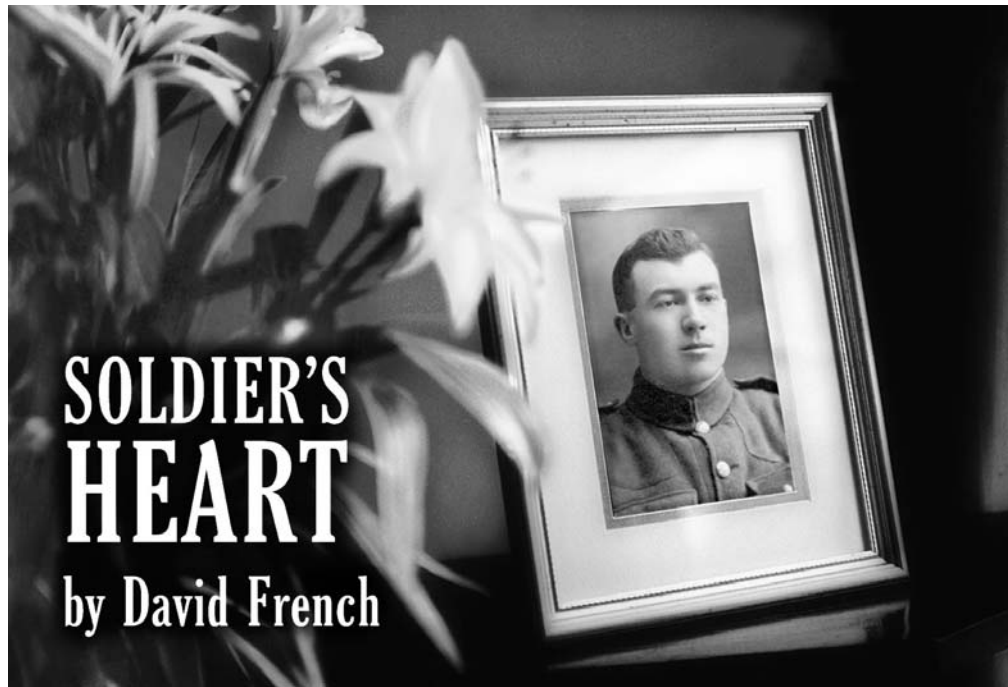


TARRAGON THEATRE

study guide for students and educators



Starring
Oliver Becker, Randy Hughson, Darren Keay

Directed by Bill Glassco
Set & costumes designed by Sue LePage
Lighting designed by Robert Thomson
Sound designed by Evan Turner
Stage Manager: Maria Costa

November 7 to December 16, 2001

About the Soldier's Heart study guide:

This study guide has been created so that your theatre experience at Tarragon is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions.

With regards to this play, we feel especially strongly that students will benefit most if they are aware of the events that are described within the script.

The Soldier's Heart study guide was compiled by Amelia Faught, Kristen Van Alphen and Mary Wood in Tarragon's **OutReach** department.

Special thanks and acknowledgements to David French, Kathleen Gallagher, Urjo Kareda and Andy McKim for their invaluable contributions.

The Soldier's Heart study guide is divided into several sections.

1. **Themes and theatrical elements** in Soldier's Heart.
2. **Pre show lesson plans** for your class grounded in the Dramatic Arts curriculum.
3. **Post show lesson plans** for your class grounded in the Dramatic Arts curriculum.
4. **Additional resources** including interviews from newspapers about Soldier's Heart. We encourage your class to discuss them (i.e., Do you agree or disagree?) and develop your own reactions to the interviews provided.

We encourage you to contact us should you have questions or comments at 416-536-5018 x243.

Introduction to Soldier's Heart

Thirty years after David French first introduced Tarragon audiences to the Mercer family in *Leaving Home* (1972), he presents *Soldier's Heart*, the prequel to the existing four plays in the Mercer family cycle.

Leaving Home (1972)
Of the Fields, Lately (1973)
Salt-Water Moon (1984)
1949 (1988)
Soldier's Heart (2001)

Soldier's Heart is set in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, in 1924. A young Jacob Mercer confronts his father about the events of July 1, 1916 in World War One, which haunt the Mercer family eight years later.

David French, the Mercer family cycle and the Tarragon Theatre by artistic director Urjo Kareda

On the evening of May 16, 1972, almost thirty years ago, I came to the Tarragon as part of my job as drama critic for The Toronto Star. It was near the end of the theatre's first-ever season, and Bill Glassco, the founding artistic director, had programmed a first stage play by a young Newfoundland-born writer who had grown up in Toronto. The playwright was David French and the play was Leaving Home. The impact of that evening would be impossible to forget. Ever. Leaving Home was about the Mercer family, also Newfoundlanders relocated to Toronto, but David French's skill was such that it was also a play about *all* our families. The play's power and its heart, both thrillingly brought to life in Bill's production, knocked all of us out of our seats. Leaving Home was the play and the evening---I've always believed---that put Tarragon Theatre onto the map. And it soon became clear that this young writer was not yet finished with the Mercer family.

Mercer Family Cycle

David French's ongoing cycle of plays about the Mercer family represents a singular English Canadian theatrical achievement, an exploration of successive generations of a family, with both the bonds and the divisions between them. The works have been widely produced and studied; they have received major awards (LIST AWARDS); they have indeed been embraced into Canada's theatrical history.

