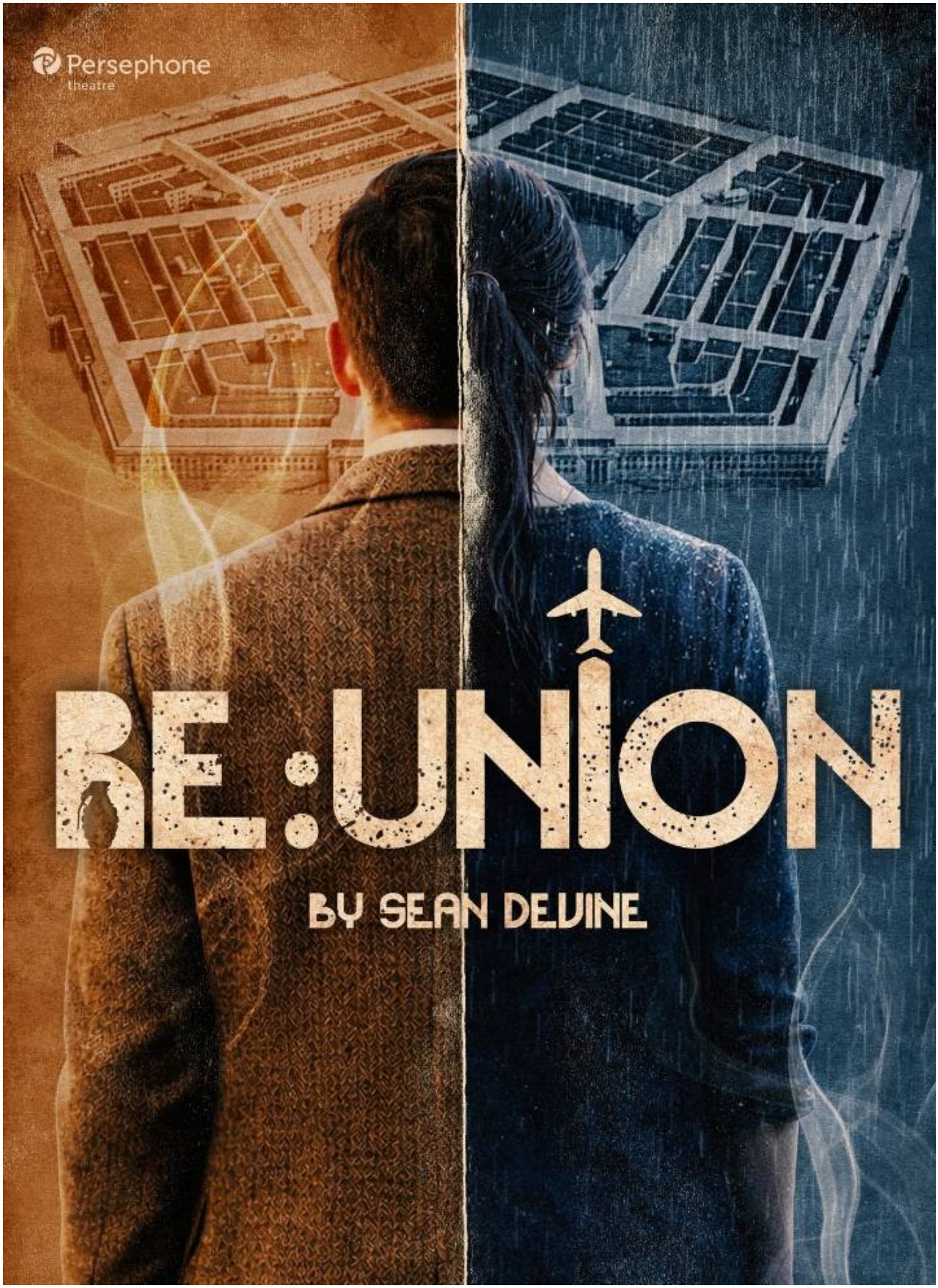


Enrichment Guide

Persephone Theatre is located on the beautiful lands of Indigenous peoples who have lived here since time immemorial, including the Nêhiyawak, Nêhithawak, Anishinabek, Nakawe, Nakota, Nehinawak, Lakota, Dakota and Dene peoples. This place is also the homeland of the Métis. At Persephone, we also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Whitecap Dakota and Round Prairie Métis peoples in establishing our city of Saskatoon. Persephone Theatre is located on Treaty 6 territory and is committed to living in good relations with our Indigenous neighbours, in the spirit with which the Treaties were intended.

THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: *Several of the Persephone School Matinees are integrated with our Subscribers Wednesday Matinee. Our subscribers are paying full price for their tickets and many of them are seniors. Bringing youth and elders together has proven to be important and valuable for both mental health and social skills of all ages, which is one of the reasons why Persephone Theatre decided to program the Wednesday matinees in this way. Some of the seniors in attendance may have hearing or visual impairment, so we ask:*

- ***Students*** *to please be respectful by turning off their phones, not talking, and staying in their seats for the duration of each act.*
- ***Teachers and chaperones*** *please step in when needed to remind students of theatre etiquette.*

Here are some other ways in which the audience can contribute to make this a positive experience for all:

- *If you purchase items at the concession - please be mindful of the noise the packaging can make. Open your bags, packages, and lids before the show starts. The concession is NOT open during the performance, only before the play begins and at intermission.*
- *Try to use the washroom before the show starts. If you cannot wait until intermission, please try to leave the theatre discreetly. Our volunteer ushers will let you know when it is an appropriate moment to return to your seat. You may be seated in an alternate seat upon return.*

What makes theatre unique is that it is a communal experience and we can all work together to make it a positive one for everyone. The actors present the audience with their characters and specific events. The audience in turn responds to the story in real time whether it is through laughing at comedic moments, crying when something meaningful happens, or even gasping in surprise – even if their reactions are not visible or audible, the energy is palpable. Everyone goes home with a special experience to reflect on. And of course, applause is always greatly appreciated.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

CHARACTERS

EMILY MORRISON An artist, mother, daughter, and citizen.
She is 36 years old on November 2, 2001, and almost 1 year old on November 2, 1965.

ROBERT MCNAMARA An architect of war and industry, now retired.
He is 85 years old on November 2, 2001, and 49 years old on November 2, 1965.

NORMAN MORRISON An activist, father, teacher, and Quaker.
He is deceased on November 2, 2001, and 31 years old on November 2, 1965.

SETTING

1965- A college classroom in Baltimore and below the office window of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara at the Pentagon in Washington, DC.
2001- A motel room and various locations including the office of Robert McNamara in Washington, DC.

RUNNING TIME

1 hour and 45-minutes, plus 15-minute intermission

CONTENT ADVISORY

This drama is based on real events and explores self-immolation, discussions of war and political atrocities, child endangerment, and grief.

DISCLAIMER

Although *Re:Union* is based on certain real events, the characterizations of the persons depicted in this play are fictitious. The family of Norman Morrison has not authorized this script, nor consented to its production.

THEATRICAL CONVENTION

This play takes place in several timelines (please refer to CHARACTERS & SETTING) and moves between them frequently.

SYNOPSIS

SPOILER ALERT: You can choose not to read or share the synopsis in advance so that you (and those in attendance with you) have the experience of discovering everything in the moment. We leave this to your discretion.

The play opens with specific moments with each character: Emily is discussing that she has a clear idea of what she needs to do. Robert is arguing with someone about a testy interview he just gave. Norman opens a jar of kerosene and Emily gives him a match.

Emily takes a train from Baltimore to Washington and is doing a voice recording announcing her plan to commit domestic terrorism at the Pentagon. She goes to Robert McNamara's office to confront him, but he quickly brushes her off, assuming she is a protestor.

Flashback to Norman teaching his class about Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's essay, "Fear & Trembling."

Emily is in her motel room recording a message for McNamara. Emily imagines what it was like when her father arrived with her (then a baby) the day he died at the Pentagon.

Emily goes back to McNamara's office and reveals to him that she is Norman Morrison's daughter. She has been invited to speak at a rally protesting the Afghanistan war on November 2nd at 5:20PM, the anniversary of her father's death. McNamara begrudgingly sets an appointment for a meeting with her the next morning.

