, [click here](#).

Share your show experience! Tag us in your posts (@ACTSanFrancisco) and use the hashtag #ACTIronbound

DIRECTOR'S NOTE FROM JESSICA HOLT

Ironbound opens with these words: “Night. An environment of black. Stars exist beyond smog; we don’t see them . . . This world is one of constant less.” With poetic economy, Majok invites us to see the North Jersey urban landscape through the eyes of Darja, the Polish immigrant working class woman at the heart of her play. When I first read Majok’s powerful, heartbreaking, surprisingly funny, and deeply human play, I was struck most by the way this story renders Darja’s life visible, and lays bare the circumstances that have prevented Darja from realizing her dreams. What is the cost of dreaming when you live in a world of constant less? And how can you continue to hope for more, in spite of those conditions?

Ironbound was based on Majok’s mother’s experiences in America. Majok and her mother immigrated to the North Jersey area from Poland. Just like Darja, her mother cleaned houses, worked in factories including a paper factory, and worked as a caregiver for the elderly. Out of this grew a play that, through the lens of Darja’s experience, interrogates the limits of capitalism, the working class and the class divide, immigration and the myth of the American dream, and what it means to survive in a world where the socioeconomic circumstances are stacked against you.

It has been an honor to investigate this rich terrain with these brave and curious MFA actors, and to simultaneously innovate with them in a new virtual medium, blending conventions from both film and theater, to create something altogether original. Thank you for joining us in our experiment as we create the visceral world of *Ironbound* virtually for the first time.



MARTYNA MAJOK (Playwright) was born in Bytom, Poland and aged in Jersey and Chicago. She was awarded the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Cost of Living* (Williamstown Theatre Festival, Manhattan Theatre Club). Other plays include *Sanctuary City* (New York

Theatre Workshop), *Queens* (LCT3/Lincoln Center, La Jolla Playhouse), and *Ironbound* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Round House, WP Theatre/Rattlestick, Geffen Playhouse, among others). Her commissions include The Public Theater, Lincoln Center, Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, South Coast Repertory, and Manhattan Theatre Club. BA: University of Chicago; MFA: Yale School of Drama and The Juilliard School.



JESSICA HOLT (Director) was a 2016 National Directors Fellow at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center and is a proud member of Ring of Keys. Selected directing credits include: *Fun Home*, Kate Hamill’s *Sense and Sensibility*, *Venus in Fur* (Virginia Stage Company), *Act*

5 (Magic Theatre), *Speech and Debate* (Barrington Stage Company), *Rich Girl* (Florida Studio Theatre), *The Daughters* (San Francisco Playhouse), *Ugly Lies the Bone* (Alliance Theater), and *The Wolves* (A.C.T.’s Young Conservatory). She has developed and directed work at Cape Cod Theatre Project, Santa Cruz Shakespeare, Magic Theatre, The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, and Bay Area Playwrights Festival, among others. MFA in Directing: Yale School of Drama.

WHO'S WHO IN *IRONBOUND*



CLINT BIDWELL
Vic



ELIZA KAYE
Darja



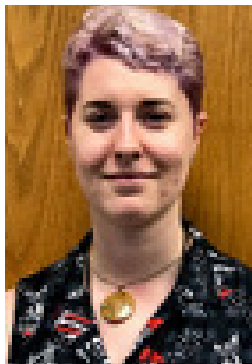
ZAHAN F. MEHTA
Maks



CHRIS STEVENS
Tommy

AN ACTOR'S NOTE—FROM ELIZA KAYE

To me, *Ironbound* is the story of a fiercely independent woman not only surviving, but finally allowing herself to dream of more. Jessica Holt's genius direction has allowed us to work in a deeply honest way and be boldly creative in our use of the online medium. There is extreme intimacy in *Ironbound*, whether it is between young lovers, partners in a toxic seven-year relationship, or complete strangers. The camera allows you to experience that connection from the inside. Darja is relatable in her flaws, and admirable in her strength. Her feminist spirit is challenged by her economic struggle and dependence on men in her pursuit of the "American Dream," but she never stops fighting for herself and what she knows she deserves. As a young woman, being able to play a character like Darja is a gift. Every rehearsal I am at a bus stop in New Jersey, traveling through time, and all from a dark corner of my bedroom.