The first play Leaving Home (1972) introduced the saga's key figures Jacob Mercer---the one character who appears in all five plays---and his wife Mary, both in their early fifties, raising two teen-aged sons in Toronto at the end of the 1950s. The second play Of the Fields, Lately (1973), set in 1961, further explored the conflicted relationship between Jacob and his son Ben. The third play Salt-Water Moon (1984) depicted the youthful courtship of Jacob and Mary on a Newfoundland night in August, 1926. The fourth Mercer drama 1949 (1988) was set in the context of Newfoundland's entry into Confederation. All the first productions of David French's plays have been directed by Bill Glassco, who had nurtured him as a playwright in that very first season at Tarragon. All the Mercer plays were premiered at Tarragon Theatre, with the exception of 1949, which was first produced by the Canadian Stage Company and the Manitoba Theatre Centre.

Now, almost thirty years after Leaving Home, David French returns with a fifth play in the Mercer cycle, Soldier's Heart, which premieres at Tarragon, directed by Bill Glassco. Soldier's Heart is chronologically the earliest chapter in the Mercer family history. Set in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, on June 30, 1924, David French's heartbreaking new play begins again with a turbulent father-son relationship, but this time between the 16-year-old Jacob Mercer and *his* father Esau.

David French

David French was born in Coley's Point, Newfoundland, in 1939, and moved with his family to Toronto when he was seven. He divides his time now between Toronto and Cable Head, PEI. In addition to the Mercer plays, he is the author of such works as Jitters, One Crack Out, and Silver Dagger. Mr French received a Dora for Salt-Water Moon in 1984, is a Chalmers Award recipient and in 2001 was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada.

"I don't write autobiographies, I write plays." David French

Although the five plays are not written in chronological order, they tell the story of the (fictional) Mercer family. The characters are fictitious, but French concedes that there are autobiographical elements to his plays. *Salt-Water Moon*, French explains, is the story of his parents' courtship. Similarly, in *Soldier's Heart*, the frightening image of Esau returning from the war and breaking all the china (because it is German-made) is taken from French's own family history.

In terms of the specific language of the characters in his plays David French states,

"I absorbed (the language) through some process of osmosis. Through my family. When I was growing up it was like Grand Central Station in my house -Newfoundlanders coming through all the time, sitting around, smoking cigarettes and telling stories. And, of course, my father and mother were great storytellers, and I picked it up from them too."
Halifax Herald, November 2, 1999

The dialect, attitudes, and behaviours of French's characters are born out of his own experiences and interactions with Newfoundlanders, but he is profoundly aware of his role as a playwright in shaping both his characters and the dramatic action in the play.

The Process of Writing Soldier's Heart

In early 2000, David French realized that he hadn't written the first or the last plays in the Mercer Cycle. Esau Mercer, the patriarch of the family, is referred to in all four plays, and French felt it was time to tell his story. Also, as in any family, the history of Esau's life experiences affects the other members of the family; therefore, French points out that what happens in the other four plays is informed by Esau's story.

It took French 1 1/2 years to write Soldier's Heart, in consultation with Bill Glassco¹, who directed all the Mercer family plays. David French has developed a crucial trust in Glassco, by working with him over the years. Both are able to communicate with each other about the development of the script and the production. French knows that Bill Glassco "*understands the*

¹ Bill Glassco current artistic director of the Montreal Young Company and founder of the Tarragon Theatre.

people [characters] in the Mercer plays better than anybody.” As a result, Glassco has established a relationship with the playwright, and also with the characters in the play.

“Soldier’s Heart” or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Every civilization has known that going into combat changes the person who fights. History has recorded many names for the syndrome currently identified as **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**. After each conflict there is an awareness that those who return from war suffer in similar ways, having nightmares, thinking obsessively of their war experiences, and feeling anger and depression. In the aftermath of America’s Civil War, the condition was known as **Soldier’s Heart**. During the first World War, there was a belief that the changes in air pressure created by exploding bombs caused physical harm to the nerves and the problem became known as Shell Shock. In World War II, it was learned that “breakdown” could occur in anyone who was in battle long enough. The new label became Combat Fatigue. Since 1980, when the American Psychiatric Association published the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III), the name Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been the official diagnosis for the physical and psychological effects of overwhelming events such as those survived by combat veterans.²

In Soldier’s Heart characters Esau Mercer and Bert Taylor fought in Newfoundland’s most famous battle during the First World War – Beaumont Hamel – in an area of Northern France called the Somme. Below is some information about the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the battle these characters would have fought.

Royal Newfoundland Regiment

Until it became a province of Canada in 1949 Newfoundland was an independent British colony. Upon the outbreak of war Newfoundland offered a force of 500 soldiers and an increase from 500 to 1000 in the naval service.

The Newfoundland Contingent sailed for England on October 3rd 1914, its ship having been joined at sea by the convoy carrying the First Canadian Contingent. Upon the convoys’ arrival in England the Newfoundland Regiment was separated from the Canadians and sent to training camps in Scotland. In early 1915 the Regiment was moved to the large British camp at Aldershot and in September was sent to Egypt on its way to its first commitment, Gallipoli.

The Newfoundland Regiment landed at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula on the night of September 19th 1915 in order to reinforce the hard-pressed British 88th Brigade of the 29th Division. From the beginning the Regiment had a hard time; day and night the Turkish army in control of the high ground surrounding the beach poured a constant stream of artillery and sniper fire down upon the British line. Casualties mounted day by day and the constant enemy fire made re-supply difficult at best, and food and water shortages were common. In spite of the hardships the Regiment played an important part in advancing the line on November 4th and was awarded two Distinguished Conduct Medals and a Military Cross during the fighting at Caribou Hill.

