DESCRIBE THE NIGHT

By Rajiv Joseph
Directed by Giovanna Sardelli

New York Premiere Play
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>**SECTION I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**SECTION II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playwright &amp; Director Biographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**SECTION III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theater Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Describe the Night</em> Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Describe the Night</em> in Historical Context:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Figures: The people of <em>Describe the Night</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Timeline: The events that inspired <em>Describe the Night</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Terms, Places, and Events in the world of <em>Describe the Night</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Theater Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**SECTION IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading a Scene for Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Aesthetics Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-Lesson Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene Analysis Worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**SECTION V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Theater Creative Response Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core &amp; DOE Theater Blueprint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**SECTION VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section I: The Play
Synopsis
Characters
SYNOPSIS

In 1920, the Russian writer Isaac Babel wanders the countryside with the Red Cavalry. Seventy years later, a mysterious KGB agent spies on a woman in Dresden and falls in love. In 2010, an aircraft carrying most of the Polish government crashes in the Russian city of Smolensk. Set in Russia over the course of 90 years, this thrilling and epic new play by Rajiv Joseph (Atlantic’s Guards at the Taj, Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo) traces the stories of seven men and women connected by history, myth and conspiracy theories.

CHARACTERS

*Denotes an actual historical figure

*Isaac - Russian, Jewish. He is the writer Isaac Babel. In 1920 he is 25 years old. A quiet, shy young man with dreams of being a successful writer, but traumatized from the Polish-Russo war, where he is a wire service journalist—a job he took in order to experience something in life he could write about.
In 1937–40 he is a successful writer of fiction and films. He has robust appetites, and is far more self-assured, he is not intimidated by anyone. He craves danger.

*Nikolai - Russian. Last name: Yezhov. A Captain in the Russian Red Cavlary in 1920, when he is 30 years old. He is enormously self-assured, an accomplished military man. A violent man. In 1937-40, he is the Head of Stalin’s Secret Police which will become the KGB. In 1989, when he is 99, he is a living relic of Russian history, and knows it. He enjoys tormenting young KGB agents.

*Yevgenia - Russian, the wife of Nikolai Yezhov. In 1940, she is 40. Bright, beautiful, drawn to astrology and supernatural topics. Unhappy in her marriage, but would never say so. In 1989 she is 89 years old. Mischievous, with a humor that is rooted in pain and tragedy.

*Vova - Russian, a KGB agent stationed in Dresden, East Germany, in 1989, at which time he is 35 years old. In 1999-2010, he is a politician of enormous stature. Deeply self-assured, yet terrified of the world.

Urzula - Polish, and in 1989, an immigrant, living in Dresden. The grand-daughter of Yevgenia.

Feliks - Polish. Thin, covered with tattoos, a dreary disposition. An orphan. At 21, in 2010, he feels middle-aged.

Mariya - Russian, 30’s, a journalist for a state-run newspaper in 2010. Moscow born and bred. Strong and steady.

Mrs. Petrovna - Russian, 70’s, the owner of a laundromat. Played by actress who plays Mariya.

SETTINGS

Time: 1920-2010 | Places: Poland, Russia & East Germany

THEMES

Betrayal, Love, Fate, Point-of-view, Tyranny, Political dissent, Blood, Adversity, Protest art & Words hurt/Words haunt/ Words heal
Section II: Creative Team
Playwright & Director Bios
Cast List
Crew List
RAJIV JOSEPH (Playwright) play Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo was a 2010 Pulitzer Prize finalist for Drama and was also awarded a grant for Outstanding New American Play by the National Endowment for the Arts. His play Guards at the Taj was a 2016 Obie Winner for Best New American Play and a 2016 Lucille Lortel Winner for Best Play. His play Archduke received its world premiere at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. Other plays include Gruesome Playground Injuries, The Monster at the Door, Animals Out of Paper, The Lake Effect, The North Pool, and Mr. Wolf. Rajiv has been awarded artistic grants from the Whiting Foundation, United States Artists and the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust. He is a board member of the Lark Play Development Center in New York City, where he develops all his plays. He served for three years in the Peace Corps in Senegal and now lives in Brooklyn, New York.

GIOVANNA SARDELLI (Director) With Rajiv Joseph: Los Angeles: Archduke (World Premiere at the Taper, CTG), Guards at the Taj (Geffen Playhouse, 2017 Ovation Award for Best Production of a Play). Off-Broadway World Premieres: Huck & Holden (Cherry Lane); Animals Out of Paper and All This Intimacy (Second Stage); The Leopard and The Fox (AlterEgo). Regional: Mr. Wolf (Cleveland Play House); The Lake Effect (TheatreWorks Silicon Valley); The North Pool (TheatreWorks Silicon Valley World Premiere, Barrington Stage Company). Other Select Off-Broadway World Premieres: Little Children Dream of God (Roundabout); Wildflower (Second Stage); Finks (Ensemble Studio Theatre); Apple Cove (Women’s Project). Other Select Regional: All The Way, The Whipping Man (Cleveland Play House); The Mountaintop, Absalom (Actor’s Theatre of Louisville); Clybourne Park, Lord of the Flies, Muckrakers (Barrington Stage Company); Crimes of the Heart, Velocity of Autumn, Somewhere (TheatreWorks Silicon Valley). Though based in New York, Sardelli is the Director of New Works for TheatreWorks Silicon Valley. Education: MFA Graduate Acting Program, NYU and graduate of their Director’s Lab.

