

theatre:
CALGARY

IN A JOINT PRODUCTION WITH THE ARTS CLUB THEATRE COMPANY (VANCOUVER)



Yoshie Bancroft and Griffin Cork:
projection design by Cindy Mochizuki;
photo by David Cooper for the Arts
Club Theatre Company

FORGIVENESS


BY MARK SAKAMOTO

STAGE ADAPTATION BY HIRO KANAGAWA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3** **HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**
- 4** **ABOUT THE PLAY**
Summary
Character Breakdown
Historical + Social Context
- 10** **WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE**
- 12** **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**
If you have 15 minutes...
If you have 30 minutes...
If you have an hour...
- 15** **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION**

SPONSOR

Thanks to our Student Learning sponsor: **canada**  **life**™

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome educators!

Theatre Calgary's 2022-2023 Play Guides are intended to support your students' experience at Theatre Calgary this season. We encourage you to use some or all of these materials to provide context for your students before, during, and after their visit to Theatre Calgary. While not mandatory for students to enjoy the production, research shows that where young people are given opportunities to connect a work of art to their personal lives and experiences, the more deeply they are able to understand and appreciate the piece.

With that in mind, each guide provides you and your students with a range of contextual material. You will find background information on the play and playwright; social, linguistic, and historical context; expectations for the theatre; activities for you to lead in the classroom; and reflection questions to guide discussions. You'll find activities that connect to current events, are interdisciplinary, tie to your curriculum, and can be facilitated for various lengths of time.

Pages marked with a ★ can be photocopied and distributed to students.

We hope that you and your students enjoy your experience at Theatre Calgary this year!

ABOUT THE PLAY

SUMMARY.

Forgiveness opens with a split scene (Learn about Theatrical Conventions like this on page 5) where we see Mitsue and Ralph immersed instantly in their respective hostile environments: Mitsue upon arriving at an internment centre and Ralph as a prisoner of war (POW). The characters then introduce themselves and invite the audience into the world of the play.

The first scene is set in Medicine Hat, Alberta in 1968–25 years following World War II. We meet Mitsue’s son, Stan, who informs his mother that he wants his girlfriend’s parents for dinner. His girlfriend, Diane, is white, and her father is Ralph, who we met in the opening of the play. The conversation that Mitsue and Stan have about her cooking being “too Japanese” plays an important role in the telling of this story and one that resurfaces throughout the play. Flashbacks show us moments in Stan’s past when he meets Diane and her father, Ralph.

The next scene takes us back 30 years to 1936 Quebec where we see a young Ralph with his friends, making ignorant comments, as teenagers do, and showcasing how different Ralph and Mitsue’s upbringings were, as this scene is juxtaposed with Mitsue and her best friend’s conversation about their romantic prospects and futures. The girls’ conversation is interrupted by our first glimpse at the anti-Japanese sentiment brewing in British Columbia.

After we’re introduced to Ralph’s abusive father, Ralph makes the decision to enlist in the army to fight against Germany. Meanwhile, Mitsue is facing very immediate marriage proposals threatening her dream of becoming a teacher. Her parents warn her, however, that in *hakujiin shakai*—white society—a woman wouldn’t be hired anyway.

We return to 1968 to see Ralph struggling to make it to work as he continues to cope with the psychological toll the war took on him. He and his wife, Phyllis, discuss the impending invitation to dinner at their daughter’s boyfriend’s home.

STORY WHOOSH

is an interactive storytelling technique that enables any kind of plot to come alive, even without participants having prior knowledge.

- The teacher facilitates the shared storytelling by bringing individuals and groups in and out of the action.
- As soon as characters, objects, places, or events in the story (i.e., servants, bad thoughts, ships, etc.) are mentioned, the first students step into the circle and make a shape or pose that represents what has been narrated.
- At any time the teacher can say “Whoosh!,” and students quickly return to their ‘places’ in a circle.
- Continue the story around the group, so that different students get to play various characters and everyone gets a chance to try several roles, regardless of gender.