With the coming of winter the conditions on the peninsula went from bad to worse. On November 26th a severe storm struck the Regiment a nasty blow. Three days of torrential rain and driving sleet washed away trenches and supplies and as the temperature fell rapidly the

² Excerpt from the introduction to *Soldier’s Heart: Survivor’s Views of Combat Trauma* (1995), p.1.

rain turned to snow. With food and water running short and little or no shelter to be found even the hardy men of Newfoundland, who were no strangers to bad weather, began to succumb and several died of exposure. By December 10th the Regiment was down to quarter strength. On the 20th December the British withdrew from Suvla and the Newfoundland Regiment was sent to Cape Helles to assist in the final withdrawal of British forces. By then only 170 men were left. The Newfoundland Regiment was moved to France on the 22nd of March 1916, and there they began the task of rebuilding the tattered remnants of the unit in preparation for their next engagement on the Somme.

The rebuilt Regiment, still with the British 29th Division, went into the line on April 22nd, facing Beaumont Hamel, a particularly strong part of the German line. On July 1st 1916 the Newfoundland Regiment, 801 strong, went over the top and into history. To reach their objective the Regiment had to walk across 800 meters of bullet-swept ground, with each man carrying a 60 pound pack, a rifle, 120 rounds of ammunition, two grenades, two sandbags, a shrapnel helmet, a gas mask, rations, canteen, ground sheet and field dressing. With no support or anything to distract enemy fire, the Regiment sustained casualties which can scarcely be equaled by any unit during the war. Within half an hour the battle was over for the Regiment. As the men struggled to find their way through the small gaps in the barbed wire the German machine guns cut them down by the hundreds. As the dazed survivors staggered back to their lines the tin signs they wore on their back for unit identification glinted in the hot sun, making ideal targets for the German gunners. Only 68 men made it back to their lines not wounded ~ a casualty rate of over 90%. The commanding officer, Lt. Col. A. L. Hadow, a British Officer, reported that the attack had failed despite training, discipline, and valor, because dead men can advance no further. The Newfoundland Regiment had ceased to exist.

The Newfoundland Regiment was again rebuilt and went on to fight at Monchy and Cambrai and would be granted the title of Royal in recognition of its conduct in the defense of Masnières. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment served with honour and distinction. It was and is a credit to the people of Newfoundland and Canada.³

Themes within Soldier's Heart

Heroism

We consider the men and women who went overseas and fought in battle or worked on the war effort as war heroes. They sacrificed greatly. They said good-bye to their families, went far from home, lived in atrocious conditions and were wounded. Many gave up their lives, their future, their husbands, wives and children for our country.

In Soldier's Heart, we are called upon to rethink the construction of the hero, and the concept of heroism itself. David French is concerned with the heroism of ordinary people, specifically in this case the Great War (World War 1): "*What is heroic is that they all knew they were going to die...and they still went ahead.*"

Brainstorm, with your students, words that come to mind when we think of the word hero. Consider the following excerpts from Soldier's Heart in light of this discussion.

³ Excerpt from www.rootsweb.com/~ww1can/nfld.htm

Esau and Bert discuss Field-Marshal Haig:

Esau: ...How can a man like that sleep at night? How can he lay his head on the pillow, with the slaughter of the Somme on his conscience? (To **JACOB**) 60,000 British soldiers fell on July 1st, and him 15 miles behind the front, strutting about with his shiny boots and swagger stick, not a hair out of place.

Bert: For God's sake, Esau, the Commander-in-Chief can't be expected to go over the top like a common soldier.

Esau: Maybe that's the trouble, Bert. Maybe if he had to, he wouldn't be so quick to send others...Here. Give me that. (He snatches the bottle from **BERT** and pours himself a shot) 20,000 dead, 40,000 wounded. And him with his neatly-trimmed moustache and glass of old port.

Exaggerated class stratification leads to dissent, and causes Esau to question the socio-economic structure that makes working class men and women pawns in a fight that doesn't always make sense. What makes someone heroic?

Bert and Esau reflect on facing death on the front lines:

Bert: A soldier doesn't die for King and Country, Jacob. Or for any other high-falutin' idea. He doesn't want to let his friends down. That's why he dies.

Esau: At 9:15 the whistles went. If you refused to climb the ladder, they shot you on the spot. An M.P. was standing there, his pistol drawn. He walked up and shot you.

Bert: Some choice. Go forward and die. Or stay back and die.

This passage reflects a powerful sense of loyalty to the people who have grown to mean something to the men. Can a person still be heroic if s/he is not afforded choice?

Bert and Esau recall marching to the front on June 30th:

Bert: Someone sang *Tipperary*. Remember that? (To **JACOB**) But not the words Sadie's used to hearing. (Sings)

'That's the wrong way to tickle Marie,
That's the wrong way to kiss!
Don't you know that over here, lad,
They like it best like this!'

Esau: (sings)

'Hooray pour le Francais!
Farewell, Angleterre!'

Bert & Esau: (sing)

'We didn't know the way to tickle Marie,
But we learned how, over there!'

The perversion of lyrics in this song counters the "King and Country" ideal that soldiers were expected to embody, and brings to light the sense of adventure and social aspects that appealed to many young men and women. If the soldiers had known what war was going to be like, would they still have enlisted?