CHARACTERS

TINA BENKO (Yevgenia)  
NADIA BOWERS (Mariya, Mrs. Petrovna)  
DANNY BURSTEIN (Isaac)  
ZACH GRENIER (Nikolai)  
REBECCA NAOMI JONES (Urzula)  
MAX GORDON MOORE (Vova)  
STEPHEN STOCKING (Feliks)

CREW

TIM MACKABEE (Scenic Designer), AMY CLARK (Costume Designer), LAP CHI CHU (Lighting Designer), DANIEL KLUGER (Original Compositions & Sound Design), J. DAVID BRIMMER (Fight Master, SAFD), LORI LUNDQUIST (Production Stage Manager) & CAROLINE ENGLANDER (Assistant Stage Manager)
Section III: Your Students As Audience
Theater Vocabulary
Vocabulary from
_Describe the Night_
Historical Figures
Historical Timeline
**TEACHER OBJECTIVE**
To be able to discuss theater through a common, shared vocabulary.

**STUDENT GOAL**
To understand that the most effective way to discuss theater and new ideas is through a shared vocabulary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACTION</strong></td>
<td>The events that move along the story of the play and which influence the characters within the play.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>CHARACTERS</strong></td>
<td>Individuals the audience learns about from their actions and reactions.</td>
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<td><strong>ENSEMBLE</strong></td>
<td>A group of performers working together to create a complete production.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>DIALOGUE</strong></td>
<td>The exchange of speech between two characters which reveals the feelings of the character as well as the story of the play.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>MONOLOGUE</strong></td>
<td>A speech by one actor on stage which is intended to reveal the inner thoughts of the character the actor plays.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>CHARACTER ARC</strong></td>
<td>The change produced in a character by the events and other characters in the play.</td>
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<td><strong>MUSICAL THEATER</strong></td>
<td>A twentieth century creation where writers and musicians collaborate to create a play which features song, dance and drama.</td>
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<td><strong>MOOD</strong></td>
<td>The overall feeling the play evokes.</td>
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<td><strong>COSTUME</strong></td>
<td>The clothes, boots, etc., worn by the actors based on their character.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROP</strong></td>
<td>Objects used by an actor to enhance their character. For example, wine glasses at a bar for drinks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SET</strong></td>
<td>The constructed environment of a play within which the action takes place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUND</strong></td>
<td>Noises and music used in the play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**POMP**
A show of magnificence, splendor.

**SUBVERSIVE**
A person who makes a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system secretly from within.

**RENDEZVOUS**
A meeting at an appointed place and/or time.

**SEDITIOUS**
An act that is an incitement of resistance to, or an insurrection against, the lawful authority.

**INDISPOSED**
Slightly ill for any number of reasons.

**SQUALLOROUS**
An adjective used to describe something in a state of “squalor,” meaning it is marked by filthiness and degradation from neglect or poverty.

**IMMATERIAL**
Of no substantial consequence.

**MAMBY-PAMBY**
An adaptation of the colloquial phrase, “namby-pamby,” meaning that something is lacking in character or substance.

**GANGRENOUS**
Having succumbed to gangrene, which is the death of soft tissues in the body due to loss of blood supply. Gangrene can also be used metaphorically to describe a state of pervasive decay or corruption.
ISAAC BABEL

Born in 1894 in Odessa, Ukraine. He was a playwright, short story writer, journalist, and translator. His most significant works are *Red Calvary* (centered around the Bolshevik army during the Russian Civil War of 1917-1923), *Tales of Odessa*, and *Story of My Dovecote*, all are considered masterpieces of Russian literature. He attended the Kiev Commercial Institute, Nicholas I Odessa Commercial School No. 1, Count Witte Commercial School, and Petrograd Psycho-Neurological Institute. He experienced hope and popularity as a writer, journalist, and translator in spite of the repressive Russian society of his time.

He notably withdrew from public life and from writing during the late 1920's and early 1930's as Stalin tightened restrictions on the arts, only allowing “socialist realism.” This shift prompted many writers to retroactively edit their works to adhere to the standard.

Babel was married three times. He had an affair with Yevgenia Feigenberg, the wife of Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD and a secret police official under Joseph Stalin. The affair eventually led to Yezhov’s call to have Babel placed under NKVD surveillance. Babel spent many years traveling between Paris and Moscow to visit his wife, Yevgenia Gronfein, and their daughter, Nathalie. Though they encouraged him to stay in Paris, he always returned to Moscow. On January 27, 1940, he was murdered by Stalin’s police at Budyanka Prison in Moscow, on the basis of a false suspicion of spying and treason.

Babel’s work was not published again in its original versions until the 1990s. In describing his own work, Babel once said, “Your language becomes clear and strong, not when you can no longer add a sentence, but when you can no longer take away from it.”

From the New World Encyclopedia:

“According to early official Soviet version, Isaac Babel died in a prison camp in Siberia on March 17, 1941. His archives and manuscripts were confiscated by the NKVD and lost. Many of the stories were banned in the USSR until the glasnost of the 1980s.”

“On December 23, 1954, a year and a half after Stalin’s death, in the midst of the “de-Stalinization” campaign begun after Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret speech” outlining Stalin’s excesses to the twentieth Communist Party congress, Isaac Babel was publicly exonerated of the charges against him “for lack of any basis.”
NIKOLAI YEZHOV was born in 1895 in St. Petersburg, Russia. He was a soviet secret police officer under Stalin. He became a Russian Communist Party official, who while chief of the NKVD from 1936-1938 oversaw the most intense stages of the Great Purge, where he personally oversaw executions and mass arrests. At five feet tall, he was known as “Stalin’s Bloody Dwarf.”