Back in 1936, Mitsue learns that her best friend, Miyoko, has contracted tuberculosis and has passed away. The following scene takes place four years later as Mitsue starts her first job, working at Mrs. Yamamoto's dress shop. Ralph is finally shipping off to war after "doing nothing more dangerous than chasing off...seagulls," and both come to the realization that their lives have not gone the direction they'd imagined.

Next we're back in 1968 where we see Ralph confronting Stan about his intentions for Diane before Stan crosses into his mother's kitchen for another discussion about the food she is preparing for the big meet-the-parents dinner. We learn that Mitsue's mother, Tomi, is still alive and residing with them.

THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS

Hiro Kanagawa's theatrical adaptation of *Forgiveness: A Gift from My Grandparents* by Mark Sakamoto utilizes a number of theatrical conventions (tools used by theatre artists to heighten the visual effects of storytelling). Some that you'll see in this play include:

- **Projection.** Using digital imagery to enhance the story
- **Simultaneous staging.** Showing two locations on stage at the same time
- **Breaking the fourth wall.** Stepping out of the action to speak directly with the audience
- **Doubled actors.** Actors who use costume pieces and physical and vocal transformation to play multiple characters throughout the play
- **Flashbacks.** A seamless transition between scenes taking places at different times in the characters' lives
- **Tableaux.** Frozen images that depict singular moments in time

After being introduced to a rapidly rotating line of suitors for Mitsue—Joji, Motoharu, and Ichiro—we meet Hideo and see an obvious change in her interaction with him. While Mitsue is meeting her future husband, Ralph and his army buddies from Canada have arrived in Hong Kong. A tender moment between Mitsue and Hideo is interrupted by the announcement of the bombing of America's Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces, inciting immediate anti-Japanese sentiments and threats of violence.

At Mitsue's home we learn the true extent of the impact of the declaration of war. Boats owned by Japanese Canadians are being taken, shops are being shut down, and curfews enforced. While in Hong Kong, Ralph and his friends are experiencing the exhaustion, violence, and loss of war.

Upon learning that he will be forced to return to Japan, Hideo proposes to Mitsue so he can stay in Canada. The first act ends with "the most funereal wedding party one can imagine," as Mitsue and Hideo wed under the watchful eye of the RCMP, while in Hong Kong Ralph is captured by Japanese soldiers.

We are welcomed back after intermission by Mitsue and Ralph and warned of the hardships that await us in Act Two. In 1942, Ralph is reunited with a friend he'd thought was dead, and they plot to escape their POW camp. Back in British Columbia, Mitsue and Tomi are separated from their husbands and locked in livestock pens with hay, cots, and...bugs. Mitsue reveals that she is pregnant.

Months after incarceration, Ralph manages to leave the POW camp for a hospital, and Mitsue and her mother are reunited with their husbands. They make a plan to move to a sugar beet farm in Alberta where they will be 'permitted' to work and help the war effort. The home they'd imagined for themselves turns out to be a chicken coop on the property of a cranky woman named Mrs. Rutt.

Ralph's ongoing battle with the after-effects of war are juxtaposed against Mitsue's struggles in Canada. Her pregnancy makes it hard to work the long hours required of them to earn the little money they are promised. Yosuke, Mitsue's father, too, cannot make it. He collapses in the field and Mitsue experiences death for the second time in her life.

Ralph is transported by "hellship"—a cargo transport for Japanese POWs to a new camp. He is weak, unfit for work duty, and assigned as a servant to the Camp Commandant, Kato. Kato longs for company and someone to practice English with, but he is unpredictable, and it is a scary assignment.

Mitsue and Hideo convince Mrs. Rutt to allow them to move into her barn as winter approaches. Three more winters pass with Ralph interned at the POW camp. In 1945, as the end of the war is in sight, Ralph tries to understand his fate by speaking with Kato. The dropping of the atomic bomb by the Americans on Hiroshima leads to the evacuation of Japanese soldiers from the POW camp. Large drums of supplies are flown in, but Ralph's momentary joy and relief passes when his comrade is hit and killed by one of the drums.

