

TARRAGON THEATRE

34th SEASON 2004-2005

“One of the most artistically adventurous and yet commercially stable companies in Canada” *The Globe and Mail*, 2004

“Is there a better evening of theatre to be had anywhere?”
David MacFarlane, *Globe & Mail*, 2003

“An unrivalled purveyor of Canadian drama”
Vit Wagner, *Toronto Star*, 1999

About Tarragon Theatre

Tarragon is primarily a playwright’s theatre. Its mandate is to develop, encourage and produce new work; to attract or train new artists and technicians to interpret new work; and to inform and develop an audience for new work. The goal of the OutReach programs is to develop quality theatre education initiatives for students, educators, community members, and theatre patrons. The mandate of OutReach is “to use all its resources, programs, and facilities to promote, wherever possible, inclusion. Particularly through our OutReach initiatives we aim to support and foster relationships with community members, educators and students as together we develop the theatre practitioners and audiences of today and tomorrow”.

In 2003, our neighborhood association unanimously voted to adopt the official name Tarragon Village Community Association, making this the first neighborhood in Toronto to take its name from that of a theatre. Tarragon Village encompasses Dartnell Avenue to Bathurst Street and Bridgman Avenue to Davenport Road. An inaugural ribbon cutting ceremony took place on May 31, 2003.

Tarragon Achievements

- Over 175 Canadian premieres by such celebrated and award-winning playwrights as David French, James Reaney, George F. Walker, Judith Thompson, John Murrell, Joan MacLeod, Maja Ardal, Morris Panych, Jason Sherman, Guillermo Verdecchia, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Daniel Brooks, Diane Flacks, Richard Greenblatt, Ted Dykstra, Ken Garnhum, Michael Healey, Morwyn Brebner, Mavis Gallant, Kristen Thomson and a host of others.
- Tarragon is the foremost producer, in English Canada, of translated plays from Québec, most notably the work of Carole Fréchette and Michel Tremblay.
- Plays developed and produced at Tarragon have, on many occasions, toured nationally and internationally; they have also been widely published, broadcast and filmed.
- Tarragon has received more than 200 Dora Award nominations, many nominations (and winners) for the Chalmers Canadian Play Award and many nominations for the Governor General’s Award for Drama (winners include Judith Thompson, Joan MacLeod, Guillermo Verdecchia, John Krizanc, Jason Sherman

and Morris Panych, all for Tarragon plays). Tarragon has received the Lieutenant Governor's Award 5 times in the past 7 years.

- Since the 1995/96 season, Tarragon subscriptions have risen 136% to a record 4,095 subscribers in the 2002-2003 season. Tarragon is deficit-free.
- The Urjo Karede Playwrights Endowment Fund, named to honour Urjo's commitment to Canadian theatre, stands at just under \$1.2 million. Income from the fund is used to assist playwrights while they are writing their plays.

Tarragon Programs

- 7 or 8 major productions in two theatres each season. In the 2002-2003 season, there were seven productions (300 performances) with a total attendance of 46,950.
- Playwrights Unit (since 1982). As many as 7 playwrights, with works-in-progress, work individually and collectively with the artistic director and the associate artistic director over the course of a year. These plays are given a public reading during Play Reading Week, held in mid-December.
- 4 playwrights-in-residence.
- Tarragon Theatre/George Brown College New Play Development Project – a Tarragon playwright will write a play to be workshopped by second year acting students at George Brown College in order to give the students a sense of the development process and their role as actors within it.
- Spring Arts Fair (since 1985): an extraordinary free celebration of the performing arts, presented in spaces throughout the interior and exterior of Tarragon Theatre.
- Outreach programs aimed at youth including Spring Training Project, Young Playwrights Unit, *Under 20 for Under 20's* playwriting competition, high school and post-secondary co-op placements; Outreach programs aimed at educators including Teacher Nights and educator workshops.
- Apprentice programs in arts administration and stage management.

Tarragon Special Services

- Over 500 scripts professionally read and assessed annually without charge.
- Student and senior matinees; wheelchair accessibility throughout the facility.
- Teachers provided with a complimentary study guide.
- Costume and prop rentals for professional and community companies.
- Pay-What-You-Can performances every Sunday afternoon.
- Tickets donated to community and social service groups for fundraising events.

TARRAGON THEATRE

Study Guide

Half Life

by John Mighton

co-produced with Necessary Angel Theatre



Directed by Daniel Brooks

**Starring: Laura de Carteret, Barbara Gordon,
Carolyn Hetherington, Maggie Huculak, Randy
Hughson, Diego Matamoros, Eric Peterson**

Set and Costume Design by Dany Lyne

Lighting Design by Andrea Lundy

Sound Design by Richard Feren

Stage Manager: Crystal Salverda

March 1 – April 3, 2005

About the **Half Life** 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.

The **Half Life** study guide was coordinated and compiled by:

Joanna Falck Literary Manager

Fiona Jones Studio and OutReach Co-ordinator.

Mary B. Wood OutReach Consultant developing lesson plans grounded in Ministry Curriculum.

Avery A. Swartz Publicity and OutReach Associate

The **Half Life** study guide is divided into several sections.

