

EMERSON COLLEGE'S THEATRE EDUCATION GRADUATE ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

# FINDING AMERICAN

AN ORIGINAL DEVISED PLAY

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WITH ADDITIONAL WORDS BY LYNDA BACHMAN

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## ABOUT TEGA

The Theatre Education Graduate Association (TEGA) is an organization of graduate students in the Theatre Education Master's program at Emerson College. Some of us hope to become high school drama teachers. Others want to run education programs at professional theaters or within communities. We include future college professors, teaching artists, and community leaders, but we all have two things in common -- a love of theatre, and a commitment to sharing that love with others through education and outreach.

## ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

Every fall, TEGA stages a show and then performs it at a variety of schools in the greater Boston area. Recent touring shows include Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (performed for middle schools) and *The Boy Who Loved Monsters* and *The Girl Who Loved Peas* (for elementary school audiences). This year, we wanted to focus on high school audiences, and we also wanted to try something different -- creating a brand-new play that dramatizes important events in American history.

*Finding American* is the result of a collaboration among a playwright, a director, a cast of actors, and the voices of real immigrants from America's past. It is a work of devised theatre, which means that although we had a playwright who was in charge of the final script, much of the play was created in the rehearsal room, through exercises, writing prompts, and scene work with the cast. (For more information about devised theatre as an art form, along with exercises you can use to create your own work of devised theatre, please see page 27.) Our intention was to create a play that is thought-provoking and moving, encouraging all of us to think more deeply about how our country's past and present relate to and inform one another.

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for teachers of drama, English, social studies, or other high school subjects, and it may also be used by high school students who are interested in delving further into the play independently. It includes contextual information about the history of immigration, activities for the classroom, details about the play, interviews with the creators, and further reading suggestions. Please feel free to use this guide in whatever way is most helpful for your classroom -- before the show, after seeing the show, or both. We hope that you will find it useful and that it will inspire you to continue exploring the ways theatre can help us uncover the past and connect with our present circumstances.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	FINDING AMERICAN: THE STORY AND THE CHARACTERS
5	IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: IRISH
8	IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: RUSSIAN JEWS
12	IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: HAITIANS
15	IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: PAKISTANI MUSLIMS
17	OTHER WAVES OF IMMIGRATION
20	ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM: UNPACKING IMMIGRATION, TRADITION, & CULTURE
20	ACTIVITY: WHERE I'M FROM
22	ACTIVITY: INTERVIEWING A CLASSMATE
24	ACTIVITY: TRADITIONS
26	ACTIVITY: WALK (OR WRITE) A MILE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES
27	DEVISED THEATRE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ART FORM
29	AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LYNDA BACHMAN AND PLAYWRIGHT STACY PARK
33	A GUIDE TO CREATING DEVISED THEATRE
37	A CLOSER LOOK: SET DESIGN
39	FURTHER READING SUGGESTIONS
40	WORKS CITED

# FINDING AMERICAN

## THE STORY

Nailah is having a tough time adjusting to her new life in the United States. After arriving from Pakistan five years ago, she is still treated as an outsider and doesn't feel like she can ever be accepted in her new home. At the end of her rope, Nailah calls for help -- and her call is answered by the voices of past immigrants who once lived in her house in Dorchester. Through the experiences of Maggie from Ireland, Abram from Russia, and Jeanine from Haiti, Nailah learns that she is a part of a long tradition of individuals who had to restart their lives in an unfamiliar place with the hope of a better future. She learns that this process of rebuilding her life is not an easy one and differs individual to individual and from time to time. As she learns that she is a part of a broader picture, she sees herself more as a part of the United States than apart from it.

## THE CHARACTERS

### NAILAH

Age 15. First year of high school. Lives at 16 Victory Lane in Dorchester in 2015. Family immigrated from Pakistan five years ago. Is having difficulty fitting in.

### MAGGIE

Immigrated in 1850 from Ireland due to the potato famine. Begins as a servant in wealthy households, retires as a cook to start her family in Dorchester.

### ABRAM

Immigrated in 1906 from Russia. Lived in a Jewish community and immigrated to flee anti-Semitic violence. Begins in Brooklyn as a factory worker and moves to Boston for college. Starts a family in Dorchester and moves to Newton once his family has achieved financial security.

### JEANINE

Immigrated in 1986 from Haiti to flee Papa Doc's dictatorship. Lives in Dorchester and becomes a well-known figure within the community. Loses her house in foreclosure during the most recent financial crisis.

## IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: IRISH

### 1845-1849: 100,000 IRISH IMMIGRANTS ARRIVE IN BOSTON

While a number of factors propelled a large wave of Irish immigration to America in the 1840's, arguably the most significant and commonly known reason was the Great Famine from 1845-1852. Because of Ireland's unique dependence on potatoes for an array of reasons -- from political to social to economic -- the country was affected by a multi-year potato blight in the 1840's to a much greater degree than other areas in which potato crops suffered. More than three-quarters of a million Irish starved due to the famine, and between 1820-1870, more than half of the population of Ireland emigrated to the United States.



"No Irish Need Apply" ("NINA") signs were a common sight in store windows

### 1850's: A ROUGH WELCOME IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES

This was the first massive immigration wave that consisted mainly of refugees, and the reception of the Irish Catholics was the most hostile of all in Boston, a city saturated with Puritan history; Puritans themselves left England in direct conflict with Catholics. The Irish were relegated to the lowest depths of the socio-economic ladder. Irish men predominantly worked any number of physically taxing and low-paying jobs, while Irish women who worked were typically employed as servants. Irish families were also taken advantage of by Boston landlords who shoehorned a number of multiple-person families into single rooms in old houses, leaving the Irish in unsafe and often squalid conditions. The dirty conditions, unfortunately, proved to be the perfect petri dish for disease and sickness.



Anti-Irish immigration cartoon

## THE MID 1800's: TENSIONS AND PREJUDICE CONTINUE

Tensions arose between the Irish and the Bostonian working-class over competition for similar jobs. Unrest around Irish immigration was particularly bad in Boston due to the city's size; relationships between Americans and Irish immigrants were less volatile in areas where larger populations could better incorporate the Irish into their societies. In general, however, Irish were discriminated against and viewed as angry alcoholics, uneducated illiterates, money-grubbing misers, and as part of an insular and closed-off community; these prejudices were illustrated in cartoons, in print, and onstage.

