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## Theatre of the Oppressed in Rural Education: An Applied Theatre Activity Teaching Social Empathy in Isolated, Homogenous Communities

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### Abstract:

I knew that mere comprehension of facts and figures was not going to solve the problem of urban and rural divide, and that it was more of a socio-emotional challenge, but I imagined the ideal solution to combine empathy and knowledge to elucidate greater understandings. The solution I sought was social empathy. Theater is critical aspect in achieving this goal because, like many art forms, it has an ability to create imagined worlds and to access human emotions. For isolated rural students, theater can provide a space to imagine and to stage life outside of their community. In order to know how to best cultivate social empathy through theater, I had the following research questions: In what ways have educators attempted to provide an education that embraces tolerance, diversity, and empathy to students from isolated and homogenous communities? How have rural communities historically treated difference, approached belonging, and crafted a rural identity? How can educators affirm rural identity in a way that builds social empathy rather than divisiveness? In what ways has Applied Theatre been used to promote social justice and build empathic skills? Before I began writing the play, I researched these questions to make sure my approach was sociologically sound, informed by research, and well-intentioned.

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Yale University

Theatre of the Oppressed in Rural Education:

An Applied Theatre Activity Teaching Social Empathy in Isolated, Homogenous Communities

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A Senior Capstone Project in Education Studies

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## Theatre of the Oppressed in Rural Education:

### An Applied Theatre Activity Teaching Social Empathy in Isolated, Homogenous Communities

#### **Introduction**

Aroostook County, colloquially known as “The County,” is the largest American county east of the Rocky Mountains. But with only eleven people per square mile, this statistic is based solely on land area. The result of this vast expanse of land and its sparse population was realized during my own upbringing in a small town at the northernmost tip of the state of Maine. An eight-hour drive from Boston, Fort Kent was far removed from any large city and extremely isolated from the rest of the world. What’s more, Maine is the whitest state in the nation, and “The County” is one of the whitest counties within the state; everyone I grew up around looked just like me. Plus, we all mostly descended from the Acadians or the Quebecois, so even the variety of last names was minimal. I seldom understood the effect that this upbringing would have on me, but slowly I began to see just how sheltered I really was. Take, for instance, the moment in high school when I learned that Roman Catholicism was *not* the dominant religion in the United States. Everyone was Catholic in my bubble, so I figured the majority of people elsewhere must be as well. The true epiphany, however, occurred when I arrived as an undergraduate student at Yale University. I realized just how little I understood about the variety of experiences and people in this country. While I struggled to connect with others who had lived totally different lives from myself, many of my peers also struggled to comprehend and connect with my upbringing and experiences in rural America.

The rural-urban divide I personally experienced as a student at Yale was nationally codified by the 2016 presidential election, when it became clear that our nation is a sea of small

conservative rural communities with pockets of liberal metropolitan cities and suburbs.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of the election, the political psyche of the east- and west-coast liberals was fixated on the idea that Trump's America is rural America. Stereotypes of rural America were pervasive among this demographic, usually leaning into the idea of poor white trash: rural people are bigoted, lazy, and unintelligent by conventional standards.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, these white rural people, supporters of the so-called Trump's America, often viewed these coastal elites as corrupt aristocrats who were out of touch and damaging the heart of America.<sup>3</sup> The election proved that rural voters harbor resentment for the liberal urban elite, a phenomenon existing long beforehand as described in Katherine Cramer's 2016 book *The Politics of Resentment*. However, the stereotypes and animosities that erupted around the 2016 election are ubiquitous across the rural-urban divide, and polls now show that both rural and urban individuals feel equally looked down upon by one another.<sup>4</sup> This is having drastic civic consequences, as these two Americas cannot figure out how to work with one another and recognize the moments when their political interests are interwoven.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not this country is more divided now than ever before, the 2016 election reinforced the deep divisions between the rural and urban in the American electorate.

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<sup>1</sup> For more discussion on the state of politics after the 2016 presidential election, see Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* (2018), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Marshall, "The White Trash Theory of Donald Trump" (2016) for more on stereotypes about Trump voters and the concept of white trash. The concept of "white trash" is not new and has existed for hundreds of years. For a more in-depth discussion of the topic and of stereotypes of poor, rural, white people, see Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (2016).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on rural stereotypes of Washington, D.C. and urbanites, see Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* (2018), 9.

