

# TARRAGON THEATRE

34<sup>th</sup> 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

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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

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- 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 Kareda 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**

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- 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 contest, high school and post-secondary co-op placements; OutReach programs aimed at educators including Teacher Nights and study guides.
- Apprentice programs in arts administration and stage management.

### **Tarragon Special Services**

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- Over 500 scripts professionally read and assessed annually without charge.
- Student and senior matinees; wheelchair accessibility throughout facility.
- 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

**No Great Mischief** by David S. Young with the company  
adapted from the novel by Alistair MacLeod

In association with Mirvish Productions



**Starring: David Fox, Stephen Guy-McGrath,  
Nancy Palk, Geoffrey Pounsett, Jody Richardson,  
Mike Ross, R.H. Thomson  
Directed by Richard Rose  
Set and Costume Design by Charlotte Dean  
Lighting Design by Graeme S. Thomson  
Music Direction and Arrangements by Mike Ross  
Sound Design by Todd Charlton  
Stage Manager: Kathryn Westoll**

***November 9 – December 12, 2004***

### About the **No Great Mischief** 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 **No Great Mischief** study guide was coordinated and compiled by:

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**Avery A. Swartz** (BFA Honours) is a graduate of Ryerson University's Technical Theatre Production program. She spent 4 years as a producer with Festival of Classics in Oakville. She is Tarragon's Publicity and OutReach Associate.

**Mary B. Wood** (BA Honours, B.Ed.) first came to Tarragon in 2000 as a Tarragon Theatre/ OISE intern. She teaches dramatic arts full time and continues to work with Tarragon Theatre as our OutReach Consultant developing lesson plans grounded in Ministry Curriculum.

Special thanks and acknowledgements to Kirk Thomson, Charlotte Dean, Ashlie Corcoran, Craig Morash

The **No Great Mischief** 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. **New Play Development**
6. **Points of Discussion – No Great Mischief**
7. **Elements of Design**
8. **Additional Resources**
9. **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.**

## No Great Mischief

*"All of us are better when we're loved."*

The long history of the Clan MacDonald begins in 1779 as Calum Ruadh (pronounced Roo-ah) leaves Scotland to begin a new life on Cape Breton Island. Haunted by the stories and songs of their ancestry, two brothers seek to reconcile their past with their present. From the writer of *Glenn* and *Inexpressible Island* comes this adaptation from the award-winning novel by Alistair MacLeod.

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### About the Playwright

**David S. Young** is an acclaimed Canadian playwright. Among his plays are *Fire* (written with Paul Ledoux, nominated for a Dora Mavor Moore Award and winner of a Chalmers Award); *Glenn* (nominated for seven Dora Mavor Moore Awards, the Chalmers Award and the Governor General's Award); *Inexpressible Island* (a finalist for the Governor General's award) and *Clout*. David, an active screenwriter, and the author of two novels, was also president of Coach House Press for ten years.

**Alistair MacLeod** is the author of the novel *No Great Mischief*. He was born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan in 1936. He lived on the Prairies until the age of ten when his parents moved back to the family farm on Cape Breton. After obtaining his Teacher's Certificate from the Nova Scotia Teacher's College, Alistair took his B.A. and B.Ed. (1960) from St. Francis Xavier University, his M.A. (1961) from the University of New Brunswick, and his Ph.D. (1968) from the University of Notre Dame. He taught at Indiana University from 1966 until 1969, and then moved to the University of Windsor, where he was Professor of English and Creative Writing until his retirement. He was also the director of Short Fiction at the Banff Centre for Fine Arts. His previous collections of short stories - *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* and *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun* - have established themselves as Canadian classics. In 2000 he published *Island: The Collected Stories*. Although Dr. MacLeod was not involved in the writing of the play, he has seen it in its early stages and made many helpful suggestions, especially regarding the music in the play.

*No Great Mischief* has won numerous distinguished awards including the Trillium Award in 1999; the Association Libris Award for Book of the Year and Author of the Year, the Thomas Head Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award, the Dartmouth Book & Writing Award for Fiction and the Atlantic Provinces Booksellers Choice Award in 2000; the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2001 and the Lannan Literary Award in 2003.