## 1914: A TURNING POINT IN IMMIGRANT EMPOWERMENT

In the early 20th century, Irish Catholic immigrants found an avenue for change -- the democratic process. The Irish, being so plentiful in numbers, finally had a critical mass to become politically active, flocking to the Democratic party and voting Irish into small and then larger offices. In 1914, James Michael Curley, then mayor of Boston, famously stated, "The day of the Puritan has passed; the Anglo-Saxon is a joke; a new and better America is here."



Living Conditions for Immigrants in New York

## IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: RUSSIAN JEWS

### 1855: TSAR ALEXANDER II

Tsar Alexander II ruled Russia from 1855 until his assassination on March 1, 1881. Alexander had attempted reformation during his rule by abolishing serfdom with the Emancipation Edict of 1861. However, these reforms only fueled the frustrations of the landowning class and lit the fire of revolution for the rising lower class.

### 1866: REVOLUTION AND ASSASSINATION

A young revolutionary, Dmitry Karakozov, attempted to assassinate the Tsar. This began a chain reaction of Alexander retreating to conservative rule and political upheaval as new revolutionary groups formed. A group called 'Land and Liberty' initiated another failed assassination attempt on Alexander in 1879. The attacks in 1879 precipitated the formation of the Okhrana, a department of the police specifically designed to seek out terrorists, and 'The People's Will,' a sect of 'Land and Liberty' which favored the use of terrorist attacks to pursue their agenda. On March 13, 1881 the 'People's Will,' led by Vera Figner and Ignacy Hryniewiecki, succeeded in assassinating Alexander with a bomb.

### 1880: POGROMS AND JEWISH MASS EMIGRATION

Pogrom is a Russian word meaning 'to wreak havoc, to demolish violently,' and the pogroms that spread throughout Russia in the late 19th century were organized massacres of the Jewish people. The violence was primarily directed at Jewish shops and shtetls (small towns). In 1881, pogroms became wider spread because of the belief that terrorists involved in the Tsar's assassination were Jewish. In 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution began, inciting further turmoil. Ukrainian nationalists, Polish officials, and Red Army soldiers all engaged in pogrom-like violence in western Belorussia (Belarus) and Poland's Galicia province (now West Ukraine), killing tens of thousands of Jews from 1918-1920. Approximately 1.5 million Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1920 in an effort to escape the relentless violence.

## 1892: ELLIS ISLAND AND IMMIGRATION

Ellis Island opened its gates in 1892. What is often not told is the vast number of Jews and other immigrants turned away during this time. U.S. authorities would send those immigrants deemed 'undesirable' back to their home countries. Undesirables included convicts, prostitutes, people believed to carry contagious disease, and those who appeared to be unable to support themselves. Ellis Island often evokes the image of the Statue of Liberty with its inscription, 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.' However, the real Ellis Island was also a way for the U.S. to monitor and screen the immigrants entering its borders.

## 1921: IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION

The Immigration Restriction Act of 1921 imposed a restriction where only 3% of the total number of people from a country already residing in the U.S. would be allowed to enter. The Immigration Act of 1924 lowered the cap further, to 2%.



Immigrants standing in line at Ellis Island

## A TIMELINE OF JEWISH IMMIGRANT PRESENCE IN BOSTON

1649

Solomon Franco, the first Jew to set foot in North America, disembarked in Boston and was promptly told to leave because the city fathers disputed the cargo he was delivering.

1720

Judah Monis received his M.A. from Harvard.

1722

Judah Monis was forced to convert to Congregationalism to teach Hebrew at Harvard.

1842

Ohabei Shalom, the first Jewish congregation, was formed.

1880

Jews from Russia, Poland, Romania, Galicia, and Lithuania entered the city and moved towards the suburbs, Brookline, and Roxbury. Many were educated enough to start in white-collar jobs.

1902

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society was created to guide incoming Jewish Immigrants.

Mount Sinai Hospital opened in the West End for Jews who were often banned from other hospitals.

1904-1905

New Jewish newspapers began under Jacob de Haas.

1948

Brandeis University founded in Waltham.



Immigrants being inspected at Ellis Island



Jewish tailor in New York

## IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: HAITIANS

### 1957: A POWER SHIFT IN HAITI

Prior to the 1950's, only 500 Haitians had permanently immigrated to the U.S. each year. When President François "Papa Doc" Duvalier took absolute power in Haiti, the U.S. actively encouraged Haitians to immigrate. The first to leave were members of the upper class who directly threatened the Duvalier regime.

### 1963: IMMIGRATION BEGINS

The first boatload of Haitian refugees landed in South Florida. They asked for political asylum, but the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service, now United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) summarily rejected the request and the boat was sent back to Haiti. The Immigration Act, passed in 1965, expanded Haitian immigration by permitting family members to bring close relatives. Nearly 7,000 Haitians became permanent immigrants every year, and another 20,000 came with temporary visas.

### 1970's: A REFUGEE CRISIS

Haitian immigration entered the American public consciousness as boatloads of people washed onto South Florida's shores. Crude sailboats, often nearly overflowing with refugees, began to arrive regularly. Though there were tales of boats that never made it, enough arrived to cause concern among South Florida officials. The desperate plight facing many Haitians began to make media headlines. Haitian advocates argued that they were fleeing legitimate political persecution and at least deserved a chance to make their case. Repeatedly, the INS used its resources to turn them back.