<sup>4</sup> See Badger, "Rural and Urban Americans, Equally Convinced the Rest of the Country Dislikes Them" (2018) for more information on these pools.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the rural-urban divide has become a mechanism for obscuring common interests in educational justice, as described in Tieken, "The Spatialization of Racial Inequity and Educational Opportunity: Rethinking the Rural/Urban Divide" (2017).

During my four years at Yale, I often reflected on what could have helped diminish this rural-urban divide both for me personally and for our nation at large. I have sometimes wondered if the rural-urban divide is rooted in a lack of information and if the missing puzzle piece to understanding one another is just a fact-based education. However, as a child growing up in an isolated and homogenous rural community, I was often exposed to images outside my rural community. I watched television, listened to the radio, and read plenty of books, often about cities and urban life. Yet, I was still unprepared to understand these different experiences and perspectives upon entering college. Likewise, my urban friends likely watched, read, and absorbed, though far less frequently, various forms of media about rural life, such as memoirs, documentaries, and sitcoms—and they still struggled to understand my experience.

Comprehension across the rural-urban divide is certainly viable, but, if the 2016 election is any indicator, it does not seem to eradicate stereotyping and scapegoating. Despite the accessibility of knowledge, our nation is still grappling with large misinterpretations on both sides of the geographic spectrum, rippling into the political, economic, and cultural bedrock of America. Thus, I argue that the issue is not one of comprehension but of empathic reasoning. Though I had knowledge of urban America, I had little experience empathizing with my urban peers and stretching the psychological muscles that would allow me to understand their unique experiences.

This conflict may be one that plagues the nation writ large, but it has particularly damaging consequences in America's rural communities. In the 2004 book *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, historian Thomas Frank documents the ways in which hatred for the coastal elite causes rural Kansans to vote against their economic

interests.<sup>6</sup> Rural people are vulnerable to manipulation by conservative politicians who enlist rhetoric of the “culture wars” and of social issues to win votes, but seldom do these politicians actually help rural communities.<sup>7</sup> New studies have also found that cities are crucial to the success of rural economies; rural resentment for the urban elite can hinder rural revitalization, a venture which entails ensuring that rural communities are equipped to interact with urban economies around the globe.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the distaste for urbanities in rural communities puts certain restraints on local culture: rural citizens are relegated to stay in their community with limited opportunities, and anyone who is different or dissents from local culture must move to a city and contribute to the rural phenomenon known as “brain drain.”<sup>9</sup> If these individuals who leave their rural communities for cities—individuals like myself—are not properly prepared for this transition and for living in a diverse world, they may very likely fulfill rural stereotypes and perpetuate the divide. Since urban individuals seldom venture into rural communities but are likely to interact with rural folks who have left, it is all the more important to focus on educating and preparing rural individuals if we want to heal this divide. Ultimately, America’s divide between rural and urban affects both sides, and everyone should be suited with the empathic skills necessary to live in our complex world. Yet, the stakes are higher in rural communities, where resentment for the urban elite impacts their economic outcomes, educational attainment, and overall culture.

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<sup>6</sup> For information about Frank’s argument and inquiry, see Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (2004), 1-12.

<sup>7</sup> More information about this tactic can be found in Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (2004), specifically pp. 237-264.

<sup>8</sup> For more information about these studies and arguments about why rural America needs cities, see Arnosti and Liu, “Why Rural America Needs Cities” (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Brain Drain can be described as the out-migration of young, college-educated workers leave their small towns and head toward urban areas. Lots of America’s rural areas have been losing their most talented young people at precisely the same time that changes in farming and industry have transformed their communities. Brain Drain is having very serious consequences on these communities, as they their populations dwindle and their economies struggle to survive.

For this reason, the project outlined in this paper focuses on rural social empathy education to ameliorate the divisiveness between America's rural and urban communities. Isolated and homogenous rural schools must come first in this mission so as to provide their students with at least some exposure to diversity and to curb their cultural histories of bigotry. The intervention I propose is an applied theatre<sup>10</sup> activity for a high school classroom in which students improvise and practice using social empathy to resolve moments of conflict, tension, and oppression. The script is not a finalized play in the traditional sense; it instead provides the framework for a classroom activity and discussion about empathy, community, and diversity. While it still has a narrative arc with developed characters, my play primarily constructs scenes and drives them towards a point of conflict. Following the Theatre of the Oppressed method known as Forum Theatre, students then improvise different solutions to the conflicts presented in the scenes. This paper outlines the rationale behind creating this educational theater activity, and it also describes the activity's various attributes in detail. I propose that we can learn from the various literature about multicultural education, rural communities, social empathy, and social justice theater in order to create an educational tool that fills the tremendous gap of empathy/diversity education in rural schools. My capstone draws upon these discrete disciplines and places them in conversation with one another for the first time in the form of a classroom theatrical activity so that rural students are better prepared for living in a diverse and complex society and to ultimately improve relations across America's rural-urban divide.