Flashback to Norman's class. He speaks more in depth about the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. In his teaching, he reveals his struggles with what is happening in Vietnam. Norman feels called to action.

Emily and McNamara meet. They casually chat for a bit about the plane that hit the Pentagon, the anthrax scare, family, and his latest book. She asks him why he has not taken a stance on Afghanistan. They begin to argue about Norman's self-immolation and its purpose.

Flashback to Norman's class. In his teaching about Abraham, he reveals his struggles with what is happening in Vietnam. Norman feels called to action. Emily is in her hotel room discussing a note that her mother found in Norman's jacket days after he died. It was a note for his next lecture, the one that would have happened a week after his death.

Emily imagines the morning of Norman's last day based on what her mother told her. He describes a village that was bombed. He had seen photos of the Vietnamese children burned from the bombings and read about the Priest who had tried to save the injured and buried the dead. At the same time, we see Robert McNamara at the Pentagon holding a briefing on the Vietnam War where they discuss the effectiveness of the napalm bombings.

ACT TWO
Act Two opens with Norman at the Pentagon about to self-immolate.

Emily is recording a video for McNamara, discussing how she has collected information others have written about her father and McNamara with the intent of someday making it an exhibit or

documentary. At the end of it, she announces she will commit an act of domestic terrorism at the protest.

McNamara is in his office watching Emily's video. Emily mentions when he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and said he would speak about it on another occasion. Emily knows what was in the transcript that he did not say, and says now is the time to say it. McNamara has a vision of Norman appear before him.

McNamara shows up at Emily's hotel room. Emily accuses him of knowing what the price of the Vietnam War would be, but that he chose not to speak up about it. She has written a statement for him to give at the protest the following day admitting his wrongs, after which she plans to burn the Patriot Act.

McNamara returns to his office in a fury. He remembers the day he received the Medal of Freedom. He sees Norman and Norman puts the medal around his neck. McNamara imagines trying to advise the President to stop the war.

Emily shows up at McNamara's office the day of the protest, right before it is to happen. She reveals that she was there and when a soldier asked what her purpose was, she told him the truth. The soldier walked her to a taxi and told her to leave. Emily says she feels like she failed her mission. Emily gives McNamara a piece of paper to read: it is the letter that Norman left for his wife.

McNamara gives an interview about his book. He asks what time it is and when he hears it is 5:20PM, he asks the interviewers for a moment of silence. Emily records a video addressed to her dad. Norman is in his car at the Pentagon the day of his death. Emily gets in the passenger side of the car. She shares with Norman how important his act was to so many people. Norman shares with Emily how important she was to him. We see him pour the kerosene on himself and he lights the match.

End of play.

CONTEXT

Robert McNamara - Robert Strange McNamara (June 9, 1916 – July 6, 2009) was an American businessman and government official who served as the 8th United States Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968 under presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson at the height of the Cold War. He is the longest serving Secretary of Defense, remaining in office more than 7 years. He played a major role in promoting U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and developed an algorithmic process called systems analysis used for allocating defense spending and military action "to spot, predict, even create patterns", but the program was widely criticized due to its lack of objectivity and its inaccuracy compared to actual spending. He resigned from his position in 1968

over his differences in opinion from President Johnson over the Vietnam War. In 1996, in his memoir, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, McNamara talks about the impact Norman's action had on him and his family. He writes candidly about the Vietnam War - that he was convinced it was futile and could not be won - and admits that "we [the U.S. government] were wrong, terribly wrong."

Secretary of Defense/War - This position is called the Minister for National Defense in Canada. The U.S. president appoints the Secretary of Defense with the advice and consent of the Senate. This position is a member of the Cabinet. Subject only to the orders of the president, the Secretary of Defense exercises command and control, for both operational and administrative purposes, over all Department of Defense-administered service branches - the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Space Force – as well as the Coast Guard when its command and control is transferred to the Department of Defense. Pete Hegseth is the incumbent Secretary of War and has been in this position since January 2025, when President Trump was inaugurated.