Identity

Newfoundland vs. Canada

In 1924, when the play takes place, Newfoundland was still an independent British colony. Newfoundlanders saw themselves (and some still see themselves) as fundamentally different from Canadians; in the same way, Canadians see themselves as distinct from Americans. The indignation that Will feels at being referred to as a Canadian is expressed by Esau in the following exchange.

Jacob: He mistook you for Canadians?

Esau: Will soon set him straight. 'I'm no bloody Canadian,' says Will. 'I'm one-hundred-percent British. As British as those guards there.' He didn't want to be called a Canadian, Will didn't. Not even by the enemy.

Search for identity to be seen as an adult

Struggle for recognition and identity is enhanced between the father and son relationship as articulated through Jacob and Esau.

A power struggle has developed between Esau and his son Jacob especially as Jacob comes of age and enters manhood (in two years we know – from the earlier play Of the Fields Lately – that he will court the woman he is to marry, Mary Snow). Their struggle may also be heightened since Esau left for war when Jacob was 6 years old and was absent for a full four years. Now, just a couple of weeks after his sixteenth birthday Jacob struggles to have his father recognize him as a man. He would like Esau to share with him the stories of the War – what his father lived through. After an argument, Jacob purchases a train ticket to St. John's and has decided to leave home:

Esau: By the way, what'd you expect to do in St. John's? Curl up on a park bench? Sleep in some doorway like a lost dog?

Jacob: I can look after myself.

Esau: Yes, you can so.

Jacob: I can

Esau: You'm only fifteen years old, Jacob. Fifteen!

Jacob: I'm sixteen. I turned sixteen two weeks ago. Even Bert Taylor knows that.

Esau: Sixteen's still a boy.

As the play unfolds Esau begins to tell Jacob more of what happened to him overseas. In this particular passage he recounts a moment that illustrates how important his son Jacob is to him:

Esau: It felt so real, too. Not like a dream at all...And then I was in darknedss, suddenly, only this time....this time I heard a voice.

Jacob: A voice?

Esau: It seemed to be calling out to me. Calling my name back from that terrible darkness.

Jacob: Whose voice was it, Father? Can you remember? Father?

Esau: I remembers...It was your voice, Jacob.

Jacob: Mine

Esau: I hadn't laid eyes on you since that day in St. John's. The day you and your mother came to wave us off. But I swear your face came shining through the darkness, suddenly I snapped awake, and the shadow of the mortar shell lay across my face. And the shadow

Do we have similar experiences with our own parents? Have you experienced a moment when your parents saw you in a different way – not as their child, but a blossoming individual?

Community and Family

- Family is of utmost importance in the play. Although Esau has a hard time admitting it, the most important thing to him is his family, particularly his son, Jacob. Similarly, Jacob wants desperately to help to heal his father of the terrible events he experienced during the war.
 - The dramatic action in the play revolves around the father who wants his son back (because he is preparing to leave to go to St. John's and find work), and the son who wants his father back. Jacob needs his father to be emotionally present in his life and share with him what happened during his fighting overseas.
 - Family history (where do we go to find out about our own family history?)
-

Socio-economic status (rank, position, etc)

- One of the reasons Esau enlists in the war is to "make a few dollars." He needed the dollar a day wage to support his family. (See the dialogue between Jacob and Mary on pp. 36-40 of *Salt-Water Moon*).

Esau Mercer's socio-economic status likely precluded his rank/position in the army. It was nearly impossible for working class men to become officers.

War

In light of current developments in our world, our connection with war is more immediate. In *Soldier's Heart* we experience a battle of the Great War and see its effects through the lives of only one family.

Are there similar war stories/experiences that you have overheard in your family? What forms of war are students today more familiar with? (gang violence, school shootings, bullying, etc)

Elements of Design:

Set and Lighting Design

Usually, before rehearsals begin the designer meets 3 or 4 times (for a period of 4 to 8 hours) with the director (in this case Bill Glassco). The designers (set & costumes Sue LePage, lighting Robert Thompson) and director thoroughly discuss the play to ensure all parties share a similar vision of the play, and explore how this vision will be represented through design.

It will be interesting to take notice of the following:

- where on the stage certain scenes take place ?
- how scenes are blocked?

The set design for Soldier's Heart is by Sue LePage. The play takes place in 1924, and the **set** is a single location, the platform of the railway station at Bay Roberts, Nfld. The action taking place at a train station reinforces the story in a number of ways:

- A sense of immediacy is created in the play, since Esau must tell his story before the train arrives.
- There are five Caribou statues in Europe that were erected as memorials to the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. The fact that the train approaching the station is called the Caribou is a constant reminder of the journey and trials of the Regiment in WWI.
- Train stations are the place where thousands of men said good-bye (many forever) to their families before departing for war. They are also the place the soldiers arrived when they came home. Thus the train station surfaces strong feelings of deep sadness and also great joy.
- Today in Newfoundland trains no longer run the rails. This reinforces the notion that this is a play of historical importance as we move further from that time.
- Canada came together as a country, through the railway system and represents an important part of our shared history. Like the Great War many Canadians died building the railway – a sad circumstance which brought communities together.
- Sue LePage designed a variation of the classic thrust stage. The audience sits around the stage, creating an intimate atmosphere that invites us to take part in Jacob and Esau's father and son struggle and telling of a very sacred story of what Esau and Bert suffered through in the Great War.

Esau and Bert's story truly comes alive through the imagery in their storytelling, and the simple set allows the audience to better visualize the events that the two men describe.