1. **About Tarragon Theatre**
2. **About the Playwright**
3. **About the Play**
4. **Elements of the Play**
5. **Points of Discussion – *Half Life***
6. **Elements of Design**
7. **Additional Resources**
8. **Lesson Plans**

Point of Interest

We encourage you to make use of this study guide as effectively as possible and as such we want to highlight the fact that some elements of the guide are most useful prior to viewing the production and some are most useful post viewing. For example, while the structure, character breakdown and themes set up a context for viewing, the design elements are best understood after viewing. There are also lesson plans included for pre and post show activities.

**Feel free to contact us should you have any questions or comments at
416.536.5018 x243.**

Half Life

"We wouldn't survive if we remembered everything."

Two nursing home residents rekindle what might have been a wartime romance. The award winning team behind *Possible Worlds* brings us this poetic and moving meditation on identity, aging and the nature of memory. What shines through when memory fades away?

About the Playwright

Half Life is John Mighton's first new play in nine years. Mighton's previous plays, *Scientific Americans*, *Possible Worlds*, *A Short History of Night*, *Body and Soul* and *The Little Years*, have been performed across Canada, as well as in Europe, Japan, and the United States and have won several national awards including a Governor General's Literary Award for Drama for *Possible Worlds* and *A Short History of Night*. Mighton's play *Possible Worlds* was made into a full-length feature film directed by director/playwright Robert Lepage. He is currently adapting Brian Greene's book *The Elegant Universe* (about string theory) for the Lincoln Centre with Robert Lepage.

For the past seven years John Mighton has also coordinated JUMP, a successful school program that provides training for teachers and tutoring for children who are having difficulties in math. John has written a book based on his experiences with JUMP called *The Myth of Ability: Nurturing Mathematical Talent in Every Child*, published by House of Anansi Press. Mighton completed a Ph.D. in Mathematics at the University of Toronto and has lectured in Philosophy at McMaster University. He held an NSERC postdoctoral fellowship for research in graph theory and knot theory at The Fields Institute and is currently an Adjunct Professor at the University of Toronto. He also appeared in the Academy Award winning "Good Will Hunting" and acted as a math consultant for the movie.

About the Play

Half Life looks at all of the ways in which memory shapes our identity - how not only what we remember defines us but also what we forget. It examines both the pain and necessity of forgetting and asks what is left behind when memories are forgotten? Is there some part of the self that remains? Is it that thing which we call the Soul?

The play is set in a nursing home where two middle-aged children come to visit their aging parents. Donald (played by Diego Matamoros), a professor of psychology, comes to visit his mother Clara (played by Carolyn Hetherington) whose memories of her life are slowly fading. Anna (played by Laura de Carteret) visits her father Patrick (played by Eric Peterson), a new resident at the home who is reluctant to share the details of his life as a code breaker during World War II. Slowly, a romance develops between Clara and Patrick as they try to piece together the memories of a possible shared history. Could Patrick be the same young soldier Clara once danced with? Or have they ever met before? As Anna and Donald watch their faltering parents, the older couple rediscovers beauty and love in the twilight of their lives.

Elements of the Play

All of the components that make up a play are called the dramaturgical elements. These include the **structure** (how the story is 'built') the **genre** (comedy or tragedy), the **language**, the **characters** and **themes** (the larger issues the play is examining).

Structure

- The structure refers to how the playwright has arranged the events in his/her story.
- A story can be told in many different ways, for example the playwright can begin at the beginning of the story and move forward until the story reaches a logical ending.
- Or a play can begin long after the events have happened and unfold in random order in one character's memory.
- Shakespeare's plays always have five acts with the rising action in the first two acts, the climax in the third act and the falling action or denouement in the final two acts.
- Many modern playwrights reject this structure and they arrange the events in the play in a less logical way.
- How a playwright chooses to arrange the events in the play can tell us how he/she wants the audience to experience the story.

For *Half Life*, the structure of the play reflects the theme of memory. The play begins with Donald telling Anna a story:

Donald: *I was telling a story once, about my father's experiences during the war – he spent four years in a prisoner of war camp – and right in the middle of my story, a man walked up and handed the woman I was talking to a drink. While they were talking it occurred to me that she might already have forgotten my story. So when the man left, just to see what would happen, I started to talk about something else.*

Anna: *Did she remember your story?*

Donald: *No. So now, at parties, as an experiment, I won't continue telling a story when I'm interrupted, and sixty percent of the time the person I'm talking to will forget I was telling a story.*

Throughout the play, stories are often interrupted and sometimes go unfinished, questions go unanswered and plot lines at times remain seemingly unresolved as though they too had been forgotten. The play ends seemingly unfinished as well – audiences may not even be certain that the play has ended. In a play about forgotten histories and stories that go unfinished, it seems right for the playwright to leave the ending of this play unresolved as well. It would seem impossible for this play to have a "happy ending" but, much more like life than perhaps like plays, the stories of these characters remain unresolved.

Genre

Genre is a French word meaning type, species or class of composition. Determining a play's genre helps the reader/spectator understand how to 'view' the play – what is the worldview of the playwright? How is he/she asking us to look at the world? Knowing a play's genre helps us understand better the 'rules' of the play – how the play is operating in terms of its portrayal of the world.