With war's end, Mitsue is hopeful to return home to British Columbia. The government has issued her family a cheque for merely \$87 for their boats and house and has forbidden Japanese Canadians from returning to the province; they're required to stay east of the Rocky Mountains. So they make a plan to move to Medicine Hat and start a farm.

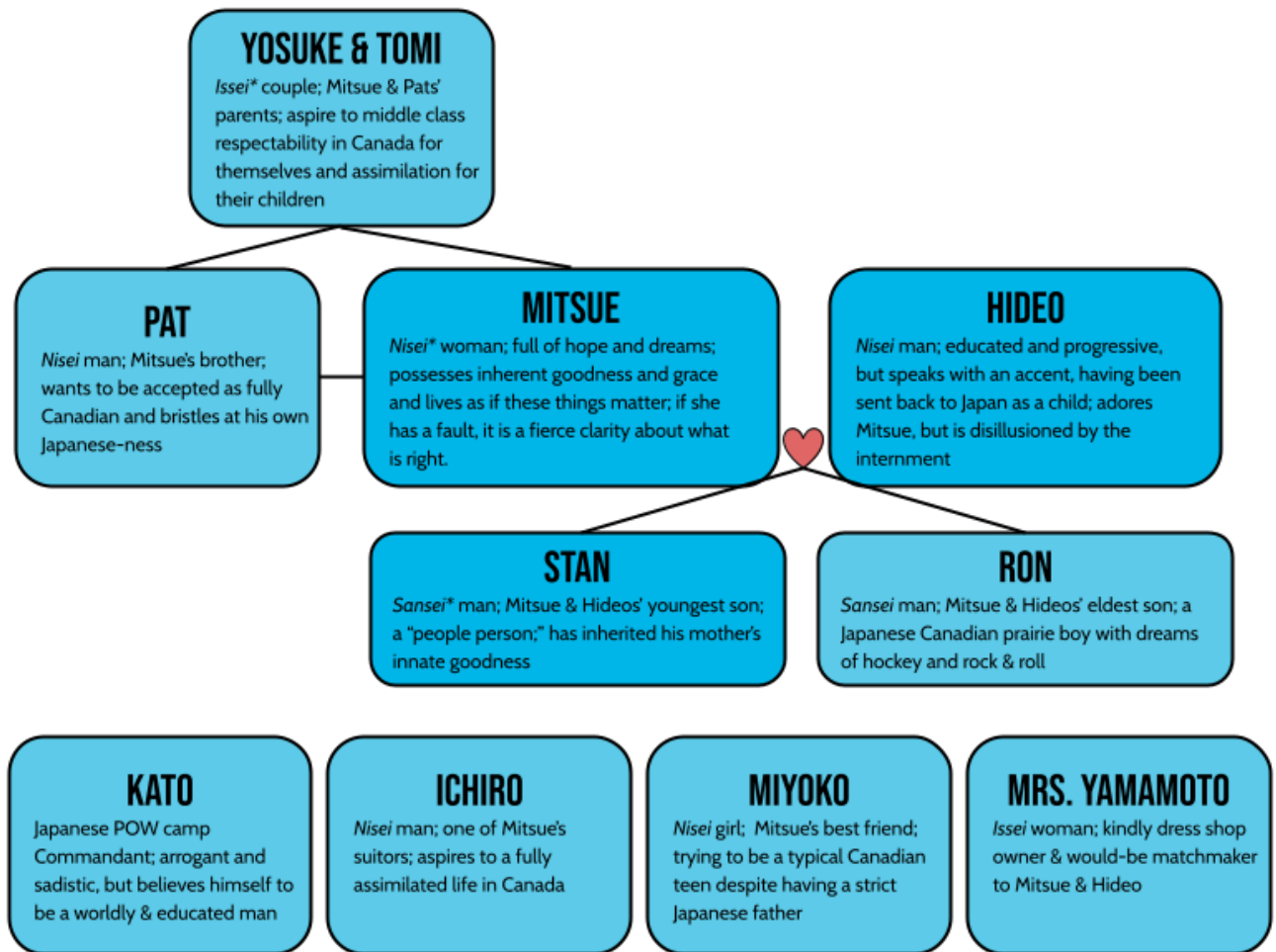
In 1949, the government order is lifted and Japanese Canadians are permitted to return to the coast. Mitsue takes the train back to her home. She discovers that Mrs. Yamamoto's dress shop has been sold, Mrs. Yamamoto returned home...to Hiroshima, and her community is empty, no longer filled with Japanese as Mitsue remembers. She bumps into an old suitor, Ichiro, who tells her of his struggles and his plans to return to Japan.