Yezhov was married twice, to Antonia Titova from 1919-1930, and then to Yevgenia Feigenberg from 1930 until her death in 1938. They had one adopted child, Natalia. Nikolai was the People’s Commissar for State Security from January 1937 until November 1938, the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs from September 1936 until November 1938, and the People’s Commissar for Water Transport from April 1938 until April 1939. He was also a Candidate member of the 17th Politburo from October 1937 until March 1939, and a Member of the 17th Secretariat from February 1935 until March 1939.

From the Encyclopedia Brittanica:

“By the summer of 1938, however, Yezhov himself had become the object of Stalin’s suspicions. In December, Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria replaced him as head of the NKVD, and Yezhov was arrested in April 1939. During interrogation, Yezhov implicated dozens of his family members and personal acquaintances for supposed counterrevolutionary activities, and hundreds were killed in the ensuing purge. In February 1940 Yezhov became a victim of the trial process that he had helped create, and he was executed that month.”

As a result of his crimes and execution, his legal status was designated as “unperson.” He was subsequently removed from all public photographs and documents. Because his execution was conducted in secret and remained a secret until the late 1940’s, theorists have suggested he could have survived and lived out his life in exile or in an institution. These are considered conspiracy theories, with no evidentiary basis. Yezhov’s daughter attempted to have Yezhov rehabilitated (allowing his image to be printed in subsequent printings of documents and photographs containing his likeness.)

From Mama by Vasily Grossman:

“In late 1926 and early 1927 Yevgenia and Aleksandr Gladun lived in London; she was employed in the Soviet Embassy as a typist. In May 1927, as a result of Britain breaking off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, they were both expelled. Aleksandr returned to Moscow, but Yevgenia went first to work in the Soviet Embassy in Berlin; it was during the several months that she spent there that she began her relationship with Isaac Babel. Soon after her return to the Soviet Union, she and Nikolai Yezhov met in Sukhumi, a resort on the Black Sea. Yezhov fell in love with her; Yevgenia and Gladun divorced; and, in the summer of 1930, Yevgenia and Nikolay Yezhov were married.”
**VLADIMIR PUTIN**

**From History.com:**

Russian leader Vladimir Putin was born in 1952 in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad). After graduating from Leningrad State University, Putin began his career in the KGB as an intelligence officer in 1975. Putin rose to the top ranks of the Russian government after joining President Boris Yeltsin's administration in 1998, becoming prime minister in 1999 before taking over as president. Putin was again appointed Russian prime minister in 2008, and retained his hold on power by earning reelection to the presidency in 2012. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, he retired from the KGB with the rank of colonel, and returned to Leningrad as a supporter of Anatoly Sobchak. On the latter's election as mayor of Leningrad (1991), Putin became his head of external relations and first deputy mayor (1994).

After Sobchak's defeat in 1996, Putin resigned his post and moved to Moscow. In 1998 he was appointed deputy head of management in Boris Yeltsin's presidential administration, in charge of the Kremlin's relations with the regional governments. Shortly afterwards, he was appointed head of the Federal Security, an arm of the former KGB, and head of Yeltsin's Security Council. In August 1999 Yeltsin dismissed his prime minister Sergey Stapashin together with his cabinet, and promoted Putin in his place. In December 1999 Yeltsin resigned as president, appointing Putin acting president until official elections were held (in early 2000). He was re-elected in 2004. In April 2005 he made a historic visit to Israel for talks with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the first visit there by any Kremlin leader.

Due to term limits, Putin was forced to leave the presidency in 2008, but not before securing the office for his protege Dmitry Medvedev. Putin served as Medvedev's prime minister until 2012, when he was reelected as Russia's president.

**Controversy: (From The Guardian)**

In the winter of 2011–2012, Russia saw its largest protests since the 1990s. Provoked by the blatant fraud of the 2011 Russian legislative elections, and by Putin's decision to run for president again after four years of using Dmitry Medvedev as a figurehead, the protesters formed an unlikely coalition: scruffy leftists, cosmopolitan liberals, strident nationalists and disgruntled workers. Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in central Moscow in sub-zero temperatures, white ribbons on their lapels.
Russia had long feared the possibility of a pro-democracy “colour revolution” on its own territory, having watched in horror as mass protests overthrew regimes in the former Soviet states of Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Putin and the state-controlled media depicted these movements as western conspiracies, CIA plots funded by George Soros. For Putin, they were threats to Russia’s regional authority and stability, which had already been ravaged by the fall of the Soviet Union, as well as threats to his personal power. It was unsurprising, then, when Moscow moved swiftly to quash Russia’s nascent “snow revolution”, as it was being called by some English-language journalists. Repression came in the form of beatings and violent dispersals, arrests of opposition leaders and protesters on trumped-up charges, show trials of dissidents – most famously of The band Pussy Riot – and further curtailments of the already limited freedoms of the press, speech and assembly.

But Putin’s efforts to head off a potential colour revolution went beyond repression to a campaign that might have been called “Make Russia Great Again”, aimed at constructing a positive sense of Russian identity. Through a strategic combination of propaganda and geopolitical aggression, Putin’s government promoted a narrative meant to bolster patriotism, and Russian xenophobia and paranoia along with it.

By the end of 2013, the Russian opposition movement had fallen apart, but Putin had a new headache: The Maidan Revolution in neighbouring Ukraine, a massive, mostly nonviolent protest movement that occupied central Kiev for months, and culminated in the flight of Ukraine’s Russia-friendly president, Viktor Yanukovych, in February 2014.