MIRANDA ERIN CAMPBELL
Stage Manager



MORGAN BADILLO
Visual Designer



JESSIE AMOROSO
Costume Designer



ELTON BRADMAN
Sound Designer



LISA ANNE PORTER
Faculty Voice
& Dialect Coach



DANYON DAVIS
Faculty Movement Coach



ASH MALLOY
Assistant Director

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT, MARTYNA MAJOK



Inspiration for the play

Ironbound was based on my mother's experiences in America. She and I came to North Jersey from Poland when I was young. We lived in the Newark area, surrounded by factories. Most of the folks living in my neighborhood were also recent immigrants, from all over, also working in factories or in construction or cleaning houses. My mother cleaned houses—she still cleans houses. She worked in a paper factory, a cookie factory, and a book-lining factory in Jersey City, and she also worked as a caregiver for the elderly.

I was pulled to write *Ironbound* the way I did, with a working-class immigrant woman as an intelligent and capable but flawed core of a story, because centerstage wasn't afforded these types of characters in the stories I had access to growing up—in the latchkey-kid TV that I watched. They were a joke. Their English was a punch line. Or they were some magical janitor that came in for a scene to offer sage advice to the main character about how it's "best to live a simple life" or some s***. It's about who's telling the story and who's seen as the "other."

Regarding how the play jumps time

I wanted to show Darja's relation to her dreams over time. She has a plan for her life, the best of intentions—we see that spark and that hope in her original dream in the 90s—and then we check in on her 10, 20 years later, and her life has become something very different. We're always making the best decision we think we can make in the moment. We only find out later how that decision works out. I wanted to show the different sides of this one particular woman's life and spirit. She has agency over her choices and she definitely f***s s*** up a few times, but there are also circumstances that strongly affect her that are just beyond her control. Like the factory. I used the factory as an anchor of time—because I'd seen what happened with these factories in Jersey over 20 years—as a reflection of what was happening economically. In the '90s, the factories were full and running; in the 2000s, they were starting to shut down and outsource; in 2014, they're gone. They're ghosts. That factory I was writing about is now just rubble.

Read the full interview in [***American Theatre Magazine***](#).

About the Language & Style of the Play

I see beauty and potential in what others might consider "broken" language. English was a second language for many of the families I grew up with. The parents needed to get right to work once they arrived in America and learned English through living and working (or at home, from us kids who were sent to public school). Sometimes a person's particular way of seeing the world felt like it translated more truthfully, directly, and poetically than maybe if it were spoken with perfect "proper" English.

Another influence is the sense of humor I grew up around in a working-class, multicultural immigrant neighborhood. I think humor is one of the best tools we have to disarm each other and welcome others into an experience of life they might not think they relate to—or might even resist. I always think about that in writing. I learned early on—in life and in writing—that if I wanted people to listen, I had to make them laugh.

Read the full interview at [***Vilcek***](#).

ABOUT THE PLAY

The title of Martyna Majok’s play comes from the neighborhood of Ironbound, where the play is set.

The Ironbound, also referred to as “Down Neck,” is a multi-ethnic, largely working class neighborhood of 50,000 in Newark, New Jersey. Historically it has been a mosaic of peoples from countries around the world who arrive in the community with aspirations for a better life for themselves and their children.



German, Lithuanian, Italian, and Polish immigrants settled in Ironbound in the 19th century. In the early 20th century, Black Americans arrived during the famed Great Migration from the Jim Crow era South, along with large numbers of Portuguese and Spanish immigrants. In the latter half of the 20th century immigrants from Central and South America, attracted by the Iberian flavor and multilingual nature of Ironbound, joined the community. These successive waves of migration and immigration all contributed to the richness of Ironbound’s cultural diversity. Immigration to Ironbound continues to the present, and now two out of three Ironbound residents have come to the U.S. as immigrants. Three languages—Spanish, Portuguese, and English—can be heard throughout the community.