The play ends with the much-anticipated dinner with a perfect menu and plenty in common.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.



JAPANESE CHARACTERS



* GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Issei. (*Japanese: 'first generation'*) A Japanese person of the first generation to immigrate to North America

Nisei. (*Japanese: 'second-generation'*) Child of Japanese immigrants born and educated in North America

Sansei. (*Japanese: 'third generation'*) Child of a child born to ethnic Japanese in North America

PRONUNCIATION

Mitsue: Me-tsoo-eh

Hideo: He-day-oh

Yosuke: Yo-skeh

Kato: Kah-toe

WHITE CHARACTERS

DEIGHTON

Grindstone boy; Ralph's best friend; naive, good-time-Charlie

RALPH

Grindstone boy; has an innate sense of morality and fairness; signs up for war in search of escape from a small and abusive life at home

PHYLLIS

Ralph's long-suffering wife; trying her best to support Ralph through his PTSD and to not disapprove of her daughter dating a Japanese Canadian

COOPER

Grindstone boy; Ralph and Deighton's friend; coarser, more crudely 'male'

DIANE

A Prairie girl; Ralph's daughter; not a hippie, not a rebel, just happened to fall in love with a Japanese guy

ADAMS

A straight-talking Southerner; has probably seen horrible things that only Americans fighting in the Pacific will ever see

MORTIMER

A Canadian officer from the stiff-upper-lip military academy; does his best to keep himself and Ralph alive

MRS. RUTT

Sugar beet farmer; not consciously cruel or racist, but entirely comfortable with housing a Japanese family in a chicken coop

MR. ARCHIBALD

A tailor who Mrs. Yamamoto entrusts with valuable items from her dress shop and who later takes it over



Griffin Cork and Fionn Laird, photo by Moonrider Productions



The cast of *Forgiveness*, photo by Moonrider Productions

HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.



3 QUESTIONS FOR MARK SAKAMOTO

1 What do you think of *Forgiveness's* relevance today?

When I was interviewing [my grandmother], I asked her, "Why am I learning much of this for the first time?" And she looked up at me in her calm and graceful way, and said, because "Hate can come back." She didn't want to give voice to that hate and pass it on or trigger it. And you know, I laughed at the time, 2012, not at my grandmother, but at the notion that that kind of ugly nationalism, of state-sponsored racist policies, could find a renewal in my lifetime. Yet here we are.

2 When your parents began dating, Mitsue hosted Ralph's family for a dinner that could have been a disaster. Why is that?

My grandmother really fretted about what to serve. They were exact opposites in every way, and it could not have been easy for them to bridge that. But almost immediately they saw themselves in each other. They saw they were both survivors who were able to move beyond pain, both determined they weren't going to bequeath those awful years to their children.

3 What was your reason for writing this book?

My mom died of alcoholism, a disease with no mercy. You have a thousand small goodbyes before the final goodbye. And all that just struck me when I was holding my daughter. I started to think, how did my grandparents do this, how did they get through their apocalypse? I told my girls, "I wrote this so you know what you're made of." These people's blood is in your veins. I wanted my grandparents' lives chronicled for my daughters, so that when life brought them down they had a path forward, a lighthouse to get them through choppy waters.