This began as a response to Yanukovych’s refusal to sign an EU association agreement. Therefore, as far as Putin was concerned, it signified yet another western encroachment on his sphere of influence. The world seemed to be closing in on Russia. But Putin was prepared. Setting in motion a plan that had clearly been developed in advance, polite “little green men” in military gear without insignia swarmed over the peninsula of Crimea. In just days, with almost no bloodshed, Ukrainian troops on the peninsula had been contained or won over, Crimean politicians had been induced to dissolve the parliament and replace the prime minister with a member of Crimea’s Russian Unity party, and the region had been “reunited” with Russia. The Russian propaganda machine was already in overdrive, convincing the Russian populace, as well as the inhabitants of Crimea and eastern Ukraine, that post-Maidan Kiev was a “fascist junta” led by bloodthirsty Ukrainian nationalists who planned to exterminate Russian speakers, crucify Russian children, and so on.

State-controlled media pushed the idea that the “return” of Crimea to Russia was the greatest moment in Russian history since victory over the Nazis in 1945, the lodestone of postwar Russian identity, the tragedy and triumph that united the Soviet people. Putin’s flagrant violation of international law and the postwar order, through the annexation of Crimea, was an aggressive move to return to a world in which Russia was still an international superpower, filling its citizens with patriotic pride. Russians crowed, “Krym nash!” – “Crimea is ours!”

From NY Magazine:

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence on a new report titled “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections,” straightforwardly recapping a lot of what independent research has already determined...

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign aimed at the US presidential election. The campaign was meant to hurt Clinton’s chances and help Trump. The CIA and FBI have high confidence in these findings, the NSA has moderate confidence.

The Kremlin denies all accusations of interference in the 2016 US presidential election, as well as similar accusations of influence campaigns throughout Europe.

Putin’s government has faced accusations of political corruption, as a significant number of journalists and political opponents have been jailed for superficial legal reasons.

Some accuse the Kremlin of state terrorism, as many political opponents of Putin’s have fallen ill or died under mysterious circumstances. The Kremlin has publicly called such accusations “absurd.”
HISTORICAL TIMELINE: THE EVENTS THAT INSPIRED DESCRIE THE NIGHT

GREAT PURGE

The Great Purge is a retrospective term that refers to the state organized bloodshed in the Communist Party and Soviet Society from 1936-1938. The Great Purge began with the assassination of Sergei Kirov, whose 1935 murder by Leonid Nikolayev is suspected to have been ordered by Joseph Stalin. Kirov, though a faithful Communist, had a certain popularity in the party that threatened Stalin's consolidation of power. There were three main staged “show trials” of former high-ranking communists to prove the legitimacy of the “purge.” It was a campaign of political repression in Soviet Union. Stalin was worried about people opposing his political position and became suspicious of anyone with any political power and initiated the purge where people were rounded up and questioned. The first people rounded up were labeled “Trotskyites” after Stalin's Nemesis Leon Trotsky, who was his main opposition in the Russian Revolution. Those that followed were Kulaks (wealthy laborers), intelligentsia, and any person with suspicious political affiliation. Often, confessions were coerced out of people even if the suspects had no intention of opposing Stalin. These false confessions often led to execution. Quotas were established in each district for the number of arrests that were needed and between 1934 and 1939, one million party members were arrested and executed. Purges ended on August 20, 1940 when Leon Trotsky was murdered by a Soviet agent. Trotsky wrote in his incomplete biography: “Stalin's first qualification was a contemptuous attitude towards ideas.”

THE KATYN MASSACRE

From the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA):

One of the earliest - and certainly the most infamous - mass shootings of prisoners of war during World War II did not occur in the heat of battle but was a cold-blooded act of political murder. The victims were Polish officers, soldiers, and civilians captured by the Red Army after it invaded eastern Poland in September 1939. Strictly speaking, even the Polish servicemen were not POWs. The USSR had not declared war, and the Polish commander in chief had ordered his troops not to engage Soviet forces...On 28 September, the USSR and Nazi Germany, allied since August, partitioned and then dissolved the Polish state. They then began implementing parallel policies of suppressing all resistance and destroying the Polish elite in their respective areas. The NKVD and the Gestapo coordinated their actions on many issues, including prisoner exchanges...

The Poles were encouraged to believe they would be released, but the interviews were in effect a selection process to determine who would live and who would die. On 5 March 1940, Stalin signed their death warrant--an NKVD order condemning 21,857 prisoners to “the supreme penalty: shooting.” They had been condemned as “hardened and uncompromising enemies of Soviet authority.

Official records, opened in 1990 when glasnost was still in vogue, show that Stalin had every intention of treating the Poles as political prisoners. Just two days after the invasion began on 17 September, the NKVD created a Directorate of Prisoners of War. It took custody of Polish prisoners from the Army and began organizing a network of reception centers and transfer camps and arranging rail transport to the western USSR. Once there, the Poles were placed in “special” (concentration) camps, where, from October to February, they were subjected to lengthy interrogations and constant political agitation.

During April-May 1940, the Polish prisoners were moved from their internment camps and taken to three execution sites. The place most identified with the Soviet atrocity is Katyn Forest, located 12 miles west of Smolensk, Russia. For years historians assumed that the grounds of an NKVD rest and recreation facility were both an execution and burial site for nearly a fifth of the unfortunate Poles who found themselves in Soviet captivity. Post-Cold War revelations, however, suggest that the victims were shot in the basement of the NKVD headquarters in Smolensk and at an abattoir in the same city, although some may have been
executed at a site in the forest itself. In any event, the Katyn Forest is—and will probably long remain—the main symbol of the atrocity, even if it was not the actual killing field.