“Ironbound” is derived from the many forges and foundries and railroads that once encircled it. It is bound by Penn Station and the Amtrak line on the west; the Passaic River—the nation’s longest Superfund site—on the north; US Routes 1 and 9, the NJ Turnpike, and Port Newark on the east; and US Highway 78 and Newark Airport on the south. The Ironbound is an economic engine within Newark driving 40% of its economy and contributing to 33% of its tax base. Today local factories, warehouses and industrial properties continue to operate alongside one-, two- and three-family homes and public housing complexes.

And, of course, the Ironbound is well known for great restaurants, and its soccer clubs and cultural festivals are great sources of community pride. Ironbound continues to be a desirable community to live in, invest in, and visit.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Nonetheless, this hardworking and aspiring community is not without its challenges:

- 25% of residents live in poverty.
- 26% of households have an income of less than \$25,000; 58% less than \$50,000.
- 20% of families have single heads of households.
- 55% of adults do not have a high school diploma – ten points higher than the city average of 45%.
- For more than 80% of residents, English is not a first language at home.
- Ironbound’s elementary schools—five built in the 19th century—are severely overcrowded.
- Each year, large numbers of five-year-old children cannot attend kindergarten due to lack of space.
- As in most of Newark, Ironbound’s children suffer from high rates of asthma and other respiratory ailments, which impacts their daily lives and causes school absences that affect their educational advancement.
- Thousands of residents are undocumented, live in fear, and are often the victims of crime and labor exploitation.

To learn more about the Ironbound community, [click here](#).

THEMES OF THE PLAY

Survival, Security, and Choosing Partners

Humor is a survival skill, a skill one sees Darja using in the play.

In addition to empowering us, humor can fend off the depression caused by oppressive circumstances. In an article on humor as a “psychological salve,” counselor Nichole Force suggests that “humor often is viewed as an expression of resilience and hope that has the power to soothe suffering.” (*PsychCentral*, 2016)

When energy flags and humor fails, it is completely normal to feel deeply distressed by unyielding difficulty. At such moments, Darja acts out against Tommy and his lover. Like other hardy survivors, however, she does not wallow in her misfortunes, but presses on. In addition to drawing on her strengths, Darja persists in trying to get what she needs from the men in her life.

Her relationship with her first husband Maks is romantic in spirit, but his dreams of moving to Chicago to make his way as a musician come into conflict with her desire to have a family. We never meet her second husband, who was her boss in the factory, but it is not hard to imagine that, at the time and until he abused her, she chose to be with someone in a prominent position at the factory, in order to take care of her child.

Tommy has a steady government job, though the revolution in communications and transporting goods brought on by the Internet threatens the viability of the U.S. Postal Service. He seems to need her more than she does him, emotionally, but she is after essentials, such as a place to live, access to a car, and some cash to give her son.

While we may wonder why Darja takes up with such partners, psychologist Noam Shpancer casts light on her choices: “When choosing a partner, we frequently engage in internal negotiations whereby the value of romantic love is pitted against the value of social status and economic security. If the love is strong, we may sacrifice security or economic status. If the potential partner’s status is high, we may compromise regarding the intensity of our romantic feelings.” (*Psychology Today*, 2014)

Perhaps Darja’s pursuit of economic security is also the result of wanting to move beyond the privation she endured in Poland. Before Soviet domination ended, Polish citizens often lived with several other families in small apartments, had to rely mainly on public transportation because of a shortage of cars and stand for hours in line to get basic food staples like bread. (Members of Poland’s Communist Party, on the other hand, enjoyed Western goods and much better services.)

Lifelong poverty and the constant uncertainty it unleashes take enormous physical, mental and emotional tolls on human beings. Darja may be at a point in her life where she sees the promise of a place to live and regular meals as luxuries she cannot afford to turn down.

To read more on themes and topics addressed in this play, [**click here**](#)

Courtesy: Geffen Playhouse Study Guide.

POSTSHOW ACTIVITIES

Discuss in Class!