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<sup>10</sup> Applied Theatre is an umbrella term used to describe the practice of using theater in an educational, community, or therapeutic context. It's often performed in non-theatrical spaces by individuals who wouldn't necessarily consider themselves artists.



## Rationale

I knew that mere comprehension of facts and figures was not going to solve this problem and that it was more of a socio-emotional challenge, but I imagined the ideal solution to combine empathy and knowledge to elucidate greater understandings. The solution I sought was social empathy. Social empathy has been defined by its leading researcher, Elizabeth A. Segal, as “the ability to more deeply understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities.”<sup>11</sup> Essentially, it is a way to further empathy’s utility by considering societal impact, thus motivating individuals to transform emotional understanding into justice and action. Research by Segal also shows that teaching social empathy is a way to promote social justice in a nonpartisan way, which is important for implementing this project’s somewhat liberal objectives in historically conservative communities.<sup>12</sup> Building empathic reasoning within the context of our society is most important, according to Segal, because it “can keep us from falling into the trap of using misinformation and stereotypes as rationales for unjust social conditions.”<sup>13</sup> This is why this project places social empathy at the center of its goals, using it as a way for students to learn and care about our diverse and multifaceted world. Simply gaining knowledge about this nation’s diversity may not cause much of an effect but fostering social empathy can move individuals towards social justice.

Empathy is often developed when one has the opportunity to experience others’ situations. The trouble is that rural communities are often isolated, and rural students may not be

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<sup>11</sup> Quote from Segal, “Social Empathy: A Model Built on Empathy, Contextual Understanding, and Social Responsibility That Promotes Social Justice” (2011), 267.

<sup>12</sup> See Segal and Wagaman, “Social Empathy as a Framework for Teaching Social Justice” (2017), 208 for more information about this research and its findings.

<sup>13</sup> Quote from Segal, “Social Empathy: A Model Built on Empathy, Contextual Understanding, and Social Responsibility That Promotes Social Justice” (2011), 276.

offered the chance to interact with and step into the shoes of urban students. This has made developing social empathy across the rural-urban divide quite difficult, and this is often brought to light when rural individuals move to an urban community, or vice versa. Students need to be prepared to use empathy and to take ownership over their rural identity in this transition in order to bridge the rural-urban divide. I argue that rural students must be provided with a social empathy education that teaches them to embrace their own community's unique identities so that they can eventually embrace diversity and difference more broadly and perhaps even one day build mutual emotional understanding with urban individuals. This model has its roots in multiculturalism but goes further by focusing on empathic understanding and not just highlighting difference. It reaches towards social justice by trying to have students find true commonality with others based on shared emotions and experiences. Ultimately, students, especially those who have grown up in rural communities, must be given educational opportunities that emotionally prepare them to live in a complex society.

However, nothing of this sort currently exists for rural schools. Some education scholars and practitioners have touted literature as a way to teach rural students about diversity and the outside world, but this still runs the risk of promoting mere comprehension and not empathic reasoning. Others have built curriculums around mastering facts about diversity and the lives of diverse people around the world. This is what often comprises the typical multicultural education curriculum. While this can provide exposure to isolated rural students in homogenous communities, it does not go far enough, as I have argued, in affecting the emotions and social empathy of rural students to make a large dent in bridging chasms of difference. This effect can best be implemented in rural schools through the use of arts education.