When Nazi occupation forces in April 1943 announced the discovery of several mass graves, propaganda minister Josef Goebbels hoped that international revulsion over the Soviet atrocity would drive a wedge into the Big Three coalition and buy Germany a breathing space, if not a victory, in its war against Russia... Despite overwhelming evidence of Soviet responsibility, Moscow blamed the Germans, and for the rest of the war Washington and London officially accepted the Soviet countercharge. When the Polish government-in-exile in London demanded an international inquiry, Stalin used this as a pretext to break relations.

Those who died at Katyn included an admiral, two generals, 24 colonels, 79 lieutenant colonels, 258 majors, 654 captains, 17 naval captains, 3,420 NCOs, seven chaplains, three landowners, a prince, 43 officials, 85 privates, and 131 refugees. Also among the dead were 20 university professors; 300 physicians; several hundred lawyers, engineers, and teachers; and more than 100 writers and journalists as well as about 200 pilots. Recent historical research shows that 700-900 of the victims were Polish Jews.

At a Kremlin ceremony on 13 October 1990, Gorbachev [released] a folder of documents that left no doubt about Soviet guilt. He did not, however, make a full and complete disclosure. Missing from the folder was the March 1940 NKVD execution order. Gorbachev laid all blame on Stalin’s secret police chief, Lavrenty Beria, and his deputy. (This was a safe move, because Beria and his deputy had been branded criminals and summarily shot by Stalin’s successors.) Gorbachev also failed to mention that the actual number of victims was 21,857—more than the usually cited figure of 15,000. By shaving the truth, Gorbachev had shielded the Soviet Government and the Communist Party, making Katyn look like a rogue secret police action rather than an official act of mass murder.

The discovery of new evidence put additional pressure on the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation to reveal the full truth. In 1992, Moscow suddenly "discovered" the original 1940 execution ordered signed by Stalin and five other Politburo members--in Gorbachev’s private archive. Gorbachev almost certainly had read it in 1989, if not earlier. In October 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin presented a copy of the order along with 41 other documents to the new Polish president, former Solidarity leader Lech Walesa. In June 1998, Yeltsin and Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski agreed that memorial complexes under construction at Katyn and Mednoye, the two NKVD execution sites on Russian soil, should be completed before 2000.

THE SMOLENSK PLANE CRASH

On April 10, 2010, a plane carrying Polish president Lech Kaczyński and other important political and military leaders crashed in Western Russia killing 96 people. The plane was traveling to visit the site of the Katyn Massacre. While attempting to land in thick fog, the plane missed the runway. The plane crashed, causing Poland to lose a large sum of the country’s leadership. It happened at a time where Russia and Poland were starting to acknowledge Russian responsibility for the Katyn Massacre. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin became the first Russian leader to join Polish officials in remembering the 1940 massacre in Katyn Woods.

Some Polish citizens hold conspiracy theories that Russian officials were responsible for the crash, but no one was prosecuted in the official investigation. In 2016, a Polish commission re-investigating the plane crash accused its predecessors of doctoring evidence. They also accuse Russian authorities of providing them with evidence that was tampered with, including black box recordings missing several seconds of audio recordings. Experts from the initial investigation have dismissed these concerns. Despite significant traction, it is still considered a fringe conspiracy theory that divides Polish citizens.

Further reading:


http://smolenskcrash.eu
JOSEPH STALIN was born in December 1878 in a small town called Gori which was part of the Russian empire. He grew up poor and an only child. As a teen, he earned a scholarship to study priesthood. While at the school he started secretly reading the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx. After getting expelled from school, he became an underground political agitator. In 1912, he was appointed to join the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party. In November 1917, Bolsheviks (made up of Members of a wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party) seized power in Russia. The Soviet Union was then founded in 1922. The Soviet Union changed from a peasant society to a military and industrial superpower. Stalin ruled through the fear of terror in the face of his own fear of being opposed. During World War II, he aligned with the US and Britain but later had a very tense relationship with the West during the Cold War. Stalin died in 1953 at the age of 74 after suffering a stroke. After his death the government started the de-stalinization process, executed by his successor Nikita Khrushchev. Estimates suggest he is personally responsible for the execution of 20 million people.

YUGROSTA WIRE SERVICE Southern branch of the Russian national wire service, ROSTA. ROSTA is an acronym for Rossiiskoe Telegraphnoe Agentstvo (Russian Telegraph Agency.) Isaac Babel was a war correspondent for YugROSTA during the Polish-Russo War in 1920.

ZHITOMIR Also spelled Zhytomyr. A city in northwestern Ukraine which was briefly the national capital during Ukrainian Independence. In 1920 the city came under Soviet control. It was under Nazi German occupation during WWII. Since 1991 Zhitomir has been part of independent Ukraine.