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### About the Play

The narrator, Alexander MacDonald, begins the play by driving to Toronto to visit his elder brother Calum. Alexander, a dentist and a decidedly 20<sup>th</sup> Century man, sits with his brother in a squalid Kensington Market rooming house and listens as he rides through a storm of memories – their horse Christie, their days as hard rock miners at Elliot Lake, the sound of the ocean nudging the shores of Cape Breton Island, the loss of their parents.

The act of remembering is what begins the play and is at the heart of *No Great Mischief*. When the phrase “Do you remember...” is evoked, another piece of the story of the Clan MacDonald is told. Through the sometimes-unwilling memory of Alexander MacDonald we learn the long history not only of the MacDonalds but also of the history of Cape Breton Island.

**Alexander:** *Sometimes it's hard to choose or not to choose those things which bother us at the most inappropriate of times. Voices from the past arrive unbidden, singers from a Cape Breton kitchen, the echoing shouts of workmen in a mine under Elliot Lake, family voices mingling in the hyperbole of oft-told tales that are neither true nor accurate. The legacy of my people handed down across the centuries, family histories elevated to myth. I do not choose to hear any of this private music. It is simply there from what, even in my relatively short life, seems like a very long time ago.*

In an interview about the novel, Alistair MacLeod described Alexander's journey this way: “I think this idea of understanding where you came from is a central one within the novel... [Alexander] starts out trying to understand where he came from physically himself. Then he goes backward or forward, backward or forward trying to understand where we all came from. And it becomes very murky, as all of these explorations do.”

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## Elements of the Play

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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.

*No Great Mischief* is a one-act play told through the memory of Alexander MacDonald. Its structure is that of a story being remembered – Alexander speaks to the audience and tells us the story of his life and as memories come back to him they are enacted for the audience. Because the story is told through Alexander's memory, the play shifts back and forth through time with characters appearing and disappearing, like they do in our memory. “Not a ghost and not a dream” is an oft-repeated phrase from Alexander when family members long dead suddenly appear in the present. While shopping at the liquor store, Alexander is suddenly visited by Grandpa who “dropped dead at eighty when he jumped in the air trying to click his heels together twice.” This leads to a memory of his childhood in Cape Breton, back to the days when Alexander was called *gille beag ruadh* (Gaelic for “little red boy”) and he and his brothers would play in the wind.

Music also provides structure for the play. Not only are many songs sung and played throughout the play (including “Dispersion of Highlanders”, “Neil Gow’s Lament”, “Atholl Highlanders” and “Mist Covered Mountains”) but music and song becomes integral to how the story is told. The play itself becomes a kind of ‘theatrical ballad’, taken from the literary form the folk ballad.

**Definition: Folk Ballad**

- The anonymous folk ballad (or popular ballad) was composed to be sung. It was passed along orally from singer to singer, from generation to generation, and from one region to another.
- Primarily based on an older legend or romance, this type of ballad is usually a short, simple song that tells a dramatic story through dialogue and action. It uses simple language, an economy of words, dramatic contrasts, epithets, set phrases, and frequently a stock refrain.
- More than 300 English and Scottish folk ballads, dating from the 12th to the 16th century exist. Although the subject matter varies considerably, five major classes of the ballad can be distinguished—the historical, the romantic, the supernatural, the nautical, and the deeds of folk heroes, such as the Robin Hood cycle.
- During the mid-20th century in the United States there was a great resurgence of interest in folk music, particularly in ballads. Singers such as Joan Baez and Pete Seeger included ballads in their concert repertoires; composer-performers such as Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan wrote their own ballads.

**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 s/he 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*).

In terms of *No Great Mischief* there are both comic and tragic elements in the play. If comedy is seen as the search for love and a triumph of love at the end of the play, then *No Great Mischief* can be classified as a comedy (the play ends with the words, “All of us are better when we’re loved.”). But if tragedy is seen as the forces of fate acting on a

character and the disastrous downfall of a central character, then seeing the history of the MacDonald family and its effects on Calum especially, the play can also be called a tragedy. Alexander calls his brother a “self reliant man overwhelmed by the shadow and storm of his own destiny.”

If a play displays elements of both tragedy and comedy, the play can be defined as a tragicomedy.

## Language

The use of language in the play is significant for historical reasons. Throughout the play, many characters, especially Calum MacDonald, use Gaelic.

### **Definition: Gaelic**

A name sometimes given to that dialect of the Celtic which is spoken in the Highlands of Scotland - called Gaelic by the Highlanders.