Theater is critical aspect in achieving this goal because, like many art forms, it has an ability to create imagined worlds and to access human emotions. For isolated rural students, theater can provide a space to imagine and to stage life outside of their community. While this is not as effective as direct exposure, it provides a space for students to step into the shoes of characters very different from themselves and to understand various experiences. Additionally, this project is not concerned with teaching rural students about diversity that exists, but rather, how to use empathic reasoning in approaching diversity. Contemporary theater's main aim is not information dispersal or didacticism; it is to portray human experiences that resonate with the emotions of the audience. In this way, theater can not only help individuals access their own emotions, but it can also recondition them into new forms of being. In other words, it can help in building empathy. Candace Jesse Stout notes that the arts and imagination can teach students how to care (i.e. building empathy) by allowing us to break away from ourselves and to try to understand, feel, and contextualize the other.<sup>14</sup> Theater is specifically an important art form to use in building empathy because of its semblance to role-playing when students are actively involved. Role-playing, as defined by Gerdes et al., is "an empathy-enhancement intervention that focuses heavily on imitation and mimicking to exploit the natural tendency of mirror neurons to create shared subjective experience."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Segal and Wagaman cite the importance of role-playing in macro-perspective taking.<sup>16</sup> Theater, especially variations that involve student participation and improvisation as my project does, is an incredibly helpful tool in developing the social empathy that is needed to bridge the rural-urban divide.

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on the intersection of the arts and empathy, see Stout, "The Art of Empathy: Teaching Students to Care" (1999), 33.

<sup>15</sup> Quote from Gerdes et al., "Teaching Empathy: A Framework Rooted in Social Cognitive Neuroscience and Social Justice" (2011), 120.

<sup>16</sup> See Segal and Wagaman, "Social Empathy as a Framework for Teaching Social Justice" (2017), 208 for more information about the importance of role-playing in practicing social empathy.

Many forms of Applied Theatre are dedicated to promoting communal understanding and social justice. One of the most famous ones, and the one enlisted in this project, is known as “Theatre of the Oppressed.” Developed by Brazilian theater practitioner Augusto Boal in the 1970s, Theatre of the Oppressed uses the audience as “spect-actors” to explore, analyze, and transform the play and their own realities as a means for promoting social and political change.<sup>17</sup> It is based on Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and thus destroys hierarchies and breaks down the barrier between spectators and actors in the theater. The theatrical activity described in this paper makes use of just one of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed exercises: Forum Theatre. Forum Theatre, at its essence, is a form of interactive theater that allows individuals to tackle oppressive situations on stage themselves, so they can be better prepared for facing them in real life. In almost every scene of this theatrical activity, the script sets up a Forum Theatre moment: a point of conflict between two characters where one is oppressing the other, often through false assumptions and accusations, or where both are oppressing each other. At these moments, students in the audience (since they are in fact “spect-actors”) volunteer ideas about how to solve the conflict. They will then take the stage to role-play their potential solution and to take matters into their own hands. In this way, no one person embodies each character, and everyone is able to take the matters of characters into their own hands. Students try out their different ideas of resolving the oppressive situation and the other characters improvise how they believe their character might respond. Theatre of the Oppressed is crucial to this project’s goals, as it allows students to participate in the role-playing necessary to build social empathy.

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<sup>17</sup> See Boal, “Theater of the Oppressed” (1974), 471-472 for more information about Boal’s theory.

## **Methodology**

In order to know how to best cultivate social empathy through theater, I had the following research questions: In what ways have educators attempted to provide an education that embraces tolerance, diversity, and empathy to students from isolated and homogenous communities? How have rural communities historically treated difference, approached belonging, and crafted a rural identity? How can educators affirm rural identity in a way that builds social empathy rather than divisiveness? In what ways has Applied Theatre been used to promote social justice and build empathic skills?

Before I began writing the play, I researched these questions to make sure my approach was sociologically sound, informed by research, and well-intentioned. A large portion of this research focused on the theory and practice of teaching social empathy and on teaching these subjects in rural schools. This primarily took the form of piecing together best practices and advice from the sources in my literature review, featuring scholars in the fields of empathy, multicultural education, citizenship education, and rural education. My research largely consisted of reading about different ideologies, theories, and practices and exploring the different ways that these strategies can be incorporated into the theatrical activity. No primary resources (examples of curriculum) exist for the field of rural social empathy education, so I read and analyzed research that is somewhat related and then constructed my own example of how this can be implemented.

To strengthen the theatrical aspect of my project, I moved my research into an exploration of social justice in theater education. Primarily, I examined how to best incorporate Theatre of the Oppressed techniques in the classroom from both academic articles and materials from the Theatre of the Oppressed Company-NYC. Academic articles on Theatre of the

Oppressed are largely focused on what scholars have learned from their own specific encounters leading Theatre of the Oppressed programs. Meanwhile, I used workshop handouts and my own experience as a workshop attendee with Theatre of the Oppressed Company-NYC to consider the best ways of implementing this theatrical philosophy in rural classrooms. Though none of my primary sources were focused on the same topic as my project, I used the case-studies and teacher preparation materials to elucidate best practices, and I attempt to mold these to fit a rural American classroom. Thus, just as important to this theatrical activity were my secondary sources on the state of rural America and my own life experiences with rural culture. This provided the context, background, and justification for my creative transformation of Theatre of the Oppressed for rural schools. Literature on rural communities not only helped justify the necessity of my applied theatre activity on social empathy, but it also helped ensure that my creative processes aligned with the specific needs and situations of rural America.