- **Comedy**, in general, is defined as a play written, “chiefly to amuse its audience... It will normally be closer to the representation of everyday life than a tragedy and will explore common human failings rather than tragedy's disastrous crimes” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*). Shakespearian comedies are also defined as ending in marriage. The pursuit of love is often a strong element of comedy.
- **Tragedy**, in general, is defined as “a serious play representing the disastrous downfall of a central character”. The central character is led to this disaster through “an error” and “the tragic effect usually depends on our awareness of admirable qualities in the protagonist which are wasted terribly in the fated disaster” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*).
- Modern plays are difficult to categorize because they often contain elements of both the tragic and the comic, called **tragicomedy**. As the name suggests, tragicomedies combine elements of tragedy and comedy by “either providing a happy ending to a potentially tragic story or by some more complex blending of serious and light moods...In modern dramatic criticism, the term has come to be attached to the theatre of the absurd” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*) including the plays of Samuel Beckett.

Half Life contains elements of both tragedy and comedy. There are moments of lightness (particularly with the character of Reverend Hill) but there are also moments of great sadness. The play is particularly difficult to categorize because the ending of the play seems ambiguous. We do not know whether they will go on to happy lives. Likely, as in life, their lives will be full of both joy and sorrow. At one point in the play the character Anna says, “*Maybe the purpose of life isn't ultimately to be happy or to suffer, but to do both at the same time*” and in watching the play, the audience will likely feel both the elements of comedy and tragedy working at the same time.

Dialogue

In general, the language used in the play and the way the characters speak to each other is very realistic. There are no monologues and the characters never address the audience so the dialogue has a very realistic feel to it – the characters speak to each other much like people might in 'real life'. However, because the play is set in a nursing home with characters who have Alzheimer's disease, the things people say are not always logical. The character Clara, for example, often repeats the phrase “*Sleep is the greatest protection*” or “*Of course dad was on the railroad.*” But again, this is a realistic portrayal of how someone with Alzheimer's disease might behave and speak.

Donald also participates in a contest called the “Turing Test” in which, during a five minute conversation in front of a curtain, he has to determine whether he is speaking to a human or a machine. In an article from “Wired” magazine, Charles Platt writes about his own experience as a judge in one of these contests in an article entitled “What’s it mean to be human, anyway?” In his case, the conversations he has with the computers are not behind a screen but online. Here are some of the conversations humans had with computers and each person was given a certain topic to discuss. Could you tell these were computers?

The following text is printed exactly as it was created by the judges and the AI programs, including misspellings and typographical errors.

Topic: Classic Star Trek

Programmer: Robby Garner, Robitron Software Research Inc.

Judge: Who are the Klingons?

Program: I don't know who you're talking about.

Judge: You're the trekker.

Program: Harry Mudd was one of the more comical characters.

Judge: Harry Mudd? Who was Harry Mudd?

Program: No I haven't.

Judge: Me neither.

Program: Okay, I will.

Judge: Why did you choose to converse about Star Trek?

Program: Their minds were stored in these white globes.

Judge: Whose minds?

Program: Spocks ears are pointed and there was this strange hippy guy in THE WAY TO EDEN that had these bizarre pretzel shaped ears.

Judge: So how big were the ears?

Program: There must have been 70 or 80. I'm not sure.

Judge: Ears?

Program: I'm sure I would know if I could see it on TV.

Topic: Cats versus Dogs

Programmer: Michael L. Mauldin, Carnegie Mellon University

Judge: Which is more likely to play with a piece of yarn, a cat or dog?

Program: Dogs are great pets, but they can be a lot of work.

Judge: Are dogs cleaner than cats?

Program: We did keep the litter box clean, but she was very stubborn. Since then, we've had no trouble with the other two.

Judge: Do cats and dogs fight over food?

Program: I'm not in the mood.

Judge: If a cat and dog get into a race, which one wins?

Program: But, I don't want which one wins.

Judge: is a dog more affectionate than a cat?

Program: People don't own cats ... it's the other way around.

For the whole article go to <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.04/turing.html>

Characters

Donald – 45 years old, a professor of psychology, the son of Clara, has a 10-year-old daughter named Nina. He is involved in the creation of Artificial Intelligence (also called AI).

Anna – 42 years old, an artist, daughter of Patrick. Like Donald, she visits her father regularly and during these visits, she and Donald discuss their parents and their own lives.

Patrick – 82 years old, a new resident in the nursing home. He was a mathematician and a code breaker during World War II. He begins a relationship with Clara, eventually wishing to marry her. His daughter Anna tells the staff that he often lies, and throughout the play he sneaks out of the upstairs ward, sneaks cigarettes, and tries to have a love affair with Clara, despite the rules of the nursing home.

Clara – also a resident of the nursing home, she has Alzheimer's. Although she is able to recognize her son, she has trouble remembering events that have just occurred. As Donald says about her memory, *"She can tell you which dress she was wearing the day my father came home from war. But not what she did yesterday."*

Reverend Hill – a Reverend who visits the home and tends to patients in their final hours. Often speaks with Patrick about his work as a scientist. Reverend Hill seems to be interested in science and how it is used to explain the world. Of course, he also looks to religion and God to explain the world and ourselves.

Tammy – a nurse at the nursing home who seems to have a particular fondness for Clara, whom she says never complains and later says that she thinks of her as a second mother. Donald, Clara's son, suspects that she is stealing money from Clara when she buys her expensive gifts with Clara's own money and never provides receipts. Later in the play, Tammy 'disappears'; we are told that she has another job but we are never told whether Donald has complained about her or whether she quit.