Gaelic was the language spoken by the Highlanders who first came to Cape Breton and this became the place where the Highland culture was maintained after it was nearly destroyed in Scotland (see **Highland Clearances** section of the timeline in the **Themes** section). Use of the Gaelic language is important for many of the older characters in the play. At one point, Grandfather tells Alexander as a young boy, “Gaelic was the language spoken in the Garden of Eden”.

When Gaelic is spoken in the play, generally it is made quite clear to the audience what is being said. But here is a list of the phrases used in the play and their translations:

‘ille bhig ruaidh (short for gille bhig ruaidh-pronounced gill-eea beck roo-ah) - little red boy

Fois do t’anam (Foish toe anam) – Peace to his soul

Poor cu – Poor dog

Pog Ma’thon – Kiss my arse

Rach air ais! – Go back!

Beannachd leibh – Good bye/Blessings upon you

Cu gorach! – Foolish dog!

De chuala – What did you hear?

Cha chuala sion – I didn’t hear anything.

Sin agad e – That’s it.

M’eudail bheag – My little treasure

Bheag gorach – Foolish boy.

Creid mi tha a cailte – I think he’s lost.

### **Sing along with No Great Mischief!**

The actors sing old songs in Gaelic, including “Lament for Cape Breton”, or “Cumha Ceap Breatuinn”. Here are the words in Gaelic and in English:

Chi mi bhuam, fada bhuam

I see far, far away

Chi mi bhuam, ri muir lain

I see far o'er the tide

Chi mi Ceap Breatuinn mo luaidh

I see Cape Breton my love

Fada bhuam thar an t-sail

Far away o'er the sea

Alistair MacLeod (author of the novel) speaking about language and culture: "I think for the Gaelic-speaking people, English was the language of progress...in order to get a job, you have to learn the majority language [English], especially if you go work for other people."

He relates the idea of losing one's language to issues relevant today in Canada: "I think this is the tension in Quebec. How can we preserve our language and our culture and our beliefs and so on while still being part of the year 2000...how can you retain the language while living in a dominant culture which does not use your language?"

## Characters

Many of the actors in the production play more than one character. Only the actor playing Alexander MacDonald plays one person throughout the play. Every other actor plays at least 2 characters (some play 4 or 5 characters). One actor even plays a dog and another plays a horse. Alexander does play himself at various ages, beginning as a very young boy up to his mid 50s. Calum MacDonald, his brother, also plays Calum Ruadh, the first member of their family to come to Cape Breton Island in 1834. Again, because this play takes place almost entirely in Alexander's mind, people are able to 'transform' from one person to another. The actors also play most of the music in the play.

Here's a list of all of the actors and all of the characters they play:

David Fox	Calum MacDonald, Calum Ruadh
Stephen Guy-McGrath	Brother #2, Wino, Landlord, Man #1, Kid #2, Cousin Alexander #2, Mourner, Picard Crew #1, Fiddler
Nancy Palk	Grandma, Christie the Horse
Geoffery Pounsett	Grandfather, Wino, Fern Picard, Brother
Jody Richardson	Grandpa, California Cousin, Brother, Man #2
Mike Ross	Alexander's Father, Brother #1, Policeman, Kid #1, Mourner, Dog, Picard Crew #2
R.H. Thomson	Alexander MacDonald

## Theme – Family and History

**Alexander:** *...family voices mingling in the hyperbole of oft-told tales that are neither true nor accurate. The legacy of my people handed down across the centuries, the family history elevated to myth.*

**Calum:** *'Always look after your own blood', Grandma used to say.*

It is impossible to separate these two themes because throughout the play, family and history are always closely linked. The notion of blood and history runs throughout the play – the idea that we carry the history of our family in our genes. Even history before we were born, history that we may not even be conscious of is embedded within our DNA.

Here are some important dates and events in the history of this family (these dates are also included in the program). The results of these events and battles are still felt by the family today. The battle on the Plains of Abraham, for example, can be seen as being re-enacted in the fight at the mines between the French Fern Picard and the Scottish clan MacDonald.