Norman Morrison - Norman Morrison (December 29, 1933 – November 2, 1965) was an American anti-war activist and practising Quaker. For months preceding his death, Norman had become increasingly active in his opposition to the developing Vietnam War. He wrote letters to his representatives, helped plan peace conferences, and lobbied in Washington, D.C. On November 2, 1965, Morrison doused himself in kerosene and set himself on fire below the office of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara at the Pentagon to protest the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, ultimately leading to his death. His daughter, Emily, was with him as an infant during the incident but remained unharmed. In Vietnam, Norman's actions made him a kind of hero, there were poems, songs written about him, a street named in his honour, and a commemorative stamp issued.

Self-immolation - the act of setting oneself on fire. It is mostly done for political or religious reasons, often as a form of protest or in acts of martyrdom. Self-immolations are often public and political statements that are reported by the news media. They can be seen by others as a type of altruistic suicide for a collective cause, and are not intended to inflict physical harm on others or cause material damage. Several Buddhist monks, including the famous case of Thích Quảng Đức in 1963, self-immolated in protest of the Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam, perhaps inspiring Norman Morrison's actions.

2001 Anthrax attacks - The 2001 anthrax attacks occurred in the United States over the course of several weeks, beginning on September 18, 2001 - one week after the September 11 attacks. Letters containing anthrax spores were mailed to several news media offices and political officials, killing five people and infecting seventeen others. According to the FBI, the ensuing investigation became "one of the largest and most complex in the history of law enforcement." These are the only lethal attacks to have used anthrax outside of warfare.

Quakers - Quakers are people who belong to the Religious Society of Friends, a historically Protestant Christian sect. The nickname “Quaker” is derived from when the founder of the movement, George Fox, told a judge to "quake before the authority of God." In the 1660s, English Quakers decided to abstain from wars. Quakers have used non-violence as a powerful tool for seeking peaceful solutions to conflict, however, this does not mean that Quakers are passive in situations of injustice. Instead, Quakers resist with non-violent tools rather than outward weapons. During the Vietnam War, Quakers actively opposed the conflict through peaceful protests, provided humanitarian aid to both North and South Vietnam, and gave legal counselling for draft resisters.

The Binding of Isaac - In Genesis 22 in the Bible, the Lord asked Abraham to take Isaac and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. Abraham immediately obeys God, and sets out for the place where Isaac is to be sacrificed - Moriah - taking with him two servants. When they approach Moriah, Abraham says a surprising thing to the servants: “Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you” (Genesis 22:5). Abraham tells them that he will come back with Isaac. Abraham was strong in his convictions that God would save his son. God had promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation (Genesis 12:1), and He had also promised that would happen through Isaac: “through Isaac shall your offspring be named” (Genesis 21:12). In the end, Isaac was saved because God provided a ram that was offered instead of the boy, a result of Abraham’s faith in God.

Søren Kierkegaard - (1813–1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, and writer who is often considered the father of existentialism. His philosophy focuses on the individual's subjective experience, the nature of faith, and the challenges of living authentically in the face of existential uncertainty. In his essay *Fear and Trembling* (1843), Kierkegaard examines the tension between ethical duty and faith through an analysis of Abraham's psychological state during his journey to Moriah. The text argues that it is impossible to understand Abraham's actions through an ethical framework of Hegel's philosophy (being Ethical is the highest form of being). Rather, the actions can only be understood through a distinct category—faith. It is widely regarded as one of Kierkegaard's most influential texts and a foundational contribution to the philosophy of religion and existentialism.

USA Patriot Act - a 2001 federal law that expanded the surveillance, search, and investigative powers of U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies to combat terrorism that was ratified after 9/11. Key elements include expanded wiretapping authority, delayed-notification search warrants, and enhanced information sharing between agencies. It received widespread criticism due to privacy concerns and violations to the First Amendment’s right to free speech. Canada’s similar policy, Bill C-51 (The Anti-Terrorism Act) passed in 2015 with similar backlash.

GLOSSARY

Terrorism - the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence against non-combatants to instill fear and achieve political, religious, or ideological goals.