**adapted from Brian Bethune's [2018 Maclean's interview](#)*

A TIMELINE OF JAPANESE INTERNMENT DURING WORLD WAR II

September 10, 1939

Canada declares war on Germany

March 1941

Japanese Canadians are required to register with the Federal government

December 1941

- The Empire of Japan attacks Pearl Harbor off the Pacific Coast of the United States
- Wartime blackout measures go into effect along British Columbia coast
- Canada declares war on Japan
- Anti-Japanese sentiment becomes widespread
- Japanese Canadian fishing boats are confiscated off the coast of BC

January 14, 1942

Prime Minister Mackenzie King orders the removal of all adult males of Japanese ancestry from the coast

February 24, 1942

21,000 Japanese Canadians are stripped of their property and pressured to accept deportation or "interior housing centres" in the Rocky Mountains known as work camps, where Japanese Canadians are expected to make a living without any government support

April 1, 1949

Japanese Canadians are given the right to vote, and legal restrictions used to control the movement of Japanese Canadians are removed

1988

The federal government officially apologizes for its treatment of Japanese Canadians, allotting \$21,000 to each survivor

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE



An open mind.

Let the performance surprise you! Stay open to what can happen. Look for moments of theatrical magic (how did they change that costume so quickly?) and unexpected dialogue.

Assigned seats.

Every seat in the theatre offers a unique perspective on the action. Appreciate what you can see from your seat that someone else might not.

Live actors.

The performers on stage can see you, hear you, and feel your energy. And actors love student audiences! Laugh when something is funny! Gasp when you're surprised! Applaud when you're impressed! The actors thrive on audience reactions.

A break from reality.

Theatre-makers ask the audience to "suspend their disbelief." If someone on stage says the red ribbon is blood, then it is! If an actor takes flight, then imagine you can't see the strings. This is what the actors ask of the audience. Embrace the magic of theatre.

Questions.

Listen carefully to the story being told. If you have a question, keep your voice to a whisper so it doesn't disturb others. (See the call out on Q + As to help you form great questions for the team behind the show.) Let yourself be challenged by the content. What new ideas or perspectives are you hearing?

Disconnection.

Put your phone away and immerse yourself in the technology of the theatre. The sounds and lights from your device are distracting to the actors, fellow audience members, and you! Plus, the law says that photos and videos aren't allowed, anyway.

PREPARING Q'S FOR A Q + A

While you watch the show, consider how the creative team (see pg. 11) brings the story to life on stage for you.

Consider questions about the process:

- How did the lighting / set / costume / sound designer...
- What made the director choose to...
- How did the playwright decide to...

Ask questions about the story:

- Why did [character] make the decision to...
- Can you explain how...
- Why didn't _____ happen?

Learn more about each job:

- Why did you decide to become a...
- What do I need to do to become a...
- What has been your favorite...



THEATRE TEAM TALKBACK

Theatre is a 'team sport,' and it's not the actors alone who bring a production to life. After your show, you'll have a chance to ask questions of the creative team. Here are some of the folks you might expect to speak with:

The Playwright writes the script—sometimes from an original idea, and sometimes adapted from a book or story; decides what the characters say and gives the designers guidelines on how the play should look.

The Director creates the vision for the production, how it will look on stage, and works closely with the actors, costume, set, and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.

The Actors use their bodies and voices to bring the playwright's words and the director's ideas to life on the stage.

The Designers imagine and create the lights, scenery, props, costumes, and sound that will compliment and tell the playwright's story in a way that matches the director's vision.

The Stage Manager assists the director during rehearsals by taking detailed notes and making sure the actors and designers understand these ideas. They run the show during each performance by making sure the actors' entrances and exits and the lights and sound all run smoothly.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

IF YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES...

Casting Your Life Story

Forgiveness is a play adapted from a memoir. This brainstorming activity has students thinking through the 'characters' that might appear in their own memoir. Who has shaped who they have become (and are becoming)?

Focus Question. Who are the main characters in your life story?

Objective. Students will be able to identify the people in their lives who have had a significant impact on who they are and how they think.

Procedure.

- 1 Have students write or illustrate a list of characters that might appear in a play of their lives. Encourage them to consider:
 - Family members
 - Family friends
 - Classmates
 - Teachers
 - Neighbours
 - Babysitters
 - Camp counselors
 - Coaches
 - Fellow commuters
 - And more...
- 2 Ask students to review their list and star (★) the people who would have the largest parts in their play.
- 3 Have them put checkmarks (✓) next to people who might not have big parts but still play an important role in one's life. (*Maybe a 2nd grade teacher who lit a passion for writing, or the unmemorable kid from summer camp who made them realize their first crush*)
- 4 Allow students to share their highlights with a partner.