### **1314 – Battle of Bannockburn**

- A significant battle in the history of Scotland; Robert the Bruce had finally gained the Kingship of Scotland and his rise to power led Edward II, the new king of England, to lead a massive invasion force into Scotland.
- The two armies met at the Battle of Bannockburn where 5,000 members of the clan Donald joined the battle. Robert the Bruce sent them into battle with the words, “***My hope is constant in thee***”, which is now the family motto for the clan MacDonald of Clanranald (and an oft-repeated phrase in the play).
- The Scots were victorious which left Bruce in total military control of Scotland and England forced to recognize their demands.

### **1689 – Battle of Killiecrankie**

- A battle between Highland clans (including the clan Donald) who supported the Kingship of the Catholic James II and English troops (though mostly lowland Scots) who supported the Protestant William of Orange.
- The Scots were victorious but it had little overall effect on the outcome of the war.

### **1692 – Massacre of Glencoe**

- After William of Orange was secured as King, many Highland clans still swore allegiance to the deposed King James II.
- In 1691, the Government issued a proclamation offering to pardon all who had fought against King William, provided they swore an oath of allegiance before January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1692.
- Maclan of Glencoe, the chief of the MacDonald clan, arrived at Fort William on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December to give his allegiance. He was told it had to be given at Invernay and in winter conditions he traveled and arrived January 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Magistrate was away and arrived back on January 5<sup>th</sup> and reluctantly accepted his oath.
- The Privy Council never received their oath and orders were given to get rid of this “troublesome” clan and set an example to other disloyal clans.
- As the clan slept, government troops arrived and 38 members of the clan Donald were killed either in their beds or trying to escape.

### **1746 – Battle of Culloden**

- The last full scale battle to take place on British soil and the last stand of the Highland clan system, the Battle of Culloden marked the end of an era for Scotland.
- It was the last attempt of the Jacobites (earlier supporters of James II) to reinstate a Stuart monarch to the throne led by Charles Edward Stuart, also known as Bonnie Prince Charlie.
- At the Battle of Culloden, the Highlanders were defeated and many were hunted down and killed by the government troops.
- Legislation was introduced following the battle banning tartans, kilts and pipes – laws designed to destroy the traditional clan system.

### 1759 – Plains of Abraham

- The British, under the command of Major General James Wolfe, advanced into the St. Lawrence River and on September 13th attacked the French.
- Wolfe's troops scaled the cliffs below the Plains of Abraham and attacked. Wolfe had sent French-speaking soldiers to reply to sentries on the shore before attacking, making the French believe that the incoming crafts were a convoy of supply boats. In the play, Calum tells the story that it was a French-speaking MacDonald who first went up the cliff.
- For General Wolfe, having Highland soldiers fighting with him against the French was like having a secret enemy within his own army since these same Highlanders had fought against him at the Battle of Culloden.
- In a letter to his friend Captain Rickson he wrote of the Highlanders, "***They are hardy, intrepid, accustomed to a rough country, and no great mischief if they fall.***" The French were defeated and as the Scots did at Culloden, the French lost their land to the English.

### 1770s – The Highland Clearances

- Following the Battle of Culloden, the destruction of the Highland clan system continued with English landlords, in partnership with ex-clan chiefs, 'encouraging' and often forcing the population to move off of their land which was then given over to more profitable sheep farming. The people were moved to small farms in coastal areas where farming or fishing could not sustain the communities, or they were directly put on emigration ships.
- Many emigrated to North America and particularly Cape Breton Island where, between 1775 and 1860 almost 25,000 immigrants arrived.
- In 1779, Calum Ruadh immigrates to Cape Breton from Moidart with Catriona and his twelve children.

1820 – Cape Breton re-annexed to Nova Scotia

1834 – Calum Ruadh dies at the age of 110

1867 – Confederation of Canada

1877 – Serious Grandfather is born

1961 – start of US involvement in Vietnam War

1965 – Alexander MacDonald, the narrator of the play, leaves Cape Breton Island

## New Play Development

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Tarragon Theatre is devoted to producing and developing new plays by Canadian writers. The process of bringing a play from its first draft to a full production is a long one and each play goes through its own unique process. Some common phrases or elements of this process include:

### **Dramaturg:**

- A person who works with the playwright and discusses the play with them from its earliest stages. Many have compared the job of a dramaturg to that of an editor working on a novel.
- The dramaturg discusses elements like the structure, characters, language, genre and style of the play and asks questions about the play's meanings and the playwright's intentions.
- In general, the dramaturg helps the playwright clarify his/her intentions with the play by asking questions like, "When I read the play, this is what I thought it was about. Is that what you intended?" or "I wasn't clear why this character was angry in this scene – can you explain it to me?"
- Often the director of the play acts as a dramaturg as well.