Tyranny - cruel and oppressive government or rule.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW

1. What are the consequences of action? What are the consequences of inaction?
2. "You can't hold power without moral purpose" - what does this mean to you? Use examples from real life to support your stance.

POST-SHOW

1. As a class, read the article, *Remembering Norman Morrison*, written by Anne Morrison Welsh (see 'Resources'). Do you think Norman Morrison was a martyr or the perpetrator of a senseless stunt? Discuss.
2. What does Emily ultimately want from McNamara?
3. Why is this story still relevant in Canada today? What parallels can you draw from Norman's time (1965), Emily's time (2001, post-9/11) and the present day?

RESOURCES

FILMS

1. **The Fog of War** (2003) PG-13 2003 The Fog of War Official Trailer 1 HD Sony Pictures Classics A documentary depicting the life of Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War.

2. **Path to War** (2002) - Not Rated
   A look inside Lyndon B. Johnson's (played by Sir Michael Gambon) presidency during the Vietnam War.

ARTICLE

1. **Remembering Norman Morrison**
   On November 1, 1995, Friends Journal (a Quaker newsletter) published this article written by Norman Morrison's wife, Anne Morrison Welsh. Anne reflects on Norman's actions and the effect it had on his family and the world.

BOOKS

1. **Emily, My Child by Tố Hữu**
   A poem written by a prolific Vietnamese poet 5 days after Morrison's protest as a response to his sacrifice. A link to an English translation

2. **In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam by Robert McNamara**

Written twenty years after the end of the Vietnam War, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's controversial memoir answers the lingering questions that surround this disastrous episode in American history.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **Writing prompts**

   Response poem

   Like Tố Hữu responded to Norman Morrison's self-immolation with a poem called *Emily, My Child*. Consider a current event, a photo, a piece of political art, etc., that you are emotionally moved by and create a response poem to it. Determine what angle you would like to write this response poem from, and draft your poem not as a criticism, but through your interpretation of the topic. Below is a link that provides some examples of response poems to the current climate to use as inspiration. A collection of poetic responses to the events of 2025 – Jerry Jazz Musician

   Critical thinking

   The family of Norman Morrison, namely Emily herself, has not consented to this story being told, which the playwright acknowledges in his notes preceding the script. What sort of ethics are involved in discussing Norman Morrison's actions versus the individual wishes of the Morrison family? Argue your stance on Sean Devine's choice to write the play in this way, and if it is bold or a risk.

   Reflection

   Despite likely being too young to have an actual memory of the event, Emily reflects on what may have happened the day her father died, according to what she has been told and what she hopes. What is your first memory? Describe everything you remember. What significance do you place on it? How have time and outside factors influenced the memory?

2. **Social justice project**

   "It is a sin to be silent when it is your duty to protest." - Abraham Lincoln

   Have your students develop their own plan for change as youth activists. Have them choose a topic that they are passionate about through the lens of social justice - the more specific the better. For example, addressing air pollution is a lot more actionable than broad climate change. Research the topic. Include some of the history and reasons behind the problem and why it exists, as well as people and organizations that are already working to help address the issue. Have your students develop an actionable plan to combat the issue they've chosen, with a tangible product as a result. Perhaps publish an interview with people who have worked to address their topic in their community, make a social media page dedicated to awareness of the topic, write a letter to local government, or make a public performance art piece. This work is meant to be shared, not just for the eyes of the teacher.

3. **Open Mind Character Analysis**

The characters of Norman, Emily, and Robert are all very different since they come with differing beliefs, values, and even live in different time periods! Choose one of the three to analyze. Brainstorm:

- Some adjectives to describe the character
- Key quotations or images that help define the character
- Their desires and dreams
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Personal history and background information that helps define the character
- Analysis of how the character grows/changes/transforms throughout the text
- Key connections and relationships to other characters
- Motivations
- Interests, passions

On a silhouetted picture of a head, have your students organize their thoughts to represent that character. Have them consider placement, size, colour, font, imagery, and symbols to illustrate what is going on inside the character's head. This could be done digitally on a program like Canva or by hand. Examples of the Open Mind characterization are at the end of this guide.