Haitian migrants attempt to reach the United States by boat

## **1970's-1990's: HAITIANS FACE ENORMOUS PREJUDICE**

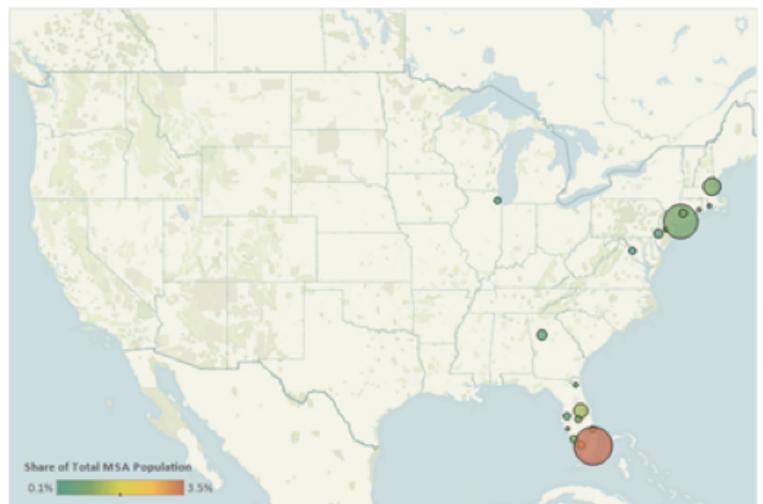
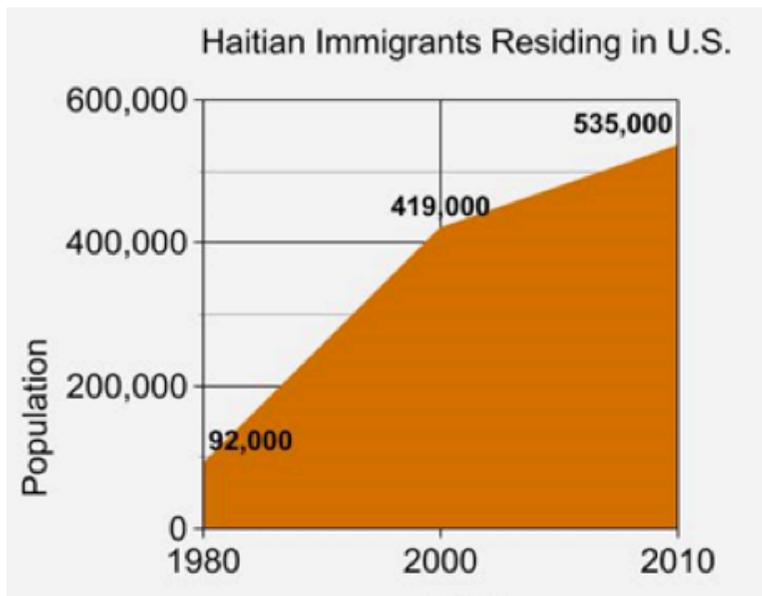
Many undocumented Haitians who made it to U.S. shore, were incarcerated and requests for political asylum were met with the highest rejection rate of any national group. When Congress passed an immigration law that permitted many Central Americans to obtain legal immigration status, Haitians were left out. Later, when a law was passed specifically for Haitians, the INS delayed issuing regulations on who could qualify. The Centers for Disease Control also identified Haitians as one of the primary groups at risk for AIDS. In spite of their later removal from that list, the Food and Drug Administration in the late 1980's refused to accept the donation of blood from individuals of Haitian origin.

## **1990's: POLITICAL TURMOIL CONTINUES IN HAITI**

Even after the fall of Duvalier's son Jean-Claude, human rights violations, desperate poverty, and government corruption remained an integral part of everyday life. As a result, the number of Haitians seeking refuge in the United States climbed. Haitian hopes rose with the election of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, but soon after he was overthrown in a military coup. Haitians again began to leave for the United States: 38,000 in the first eight months following the coup. Unfortunately, they were not always welcomed. According to Haiti Insight, the United States Coast Guard spent an average of \$45,000 per day intercepting, housing, and returning most Haitians to their homeland.

## PRESENT DAY: HAITIAN PRESENCE IN AMERICA

As of 2009, the U.S. Census estimated that there are 830,000 Haitian Americans living in the U.S. Behind Miami and New York, Boston has the highest Haitian population at 65,658.



Top destination metropolitan areas for Haitian Immigrants in the U.S. 2008- 2011

# IMMIGRATION OVERVIEW: PAKISTANI MUSLIMS

## PRE-1947: EARLY MUSLIM IMMIGRATION

Although Pakistan did not become a nation until 1947, a small number of Muslim immigrants from India and the region that is now Pakistan began to immigrate and to settle in the western states (mostly California) in the 18th century. Most of them worked in the logging and mining industries, and at the start of the 20th century, they worked alongside Chinese and other Asian immigrants to build California's Western Pacific railroad. These early immigrants faced a double prejudice due to their race and their Muslim faith. Many white Americans called for all Muslims to be removed from the country, and tactics such as literacy tests were used to bar any Asian immigrants from becoming residents or citizens.

## 1947: PAKISTAN BECOMES A NATION

After centuries of colonization, India and Pakistan finally achieved independence from British rule. Although Hindus and Muslims had worked together in the resistance movement against the colonists, Indian Muslims were concerned that, once India became independent, they would be second-class citizens in a country dominated by Hindus. Muslim leaders within the independence movement established the country of Pakistan in the western region of India, and both India and Pakistan became independent nations in 1947.

## 1965: IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT OPENS DOORS FOR IMMIGRANTS

Prior to 1965, immigration was heavily restricted through quota laws, which put a cap on the number of people who could immigrate from any given nation. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act opened up opportunities for people from all over the world. Pakistani Muslims began immigrating to the United States at a rate of several thousand per year -- a trend that continues to this day.

## PRESENT DAY: PREJUDICE AGAINST MUSLIM AMERICANS

Most Pakistani immigrants are well-educated professionals, including engineers and scientists. According to the 2010 census, there are currently 363,699 people of Pakistani descent living in the United States, and about one-third of them reside in the Northeast. However, anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, which existed for decades, has increased exponentially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. According to the FBI, hate crimes against Muslim-Americans increased by 1,700% in the months following the 9/11 attacks. A 2010 Gallup poll found that 48% of Muslim-Americans reported having experienced religious or racial discrimination on a personal level within the previous year. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that many non-Muslims view the Muslim community as a homogenous group, rather than a diverse and varied community covering a broad array of nations, ethnicities, and cultures.



Anti-muslim graffiti covers the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Michigan



Pakistani-American immigrants

## OTHER WAVES OF IMMIGRATION

*Finding American* includes stories from a few of the major waves of U.S. immigration, but there are still many immigrant stories that we weren't able to include in our show. Hundreds of millions of immigrants have come to the U.S. from every other nation on earth. A few of the other major waves of immigration are described over the next pages.