Sound Design

The sound design for *Soldier's Heart* is by Evan Turner. Most of the sound consists of war songs. The characters sing variations of war songs, and the gramophone at the train station plays war songs: "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." These songs come to represent the experience of the soldiers who fought in the war, and as such, are not always appreciated. The following quote from p.11 also indicates the rift in communication and understanding between those men and women who experienced war and those who remained in Canada.

Bert: Goddamn gramophone! I don't know why I allowed Sadie to talk me into buying it. She doesn't realize what those songs can do to a man.

Most interestingly, much of the sound in the play is suggested through the storytelling of Esau and Bert. Consider how David French uses language to evoke sound in the play.

Furthermore, the audience hears the approaching train whistle that provides an echo-like far away distant quality which is a reminder of time constraints under which Esau must reveal his story to Jacob before he boards the train for St. John's.

What other sounds – maybe not realistic – could be used during this play?

Lighting Design

The lighting designer, Robert Thomson, encounters a challenge in Soldier's Heart, in that the play takes place at night. The designer must convey a realistic "night look," while still allowing for flexibility in the feel and location of the storytelling. Since the play is set in 1924, the designer must be aware of the type of lighting available in the train station at that time period (limited electrical lighting, no neon lights).

- The lighting designer also has the challenge to light scenes emotionally within the realistic parameters listed above.
 - What lighting colours prevailed during Soldier's Heart?
-

Costume Design

When designing costumes the costume designer considers several elements as part of the costume creation.

Research

Through discussion with the director, the costume designer will decide whether or not to make the costumes **period accurate**: For Soldier's Heart, it would be 1924 Newfoundland. The designer researches clothes of the period by looking through old department store catalogues (Sears or Eaton's), going to the Metro Toronto Reference Library and accessing the picture archives or even looking at old family photographs if appropriate. Similarly, if the costumes are contemporary, designers look to current fashion magazines and stores for research.

Looking at the script

The designer also works from indications within the play's script. For instance we know that Bert is the train station master and thus would be dressed appropriately.

Practical considerations

Designers must also think practically when creating. Costumes need to: allow the actors to move about the stage as required; remain effective under certain lighting; and be created within the designer's allocated budget.

Artistic choices

The designer continues to study the script and look for hints into the characters' personality and then makes artistic choices for the colour of the costumes, their shape and the fabrics to be used.

Costume designer, Sue LePage, must be careful to research both the time period of the play, including the socio-economic dress for the characters.

In Soldier's Heart, Esau and Jacob's costumes are simple and earth coloured fabrics. Why do you think Ms LePage picked that simple style and those colours? What may this indicate about their characters?

Jacob wears a jacket that is obviously too small. What information does this give us?

Pre show Lesson Plan 1 Finding Voice/Monologue/Storytelling

Objectives:

- *demonstrate an understanding of volume, tone, pace, and intention in the development of expressive speech;*
- *demonstrate an understanding of role as a balance of self (student) and other (role and circumstances in the drama);*
- *explain connections between their own lives and the metaphor or theme in a drama*

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Preparation:

About a week before this lesson, discuss with the students the far-reaching impact of war. Explain that war does not just affect the men and women who serve in the war, but also family members and relationships within the family. Ask students to think of a family member or friend who has, in some way, been touched by war. This person may have been directly involved in a war, s/he may have experienced the impact of war on the home front, s/he may have had a parent or other relative serve in a war.

Ask the student to interview this person about their experiences in the war before next week, and listen to the story this person would like to tell. The students should write down approximately three sentences from this story (they do not have to be consecutive), and bring them to school on the day of the lesson. Students should attempt to retain the language and manner of speech of this person.

Warm –up:

- Lead the students in a physical warm-up, in which they can begin to think about the voice, intonation, mannerisms and attitude of the person they have interviewed. Ask the students to keep running the three sentences over in their minds (it would be better if the students memorized their speech)

Activity:

- Divide the class into groups of about five
- Ask the students to choose one physical action that they find applicable to their speech, and that they are able to execute repetitively
- Students should number themselves off in their groups, so that they know the order that each person will speak in
- Ask the students to begin their repetitive movement; they should then begin to speak, in turn; after they have spoken, they freeze in their movement, and the next person in the group continues speaking (the effect at the end should be of a group tableau)
- Allow the students time to listen to each other and practice within their group, and then establish an order for the groups to present to each other
- Groups who are not presenting should only start their movement when it is their group's turn to present

Students may need time to debrief the activity. It can be very emotionally charged for some students.

Extension:

- Ask students to expand the story from the three sentences they have gathered to a short monologue
- Students should attempt to stay true to the voice of the person whose story it is, but shape the monologue according to their storytelling instincts
- Like David French's characters, this character is based on a real person, with distinct rhythms of speech, language, mannerisms, etc., but students should feel free to develop this character in a way that allows them to tell a particular story
- Students should consider:
 - Why does this character need to tell this story?
 - Are they trying to convince us of something?
 - Do they need to prove something?
 - Is this a difficult story to tell?
 - Would the people who know this character expect him/her to express these things?
- Ask students to work in partners while developing their monologue, so that they have someone to discuss ideas with, and share constructive criticism
- Students may want to present their works-in-progress to the rest of the class

Portfolio/Journal Entry suggestions:

Canadian playwright Judith Thompson says about monologue writing: *"[Storytelling instincts] are instincts that each one of us has. Each one of us, if we are reliving an emotional experience, tells the story perfectly."*

- To what extent is this the case in your own experience in writing this monologue?
- What are the challenges and opportunities of beginning with someone's very personal story from which to develop a monologue?