NKVD An acronym that stands for “Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del”, or The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs. This was the leading soviet secret police organization from 1934-1946, and was the predecessor of the KGB. As the leading Soviet secret police organization from 1934 to 1946, NKVD is known for its role in political repression and carrying out the Great Purge under Joseph Stalin. The agency was led by Genrikh Yagoda (executed in 1938), Nikolai Yezhov (executed in 1940) and Lavrentiy Beria (executed in 1953). Nikolai Yezhov was responsible for the most intense purge from 1937-1938, referred to as “Yezhovshchina”. The NKVD conducted mass extrajudicial executions; conceived, populated and administered the Gulag system of forced labor camps; was responsible for the repression of the Kulaks (laborers who were wealthy to employ hired laborers and machinery), intelligentsia, military figures and the mass deportations of entire nationalities to uninhabited regions of the country. It is estimated that 600,000 people died at the hands of the Soviet government during the Great Purge. Its agents were responsible for the protection of Soviet borders and espionage (which included political assassinations), as well as enforcing Stalinist policy in communist movements and puppet governments in other countries, mostly notably the repression and massacres in Poland.

THE KGB An acronym that stands for “Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti”, or Committee for State Security, the KGB was established in March 1954 in Moscow as an organization that was designed to be a state security committee. It operated as the main security agency independently within the Soviet Union. With over 500,000 workers, the main duties of the KGB were to collect intelligence in other nations, run the secret police/military corps/border guards, control internal resistance and dissent, and run electronic espionage. It is considered the world’s largest spy and state organization and been quoted to have “It’s doors...shut tightly to the public.” The KGB promoted the Soviet Union through released propaganda and during the Cold War, the KGB played a critical role in the survival of the Soviet one-party state through its suppression of political dissent (termed “ideological subversion”) and hounding of notable public figures. The KGB fell apart when its chief, Colonel-General Vladimir Kryuchkov, used the KGB’s resources to aid the August 1991 coup attempt to overthrow Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. On November 6, 1991 the KGB ceased to exist. Its services were divided into two separate organizations; the FSB for Internal Security and the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) for Foreign Intelligence Gathering.

KAPOTNYA An administrative district of Moscow, known for immigrant workers and a large homeless population. It is one of the cheapest districts in Moscow to live due to the high pollution from the Oil Refinery in that area.
**GAZETA** Likely refers to Rossiyskaya Gazeta, a Russian government-run daily newspaper which publishes official decrees and documents.

**PRESIDENT KACZYNSKI** President of Poland from 2005 until his death in the Smolensk plane crash of April 10, 2010. Prior to his presidency, Kaczynski was mayor of Warsaw.

**IZVESTIA** A long-running, high-circulation daily newspaper in Russia that was run by the Soviet government from 1917-1991. A controlling stake in the paper was owned by state-owned Gazprom Media holding until 2008, when it was sold to the privately-owned (but government-friendly) National Media Group.

**“FIFTH CHIEF DIRECTORATE, BY PROXY OF 9TH DEPUTY DIRECTORATE, BY PROXY OF 27TH OPERATIONAL COLLEGIUM ASSISTANT DEPUTY DIRECTORATE”** This is a title Rajiv, the playwright invented. But in case you want to know more: both the Fifth and Ninth directorate are real branches of the KGB concerned with intelligence. The Fifth Chief Directorate was a branch of the KGB designed to work against political dissidents, including religious dissidents, students, and “subversive expressions of nationalism.” The “Ninth Chief Directorate” was a branch of the KGB responsible for bodyguard services to major Soviet political figures and running their secure VIP subway system and secure government phone system. The KGB/FSB (Federal Security Service, which encompassed many of the responsibilities of the KGB after it was abolished by Gorbachev in 1991) underwent a massive reorganization in the mid-nineties, so these terms are either no longer used or have different meanings. The Ninth Directorate has since morphed into the Presidential Security Service (PSB), and the term “Fifth Directorate” now refers to a branch focused on operational intelligence surrounding transportation and military vehicles.

**LENINGRAD, PETROGRAD, ST. PETERSBURG:** St. Petersburg is the second largest city in Russia after Moscow. In 1914 the name of the city was changed to Petrograd, meaning “Peter’s City,” because they wanted to remove the German words “Sankt” and “Burg,” due to World War I. In 1924, just after Lenin’s death, the name of the city was changed to Leningrad. In 1991 the name was changed back to St. Petersburg during a referendum that was concurrent with the first Russian presidential elections after the fall of the Soviet Union.

**BABCIA:** Polish word meaning “grandmother.”

**MOSCOW FIRST DOMINION STATE ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE:** The name of this asylum was invented by Rajiv, the playwright of *Describe the Night*, but the practice of “punitive psychiatry” in the Soviet Union, both in the 1930s-60s and in the present, is well documented. Political dissidents were and are falsely diagnosed with mental issues and confined indefinitely in mental hospitals along with actual mental patients. There they could be abused, mistreated, and neglected with little oversight.

**THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL:** The Berlin Wall was built in 1961, by order of Khruschev, when American, British, and French troops refused to withdraw from Berlin. The wall split the city into East (Soviet occupied) and West Berlin. Crossing between them was difficult & the wall came to symbolize the division of the whole country. On November 9, 1989, due to increasing civil unrest, the East German government announced that citizens would now be allowed to cross the wall. The wall’s demolition officially began in 1990 and was completed in 1992.

**GLASNOST:** A Russian word that literally translates to “publicity” or “openness.” When Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, he introduced a policy which he called “glasnost,” drastically loosening the control the government held over media and religious groups, and allowing citizens to express more varied views without the strict punishment that had been the norm during and after WWII.