### **Workshop:**

- A stage in the development process before the play is produced where a group of actors is brought in to read the script out loud for the playwright, dramaturg and director.
- Normally the play is read out loud once and the actors ask questions about their characters or about scenes that are unclear to them. A break is then taken and the playwright discusses these questions with the director and dramaturg.
- If the workshop is over several days, the playwright may write new drafts of the play, incorporating the concerns and questions expressed in the workshop.
- Sometimes at the end of a workshop process, there is a public reading, where the public is invited in to hear the play and sometimes they are asked for feedback as well.
- Depending on the kind of workshop, the public reading may be actors standing at music stands reading the script, or the actors may be moving with scripts in hand.

The development of *No Great Mischief* began with the novel. Long time collaborators Richard Rose (director) and David S. Young (playwright) worked together to create a first draft of the play (Richard Rose is a frequent collaborator with David Young and acted as an early dramaturg of the play). The play then went through the Tarragon's WorkSpace process – a unique program here at Tarragon of an extended workshop (this one lasting 5 weeks). Throughout the process there were several public presentations where audience feedback was gathered. Designers were also involved in the process. For both the theatre and the playwright, the WorkSpace is a unique opportunity to create almost an early 'mini production' of the play.

Because of the strong participation of the cast in this WorkSpace, the company of actors who have been involved with this play since early on are also considered 'writers' of this play (the play is credited as having been written "with the company"). The actors not only acted in the WorkSpace presentations but also sang and played instruments. Many also did research on Scottish history, Cape Breton Island and Gaelic. They also brought their considerable musical talents into the rehearsal and helped bring this story to life.

## Points of Discussion – No Great Mischief

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The following are questions you can use to begin discussion with your students. The questions relate to both the play and the production.

### **About the Play**

A common trait of modern novels and plays is to have an “unreliable narrator” at the centre of a story – a person who tells the audience a story but we cannot be certain whether they are telling us the truth or not because one person’s memory is often unreliable. Discuss in relation to Alexander MacDonald.

Do you think the play is a tragedy or a comedy? Is it both? Can a play be both tragedy and comedy?

Why would a playwright use another language in a play, especially one many people in the audience may not understand? What do you think the experience would be like if you went to see a play where you didn’t understand any of the language?

Do you see any connections between the characters one actor is playing? ie. Are there any similarities between Grandfather and Fern Picard? Or Grandpa and California Cousin?

If you have read the novel: Why do you think the character Catriona (Alexander’s twin sister) has been cut? What are some other major differences between the novel and the play? How is telling a story on stage different than telling a story in a novel? What has been added to the story by staging it? What has been lost?

### **About the Production**

What is the effect on you as an audience member when a character looks out at the audience and speaks to you directly? Does it change how you experience the play?

If you were directing this play, would you choose to put an intermission in? Why or why not?

If you were directing this play, would you have a separate actor playing each role? Why or why not?

How did each design element (lighting, set, costumes, sound) help the audience to understand the story?

## Elements of Design

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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

Because *No Great Mischief* is a memory play, the overall design of the play reflects Alexander MacDonald's mind. Changes in thought happen very quickly and the design of the set, costumes, lighting and sound all work together to help the audience understand the quick transformations from the past to the present and from one scene or location to another.

The designers were inspired by the paintings of Newfoundland painter David Blackwood. From the Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador website:

“David Blackwood was born in Wesleyville, Newfoundland, in 1941. He grew up in an outport where education was highly valued and storytelling was an art form. Listening to stories about the seal hunt and the lives of his neighbours influenced the kind of art Blackwood would produce later in life.”

For more information about Blackwood and to see some of his paintings, go to the website of the Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador at <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/arts/agnl/blackwood.html>

## 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:

- the socio-economic level of the characters
- 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.)

It will be interesting to take notice of the following:

- Where on the stage certain scenes take place
- 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, designed by Charlotte Dean, is a simple painted set with six chairs. The open space and minimal furniture allows the actors and the audience's imagination to transform the space into many different places. Watch for:

- The chairs become a boat, backpacks, beds, a car and a coffin.
- Some of the locations represented include a schoolyard, the ocean, a rooming house and a mine.
- Fog or mist is also present in many of the scenes, representing the haze or fog of memory and to represent the fog on the Scottish highlands.