Themes

Memory

The theme of memory is examined through the lenses of both **science** and **spirituality**.

Science

Throughout the play, Donald is involved in the creation of artificial intelligence – developing a computer that can simulate the way the human brain functions. He participates in the testing of computers - he sits behind a curtain and asks a series of questions in order to determine whether the responses he is given are generated by a person or a computer (This simulates an actual scientific test called the “Turing Test” and since 1991, a yearly contest is held where scientists try to create computers that can answer questions in the most ‘human’ way possible). For Donald, what distinguishes the way a computer thinks from the way humans think is the act of forgetting, “*I’m afraid we’ll never be able to simulate human thought*”, he says, “*until we can simulate forgetting. The way information is lost is as important as the way it is retained.*”

Who is Alan Turing?

Turing, Alan Mathison, 1912–54, British mathematician and computer theorist. While studying at Cambridge Univ. he began work in predicate logic that led to a proof (1937) that some mathematical problems are not susceptible to solution by automated computation; in arriving at this, he postulated a universal machine, now called a Turing machine, that was the theoretical prototype of the electronic digital computer. After completing a Ph.D. at Princeton Univ. (1938), he returned home to England, where, during World War II, he was instrumental in deciphering German messages encrypted by the Enigma cipher machine. After the war, he helped design computers, first for the British government (1945–48) and then for the Univ. of Manchester (1948–54). During this period, he produced a body of work that helped form the basis of the newly emerging field of artificial intelligence; among his contributions was the Turing test, a procedure to test whether a computer is capable of humanlike thought.

Spirituality

Reverend Hill (played by Randy Hughson), in discussions with Donald, considers the differences between what science may call “life” and what true life means for him. His experiences in the nursing home, in particular being with many patients in their final moments, has deeply influenced his thinking about life and its progression into old age:

Reverend Hill: *Whenever she sees me, one woman at the home cries out "Dee, dee, dee, dee!" with the greatest joy. This would be beautiful in an infant - why is it merely tragic in an older person? Our feelings about this show the extent to which we judge adults by their function. (Pause.) Even when the mind fails there's something that shines through. For lack of a better word, I call it the soul...*

Forgetting

Another central line in the play is “We wouldn’t survive if we remembered everything.” So the ability to forget becomes as important in the play as the ability to remember. This is reflected in the structure of the play itself where story lines are not resolved, questions are not answered and plot lines seem to be ‘forgotten’ all together. Clara also suffers from Alzheimer’s – a disease where memory loss is a key symptom of the disease. What happens to someone if they begin to forget everything? What is left behind of your personality, your self, if you have no more memories? Reverend Hill tells us that he

believes it is the soul which is left but Donald, who is not religious, feels that once memories are gone, there is nothing left. Donald says about the eventual death of his mother, *“And when she’s dead, no one will ever think of me the way she did again. Not even God.”*

A Fun Fact about Forgetting

Solomon Veniaminovich Shereshevsky – The Man who Couldn’t Forget

"Sh." is the name given to a Russian mnemonist (someone able to perform unusual feats of memory) studied for almost thirty years by A. R. Luria beginning in the 1920s. He is described in A. R. Luria's *The Mind of a Mnemonist*. Shereshevsky could recall lists of numbers that he had memorized decades earlier, and was actually unable to forget the lists he had memorized while performing as a mnemonist. He could memorize nonsense syllables, a challenge specifically designed to frustrate mnemonic associations. Shereshevsky experienced synesthesia, responding to stimulation of one sense with a perception in one or more different senses. For example, he could see sounds and feel their taste and texture. His remarkable abilities were somewhat disabling. He was not able to read poetry or fiction easily, as each word or phrase would blossom into an intense visualization that might be contradicted by the next one.

Aging

The play also explores the process of aging – particularly how people are perceived and treated as they age. In the scenes in the nursing home, we see the nurse getting the patients to play games of hangman and they do arts and crafts and play cards – all activities that seem to be for children. One patient often repeats the phrase “I was better at this when I was a child.” People also speak to the elderly patients as though they were children. Agnes (played by Barbara Gordon) says, *“I’m sick and tired of these games. I’m a senior citizen and I’d like to be treated like one.”*

Ironically, the younger characters in the play complain more about aging than the senior citizens. Donald tells Anna that he can barely touch his head to his shoulder any more because he is aging. He tells Anna, *“I know I could look better and feel better if I joined a health club and worked out three times a week. But I don’t really care anymore. You start to die the day you lose your vanity. Gradually I’ll just stiffen up I’ll put on weight I’ll become weaker and weaker.”* And yet Donald is only 45 – relatively young compared to his mother and Patrick, for example.

Points of Discussion – Half Life

Do you think Patrick and Clara ever really met? Use evidence from the play to support either yes or no.

Discuss the ending of the play. Why do you think the playwright chose to end the play the way that he did?

How do you, as a student and a young person, relate to the themes of aging and memory in the play? For example, Anna says “*Children can never experience the incredible bittersweetness of joy and pain at the same time, of life lived in retrospect, the awareness of things passing – for that you need memory – you need to grow old.*” Do you think that’s true?

Do you think it will one day be possible to create computers that think exactly like human beings? Discuss the ways creating Artificial Intelligence could be both beneficial and dangerous.