**GORBACHEV:** Mikhail Gorbachev was the eighth and last leader of the Soviet Union. He strove to reform the Soviet Union through his policies of Glasnost and Perestroika (a major overhaul of all the top leaders of the party). These policies caused political instability and major cultural shifts that eventually led to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. After the fall of the USSR Gorbachev attempted to form several different political parties & remained active in Russian politics, but was no longer the country’s leader.
PRE-THEATER ACTIVITY: COMMUNICATION MODEL

TEACHER OBJECTIVE
To develop critical thinking skills through examining how messages are sent and received.

STUDENT GOAL
To understand the importance “influencers” play in sending and receiving messages.

MATERIALS
Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard, and the attached worksheet/graphic.

STEP ONE
Discuss the sender/receiver communication model graphic attached.

STEP TWO
Discuss the possible “influencers” of a sender and a receiver.

STEP THREE
Using turn-and-talk, ask the students to brainstorm a list of “influencers” (i.e. age, education level, etc.) that may impact how a message is sent and received.

STEP FOUR
Ask each pair to report how “influencers” control a message and its travel cycle between sender and receiver.
Section IV: Your Students As Actors
Reading a Scene for Understanding
Practical Aesthetics Exercise
A scene from Describe the Night
Scene Analysis Worksheet

The following activities are designed to assist your students in understanding the actor’s “job.” Like every job, even acting has its “tools.”

The Practical Aesthetics acting technique was developed by David Mamet, William H. Macy, and the founding members of the Atlantic Theater Company. This technique offers the actor a set of analytical tools to understand the playwright’s intentions and what the characters want. This process of script analysis helps define the actor’s job on stage.

“Actors should remain truthful to the story and their character.”
- David Mamet, American playwright & noted actor, William H. Macy, founders of Atlantic Theater Company
READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

TEACHER OBJECTIVE
To introduce the Practical Aesthetics “tools” for breaking down a scene. To understand the character and the story of the scene by relating the character’s actions to the student’s own life.

STUDENT GOAL
To understand that an important part of creating a simple, honest character involves knowing what that character wants.

MATERIALS
Pencils, pens, copies of the following scene from Describe the Night, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS EXERCISE

Step One
Divide the students in pairs. Ask the students to select which character they want to portray.

Step Two
Allow the students time to read the scene silently to themselves.

Step Three
Ask the students to read the Introduction to the Practical Aesthetic Acting Technique sheet and have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet.

    NOTE: The four questions and the students’ answers to them form the basis for the Practical Aesthetics scene analysis; and enables the actor to create a simple, honest character by simply being honest to their own experiences!

Step Four
After the students have completed the question worksheet, ask each pair of actors to read the scene in the front of the class room for an audience. The students should incorporate the ideas from the worksheet as they read the scene.
A SCENE FROM DESCRIBE THE NIGHT

FELIKS
I did something bad. I did something... that I shouldn't have done...
(beat)
I went out there. I went into the woods.

MARIYA
You did? You went out there after the—

FELIKS
—Everything smelled of gasoline. Everything still does. I can't get the smell out of my nose, fuel. Gasoline. And there were seats, twenty, thirty, airplane seats, chunked into the ground like tombstones. Just partial bodies in each one. But there was a woman. She was older, she was still alive. She sees me and she smiled at me.
(this memory messes him up more)
She smiled at me. She had a piece of metal coming out of her neck. She said... She said... “Hello My Son”.
(beat)
Why would she say that to me? Why would someone say something like that?
(a sort of eruption of many things from his entire life)
I'm not her son! Why's someone got to say something like that, and really formal too, as if she meant it, not like it was some nickname or... People should think more when they have dying words, is what I say, especially if they utter them to strangers. I didn't have a mother, or I never met her anyway, I'm an orphan, I grew up in an orphanage, and this woman doesn't know that, but then she... then she... she says something crazy like call me her son and then dies!? What kind of messed up shit is that?

MARIYA
People see things when they die.

FELIKS
That's fine, they don't need to talk about it while they do.
ANALYSIS
Script analysis is the process of breaking down a beat within a scene. We ask four questions in order to do this.

1. What is the character LITERALLY doing?
2. What does the character WANT?
3. What is the essential ACTION?
4. What is that action like to me? It is AS-IF...

LITERAL
In this step, the actor determines what the character he or she is playing is literally doing according to the text.

PURPOSE: An actor has to travel far—think of this preparation as the road map.

WANT
In this step, the actor identifies the goal of the character in the scene, specifically what the character wants from the other character/s in the scene. The given circumstances of the story inform the WANT.

PURPOSE: To focus the actor on the characters' interaction.

ACTION
Playing an ACTION is the physical pursuit of a goal. Defining the ACTION of the scene allows the actor to determine what result or CAP he or she is looking for from the other actor/s in the scene.

EXAMPLES:
- Put someone in their place.
- Beg someone for forgiveness.
- Get a favor.
- Get someone to let me off the hook.
- Force someone to face the facts.
- Inspire someone to greatness.
- Get someone to see the light.

PURPOSE: Using an action gives the actor a task and a specific point of view. The Atlantic Theater Company teaches that the Action creates character.

AS - IF
In this step, the actor personalizes the action by finding a real-life situation in which they would behave according to the action they have chosen for the scene.

Example: Get a favor.

It’s AS-IF I forgot to do my science homework and I’m asking my teacher for an extra day to hand it in.

PURPOSE: To gain personal insight and urgency to the scene or beat.

TACTICS & TOOLS
Different ways an actor goes about getting his action.

Example: Plead, flirt, demand, inspire, challenge, level, threaten.