## Sound design / Musical Direction

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”. S/he 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.

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?

Sound and music play an important part in *No Great Mischief*. Live music is played and sung throughout the production and the musical direction, arrangements and composition are by Mike Ross, who is also an actor in the play. Mike is an accomplished musician from the East Coast and brought his own knowledge of the songs and traditions of that place to the creation of the music. Other actors also sing and play instruments including Jody Richardson (plays guitar and sings), Stephen Guy-McGrath (plays fiddle throughout and sings), Geoffrey Pounsett (plays mandolin and sings) and Nancy Palk (sings).

The scene at the mines where the French and Scottish miners fight one another begins as a musical battle, each side playing songs from their culture including “The Times, They are A-Changin’” by Bob Dylan and “Mon Pays”, (“My Country” in English) which was composed by Gilles Vigneault in 1964. The lyrics of the French song talk about winds, cold, snow, and ice, of the solitude of wide open spaces and of the ideal of brotherhood. It soon became a kind of anthem for the Québécois, with many people seeing it as expressing the free spirit of the province, although Vigneault has denied that this was his intention.

Voices and song are used to create musical effects as well – they ‘sing’ the sound of bagpipes for example. The fiddle is also used to make a sound effect of ice breaking.

In addition to music, sound effects, designed by Todd Charlton, also add to the soundscape of the play. The play begins with the sound of the ocean lapping the shore and other sound effects include drilling in the mines, a multitude of telephones ringing, thunder and rain, and echo effects on Nancy Palk’s singing.

## 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.

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

In *No Great Mischief* lighting is another key element in separating the world of memory from the present day and in establishing location and focus for every scene. Different kinds of lights are used throughout the production including lights which shine up the wall at the back, small lights which shine through the back wall to create a 'starry night' effect, lights on the mining hats and lanterns which come to represent the lives of Alexander's family on the ice. Light is also an important element throughout the story. The line, "It was the only light in the world." is repeated several times in the story.

Lighting also creates spaces, like the separate doors in Calum's rooming house and is used to distinguish one location from another when there are several on stage at the same time ie. when Alexander drives back from his graduation, he and his Grandparents sit in the car while his Cousin Alexander is underground in the mine and Calum sits in his rooming house. All of these locations are distinguished clearly through lighting.

Lighting also helps distinguish those scenes which are "real" and those which are "dreams" or memories.

## 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

In *No Great Mischief*, many of the actors play multiple characters, and must quickly switch between them, usually without leaving the stage. This makes it impossible for the actors to have a complete costume change for each character. Therefore, each actor wears a costume that can be adapted for each character they play. For example, Geoffrey Pounsett wears a carpenter's apron, a sweater and glasses when he's playing Grandfather. These costume accessories are gone when he plays Fern Picard.

All of the characters except for Alexander MacDonald are dressed in simple workclothes. Alexander wears a suit jacket and shirt, which separates him from the others. It indicates that Alexander is from a different class of society, and he is from a different time (he is in present day, and the other characters are seen through his memory of the past).

The only actor who undergoes a complete costume change offstage is Jody Richardson, who changes from Grandpa to California Cousin.

## Additional Resources

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### Glossary of Useful Technical Terms

<b>Acoustics</b>	The sound transmission characteristics of a room, space or material
<b>Cue</b>	A directive for action (i.e. a change in the lighting, sound, or an actor's entrance)
<b>Cyclorama</b>	A large piece of scenic material used to surround the stage on to which colour can be projected
<b>Gel</b>	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)
<b>Gobo</b>	A thin metal template inserted into a lighting instrument in order to cut a pattern into the light that is projected onstage
<b>Flyhouse</b>	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
<b>Maquette</b>	A scale model 3-D representation of the set design
<b>Plot</b>	A scale drawing showing the placement of various elements (i.e. lighting instruments) relative to the stage configuration and theatre
<b>Prompt book</b>	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
<b>Raked stage</b>	A stage that is higher at the back than at the front
<b>Scrim</b>	A scenic panel made from translucent gauze-like material

### Stage Configurations

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

## Pre Show Lesson Plan 1 Family History Elevated to Myth

### Expectations:

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

ANV.02: use the vocabulary of dramatic arts to discuss, critique, and review drama presentations in the school and the community;

CRV.02: create and present an original or adapted dramatic work;

CR1.04: apply appropriate voice and movement techniques in rehearsal and performance;

### Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Warm up:

***I Am From*** (based on a 2003 CODE workshop instructed by Kathy Lundy)

In order to stimulate student thinking about *who they are* and *where they come from*, this exercise leads students through the creation of a poem titled "I Am From". The teacher gives prompts for each line beginning with "I Am From..."