### **Literature Review**

A variety of recent literature on rural America has risen to the forefront of scholarship since the 2016 presidential election, as individuals attempt to piece together the election's outcome by glimpsing into the situations of rural communities. Two are notable: the aforementioned sociological, ethnographic study of Robert Wuthnow's *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* and J.D. Vance's popular memoir *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. Vance, a Yale-educated lawyer, recounts stories of his own experiences growing up in Appalachia, emphasizing themes of instability, alcoholism, violence, and poverty. He ultimately holds his hillbilly kin responsible for their own misfortunes and

renounces the hillbilly culture of “learned helplessness.”<sup>18</sup> Wuthnow’s book takes a much more academic approach and political bend, arguing that understanding rural America requires seeing the places in which its residents live as moral communities; town and community are central to its values and identity.<sup>19</sup> Both accounts of rural America, either biographical or scholarly, highlight how economic, political, or systemic issues seldom influence rural ideology; rural Americans are instead largely influenced by sociocultural issues. If the “rural problem” is truly a cultural one, education, which has long promised being able to transform cultures and societies, is a key part of the solution.

One of the largest sociocultural tenants of rural America, in both the American imaginative and in the literature, is bigotry. It is the problem stemming from the family and culture Vance describes, saying, “We do not like outsiders or people who are different from us.”<sup>20</sup> Wuthnow encounters a variety of bigotry in his exploration of rural America, especially in relation to immigration, Muslims, racism, and misogyny; he attributes much of the recent uproar of bigotry to Obama’s presidential administration.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, research from Cook et al. showcases the historical effects of segregation on racism in rural communities, and Ceballos and Yakushko find that residents of rural Nebraska have relatively strong anti-immigration attitudes in large part due to the perceived threat of immigrants. Research has shown that many rural, primarily white, communities in America are currently suffering from bigotry, xenophobia, antagonism, and some variation of racism, weaving its way into their sociocultural bedrock. While Wuthnow notes that rural Americans are probably no more prone toward bigotry than

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<sup>18</sup> Quote from Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016), 163.

<sup>19</sup> This argument can be found in Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* (2018), 4.

<sup>20</sup> Quote from Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016), 3.

<sup>21</sup> For further discussion on bigotry in rural America, see Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* (2018), 157-158.

their suburban and urban counterparts,<sup>22</sup> solutions have historically left out rural communities. Generally, some form of multicultural education has been employed in the past to combat issues of bigotry, racism, and xenophobia in urban and suburban schools. Wuthnow confirms that the solution to these issues lies in education,<sup>23</sup> but these types of educational practices have excluded one of its highest-need audiences.

Multicultural education has been a priority of the United States since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when an influx of diverse immigrants entered the country and its education system.<sup>24</sup> The idea of American multiculturalism is considered to have risen especially after the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), as some scholars view it as the end of ethno-racial divisions.<sup>25</sup> By the 1990s, the multiculturalism movement blossomed, and ethnic content was demanded to be incorporated into mainstream curricula, perhaps due to the Black Power movement and the rise of white guilt.<sup>26</sup> Today, multiculturalism has become a mainstay in the American education system, especially as it develops into more and more sophisticated forms based on an increasing amount of research.<sup>27</sup> The prevalence of multicultural education does not only stem from postwar pluralist desires as explained by Scott, but also from its effectiveness in helping individuals become more civically minded.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the literature on multicultural education, scholars agree that it is necessary citizenship training.

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<sup>22</sup> See Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* (2018), 157-158.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> For more information on the history of multicultural education, see Grant, "The Evolution of Multicultural Education in the United States: A Journey for Human Rights & Social Justice" (2019), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Daryl Scott is one of these scholars. His argument can be found in Scott, "Postwar Pluralism, Brown v. Board of Education, and the Origins of Multicultural Education" (2004), 69.