Living in the Moment. Reacting impulsively to what the other actor in the scene is doing, from the point of view of the chosen action.
Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is my character literally doing?</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING FELIKS...</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING MARIYA...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feliks is literally talking to Mariya about how difficult it was to have a dying woman he had never met before call him her son.</td>
<td>Mariya is literally talking to Felix about the experience he had when he went into the woods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| What does my character want? | Feliks wants Mariya to tell him that there couldn’t be any truth to what the woman said. | Mariya wants Felix to tell her everything he saw in the woods. |

| What is the action I’m going to play? | To get someone to throw me a life line. | To get someone to put their cards on the table. |

| The As-If... | As if I was lost in a strange country without means of communication and needed someone to let me borrow their phone. | As if I was planning a move to a new apartment with my roommate and they kept making comments suggesting they might not want to live with me anymore. |
**MINI-LESSON IN VOCABULARY**

**Literal**
The process of accessing the basic story-line of the characters in a particular scene or beat.

**Want**
The process of identifying the goal of the character in a scene or beat.

**Action**
The actor's physical pursuit of a specific goal.

**As-If**
A way to determine what this action means to me.

**HANDY TOOL KIT FOR THE ACTOR**

**Acting Tactics & Tools To Use in The As-If Step**

- Laughing to get what you want
- Teasing to get what you want
- Testing to get what you want
- Threatening to get what you want
- Pleading to get what you want
- Flirting to get what you want
- Bartering to get what you want
- Bribing to get what you want
- Begging to get what you want
- Crying to get what you want
- Demanding to get what you want
- Leveling to get what you want
- Inspiring to get what you want
- Challenging to get what you want
Section V: Your Students As Artists

Post-Theater Creative Response Activity
Common Core & DOE
Theater Blueprint
POST-THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

“WORDS HURT, WORDS HAUNT, WORDS HEAL...”

Teacher Objective
To develop critical thinking skills through examining a theme in Describe the Night and relating that theme to an individual creative response.

Student Goal
To understand that an important theme from Describe the Night portrays the truths and messages of the play.

Materials
Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard, and the attached worksheet.

Step One
Discuss the role the weight of an individuals’ words plays in Describe the Night.

Step Two
Introduce the Writing Trigger below: “Words hurt . . . words haunt . . . words heal . . .”
Write a narrative, poem or Spoken Word response.

     NOTE: Allow 7-minutes for this free write.

Step Three
Ask the students to share their responses, offering positive feedback after each share.
NAME: __________________________________________________________________

BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE DURING DESCRIBE THE NIGHT, REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING THOUGHT . . . “WORDS HURT, WORDS HAUNT, WORDS HEAL” . . . HOW DO THEY RELATE TO YOUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?
“DESCRIBE THE NIGHT...”

Teacher Objective
To develop critical thinking skills through examining how the title a playwright selects effects the impact of their story.

Student Goal
To understand the importance metaphor plays in Describe the Night’s portrayal of the truths and messages of the play.

Materials
Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard, and the attached worksheet.

Step One
Discuss the role meaning and subtext play in the title, Describe the Night.

Step Two
Introduce the Writing Trigger below:

“How would you describe the night?”

Write a narrative, poem or spoken word response.

NOTE: Allow 7-minutes for this free write.

Step Three
Ask the students to select one sentence from their writing that best describes their feelings.

Step Four
In groups of six, ask the students to create one, fluid poem from the individual sentences.

Step Five
Ask the students to share their group poems, offering positive feedback after each share.
BASED ON YOUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, “HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE NIGHT?”
Enduring Understanding
Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices. For example: relationships, hopes for the future, grieving, and loss.

Theater conveys the meaning behind an individual's struggle to have his or her life choices validated by family and friends.

Essential Questions
Do the direction and staging reinforce the theme of “life’s transitions” which is prevalent in Describe the Night?

Do you accept the concept put forward in Describe the Night that “words have power” can be both empowering and destructive?

Strand Benchmarks
THEATER MAKING: ACTING
Benchmark: Students increase their ability as imaginative actors while continuing to participate as collaborative ensemble members. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on and think critically about their own work.

THEATER MAKING: PLAYWRITING/PLAY MAKING
Benchmark: Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.

DEVELOPING THEATER LITERACY
Benchmark: Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THEATER
Benchmark: Students demonstrate a capacity for deep personal connection to theater and a realization of the meaning and messages of theater.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
Benchmark: Students invigorate and broaden their understanding of theater through collaborative partnerships with theater professionals.


Additional research by Allison Haglund.
Inspired by the Group Theater, Stanislavsky, and a passion for ensemble acting, David Mamet and William H. Macy formed the Atlantic Theater Company with a select group of New York University Undergraduate drama students. Since its inception in 1985, Atlantic has produced more than 100 plays and garnered numerous awards, including: 12 Tony Awards, 15 Lucille Lortel Awards, 16 OBIE Awards, six Outer Critics Circle Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, three Drama League Awards, three New York Drama Critics Circle Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Noted productions include: *Spring Awakening*, *Port Authority*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Boy's Life*, and *American Buffalo*. The Atlantic Theater Company’s mission is to produce plays simply and truthfully, utilizing an artistic ensemble. Atlantic believes that the story of the play and the intent of its playwright are at the core of a successful theatrical production.

The Atlantic Acting School fosters new generations of actors by passing on the tools learned from Mamet and Macy and by preparing students for all aspects of a career in film, television and theater. The Atlantic offers studies through New York University, a full-time conservatory program, part-time programs and summer workshops. Atlantic for Kids offers acting classes in an after school setting as well as summer programs for children ages 4 to 18.

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