**Teacher:** I am from – *list your favourite foods –*  
I am from - *describe all the sights and sounds you go by on your way to school*  
I am from – *your favourite relative and explain why*  
I am from – *a family saying*  
I am from – *a keepsake that you will never ever throw away*  
I am from – *the place where you feel the safest*  
I am from – *a special family holiday*  
I am from – *somewhere you would like to return to one day when you have the money and the time*  
I am from – *something that happens to you everyday in spite of trying to change*  
I am from – *your first memory*

A student poem may look like this:

I am from...maple syrup drizzled crepes stuffed with whipped cream & chocolate sauce  
rattling College Street cars, crowds of people wrapped in winter coats  
cradling steaming coffees in tall styrofoam cups, the leafy trees of Palmerston Avenue  
my Aunt Myriam who always, always manages to trick me on April fool's  
"Well if Bob ain't your uncle then Fanny's your aunt"  
Beary, the bear from Eaton's I received at age three  
underneath my duvet on a Sunday night watching a cheesy movie of the week  
my grandparent's farm in southwestern France, a rolling vineyard and the cool empty stone house they no longer live in  
always forgetting to turn off the bathroom light  
waking from a nap to the warm kiss of my mother

- Students use this poem as an initial probe to look deeper inside themselves and their family for a sense of story and history. Students can keep this poem in their portfolio and at a later date extension exercises can grow out of these poems.

### **Main Activity:**

#### **Turning family stories into myths**

In *No Great Mischief* Alexander says that he carries:

*“...The legacy of my people handed down across the centuries, the family history elevated to myth.”*

Over the course of the play, the audience learns about the mythic history of the MacDonald family which is simultaneously heightened by the telling of the family story in a theatrical space, with an audience to witness it.

We too carry family histories and stories and when we share them they often transform into incredible classic feats of triumph and/or tragedy.

- Divide the students into groups of 5 or 6.
- Each student needs to recall a family story that is often told and retold at family gatherings or special occasions (this story would preferably have occurred before the student’s birth).
- The story could be about a grandfather fighting in a war, the story of the family’s immigration to Canada or even a famous family wedding.
- The idea is that each story has strong characters that now, with the passing of time, become larger than life.
- Each student will share their family story within their group.
- Each group will pick one story that they will interpret (perform) and create into a scene (beginning and closing in a tableau).
- The groups need to remember to include a clear beginning, middle and an end and that even within a seemingly ordinary story (a grandmother’s first day of school) the events should now appear as extraordinary.
- Groups should feel comfortable including language or expressions that many not necessarily be in English.
- Students can reinterpret certain aspects to create a “creative non-fiction”.
- Each group presents the dramatized story in front of the class.

### **Closure:**

Questions for the class to consider after the performances:

- 1) Did you recognize any “stock” characters or familiar characters from your own family in watching the play?
- 2) Were there universal themes which connected family stories to one another within the class?
- 3) Why do you think, as families, we are compelled to tell and retell our stories?
- 4) Do your family stories inform who you are today? Why or why not?

### **Journal:**

- 1) Ask a parent or other relative to tell you their favourite family story. Write a dramatized version of the story as a short scene.

## Pre Show Lesson Plan 2 Adapting for the Stage

### Expectations:

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

TH3.04: describe the social and historical contexts of the plays studied.

CRV.03: create drama through research or the interpretation of a source;

### Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Warm-up:

#### Follow the leader

- Students walk around the drama room in neutral position.
- Ask students to become aware of their walk, where their centre of gravity is, which body part is “leading” them.
- Tell the students that at anytime someone in the group may become a “leader” and start to change their walk (to skipping, a slow walk, a backwards walk etc.).
- As the collective group feels a leader initiating a new walk, each member of the group should take on the new walk.
- These walks eventually go through multiple leaders but each walk should have time to find it’s rhythm before someone new becomes a leader and changes it.
- This ensemble exercise helps the class come together as a group and focus on a common task.