### CHINA

The first major wave of immigration from China to the United States occurred in the 1850's. These Chinese immigrants tended to be male (many would send money to their families back in China), to settle in the West, and to work in gold mines or paving railroads. Chinese immigrants were instrumental in building the Central Pacific route of the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860's. Because these immigrants had fewer resources and less political support than American-born workers, they often had no choice but to work for lower wages -- prompting intense discrimination and violence at the hands of white Americans who accused Chinese immigrants of taking their jobs. Under political pressure, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This law put an outright ban on immigration from China and prevented immigrants already in the United States from becoming citizens, from 1882 until 1943, when it was finally repealed. Chinese immigration began to occur once more on a large scale after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 loosened restrictions, and it continues to this day. Today, there are 3.6 million Chinese-Americans in the United States. Asian immigrants represent the largest immigrant group currently coming the United States, and they tend to be highly educated -- 61% of adult immigrants from Asia have a bachelor's degree.



A Chinese-American railroad worker

## LATIN AMERICA

Immigration from Latin America to the United States was relatively light until the end of the 19th century. For many decades, Chinese immigrants had filled crucial roles in the mining, agricultural, and railroad industries, but after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, immigration from China was effectively halted for over 60 years. Employers needed to find a new source of labor -- and so they turned to Mexico. By 1930, there were about 1.5 million people of Mexican origin living in the United States. When the U.S. entered World War II and most American men traveled overseas to fight, American farms found themselves with another labor shortage. The U.S. government elected to fill this need by creating the Bracero Program, a guest worker program that provided contracts for Mexican nationals to enter and work in the United States. In the 24 years of its existence, the Bracero Program led to a surge in both authorized and unauthorized immigration from Mexico as well as an economic structure that became increasingly dependent on Latin@\* immigrant workers. The latter half of the 20th century saw an increase in immigration from other parts of Latin America. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans came to the U.S. after Fidel Castro took power in 1959, and the 1970's and 1980's saw a surge in immigrants fleeing political unrest in Central America. Later decades have seen numerous South American immigrants, particularly highly educated immigrants in search of greater economic opportunity. Today, Latin@ immigrants make up about 17% of the total U.S. population.



Cubans attempting to emigrate on a homemade raft (1994)

\*Latin@, a gender-neutral version of Latino or Latina, is commonly used to describe people with cultural or ethnic ties to Latin America (including Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean islands).

## UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Although many Americans associate the idea of undocumented immigrants with people crossing through the U.S.-Mexico border, it is worth mentioning that only about 50-60% of unauthorized immigrants actually entered the country without papers. The other group includes those who came on a tourist, student, or work visa and remained in the country after their visa expired. Regardless of how they first came to the United States, undocumented immigrants are a diverse group of people representing not just Latin America, but every nation on earth.

## FAMOUS IMMIGRANTS

Madeleine Albright (Czechoslovakia)  
Desi Arnaz (Cuba)  
Albert Einstein (Germany)  
Cary Grant (England)  
Salma Hayek (Mexico)  
Arianna Huffington (Greece)  
Mila Kunis (Ukraine)  
Ang Lee (Taiwan)  
John Muir (Scotland)  
Lupita Nyong'o (Mexico/Kenya)  
Yoko Ono (Japan)  
Natalie Portman (Israel)  
Albert Pujols (Dominican Republic)  
Arnold Schwarzenegger (Austria)  
Carlos Santana (Mexico)  
Charlize Theron (South Africa)  
Eddie Van Halen (The Netherlands)  
Elie Wiesel (Romania)

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM: UNPACKING IMMIGRATION, TRADITION, AND CULTURE

### WHERE I'M FROM

**TIME:** 40-60 minutes, depending on how much sharing and discussion you include

**MATERIALS:** Poem (reproduced below), writing implements, paper

#### GOALS:

For this activity, you will explore the varied and intriguing qualities that make YOU who you are. You will write a poem that reflects and celebrates your personal background and will then have the opportunity to share your poem with others.

#### PROCEDURE:

- 1 First read George Ella Lyon's "Where I'm From," reproduced below. Briefly discuss the piece with some simple prompts: What stood out to you about the poem and why? You can think of what it sounds like, what the words mean, or what images are conjured up. (5-10 mins)
- 2 Take a few moments to brainstorm what makes YOU you! You could list family traditions or experiences, major events, physical features of yourself, your cultural background, behaviors of your family members or good friends, memorable places you've lived and/or visited. (5 mins)
- 3 Transition into writing your own "Where I'm From" list poem. Begin with the line "I am from..." You may use the phrase repeated at the beginning of each line, or you can diverge from that specific format. The general idea is to create a poem that illustrates "where you're from," whatever you take that to mean, with or without the actual phrase in each line. Understand that you will not be expected to have a finished product by the end of 15 minutes! (15-20 mins)
- 4 You could then share these pieces in any number of ways: Pair up and read each other's poems, either silently or aloud. You can volunteer to read in a large class group.
- 5 After sharing poems in whatever format you decide, debrief using these questions: What images struck you about your peers' poems and why? Which images, ideas, words, and sounds were easiest to relate to? Were there any images you had a hard time visualizing? Can you think of why you may have had a hard time visualizing those images? List a favorite line or two from a poem. (15-20 mins)

- 6 If you choose not to share these pieces aloud, feel free to still have a debriefing discussion using these questions: What came easily to you as you wrote the poem? What was difficult about writing the poem? Do you feel as if you successfully captured “you?” If you feel comfortable, share how you think the poem captures you, or share what you think might be missing from it. (15-20 mins)

Where I'm From  
by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,  
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.  
I am from the dirt under the back porch.  
(Black, glistening,  
it tasted like beets.)  
I am from the forsythia bush  
the Dutch elm  
whose long-gone limbs I remember  
as if they were my own.  
I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,  
from Imogene and Alafair.  
I'm from the know-it-alls  
and the pass-it-ons,  
from Perk up! and Pipe down!  
I'm from He restoreth my soul  
with a cottonball lamb  
and ten verses I can say myself.  
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,  
fried corn and strong coffee.  
From the finger my grandfather lost  
to the auger,  
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.  
Under my bed was a dress box  
spilling old pictures,  
a sift of lost faces  
to drift beneath my dreams.  
I am from those moments--  
snapped before I budded --  
leaf-fall from the family tree.

# INTERVIEWING A CLASSMATE

**TIME:** 30-60 minutes, depending on how much sharing and discussion you include

**MATERIALS:** A copy of the sample questions, pen, paper

## **GOALS:**

For this activity, you will explore the familial and cultural backgrounds of one or more of your peers. Following your initial information gathering, you will work to accurately provide a snapshot of interview topics in small groups, then make connections between your stories and the stories of others in the room.