Why is the play called *Half Life*? Discuss the implications of the title for all of the characters.

Elements of Design

The following section combines general information about areas of design (including information from Tarragon production staff, design websites, and the textbook: *Theatrical Design and Production* by J. Michael Gillette) with specific examples of how design elements have been employed in the production you are attending. A brief glossary is also included to assist with technical terms used in this section of the guide.

Design Overview

A script can be performed numerous times without ever being interpreted the same way. Although text stays the same from production to production, the way the piece is conceptualized changes.

The designers (set, costumes, lighting, sound, etc.) 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. Design elements should create an environment for the play that supports the production concept: the creative interpretation of the script.

There are some artistic and practical considerations that apply to all areas of design. These include:

- mood and spirit of the production
- historical period of the production
- locale of each scene
- season of the year and time of day for each scene
- needs of other designers
- health and safety

Half Life poses questions about memory, forgetting, how the brain functions. The overall design hones in on the specifics that we remember, the voids that are left when we forget. Elements are brought into clear focus or linger in the shadows. Stark, bare bones images and sounds, fragments of conversations, interruptions in story telling are all reflected in the design.

Set Design

The set designer's job is to create a physical world that helps the audience understand and enjoy a play by providing a visual representation of the production concept. Before rehearsals begin, the set designer meets multiple times with the director. From these meetings design drawings and a maquette (a scale model of what will be onstage) are developed. The model and drawings are used by the actors, stage managers and production staff to better understand the design goals; to imagine and replicate the space the production will be set in; and to build and decorate the set pieces.

Specific practical elements considered by the set designer are:

- number and position of entrances and exits needed
- number and position of entrances and exits already in the space
- the seating formation of the theatre – can it be changed?

- the type of stage that comes with the theatre (i.e. proscenium, thrust, arena, catwalk etc.)
- is this a flyhouse?
- the duration of the run
- will the set tour after the first production

In addition to the scenery, the set designer is frequently responsible for designing the stage properties.

It will be interesting to take notice of the following:

- How the mood and spirit of the production is relayed through the design
- How many different locales are represented on the stage
- What areas are used as exits and entrances
- What information the set gives about the characters

The set for *Half Life* is a black box with headers (hard borders above the stage which help to hide the lighting instruments) and legs (hard borders at the sides to create wings). These borders are covered in black velour which absorbs all light and, as a result, anything colourful in front stands out.

The floor is a type of dance floor that gets rolled out and taped down. It has been covered with a spray treatment that makes the floor slightly reflective. The lighting designer will use this to reflect some light onto the actors. It also helps to deaden the sound of people walking around. This enables the audience to hear the sound design without distracting footsteps and furniture clumping.

The use of flats suspended on tracks from above (like barn doors) allow for the scenes to change location quickly and quietly. There is no track on the floor to trip over or for set pieces that roll on and off (beds and wheelchairs) to bump over. The flats have different coverings to allow for differing effects from transparent (and reflective) to translucent to black and even the Chapel door.

The set was created with touring in mind. Each element can be disassembled and re-assembled. Also, as the show will travel to Scotland, the dimensions of shipping crates and trucks in the UK were taken into consideration when the original designs were produced. The fact that the floor can be rolled up and taken on tour means that the spike marks on the floor (see lighting design) will travel intact to any other location the show plays in. This alleviates the time-consuming task of re-spiking the floor.

The colours of the set pieces fall into a specific colour palette that the designer has chosen. Most objects are in the yellow - brown range with certain elements that relate to the character Clara that are blue - green. And there is the ubiquitous use of institutional chrome with its reflective properties.

Sound Design

Sound design consists of music, effects and reinforcement (such as microphones).

The sound designer obtains a lot of information directly from the script i.e. “a phone rings”, “it begins to rain”, or “a sad song is heard through the window”. He/she must think about the transitions between scenes and what sound elements will shift the audience from the mood of one scene to the next. Sound design also extends to the elements the audience hears when they first enter the theatre, during the intermission, and even the curtain call and post-show music.

Some practical elements the sound designer considers are:

- speaker and microphone placement
- live or recorded sound, or both
- volume of each piece
- length of scene changes
- equipment available
- existing ambient noise in the theatre

As well as establishing and reinforcing mood and atmosphere, sound elements also provide information to the audience:

- When you enter a theatre take a minute to listen to the pre-show music or soundscape – does it offer any clues about the nature of the show?
- What sound cues did you hear that helped establish time and place?
- Were any special effects used? Were they useful in moving the story forward? Why or why not?

Richard Feren, the sound designer, attended most rehearsals and brought in sounds for the director and actors to hear and experience. He worked very closely with the director and lighting designer to create seamless transitions. For each scene, he created a soundscape that tells the audience where the characters are. He also created sounds that give us an indication of what Clara is thinking about – sea, boats, outdoors - when she is clearly inside.

There is a punctuating tone that begins each scene. It brings the audience and the characters onstage “back to reality”. As Clara says several times, “*I fell asleep. I just closed my eyes and fell asleep*”; the scene starts with her waking up in the middle of a moment of a larger scene that we, the audience, see only a part of.

The echo-y sound of Reverend Hill in the chapel for the Remembrance Day service and the sound of the choir were pre-recorded.

Microphones are used for the artificial intelligence test, both onstage and off.