### Materials:

*No Great Mischief* by Alistair MacLeod, McClelland & Stewart, 1999

### Main Activity:

#### Adapting for the Stage

*No Great Mischief* at Tarragon Theatre is David S. Young’s interpretation of Alistair MacLeod’s novel. David S. Young read the book and went through a lengthy process working with various actors and artists to create the Tarragon production.

However, the Tarragon show is representative of David S. Young’s interpretation as playwright. Now – as budding playwrights – you will have the opportunity to compare and contrast your interpretation with Mr. Young’s.

- Divide the students into four groups.
- Give each group an excerpt of *No Great Mischief* (two groups receive “Alexander’s first day of school”, pages 18-19 and two other groups interpret “the night when Alexander’s parents died”, pages 44-49).

Remind students of the following:

- one actor can play multiple characters
- do not use a narrator (however a character can use direct address with the audience)
- try to “show” as much as possible and keep “telling” to a minimum
- the scene should have a beginning, middle and an end

After students write out a script and rehearse their scene (this could take half a class or a couple of days depending on how in depth you would like the exercise to be) each group performs in front of the class.

**Closure:**

1. Lead a discussion comparing and contrasting each group's interpretation of the text into dramatic form.
2. Another layer of the discussion will be added once the students watch **No Great Mischief** and can compare and contrast their interpretation with David S. Young's (thus reinforcing the notion of theatre as an interpretive and collaborative art form).

**Journal:**

1. What did you learn about adaptation from today's exercise? Be specific. Give examples.

## Pre Show Lesson Plan 3 Scene Performance

### 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;

ANV.02: evaluate dramatic performances presented in the school and the community;

### Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Warm-up:

Lead the students in a physical body stretch.

### Materials:

Scene excerpt attached herewith.

### Main Activity:

#### Scene Performance

- Divide the students into groups of two.
- In their pairs, the students decide who is A and who is B.
- The students then decide who in the pair is the Grandma and who is Alexander
- Students read the scene each time with a different emotional emphasis:
  - a. A = apprehensive  
B= frustrated
  - b. A = shy  
B= angry etc.
- Students experiment with different emotions and remember to be open in order to honestly respond to a partner’s line.
- Students then decide what their character’s objective is, what they want from the scene.
- Based on the character objectives students then plan out a blocking sequence to symbolize the interaction and relationship between character A and B.
- Students can perform the scene in front of the peers and analyze the similarities and differences.

### Journal

1. Which emotion did you “play” that felt most honest in the scene? Why or why not?

### Extension possibilities:

1. Be sure to ask students to remember this scene in order to see how director Richard Rose and actors R.H. Thomson and Nancy Palk interpreted the same scene.

### Scene Excerpt from *No Great Mischief*

- A:** Hello, grandma, how are we doing?
- B:** We? We're doing just fine. Do you work here? There's so many new people in and out calling me grandma, it's hard to keep track of the faces.
- A:** Are they treating you well?
- B:** I'm just visiting (pause). Are you from around here?
- A:** Yes, not originally but now, yes.
- B:** You have lovely clothes. You must have a good job.
- A:** I'm a dentist.
- B:** One of my sons has a good job. He's the lighthouse keeper out there on the island. You can see it from the window.
- A:** We're in Windsor, Ontario, grandma.
- B:** My grandson lives there. He married a lovely girl. They had six beautiful children.
- A:** Three. One of them is named after you.
- Pause.
- B:** (*glimmering*) Oh.
- Alexander holds her hands.*
- B:** Do your children make their beds now?
- A:** They still remember everything you taught them.

## Post-Show Lesson Plan 1

### Whole Group Role Play based on *No Great Mischief*

#### 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;

TH3.02– 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); **Ontario Dramatic Arts curriculum**

#### 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:

**No Great Mischief** 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 **No Great Mischief** production (writer, director, actors, 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 **No Great Mischief** production team in one part of the Drama room.
- Distribute the already collected questions for members of production to the Group “B” students.
- Group “B” are told that they are media at a press conference.
- The “media” must ask the “artists” their already drawn up questions (additional questions are encouraged and everyone on the artist panel must answer as 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? List two things and give examples.

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