Pre show Lesson Plan 2 Esau Mercer – Role on the Wall

Objectives:

- *demonstrate an understanding of methods for developing roles that clearly express a range of feelings, attitudes, and beliefs (e.g., interaction with other roles, research into the past, motivation);*
- *demonstrate an understanding of how role is communicated through language, gesture, costume, props, and symbol;*
- *identify and pursue appropriate questions in beginning to research a topic;*

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Activity:

- Ask a student to volunteer to lie down on a large sheet of chart paper and have another student trace that student's shape; this outline will be posted on the wall and is meant to represent Esau Mercer
- Explain that as a class we are going to explore the character of Esau Mercer, who is the central figure of the play, Soldier's Heart
- Give some background on David French's Mercer Family Cycle, and then distribute the scenes from Salt-Water Moon, 1949, Leaving Home, and Of the Fields, Lately to students in the class; students should be placed in groups so that some students in the group will read the scene and others will listen and make notes
- Allow the students in each group to present the scene as best they can for the remaining group members who do not have roles; the group members who are watching should make notes of the qualities of Esau Mercer's character (who they are hearing about through the scenes)
- Students may switch roles in their groups so that each person has a chance to read and to analyse
- Each group should share their reading of the scene with the class, and a group representative will read the character qualities the group has derived from the scene; another representative will write these qualities on the outline of Esau Mercer on the wall until the role on the wall is full of character traits that describe Esau Mercer

Extension:

- Have a student in each group play Esau
- Read the scenes again and allow the student playing Esau to enter into the scene
- Esau may feel that he would like to comment during the scene or perhaps he will just listen
- What effect does his presence in the scene have?
- How does this change what the other readers are doing when the character they are talking about is present in the scene?

Portfolio/Journal Entry suggestions:

- How would other people describe you? Do you think that you would describe yourself in the same way?
- Write an entry as an adult in your family would describe you (i.e. write using your father or mother's voice and talk about yourself).

Post show Lesson Plan 1 Choral and Readers Theatre: Bob Dorman

Objectives:

- demonstrate an understanding of the basic process of voice production;
 - demonstrate an understanding of the principles and elements of movement;
- Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum**

Warm-up:

- Lead the students in a physical and vocal warm-up
- Introduce Bob Dorman's biography to the class (see attached resource sheet)

Activity:

- Divide the class into four groups
- Give each group one stanza from R.O. Dorman's "**The Ypres Mennen Road**"
- Give the groups time to create a movement piece or mime scene to take place during the reading of their stanza
- Students should decide how they would like their stanza to be read, and allocate roles and lines, as in choral speaking; allow students to emphasize or repeat certain words as they find appropriate
- Arrange for the groups to present their pieces in the correct order of the poem – the presentation of the poem should flow uninterrupted

Activity:

- Project R.O. Dorman's "**The Argument**" on an overhead and ask the class to read it aloud
- Discuss some of the themes and ideas in the poem
- Divide the class into groups of about five, and ask each group to write Bob's mother's response to his argument
- Students can either use the rhythm and rhyme scheme of Bob Dorman's poem, or they can create their own
- Ask students to present their short pieces chorally

Portfolio/Journal Entry suggestions:

- Ask students to find poetry written in WWI by women, eg. *The Virago Book of Women's War Poetry and Verse* (1997), or *Scars Upon My Heart* (1981)

Reflection:

- Which words have the strongest impact in Bob's argument?
- What word choices did you make to try to persuade Bob not to go?
- Does the sing-song quality of "The Argument" tell us anything about Bob's perception of war and his duty?
- How does the way the poem is read affect the impact of it?

Post show Lesson Plan 2 Exploring Subtext

Objectives:

- *identify and explain methods of creating and developing roles within a drama that accurately reflect the intentions of the performers and the circumstances of the drama;*
- *create drama through research or the interpretation of a source;*

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Warm-up:

- Lead the students in a physical warm-up

Activity:

- Read **Cecil SandercocK's August 25, 1917 letter** to the class
- Ask the students to determine what we know to be fact, based on the evidence of the letter; record the responses on the board/chart paper
- Ask the students what is implied in the letter: *Who might Cecil have come into contact with? Who might his parents have contact with? What might the daily lives of his mother and father be like?* Record the responses
- Go through the same process for the **second letter of May 28, 1918**
- Divide the class into groups according to which character they feel they would like to play (out of the cast of people they have imagined, as well as the actual people referred to in the letters; *Cecil should not be a character in the drama*)
- In developing their characters, students should ask themselves: What is my character's connection to Cecil SandercocK? What has my character done today? How does my character feel about his/her job? How will my character interact with the different characters in my scene? What impact does the war have on my character's daily life?
- Ask the students to create scenes in their groups, outlining a typical day for these characters; students may refer to events or information named in the letters
- Students may use movement, tableau, monologue, dialogue, mime, reading letters to enact their scenes

Extension:

- James Cecil SandercocK and William SandercocK are listed on the Veteran's Affairs Canada Virtual War Memorial <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/> ; ask students to find their names in the Book of Remembrance on this site; ask students to research Canadian Peacekeeping efforts in the world (both on this site and from other sources)
- Present this drama as part of the school's Remembrance Day events

Portfolio/Journal Entry suggestions:

- Consider the following quote and how does our work in class today further this ideal?

Since wars begin in the minds of men [and women], it is in the minds of men [and women] that the defences of peace must be constructed.

-- Constitution of UNESCO, 1945.