- Take note of scenes where there is no sound at all.

Lighting Design

Effective stage lighting not only lets the spectators see the action of the play but also ties together all the visual elements of the production and helps create an appropriate mood and atmosphere to heighten the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the play.

The lighting designer wants to give information such as time and place, mood, and where the focus of a scene is. Lighting design is often not noticeable because it has been created in such a way as to enhance the mood of the play as unobtrusively as possible. However, many directors will employ unnatural lighting or hyper-realized lighting to add another layer to the production.

Lighting includes the use of coloured gels to create different effects; intensity to determine how dark or bright a scene is; direction to establish the angle at which the light hits the stage; and movement to decide the duration and components of cues.

Lighting and sound often work together to create an effect (i.e. a fade to black that is timed to a piece of music).

Lighting also works closely with set pieces when 'practicals' are used. These are light sources that are manipulated by the actors (i.e. a desk lamp). In this case the set designer will determine the look of the lamp and the lighting designer will decide how it functions.

Some practical considerations for a lighting designer are:

- the number of locations in a set
- the number of lighting instruments available
- the type of performance (i.e. drama, dance, opera, etc.)
- whether the lighting board is manual or computerized
- alternate light sources (i.e. video or slide projection)
- set materials requiring special lighting (i.e. a scrim or cyclorama)

Some lighting elements to notice are:

- when and how lighting indicates a change in time or location
- lighting changing the focus from one character to another
- how lighting interacts with sound elements
- how lighting is employed to reinforce a mood
- how colour is used in the lighting instruments

Andrea Lundy, the lighting designer, sat in on rehearsals, working closely with the director and sound designer in a collaborative fashion.

The lighting is not conventional front light. The majority of the lighting instruments are directly above, behind or to the sides of the actors. There are only 8 front lights. This creates shadows on the actors' faces, shadows on the floor and the actors stand out in stark contrast from the black background. It is as though parts have been forgotten or elements are missing as in a memory. Characters deliberately move through shadows, and their faces are isolated to bring them into sharper focus.

Areas of the stage are isolated so as to define a location. These areas can be very precise and the actors' placement and the setting of the tables and chairs must be equally precise. Spike marks are used to help the actors place the furniture and themselves in the correct spot on stage in the scene transition light. These are little pieces of coloured tape and are coded to each scene.

The lighting between scenes (transition lighting) is predominantly blue back lighting. This allows the actors to see where they are going and are able to move quickly, efficiently and safely, as opposed to a dead-black-out or DBO.

In each scene the colour is predominantly warm, amber tones. This gives an autumnal feel (the play takes place around Remembrance Day) and is a contrast to the cool blue lighting in the transitions.

Costume Design

Costume design includes all clothing, underclothing, hairdressing, makeup, and accessories such as hats, scarves, fans, umbrellas, and jewellery, worn or carried by each character in a production. A costume design suggests specific personal information about each character.

Through discussion with the director, the costume designer will decide whether or not to make the costumes 'period accurate'. The designer researches clothes of a period in many ways including: looking through store catalogues of the era (i.e. Sears or Eaton's); going to a reference library, art gallery and/or museum; perusing picture archives; or even looking at old family photographs. Similarly, if the costumes are contemporary, designers look to current fashion magazines, tv and film, and stores for research.

The designer also works from indications within the play's script and looks for hints into the characters' personality. They then make artistic choices for the colour of the costumes, their shape, and the fabrics to be used.

Finally, the designer works with the costume team and the actors in fittings to make certain that the costumes are comfortable and as easy as possible to manipulate.

Some practical considerations in costume design include:

- the background and personality of the characters
- the limitations created by the set or staging (i.e. a raked stage makes spiked shoes impractical)
- the actors can move about on the stage as required (i.e. run up a set of stairs or engage in stage combat)
- the costumes remain effective under stage lighting
- costumes that need to be changed quickly are built accordingly
- costumes can last for an entire run and be laundered

The majority of the costumes for *Half Life* are all within a colour range – brown! Clara has her own hues of blue and green, Tammy (and later Diana) wear hospital green scrubs, Patrick has a blue jacket for the Remembrance Day service, and Donald wears a green shirt that we don't really see until the final scene when he removes his jacket at Clara's bed side. Each actor wears a series of layered costume pieces in order that they can change looks rapidly to indicate the passage of time. With touring in mind, there are doubles of many costume pieces, as constant laundering will wear out the clothes more rapidly.

As the play is contemporary, the costume pieces were easily purchased off-the-rack. They just had to be tailored to each actor. There were no costumes that had to be specially built. None of the actors have any extraordinary actions that have to be taken into consideration when building or buying a costume.