4. **Multiple sides to a story - drama game**

While all 3 characters in *Re:Union* were present at Norman's protest, all have a vastly different understanding of the events that happened.

In this improv game, students will portray characters that experience the same scenario but from different perspectives. Have the class suggest a series of scenarios. The teacher or the group can choose their scenario.

Four players form a line in front of the audience, with each one stepping forward when it's their turn. The first player (typically positioned stage right) is the first to speak and begins a narration from the point of view of a unique character of their making about one of the scenarios suggested. After a couple of sentences, they step back and the next player in the sequence continues the storytelling process, offering the beginning of a new arc from their own character's perspective. Once all four characters have established their personae, the sequence continues through multiple rotations until eventually all four characters and stories meet in a culminating moment in time inspired by the initial suggestion. For example, the scenario could be buying their first car: the first person could be the car salesman, the second the teenager who's grandma promised them a car if they got an A in math, the grandma, the car itself, etc. Do not discuss who each person is going to be, but make sure that each perspective in the story is varied and distinguishable (this makes the third and fourth person's job more difficult).

RESOURCE LINKS FOR TEACHERS

1. **The Cold War in Asia: Crash Course US History #38**

A crash course video series by John Green about the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, focusing on the why's and how's rather than the who's and when's. Succinct and informative, this is a good start for a baseline knowledge on the context of *Re:Union.*

2. **10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism article by Shannon Bertoni | TPT**
   A free resource on Teachers Pay Teachers that gives tips on how youth can make meaningful change in their community.

CURRICULAR OUTCOMES

English CR B10.2 - View, interpret, and report on ideas and information from more than one source to develop and support positions on various topics related to the course including identity, social responsibility, and personal agency.

English CC 20.4 - Create a variety of written informational (including an essay of explanation of a process, an application letter and résumé, and an argumentative or a persuasive essay) and literary (including a reflective or personal essay and an analysis of a literary text) communications.

English CR B30.1 - View, listen to, read, comprehend, and respond to a variety of grade-appropriate international, including indigenous, texts that address: identity (e.g., Sense of Self), social responsibility (e.g., Social Criticism), and social action (agency) (e.g., Addressing the Issues).

English CC B30.2 - Create a visual or multimedia presentation that suits the topic, purpose, and audience; teaches others about a global social issue; and persuades them to act on the issue in a responsible manner.

Drama CP10.3 - Demonstrate the purposeful use of artistic voice to communicate perspective.