## **1 PROCEDURE:**

Everyone will begin by partnering up and conducting brief interviews of one another. (A list of sample questions is reproduced below.) You, by no means, need to cover all of the questions. Focus on finding out information about your interviewee's background as well as information that is specifically new to you. Feel free to adjust questions to suit your interview. Take notes on your partner's answers, but do not write everything word for word. Use shorthand so that you can get to as many questions as possible. Interview length will depend on the amount of time you have for this activity. (15-20 mins)

**2** Pairs will then come together to form groups of four. In these groups, each person should give a two-minute summary of the information they gathered from their partners. Each person should also be given the opportunity to correct any information given about them if they feel it was misrepresented. No one should feel bad for accidentally misrepresenting someone's story! Things inevitably get lost in translation. (10-15 mins)

**3** While participants are listening to one another's stories being told, note down if you find any commonalities between your personal experiences and those you're hearing about.

**4** The whole group should come together to debrief based on the following questions: Did anyone locate any major commonalities between things like family structure or family values? How about commonalities in traditions that are valued in your experiences? Were there major dissimilarities that you noted? Without needing to mention specific stories, to what extent did family origin outside of the United States come up? (10-15 mins)

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- What is your full name? Why did your parents select this name for you? Did you have a nickname?
- When and where were you born?
- How did your family come to live there?
- What is your earliest childhood memory?
- Describe the personalities of your family members.
- What kind of games did you play growing up?
- What was your favorite thing to do for fun (movies, beach, etc.)?
- Did you have a religion growing up? What church, if any, did you attend?
- How are/were holidays (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) celebrated in your family? Did/does your family have special traditions?
- What do you know about your family surname [last name]?
- Is there a naming tradition in your family, such as always giving the firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather?
- What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors?
- Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?
- What is one thing you most want people to remember about you?

# TRADITIONS

**TIME:** 30-60 minutes, depending on which variation you do

**MATERIALS:** None, or objects brought in by discussion participants, depending on the variation of the activity

## GOALS:

In this activity, you will explore definitions of culture and tradition. You will share your own experiences and compare/contrast them to those of your peers. You will also take a step back to consider how the tradition you choose to discuss has shaped who you are. Finally, you will think about America's position in the world as a culturally diverse country and discuss the role of traditions in American culture.

## PROCEDURE:

- 1 Participants should be given time to think of the following -- be prepared to describe an important tradition in your culture. You can take culture to mean any number of things -- your parents' country of origin, your country of origin, your town, your home state, your religion, your school, your neighborhood, your block. This doesn't need to be written down, but it may be. An alternate version of this activity -- students can be asked to think about this for homework and to bring in an item that is either involved in the tradition or one that symbolizes it in some way. (5 mins)
- 2 Everyone will gather in groups of 3-4 and share their traditions. For each tradition, the "listeners" in the group should be able to discuss and identify: 1. What is "traditional" about it? What makes it a tradition? 2. How is "culture" being defined in this context? (7-15 mins)
- 3 The large group will reconvene. Group members will be specifically asked not to describe their own traditions again, but to largely speak about what they heard from others. Use the following questions to facilitate discussion: What are some commonalities between various traditions mentioned in each group? The activity leader might write up the generated list on the board. Why do you think these traits are commonalities among traditions? What were the different ways in which culture was described accompanying each tradition? Who enjoys the traditions they mentioned? Does anyone have specific traditions they do not like, but that they practice daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly? Why do you continue to do so? (10-15 mins)
- 4 Return to small groups to discuss the following question: Can you list key similarities between two traditions from completely different cultural contexts? For example -- comparing a pre-game warm up ritual for a school sports team and a holiday-related tradition that takes place in a church. After giving everyone a moment to get their thoughts together in a smaller group, briefly discuss as a whole. (5-10 mins)

- 5 Broaden the discussion with the following wrap up questions: To what extent does American culture (however you define that) value tradition? To what extent does American culture value change? How does America's cultural diversity affect how Americans view tradition and change? (10-15 mins)

# WALK (OR WRITE) A MILE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

**TIME:** Variable and dependent on how much time you give yourself to write and whether or not you share your stories with others

**MATERIALS:** Paper, writing implements

## **GOALS:**

In this activity, you will think outside of your own experience and place yourself in the mindset of any number of immigrants living in America at various times throughout history. Use sensory details (smell, sight, touch, sound, taste), memories, and relationships to create a small portrait in the quiltwork of this country.

## **PROCEDURE:**

- 1 This activity may be done independently or as an in-class writing assignment. It may be a completely personal endeavor or it might be something that you share with others.
- 2 This study guide is filled with information about several major waves of immigration to America. Choose a person who may have existed based on the historical context we've given you and write a piece from their perspective. You can write a journal entry, a monologue (the thoughts and words of a single person), or even a scene from this point of view. Use your creativity to create different characters! Possible options include:
  - An Irish man facing discrimination as he attempts to find work in his new home in Boston in the 19th century.
  - A recently arrested young Haitian woman, the sole caretaker of her little brother, who is seeking political refuge from her country in Florida in the 1970s.
  - A young eastern European Jewish teen who has just crossed the Atlantic and is about to arrive at Ellis Island in the mid 1890s.
- 3 If you choose to share these pieces in partnerships, groups, or a whole class, consider the following questions for discussion: What details were most vivid in each story? What aspects of the character's journey were hard to imagine? What aspects of the piece did you find yourself relating to the most? If you are sharing multiple pieces, what emotions, frustrations, anxieties, and/or excitements did you find in common between each story?

# DEvised THEATRE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ART FORM

## WHAT IS DEvised THEATRE?

Traditional, scripted plays are written by a playwright and later passed along to a director, a group of actors, and an artistic team. Devised theatre, on the other hand, is created by a roomful of people. With devising, also known as “playmaking” or “collective creation,” the actors are collaborators and are part of the writing process from the very beginning. There is no script at the start of rehearsals -- instead, the script is built, developed, and refined throughout the rehearsal process. The devising experience usually begins with a series of improvisational exercises. As the actors generate scenes and respond to writing prompts, common themes and storylines will begin to emerge, and the team will build upon these early ideas and shape them into the final performance piece.