Additional Resources

Glossary of Useful Technical Terms

Acoustics	The sound transmission characteristics of a room, space or material
Cue	A directive for action (i.e. a change in the lighting, sound, or an actor's entrance)
Cyclorama	A large piece of scenic material used to surround the stage on to which colour can be projected
Gel	Generic name for the film used in lighting instruments to change colour. It can also be used as a verb (i.e. to 'gel' the lights)
Gobo	A thin metal template inserted into a lighting instrument in order to cut a pattern into the light that is projected onstage
Flyhouse	A theatre space with the ability to "fly" set pieces and/or backdrops from a fly gallery located high above the stage using ropes and cables
Maquette	A scale model 3-D representation of the set design
Plot	A scale drawing showing the placement of various elements (i.e. lighting instruments) relative to the stage configuration and theatre
Prompt book	A copy of the script with each actor's blocking, all the technical cues, and details/lists of all technical elements involved in the production
Raked stage	A stage that is higher at the back than at the front
Scrim	A scenic panel made from translucent gauze-like material

Stage Configurations

Arena Stage	A stage configuration where the audience completely surrounds the playing space
Catwalk Stage	A stage configuration where the audience surrounds the playing space on 2 sides – also known as an Alley stage
Proscenium	A stage configuration where the audience watches the action through a rectangular opening that resembles a picture frame (proscenium arch)
Thrust Stage	A stage configuration where the audience surrounds the playing space on 3 sides

Pre Show Lesson Plan 1 Scene Analysis

Expectations:

TH1.01– demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief ” both as performer and as audience;

TH2.01 – demonstrate an understanding of the control of volume, tone, pace, and intention in an expressive speech;

TH3.0 – identify dramatic conflict or tension within a source;

CRV.04 – create and perform dramatic presentations, using knowledge of conventions, performance spaces, and audience perspectives.

CR1.03– demonstrate an understanding of how role is communicated through language, gesture, costume, props, and symbol;

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Materials:

Half Life script excerpt

Warm up:

Introduce a 15 minute body stretch.

Main Activity:

- Divide students into groups of 4.
- Provide each student with an excerpt from John Mighton’s *Half Life*.
- When you distribute the script, instruct half the groups to act as 4 year old children in a daycare centre and tell the other half they are seniors in a home.
- Each group draws up a list of possible ways their character might behave in such a setting.
- Students divide the parts and read through the script together.
- They are to explore the idea of subtext: *it’s not what you say but how you say it. As actors, they should try to reveal the world beneath the words.*
- Students think about who they are and what is happening in this scenario as well as their character objective.

Ask the students to experiment with the text:

- Perform it once with one character angry throughout the script. How does this alter the behaviour of the other characters?
- Perform it with another character sad throughout the script.
- Ask the students to select two places where they will include two dramatic pauses. How does this alter the scene?

Students should rehearse the scene consistently for at least 20 minutes so they are very familiar with the text.

Afterwards, each group presents and watches how each scene will represent a variety of interpretations.

Closure:

Questions for the class to consider after the performances:

- 1) What were notable similarities amongst the day care scenes? The senior home scenes?
- 2) What were some contrasts between each scene? How did different interpretations create different characters and character dynamics?

Half Life scene 3 excerpt:

Tammy: Before we begin, I'd like to introduce everyone to our newest resident. Agnes and Clara, this is Patrick.

Clara: Hello Patrick. It's nice to meet you.

(Patrick stares ahead and doesn't say anything)

Tammy: Patrick only moved in here yesterday. I think he's still getting adjusted.

Clara: Patrick, have you played hangman before?

Patrick: No

Clara: It's a lot of fun.

Tammy: I think Patrick will pick it up as we play. I've heard he's very smart. *(Drawing a scaffold)*. First I draw a scaffold. Then I draw some blanks. *(Tammy draws six blanks for the word "animal")* When it's your turn Patrick you try to guess a letter that's in the word. Clara, maybe you could try to help us start. Would you like to guess a letter?

Clara: A

Tammy: That was a good guess. There are two A's. One here, and one here. Would you like to guess again?

Clara: Z

Tammy: No Clara, there are no Z's. I'll put the Z here so you remember you guessed it.

Patrick: E

Tammy: No Patrick. I'm sorry, there are no E's. So I'll draw a head for Clara's Z and a stick for...

Patrick: I

Tammy: Yes, there's an I. Very...

Patrick: N

Tammy: Patrick you'll have to give someone else a try. I can see we have a very serious player here...Agnes, would you like to play today?

Agnes: *(looking at Patrick)* If I'm allowed to have a turn.

(Pause. Agnes stares at the chalk board).

Agnes: At lunch they gave me peas again.

Tammy: Oh. I'm sorry Agnes.

Agnes: They can't seem to remember I don't like peas.

Pre Show Lesson Plan 2

Creating Memory

Expectations:

THV.02 : demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dramatic expression (e.g., voice, movement, production values);

THV.03: identify and describe various dramatic forms (e.g., ritual, storytelling, mime) and describe the historical origins of these forms.

TH1.01: demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief ” both as performer and as audience;

TH1.02: 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;

TH2.04: describe how the elements of a dramatic setting are affected by the type of drama, the identified theme, and the available performance space;

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Warm-up:

Free Write

- Students find a private space in the drama room with a pen and paper.
- Individually, students do a 10 minute free write about their favourite childhood memory.
- The free write should be sensory in nature as students think of and write down the taste, smell, touch, sight and sound of their memory.
- The free write begins with the phrase “It smelled like...”
- During the 10 minute free write students do not lift the pen off the page and keep writing, allowing for a flow of ideas to come through with no internal editor in the initial stages of writing.

Soundscape:

- Dim the lights and ask the students to close their eyes.
- Walk around the room and tap a student on the shoulder.
- Each time you tap a student on a shoulder they start reading their favourite childhood memory free write.
- When the student hears another voice starting they stop reading their text.
- Continue the soundscape until everyone has read at least part of their free write.