Introductions to Scenes from Pre show Lesson Plan 2

Leaving Home

Synopsis:

A realistic drama of the late fifties, in which a Newfoundland family attempts to make a new life in Toronto. On the eve of their youngest son's wedding, they see their family break up.

Characters:

Mary Mercer, age 50
Ben Mercer, age 18
Billy Mercer, age 17
Jacob Mercer, age 50

Kathy Jackson, age 16
Minnie Jackson, late 40s
Harold

- *In this scene, Jacob, Mary, Ben and Billy are preparing to go to the rehearsal for Billy and Kathy's wedding. (pages 16-19)*

4 characters

Of the Fields, Lately

Synopsis:

Ben Mercer comes home to Toronto in 1961 for his aunt's funeral, only to learn of his father's recent heart-attack. The complexities of family loves, loyalties and hurts are revealed as Ben learns that "you can't go home again."

Characters:

Ben Mercer, age 22
Jacob Mercer, age 54
Mary Mercer, age 54
Wiff Roach

- *In the first scene, Ben has come home after being away. He and his father don't see eye to eye on some things, and Mary, his mother, tries to keep the peace. (pages 11-13)*

3 characters

- *In the second scene, Jacob shares with his son what his own father was like, and how he dealt with his death. (pages 63-65)*

2 characters

Salt-Water Moon

Synopsis:

On a moonlit night in 1926, Jacob Mercer returns home to Coley's Point to try and win back the heart of 17-year-old Mary Snow. A love story full of humour, poetry, and all the magic of a starry Newfoundland evening.

Characters:

Mary Snow, 17
Jacob Mercer, 17

- *In this scene, Mary and Jacob are arguing about Jerome McKenzie, to whom Mary is engaged to be married. Jacob criticizes Jerome's father for not enlisting in WW1 as both Mary's and Jacob's fathers did. (pages 36-38 and 38-40)*

2 characters

1949

Synopsis:

Newfoundland is about to join Confederation. The Mercer family is reunited for the occasion – and sparks fly as some mourn the passing of an independent Newfoundland.

Characters:

Jacob Mercer, age 41	Jerome McKenzie, age 43
Mary Mercer, age 41	Grace Wilcox, mid 30s
Ben Mercer, age 10	Norman Harris, late 60s
Billy Mercer, age 9	Miss Dunn, age 50
Rachel Mercer, age 65	Doctor Hunter, mid 50s
Wiff Roach, early 40s	Ned Spencer, age 21
Dot Roach, age 37	April Adams, age 20

- *In the first scene, Rachel and her son Jacob argue over Newfoundland joining Confederation. While Jacob is all for the economic prosperity the union promises, his mother wears a black armband in mourning. (pages 43-44)*

2 characters

- *In the second scene, Rachel shares a secret with her son, and Jacob learns more about the nature of his father. (pages 103-107)*

2 characters

Additional Materials for Post show Lesson Plan 1

Robert Dorman was born on the 6th of January 1900 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The son of an Irish artistic designer, James W Dorman and his Welsh wife Isobella Fackrell. He was one of seven children, five brothers and one sister. It appears that his childhood was quite normal for people of his class at the turn of the century.

He never advanced further in school than grade three, and by the age of nine he was working full time at Borden's Dairy, where he was still that day, when war came to call him.

He joined the Canadian Army in the fall of 1914. His mother Isobella was horrified, and managed to have him discharged by Christmas of that same year. He was fourteen years old. However on June 13, 1915, after what we can imagine was quite the battle at home, he rejoined the army enlisting in the 75th division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), and was shipped to Horsham, England.

Within months he would be fighting in the drowning muds of France and Belgium. It was about that time that he began to write the following poems. His poetry is a first hand account, sometimes humorous, sometimes tragic, of his life in the trenches as a Canadian soldier during "The war that was to end all wars!"

My grandfather was among the first Canadians to be gassed at the battle for Passchendaele. Inhaling it was like thrusting your face into a vat of vinegar, then opening your eyes and breathing deeply. Only worse. He nearly died. Robert was sent back to England to recover from his gassing, and it was there that he married the young girl that he had met and fallen in love with, Florence Cowley. Their marriage certificate states that Robert was 21 and Florence was 19, though in reality he was 17 and she was 16!

Following his discharge from the army, Robert held many different jobs, one of which was a cook for the Canadian Pacific Railway. He travelled Canada from coast to coast many times, and was never less than awed by the power and the beauty of the land. In 1933, with never more than a grade three education, Robert began working for the Immigration Department as a deportation officer. On September 13, 1947, the now defunct Montreal Standard newspaper, published an article dealing with Robert and his many exploits. He retired from I.C. with full honor in 1949.

source: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~canmil//ww1/bios/karl.htm>

THE YPRES MENNEN ROAD

*I have travelled France from east to west
And thought it very fine
Waded in mud knee deep with the rest
Of the boys in the old front line
I did not mind the tramp's in mud
Nor my pack which was such a load
But I hated one place it smelled of blood
T'was the Ypres Mennen road*

*But we had to tramp it to reach our line
In weather rough or fair
And many a comrade we left behind
Cause the enemy did not spare
man or beast you were all the same
Whether you walked or rode
As every shell bore someone's name
That hit the Ypres Mennen road*

*So I cursed that road both night and day
In my billet on up the line
And every night I used to pray
For Fritz to give me mine
I was getting you know a bit fed up
That's why I wanted to be na-pooed
So I would never again see pack and mud
And the Ypres Mennin road*