There are very few common attributes that apply to every devised theatre piece, as the very nature of devising is that it is a flexible and adaptable art form. Often, a devised play will have a director who acts as the outside eye during rehearsals and decides which material to include in the final performance -- but there are also groups of actors who direct themselves. Sometimes, a devising team will begin their process with the intention of exploring a specific theme, story, or current event -- but on other occasions, they do not decide on a particular subject until devising rehearsals are well underway. Some devised plays follow one cohesive narrative, others are comprised of episodes or vignettes, and still others take an abstract or non-linear approach. Devised plays will sometimes explore social issues and politically-charged topics, often based on the interests and life experiences of the performers. They are often experimental or non-traditional in structure and style, and they will frequently incorporate music, movement pieces, poetry, and/or primary source text.

## A HISTORY OF DEvisING

The roots of devising can be found in the many theatre troupes throughout history who would perform plays that were at least partially improvised or written collaboratively by the company. Before the famous Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were written, companies of actors from Dorian, Greece, were known to improvise short plays inspired by the actors' life experiences. Devising also has roots in ritual and religion -- one notable example being the Medieval mystery plays, which were dramatized versions of Bible stories, created by craft guilds and performed in town squares throughout Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries. Also influential were the Commedia dell'Arte theatre troupes that arose in Italy in the 16th century. Commedia actors were masked street performers who would travel from city to city. Although their characters, a basic storyline, and certain comic bits (lazzi) were set ahead of time, other aspects of the performance were improvised and would change each time the play was performed.

Modern devised theatre can be traced back to early 20th century Russia. In 1905, famed theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky met with Vsevolod Meyerhold, and the two of them decided to form a laboratory studio that would investigate experimental and collaborative approaches to theatre-making. Non-traditional theatrical processes continued to emerge throughout the twentieth-century and rose to prominence in the 1960's, a period during which artists became increasingly interested in exploring forms of theatre that they saw as revolutionary, collaborative, and existing outside of traditional establishments and practices. Today, devising is an increasingly popular approach that is taught in theatre schools across the country and the world. Many theatre companies across the world are dedicated to creating theatre collectively and incorporate devising into their practice. Examples include the U.S.-based SITI Company, Double Edge Theatre, and Culture Clash, and the U.K.-based Kneehigh and Frantic Assembly.



From *Tristan & Yseult* by Kneehigh

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LYNDA BACHMAN AND PLAYWRIGHT STACY PARK



PLAYWRIGHT STACY PARK



DIRECTOR LYNDA BACHMAN

Can you tell us a bit about your past experience?

**Stacy:** My first experience playwriting was as the writer for a summer intensive I did with San Francisco Mime Troupe -- a touring theatre company known for their political satire. Through the devising process, I wrote a script called "Olive Wars" which satirized the Iraq War using stock characters from Commedia dell'Arte. I also wrote a play for my thesis inspired by the novel *Neuromancer* by William Gibson on the topic of virtual reality. I studied solo devised work at the National Theatre School of Ireland and have since worked with high schoolers adapting existing stories for the stage through the devising process.

**Lynda:** Directing found me, more than the other way around. When I was nineteen I applied to work as a camp counselor at an overnight summer camp in Wisconsin. The camp director called me up and told me they wanted me to work there but they didn't have any cabin counselor positions available. What else could I do? I wasn't a lifeguard, and I'm not really a team sports person, but I acted throughout high school -- so I ended up teaching Drama that summer. I directed two huge musicals, taught a bunch of theatre classes, and changed my major to Theatre as soon as I returned to college in the Fall. I've been directing professionally and in educational settings ever since. After college I moved to San Francisco where I worked with a wide range of theatre companies as a director, assistant director, and teaching artist, including: Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Berkeley Playhouse, Impact Theatre, Mugwumpin, Shotgun Players, Bay Area Children's Theatre, Boxcar Theatre, The Rabbit Hole, and San Francisco Opera. During the summers I devise plays with high school students at BIMA: Brandeis University's summer arts intensive. I am most interested in new play development, and devising theatre in ensemble settings (like this show!).

What inspired you to develop a show exploring the theme of immigration throughout history?

**Stacy:** I love stories -- that's what initially drew me to theatre. And I feel like everyone can either identify or resonate with an immigrant story. Personally, I would always love to hear my grandparents talk about what they knew about their backgrounds. I feel like they would always tell the same stories over and over, but I always liked hearing them again.

**Lynda:** This all started because of my younger brother. He is currently studying to become a high school history teacher. I asked him what he would want his students to learn that he may not have time to teach in an in-depth way. He said, "Immigration history." Immigration is a key piece of American identity that is common to the majority of people living in the United States. It is part of our shared history, and yet we often don't hear about current immigration talked about in the context of historical immigration. I am really interested in the stories that exist on the margins -- the things we maybe know a little bit about but we don't really talk about a lot. I like to bring those stories into the spotlight and ask: How does this experience help me understand the world? We often hear the phrase, "The American Dream." It has many powerful associations, but what does that phrase mean for immigrants today? What is the lived experience of the American Dream now? How can our history help us understand how the American Dream has changed?

How is the role of a playwright different for a devised play, compared to a scripted play? How is it similar?

**Stacy:** It's different in that no one devising process looks like another. What the process looks like depends on who is leading the process and who is in the room. As a playwright, I benefit in having material generated for me -- it's not me coming up with ideas in isolation. I can pull from different sources and create a text that is much richer, because it has different voices within it. Conversely, having a lot of material can also complicate things because choosing what goes into the script and what doesn't can be overwhelming. It's also different in that you're not starting the process with a fully formed script -- you're crafting it throughout and sometimes it feels like you'll never have it ready in time. It's a balancing act between wanting to have the script for the director to start blocking but also wanting to get it just right.

How is the role of a director different for a devised play, compared to a scripted play? How is it similar?

**Lynda:** "Leap and the net will appear." When I am devising I often think about this John Burroughs quote. It becomes a bit of a mantra. With a scripted play the script is the net. In devising we start with nothing but some passionate questions, ideas, and the bodies in the room. The process is different every time. I am always exploring new exercises, prompts, and ways of generating material with the cast. For example, in this process we could not rely on our own life experiences to tell the story, so we had to do a lot of work to learn about past immigrant experiences.