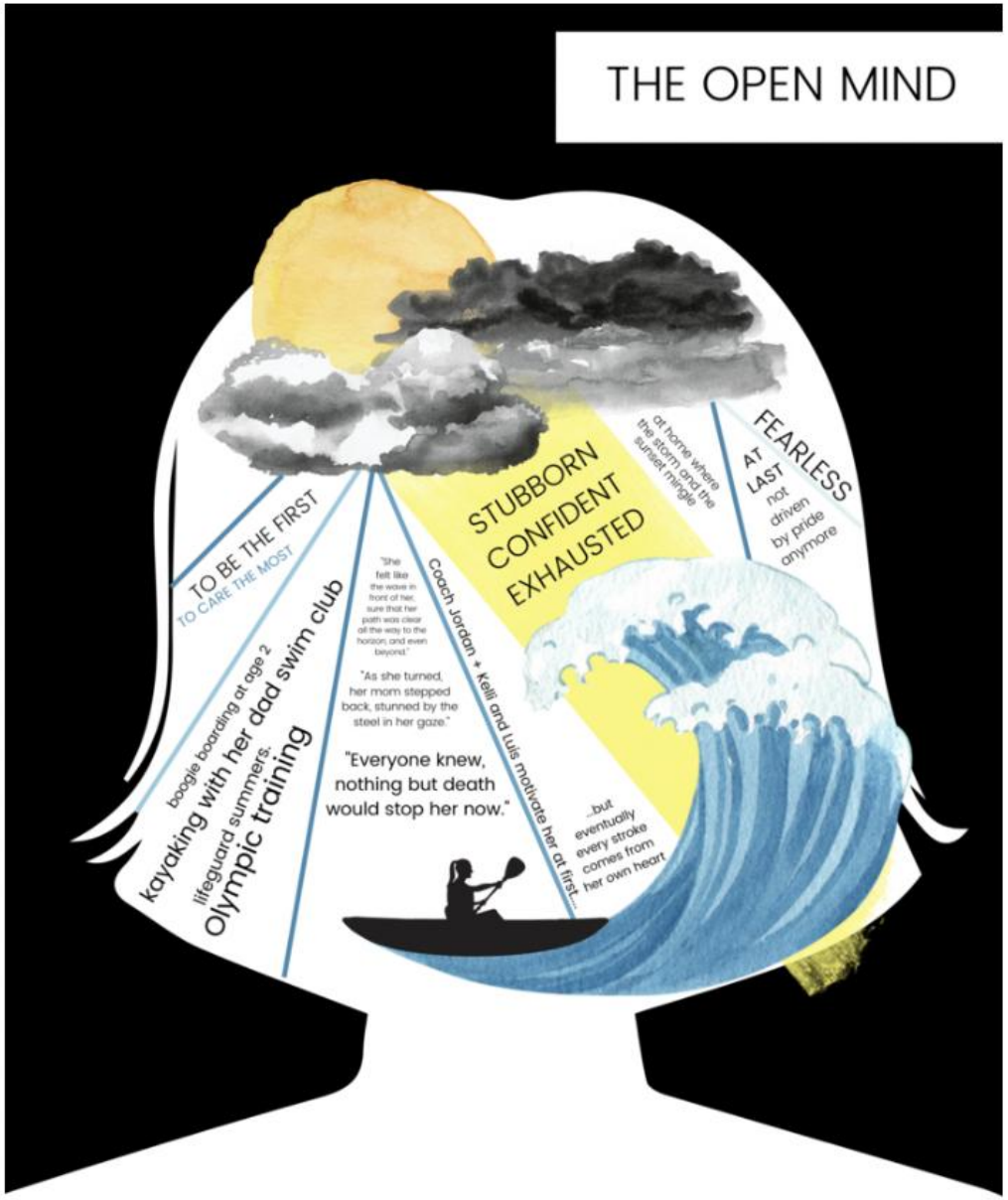
Drama CH30.2 - Examine the role of the theatre and artists as potential agents of social change.