*Now I need not worry any more
I'm away from all the strife
And landed safe on England's shore
T'is the happiest day of my life
I have said good bye to mud and slime
And to my pack which was such a load
But I thank the Lord 'cause I got mine
On the Ypres Mennen road*

THE ARGUMENT

*Hello Mother, what do you know
I enlisted to day I said I'd go
Yes, I mean to do my little bit
Afraid "Why Mum never thought of it
Oh I know it's true all that you say
Only fifteen and going away
But age dont count it's the heart within
The courage to lose the faith to win
So come now Mother you Must'nt cry
Other boys have joined so why not I
It wont last long please understand
Then I'll come Home to the things we planned
Remember Mum, what you have often said
The little house all painted red
A garden filled with lovely flowers
Where we planned to spend such happy hours
I know how much it all means to you dear
But really I could'nt be happy here
When I know that every Mothers son
Is badly needed to man the guns
So cheer up Mother dont take it so hard
You would'nt have your son branded a coward
Come smile thru your tears and think of the day
When I'll return Home to be with you always*

Additional Materials for Post show Lesson Plan 2

Letters Home

James Cecil Sandercock (1898 – 1918)
4th Canadian Mounted Rifles
Canadian Expeditionary Force

August 25th 1917

Dear Mother and Father

Just a few lines, hoping you are well. I guess you will have heard the news of my brother's death before this letter reaches you. Bill and I went out on a working party on the night of August 23rd. We were both together working when a shell lit the trench. Bill was killed. I got a slight wound in the knee. I was lucky I was not killed too.

Now mother, I will write again in a few days, when the Battalion comes out of the line.

CECIL

Somewhere in France May 28th 1918

To my dear sister

Just a few lines hope it will find you all well. How is your boys getting along. I would give anything to see them. It is a long time since I got a letter from you.

Well there has been some pretty hard fighting over here in some places. Earl Mc Master is back to the Batt he left in September so I think he had a good time. We came over together and I am still hear. Well I guess I will close for this time.

*good by xxxxxxxxxxxxx
Write soon*

Notes from **Brian Lee Massey**, The Canadian Military Heritage Project

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~canmil/>

“The letter above is from a postcard sent by James Cecil Sandercock to his Sister Myrtle (my great-grandmother) one day before his 20th birthday. He was killed in action three months later on August 28th 1918. His friend Earl Mc Master was gassed August 25th 1918 and died September 10. Cecil is one of the soldiers found on Veteran's Affairs Canada Virtual War Memorial.

He is also found in the First World War Book of Remembrance

His brother William (Bill) who is mentioned in Cecil's postcard, died one year almost to the day before Cecil. Bill can be found on Veteran's Affairs Canada Virtual War Memorial.

Plays by David French

- 1949**
Synopsis: Newfoundland is about to join Confederation. The Mercer family is reunited for the occasion – and sparks fly as some mourn the passing of an independent Newfoundland. Runner-up, 1989 Chalmers Play Award.
First Production Info: First produced in 1988 by the Canadian Stage Company, Toronto.
- Jitters**
Synopsis: A series of disasters befall a theatre company trying to open a new Canadian play in this “backstage” comedy. A hysterical playwright, vicious critics, a drunken leading man, a faulty bathroom door and the imminent arrival of a New York producer all add to the mayhem. Runner-up, 1979 Chalmers Canadian Play Award.
First Production Info: First produced in 1979 by Tarragon Theatre, Toronto.
- Leaving Home**
Synopsis: A realistic drama of the late fifties, in which a Newfoundland family attempts to make a new life in Toronto. On the eve of their youngest son’s wedding, they see their family break up. Runner-up, 1972 Chalmers Canadian Play Award.
First Production Info: First produced in 1972 by Tarragon Theatre, Toronto.
- Of the Fields, Lately**
Synopsis: Ben Mercer comes home to Toronto in 1961 for his aunt’s funeral, only to learn of his father’s recent heart-attack. The complexities of family loves, loyalties and hurts are revealed as Ben learns that “you can’t go home again.” Winner, 1973 Chalmers Canadian Play Award.
First Production Info: First produced in 1973 by Tarragon Theatre, Toronto.
- Salt-Water Moon**
Synopsis: On a moonlit night in 1926, Jacob Mercer returns home to Coley’s Point to try and win back the heart of 17-year-old Mary Snow. A love story full of humour, poetry, and all the magic of a starry Newfoundland evening. Winner, 1985 Canadian Authors Association Literary Award and 1985 Dora Mavor Moore Award.
First Production Info: First produced in 1985 by Tarragon Theatre, Toronto..
- Silver Dagger**
Synopsis: Soon after his third novel is published, Steve Marsh’s wife receives a series of phone calls and letters that threaten to destroy their marriage. Adultery, blackmail, murder, a figure lurking in the rain.
First Production Info: First produced in 1993 by the Canadian Stage Company, Toronto, and the National Arts Centre, Ottawa.
- That Summer**
Synopsis: It’s Memorial Day, 1990, and Margaret Ryan has returned from Vermont to the Ontario cottage country where, thirty-two years before, she was forced to vacation with her family at a lakeside resort. For her and her sister Daisy, it was a time of awakening, a time of discovery... Cinematic in its feel and pacing, *That Summer* is a meditation on what endures of fleeting moments over time.
First Production Info: First produced in 1999 at the Blyth Festival, Blyth, Ontario.

for more information please visit the Playwrights Union of Canada at
<http://www.puc.ca>