- What themes do you think this play is trying to highlight?
- While Darja may not be a highly skilled worker, she is an agile survivor, possessing grit, a sense of humor, and little self-pity, all of which make up the strength that sees her through the challenges in her life (Geffen PlayHouse Study Guide, 2018). What other qualities did you see in Darja? What qualities do you have that have enabled you to navigate a difficult moment in your life?
- Darja clearly values economic security. What do you value in life?
- When thinking about a romantic partner, what qualities do you look for?
- How did you feel watching an online live play? How did it compare to watching a play onstage?

Standards Addressed: National Arts Standards

Responding: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.

Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard #8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

CA VAPA Standards

Adv.TH:Re9

- a. Research and synthesize cultural and historical information related to a drama/theatre work to support or evaluate artistic choices.
- b. Compare and debate the connection between a drama/theatre work and contemporary issues that may impact audiences.

5. TH:Cn11.1

- b. Explore the ethical responsibilities to oneself and others when observing and performing.

Let's Do Some Documentary Theatre!

Alternatively referred to as Verbatim Theatre, or Ethnodrama, Documentary Theatre is a form of theatre in which plays are constructed from the precise words spoken by people interviewed about a particular event or topic.

Before we begin, ask yourself

- Did you or your family members have to learn English as a second language?
- Did you or your family members migrate to the United States?

Interview someone who migrated from another country

Find a friend, acquaintance, or family member. Ask them to share:

- A story from their childhood
- A story around their first year in the United States
- What is their biggest challenge?
- What is their greatest dream?

Record it on your device

- Transcribe it, and attempt to say it out aloud
- See how it feels to walk in someone else's shoes

Post Activity Debrief

- What did you learn from interviewing a person who migrated from another country to the United States?
- What more did you learn when you spoke their words out aloud, as if they were your own?

POSTSHOW ACTIVITIES

Pro Tip: Anna Devere Smith

Anna Devere Smith is widely recognized as a master of Documentary/Verbatim Theatre. In her seminal works, ***Fires in the Mirror*** (1992) and ***Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*** (1993), Smith was the sole performer of multiple and diverse characters, based on interviews she had conducted with numerous residents and commentators in the two cities where riots took place. For these works, she won the **Drama Desk Award for Outstanding One-Person Show** two years in a row. She interviewed more than 100 people as part of her creation of *Fires in the Mirror*, which dealt with the 1991 **Crown Heights riot**. In 1992, she interviewed some 300 people as part of her research for creating *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, which dealt with the **1992 Los Angeles riots** after the acquittal of police officers who beat **Rodney King**, in events captured on tape. Both of these plays were constructed using material solely from interviews. She went on to write several more plays in this style, including *House Arrest*, *Let me Down Easy*, and *On Grace*.

To see Anna Devere Smith in action, [click here](#).

Arts Standards Addressed

HS Proficient

TH:Cr3.1.I.

b. Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theater work

HS Accomplished TH:Pr5.1.II.

a. Refine a range of acting skills to build a believable and sustainable drama/theatre performance.

How to Maximize Your Live Video Theater-Viewing Experience

By Ariana Johnson and Livian Yeh

Even though we can't gather in person, live theater can still happen! Thank you for gathering in this virtual space for Martyna Majok's *Ironbound*. Below are a few tips to help maximize your live video theater-viewing experience.

Know that this is a new kind of theater

This isn't like in-person theater performances, or film and television. In livestreamed theater, both audience and artists meet in a digital space, where art is created live and in real time.

Embrace the medium

Keep an eye out for the characters' names, settings, and soundscapes. The artists worked hard to build a fully immersive virtual world despite physical distance.

Engage with the fellow audience

Once the show is running, there will be a chat function at the bottom of the screen, where you can converse with other audience members. Make sure you're sending chat messages to panelists AND attendees. We encourage you to exclaim, react, and applaud!

If possible, make sure you have a secure connection

Use a wired internet connection, or make sure you are close to your router if using Wi-Fi. If the connection is very laggy or slow, reduce the quality of the video or turn off Wi-Fi on unneeded devices.

For better sound/visuals

Use headphones (ideally wired) for optimal sound quality and watch in full screen.