We were concerned about authenticity, so a lot of thought went into the words and stories we used to generate the script. Unlike other devised plays, which might rely more on invention and imagination, this one became about diligent research. Now that we have a script the process is more similar to a traditional play. We are working on staging, blocking, character development, etc. Of course, the actors are deeply invested in the world of this play because it came from their creativity -- so the stakes feel higher. There is tremendous personal investment in the devising process from beginning to end. That also changes the role of the director -- because devising is completely collaborative there is no "top-down" power structure in the rehearsal space. My job is to guide the ensemble, but they have an equal stake in the creative process. It is an exciting and challenging endeavor.

How did you narrow down the focus of the show from the history of U.S. immigration -- a very broad topic -- to something more specific? Can you tell us a little about that process?

**Stacy:** I worked a lot with Lynda prior to rehearsals to narrow our focus. We individually did a lot of research and then one day we pooled together what we had and initially it was pretty daunting. And sometimes I would lose myself in the enormity of the topic. But I always went back to Lynda's original concept: "What is the lived experience of the American dream?" And that helped.

What are your goals for the show? What do you hope the audience takes away from their experience of watching the play?

**Stacy:** My goal for this show is that it engages the audience intellectually, but mostly emotionally. I feel like ideas are only as important as the way we feel about them. I also hope that the audience can connect what happens onstage to their daily lives and that it helps them think critically about the United States and their role in it.

**Lynda:** Stacy put that beautifully, as she always does. So I say "yes, and." I want to challenge my audiences to question the world around them, to think critically about their lives and the communities they live in. I see theatre as a political act -- an opportunity to transform. My goal is not to tell anyone exactly what they should do or think -- I just want to remind them that history is important, context matters, and we need to engage with our own history in order to make informed choices about how we live our lives.

What has been your greatest challenge throughout the process?

**Stacy:** My biggest challenge has been censoring myself. The first few scenes I put out there, I was so concerned what others would think. But after a while, I got into the mode of writing something just to see how it was received. I learned that I was throwing away possibly good ideas before I had given them a chance.

**Lynda:** My biggest challenge has been being realistic about scope. I am passionate about this topic and there are so many stories, nearly endless directions we could take in crafting

a play about U.S. immigration. It was hard to limit myself to just the few stories and themes we bring up in this 45 minute play.

Why now? Why do you think this is an important play to put on in 2015? Why is it important for young people to see this play?

**Lynda:** One of the things that struck me in my research for this play was how cyclical the conversation about immigration is in the United States. In 1901, when Polish immigrant Leon Czolgosz assassinated William McKinley there was a dramatic increase in discrimination and violence against Eastern European immigrants. The Immigration Act of 1924 was designed to restrict immigration by Eastern and Southern Europeans, severely limit immigration of Africans, and completely ban Asian and Arab immigration to the United States. According to the U.S. Department of State, the intention was, "to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity." After September 11th, 2001 we saw similar patterns of discrimination against Muslims and Arab-Americans. These are just three of many examples we can find throughout American history of people being grouped, labelled, and discriminated against because of where they come from.

The problematic rhetoric today about "illegal immigration" (a political term used to discriminate against undocumented immigrants), and Latin@ immigration is the perpetuation of a cycle. My hope is that we can build empathy and understanding through historical context. It may sound cheesy, but young people are the current and future change-makers in the world. It is essential that young people today understand the history of how things got to be the way they are so that they can work to make things better.

What would your advice be to someone who is interested in creating their own work of devised theatre?

**Stacy:** The biggest thing that I have learned from devising is to allow yourself to experiment. The reality is that not everything you create will work with your final piece, but you won't know until you try it. Read up on it -- there are a lot of great, informative books on Amazon. See work that comes from a devised process -- it often looks and feels different. I'm a big fan of British devised theatre from companies like Frantic Assembly and Kneehigh Theatre Company. Their work is getting more reception in the U.S. and does occasionally tour. Perhaps try to find a summer program or a youth theatre company that works in that mode.

# A GUIDE TO CREATING DEVISED THEATRE

## ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURES FOR DEVISING

The following activities are designed for teachers, students, and theatre artists who are interested in trying their hand at devising theatre. They are not intended to be a complete instruction manual, but rather a series of exercises and suggestions to inspire you and to help guide you through the process. You may also wish to consult the “Further Reading” section (page 39) for some wonderful books that provide introductions to devised theatre.

There are hundreds of ways to create a work of devised theatre, and every company of artists approaches the process differently. Some groups already have a topic, theme, or narrative in mind when they begin their process; others start completely from scratch and wait to see what themes develop organically. (When we began rehearsals for *Finding American*, we knew that we wanted to explore the connection between immigrant narratives throughout history and present-day immigration stories, but we did not necessarily know what those individual stories would be -- those emerged throughout our devising process.)

Not every scene or piece of writing created in rehearsal will make it into the final script, but every activity will help your cast develop as an ensemble and serve as inspiration during your devising process. During rehearsals for *Finding American*, we were eager to generate as many ideas as possible, knowing that even scenes that did not make it into the final script would help lead us closer to the story we wanted to tell.

Note: Many of activities in the following section are based on techniques and exercises created by Bethany Nelson.



Actors rehearse a scene from *Finding American*

## BEGINNING THE PROCESS

- 1 **Starting Points:** It can be helpful to begin with some kind of a prompt, such as an image, a question, a quotation, or a metaphor.
- 2 **Card-storming:** This is a great method for generating lots of ideas. Each actor receives a stack of post-it notes or index cards and must write a new thought, idea, or possible answer on each of the cards. Possible prompts include: What do you wish you could change about the world? What is something people think they understand, that they don't? Actors are encouraged to come up with as many ideas as possible.  
Organize the cards into thematic clusters, then ask the actors to choose an idea or group of ideas that they are interested in developing further. Divide the actors into pairs/small groups and ask them to develop short scenes, tableaux, or movement pieces based on their chosen theme.
- 3 **Story circles:** Gather the group in a circle and pose a question, topic, or prompt from which to respond. Each participant in the circle has an opportunity to tell a story related to the prompt. Storytelling proceeds in order around the circle, and each participant has an equal amount of time to tell their story. Encourage the participants to really listen to one another and not to plan their story out ahead of time. If you would like, you can have each participant record their story so that you may refer back to the stories during the devising process.  
**\* Story circles were used several times during the creation of *Finding American*. Prompts included telling "the story of your name" and responding to poems and articles about immigration.**
- 4 **Tableaux:** A tableau is a frozen image created by a group of actors, and it can be a great starting point for devised theatre. Tableaux encourage specificity and can easily be developed into scenes. A great technique for building on a tableau is fold-over scripting (see below).
- 5 **Fold-over scripting:** Ask actors to create a tableau in small groups, and assign each group another group to observe. After all of the tableaux have been presented, each group gets a piece of paper. One student writes a line that might be said by a character in the tableau they observed. (They should not specify which character says the line.) Once they have written their line, they fold over the top edge of the paper, hiding the line, and pass the paper to the next person in their group. Continue until all group members have written two lines.  
Pass each script back to the group for whom it was written and ask them to create a scene using the lines they've been given. The original tableau should appear at some point during the scene.