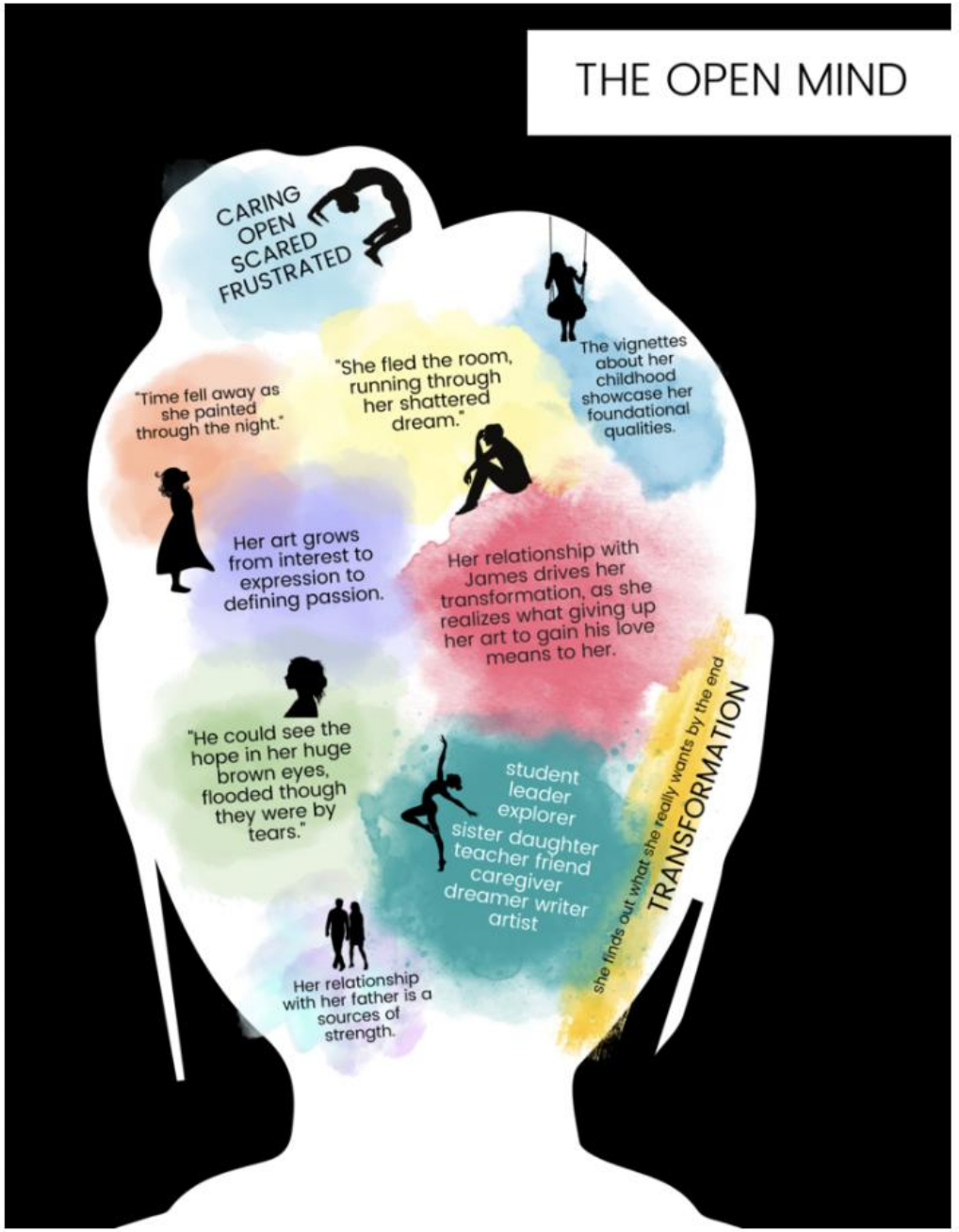
History 20: - Unit 4 (Self-Determination and the Superpowers) and Unit 5 (Global Issues)

ENRICHMENT GUIDE CONTRIBUTOR BIO

Sam Fairweather

Sam (she/her) is a theatre artist based in Saskatoon on Treaty Six Territory, working as an actor, educator, stage manager, and peacemaker. She is a substitute teacher with Saskatoon Public Schools and loves to teach primary years and math - a strange combo for a teacher who doubles as an artist! Sam is a fierce lover and protector of her fur babies and works with local organizations such as SCAT Street Cat Rescue, New Hope Dog Rescue and the SPCA to make the world a better place for all animals in her community.


THE OPEN MIND
TO BE THE FIRST
TO CARE THE MOST
boogie boarding at age 2
kayaking with her dad
swim club
lifeguard summers
olympic training
"She felt like the wave in front of her, sure that her path was clear all the way to the horizon, and even beyond."
"As she turned, her mom stepped back, stunned by the steel in her gaze."
"Everyone knew, nothing but death would stop her now."
STUBBORN
CONFIDENT
EXHAUSTED
at home where the storm and the sunset mingle
Coach Jordan + Kelli and Luis motivate her at first...
...but eventually every stroke comes from her own heart
FEARLESS
AT LAST
not driven by pride anymore


THE OPEN MIND
CARING
OPEN
SCARED
FRUSTRATED
"Time fell away as she painted through the night."
"She fled the room, running through her shattered dream."
The vignettes about her childhood showcase her foundational qualities.
Her art grows from interest to expression to defining passion.
Her relationship with James drives her transformation, as she realizes what giving up her art to gain his love means to her.
"He could see the hope in her huge brown eyes, flooded though they were by tears."
student
leader
explorer
sister daughter
teacher friend
caregiver
dreamer writer
artist
Her relationship with her father is a sources of strength.
she finds out what she really wants by the end
TRANSFORMATION