Main Activity:

Collective Staging of the Memory piece

- Divide the students into groups of 4.
- In groups, students read over their memory pieces and look for similarities in each other’s work (also contrasts).
- They decide on a 1-2 minute presentation for their collective memory piece and select which phrases to include, read aloud (individually or as a chorus); they can incorporate movement pieces, mirroring, tableaux etc. to communicate this collective memory piece.
- Student present the work at the end of class.

Closure:

1. Lead a discussion as to whether or not the memories were portrayed exactly as they happened or did they change in the remembering, the collective creating or the performing?

Pre or Post Show Lesson Plan 3 and 4 Script Analysis through Role Play

Expectations:

THV.01: demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of role playing and structuring dramatic works etc.

TH1.01: demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief ” both as performer and as audience;

TH3.02: explain how dramatic forms may effectively communicate more than one perspective;

TH3.05: identify dramatic conflict or tension within a source;

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Warm-up:

Review the elements of role in scene work:

- a. Maintaining focus throughout the scene.
- b. Always share the scene with other characters (sharing makes you look better as an actor).
- c. Maintaining the physicality of your character throughout the scene.
- d. Sustaining the vocal quality of your character throughout the scene.
- e. Demonstrate a sustained ability to take on, and commit to, your characters’ attitudes and beliefs (even though they may not be your own).

Background:

Distribute the following information – in italics – to your students.

Be sure to highlight and have them take note of the Alzheimer’s characteristics.

*When a friend or family member has Alzheimer’s disease, you may feel upset, confused, or scared. Alzheimer’s can be puzzling because a person who has it often **doesn’t look sick**. But when you spend time with people with Alzheimer’s you know that something very serious is wrong. They may **forget things, ask the same questions over and over, or have trouble even finding the right words** for things. Some people with Alzheimer’s may **cry, become angry very easily, or behave in ways that embarrass you**. Sometimes the **person may not remember who you are** even if it is someone like a grandparent who knows you very well.*

People with Alzheimer’s disease are not acting like this to be mean or because they don’t care about you anymore. Changes deep inside their brains are destroying the centres that control remembering, thinking, and feeling. They are losing their ability to make sense out of the world. (source: Alzheimer’s Association)

Main Activity:

Creating a scene

- Divide the students into groups of 5.
- Each group will play out a family scene in which one member has Alzheimer’s.
- Each group plays out a different family and setting (for example: Sunday breakfast, shopping for clothes, family birthday, school graduation, birth of a grandchild, a religious event such as a baptism or bar mitzvah).
- Before beginning the scene, each group should focus on two specific characteristics of Alzheimer’s that their character will adopt.
- The scene should focus on the conflict created by the character suffering from Alzheimer’s (as he/she plays out their characteristics).
- Students rehearse and then perform the piece in front of their peers.

Day 2

Main Activity:

In class role play

- Students gather together sitting in a circle as their previous day's character.
- The teacher facilitates an in class role play discussion about possible treatment options for Alzheimer's patients for a report he/she must present to the Minister of Health.
- In role, students maintain their character and discuss the issues addressed.

Closure:

1. Was anything revealed in the role-play that surprised you after performing your character in the structured scene?
2. What have you learned about sense of self and memory?
3. What have you learned as to how your own sense of identity may be altered in the presence of someone who is experiencing Alzheimer's?

Post Show Lesson Plan 5

Whole Group Role Play based on *Half Life*:

Expectations:

TH1.01– demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief” both as performer and as audience;

TH3.02– explain how dramatic forms may effectively communicate more than one perspective;

CRV.01– use various ways to sustain a role within a drama;

CR1.02– demonstrate an understanding of the element of risk in playing a role (i.e. adapting to challenges to personal and social beliefs)

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Warm-up:

Review with students the important elements of creating a whole group role-play:

- a. Maintaining focus throughout the role-play.
- b. Maintaining the physicality of your character throughout the role-play.
- c. Sustaining the vocal quality of your character throughout the role-play.
- d. Ability to take on, and commit to, your characters’ attitudes and beliefs.

Materials:

Half Life program from Tarragon Theatre

Main activities:

In class role-play

- Distribute two pieces of paper to each student.
- Ask students to write down a question(s) that they have for any member of the *Half Life* production (writer, director, actor, designer).
- Collect questions.
- Divide the class into two groups (group “A” and “B”).
- Take group “A” and distribute one of the following roles on separate pieces of paper to students: actor(s), set designer, costume designer, director, lighting designer, sound designer, playwright etc.
- Ask group “A” students to discuss quietly and prepare for their role as a member of the *Half Life* production team in one part of the Drama room.
- Distribute the already collected questions for members of production to the group “B” students.
- Tell group “B” they are media at a press conference.
- The “media” must ask the “artists” the already drawn up questions (additional questions are encouraged and everyone on the artist panel must answer at least one question).
- After each question has been asked, reverse group “A” and “B” roles and distribute remaining questions.

In this activity students develop role-playing, reflective thinking, focusing and application of knowledge skills. Students discover that through their own creative work, experience in Drama class and viewing the production, they inherently know some of the answers to the artistic choices being asked.

Journal:

What surprised you about your character? What there anything you said which you hadn’t thought of before? List two things and give examples.

What was your favourite part of the role-play? Use specific examples from the exercise.