Groups are allowed to use the lines in any order, repeat lines, and use shorter portions of lines. Not every line needs to be included in the final scene (although they should incorporate as many as possible), and they may add up to two new lines for clarity and flow. Present the scenes to the rest of the class.

**\* During our devising process, we created tableaux inspired by society's idea of a "perfect immigrant family" -- one from 100 years ago, and one from the present day. We used fold-over scripting to develop the tableaux into short scenes.**

- 6 Writing prompts: Pose a question and have each member of the group spend a few minutes writing a response. Share the responses when everyone is done. These can be long (a monologue) or short (a poem, sentence, or group of sentences).

**\* Some of the prompts used by the cast of *Finding American* include:**

- **"Where I'm From" poem (see page 20 for this activity)**
- **Complete the following metaphor: "The American Dream is..."**
- **Write a want ad from the perspective of America to prospective immigrants, inviting them to come to this country.**

## FINDING CONNECTIONS

- 1 It can be helpful to take time at every rehearsal to reflect back on everything the cast has generated. How many scenes have we developed so far? Have any common themes or stories emerged? Might a character in one scene be the same person as, or perhaps an older version of, a character in a seemingly unrelated scene? Take the time to think about how a collection of scenes created by separate groups might become part of one larger story.
- 2 Identify your "core scenes," and build off of them. Possible ways to do this include:
- Have the group come up with a "before" or "after" scene -- or both.
  - Ask questions about the scene: Is she going to go through with it? Why is it so important for him to get revenge? Does Character X know what Character Y is hiding? Then, create a new scene that answers that question.
  - Create follow-up scenes, but rotate groups so that all actors are working with characters other than the ones they created. This ensures that the whole cast feels ownership over the narrative.

## FINISHING THE STORY

- 1 Once you have a clear idea of your narrative, characters, and style, look over all of your generated material and decide what's missing. Does a relationship between two characters need to be clarified? Would it be helpful to create a scene showing how the protagonist gets from Point A to Point B? Are you still in need of a climax? Be sure to devote some rehearsals to pinning down these key scenes.
- 2 Finally, remember that once your script is finalized, you will still need to devote some time to rehearsing the final product, just as you would with a traditional scripted show. Be sure to set aside time at the end of your rehearsal period to finalize blocking, work scenes, develop characters, and run the show.



The cast creates a tableau during the devising process

## A CLOSER LOOK: SET DESIGN



The actors construct the set before a rehearsal for *Finding American*

The set for *Finding American* was designed by TEGA member Valerie Madden. A scenic designer must always consider the needs of the production from both an artistic perspective and a practical one. Valerie's challenge was to create a set that was abstract enough to support a play set across multiple locations and time periods, and she also had to consider the practical needs of a touring production. *Finding American* required a set that could be transported in a car and easily set up by the actors before every performance. The final set design consists of three stand-alone painted canvases and four wooden blocks. Valerie describes her design process below:

"Once it was discovered that all of the characters in the play had the similar experience of living in a triple decker [apartment building] in Boston, we decided to make three images of that shared experience; one a modern view of a triple decker, one a map of Boston, and one an image of a triple decker in the past. The structures that the images are displayed on are simple light PVC pipe that will break down and transport easily."

-Valerie Madden, Scenic Designer for *Finding American*

## ACTIVITY: DESIGN A SET FOR A TOURING SHOW

**TIME:** 50-80 minutes (adaptable)

**MATERIALS:** Pencils, paper, coloring supplies

### GOALS:

Participants will think critically about the creative and practical elements that go into designing a theatrical set, particularly a set for a touring production. They will then put their ideas into action by creating their own scenic design. This activity could be used for drama students who are studying design, or as a way to help non-drama students engage with and understand more about the theatrical process.

### PROCEDURE:

- 1 After seeing *Finding American* (or after reading about the design in this study guide), provide everyone with time to discuss their reactions to the set. What stood out to them about the visual aspects of the design -- the colors, the materials, the shape? What strategies did the designer use in creating a set that could travel easily from one school to the next? Do you think the design was effective? Discussion can occur in pairs, in small groups, or with the full class. (10-15 minutes)
- 2 Pass out paper and coloring supplies, and have each person draw their own set design for a touring theatre production. The design can be for *Finding American* or for another play that they have read or seen. Throughout the design process, they should consider both the design's aesthetics and its practicality. Can the set be taken apart and put back together? Will it fit easily into a car or van? Can it be adapted to fit a smaller or larger stage? (30-45 minutes)
- 3 Give each person the opportunity to share their design. (10-20 minutes)
- 4 Optional: Within a class that wants to delve more deeply into the process of set design, students can also build models of their sets.

## FURTHER READING SUGGESTIONS

### On Immigration

*The Arrival*

by Shaun Tan. Arthur A. Levin Books, 2007.

*Growing Up Ethnic in America: Contemporary Fiction About Learning to Be American*

by Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan. Penguin Books, 1999.

*Immigrant Voices: New Lives in America, 1773-2000*

by Thomas Dublin. University of Illinois Press, 2014.

*Passages to America: Oral Histories of Child Immigrants from Ellis Island and Angel Island*

by Emmy Werner. Potomac Books, 2009.

*Remix: Conversations with Immigrant Teenagers*

by Marina Budhos. Wipf & Stock Pub, 2007.

### On Devised Theatre

*Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*

by Alison Oddey. Routledge, 1996.

*The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*

by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. Routledge, 2009.

*Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre*

by Will Wiegler. Heinemann Drama, 2001.

*Structuring Drama Work*

by Jonathan Neelands and Tony Goode. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

*The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*

by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. Theatre Communications Group, 2004.

*Your Handy Companion to Devising and Physical Theatre*

by Pilar Orti. lulu.com, 2014.

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