Adapted from Jake Wizner's [Worth Writing About: Exploring Memoir with Adolescents](#)

IF YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES...

A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words

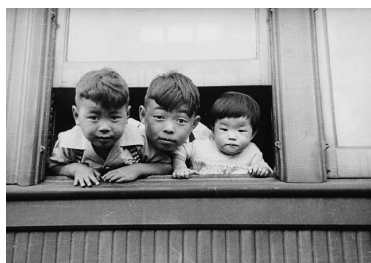
Forgiveness tells the stories of Canadians fighting against, then captured by the Japanese during the Second World War and interned Japanese Canadians. This activity puts a human face on the history of Canada's role in this history and its impact on Canadians at this time. These story activities can be extended by allotting time for revision or adaptation.

Focus Question. How do we apply an historical lens to imagine the stories of people who lived through that history?

Objective. Students will be able to consider various historical perspectives and give voice to these stories.

Procedure.

- 1 Students will work in groups of 3 or 4. Review the [attached images](#), and choose 3 different images for each group. An example might be:



- 2 Direct students to review—with their group—each image, one at a time, answering the following questions about it. They should use their knowledge of history and what they've learned from *Forgiveness* to guide their responses:

- When did this image take place? (*Year, Month, Day, Hour; the more specific, the better!*)
- What is happening in the image? Who is present? And what do those individuals appear to be doing?

- 3 Once the group has determined the answers to the questions for each image, they will begin to craft their hypothetical narrative involving the characters in the images. They can write their story as narration or dialogue.

Adapted from the [Arts Club's Teacher Resource Guide](#)

TIPS FOR WRITING HISTORICAL FICTION

- Determine a timeline
- Include facts and information from history and the play
- Consider similarities between images
- Consider relationships in the images

IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

Peer Interviews

Mark Sakamoto interviewed his grandparents about their experiences in World War II and transformed their stories into the memoir, *Forgiveness: A Gift from My Grandparents*. Hiro Kanagawa then adapted that memoir into a theatricalized script. This activity will allow students to go through the process of crafting a narrative from an interview using storytelling components.

Focus Question. How do we create stories from our histories?

Objective. Students will be able to ask questions to elicit responses from their peers, pull out story elements, and adapt those narratives into a retelling of the story.

Procedure.

- 1 Start by co-creating a set of interview questions that students can choose from to learn about their partner. Examples to start the discussion can be found [here](#).
- 2 Pair students together. Consider using a lottery system or by pre-pairing them. Avoiding students to choose their partners will encourage new conversations and relationships.
- 3 Offer students options for recording their interviews: filming, audio recording, note-taking. Ensure they have a plan before they begin.
- 4 Provide students with a time limit for each interview. Encourage them to select their starting questions in advance, but provide them with sentence starters to help push their partners' responses deeper. Some samples are provided [here](#).
- 5 Once both partners have completed their interviews, students should review their notes and complete the attached [story planning handout](#) and storyboard.
- 6 Allow time for students to share their story plans with their interviewee and/or the class.

EXTENSION Provide models and time for writing narratives, scripts, or explore [interview theatre](#) to extend the process of storytelling from interview.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

A theatrical experience is not complete without reflection. What is the audience talking about when they leave the theatre? Here are some questions to pose to your students following their experience with *Forgiveness* at Theatre Calgary.

- 1 What would you want to ask your grandparents if you could speak openly with them about their past?
- 2 This story still resonates decades after World War II, where do you see parallels to Mitsue's story in today's society?
- 3 What does 'forgiveness' look like in your life? Have you chosen to forgive someone? Have you chosen *not* to forgive someone?
- 4 What does it mean to be Canadian? How does this story reflect that?
- 5 After learning more about this story, what can you do to help keep this history alive and relevant?

THEATRE CALGARY PLAY GUIDES DEVELOPED BY

Aliza Sarian

www.alizasarian.com



Please provide feedback on your experience with this Play Guide by following this QR code to complete a brief survey.