<sup>26</sup> This portion of the history of multicultural education can be found in Scott, "Postwar Pluralism, Brown v. Board of Education, and the Origins of Multicultural Education" (2004), 69 and Banks, "Chapter 1: Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice" (1993), 18.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of how multicultural education lives on, see Sultanova, "Origin and Development of Multicultural Education in the USA" (2016), 54.

<sup>28</sup> See Cole and Zhou, "Do Diversity Experiences Help College Students Become More Civically Minded? Applying Banks' Multicultural Education Framework" (2014), 109 for further discussion on teaching civics through multicultural education.



However, the literature, especially a variety of case studies detailing best practices, often primarily focus on embracing the diversity and heterogeneity present in the classroom and the students' lives.<sup>29</sup> For example, even Samuel Shepherd's research on combatting Islamophobia in rural Appalachian classrooms is largely based on finding a way to interact with Muslim individuals.<sup>30</sup> Multicultural education is quite advanced and developed, and yet, in 2018, scare literature is available on how to offer this necessary citizenship training to the nation's citizens without direct linkages to diversity and heterogeneity.

Scant literature at present sheds light on methods for teaching multicultural education in America's rural communities, which are often homogeneously inhabited by Caucasian individuals. Scholars have begun to answer this looming question in a variety of contexts, and all come to very similar conclusions. Reed examines theories of multicultural education and posits methods of making them relevant in rural America, while Liao writes about her own process and ideology of training rural teachers in multicultural education. Meanwhile, McLaren and Giroux study practices of critical pedagogy in rural Poland to glean lessons for American schools, and Waterson and Moffa explore how to empower rural identities through citizenship education. At the center of all of this literature is one clear message: rural identities must first be affirmed in order to change the way they see the world. The community—its history, values, and traditions—must be at the center of this education; it must be a “pedagogy of place...to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation.”<sup>31</sup> This same philosophy is employed by Susan L. Croenke and Jan Nesor in their exploration of racist language in rural

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<sup>29</sup> See DiCamillo and Pace, “Preparing Citizens for Multicultural Democracy in a U.S. History Class” (2010), 69 for an example of this.

<sup>30</sup> See Shepherd, “Confronting Islamophobia in a Rural Appalachian Classroom” (2018), 98 for more information about this project and research.

<sup>31</sup> Quote from McLaren and Giroux, “Critical Pedagogy and Rural Education: A Challenge from Poland” (1990), 163.

schools, saying, “We can only understand racism by contextualizing it and looking at how its social meanings were interactively produced.”<sup>32</sup> They suggest that educators consider rural identities when disciplining and counteracting racist actions and speech. However, Croenke and Nespor, in addition to all of these multicultural education scholars, fail to move their discussion beyond ideology. Despite their desire to adapt educational practices to fit rural schools, they do not propose any pedagogical tools to actually do so.

Not only does this literature fail to offer any tangible solutions, but it also tends to presume that an affirmation of rural identity is enough to bridge the gap between rural America’s isolation and homogeneity and the diversity of the rest of the world. These scholars tend to believe that merely fostering a collective rural identity will help students understand the multiculturalism of America, but there is no guarantee that it will not do the opposite and instead stimulate divisive, prideful behavior. More broadly, multicultural education always risks staying in the realm of tolerance which is inadequate for the needs facing our country. The primary goal of multicultural education is understanding and valuing difference. Yet, some scholars find that what actually occurs is vacillating between “powerblind sameness” and “colorblind difference,” ultimately working against the real goals of multicultural education and protecting whiteness.<sup>33</sup> This fits into a larger discussion of multicultural education providing a limited solution for radical reform, as multicultural education seldom confronts racism and other social justice issues and often trivializes the voices of marginalized groups.<sup>34</sup> At the root of it all, it is clear that just teaching tolerance and acceptance of difference will not bring about actual change.

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<sup>32</sup> Quote from Groenke and Nespor, “‘The Drama of Their Daily Lives’: Racist Language and Struggles Over the Local in a Rural High School” (2010), 66.

<sup>33</sup> For information on how multicultural education protects whiteness, see Castagno, “Multicultural Education and the Protection of Whiteness” (2013), 101.

<sup>34</sup> This critique can be found in Kim, “Conceptions, Critiques, and Challenges in Multicultural Education: Informing Teacher Education Reform in the U.S.” (2011), 205.

Some scholars have suggested that in order for change to happen, multicultural education must have a strong bend towards social justice, in which individuals openly acknowledge, examine, and draw on differences.<sup>35</sup> Social justice is an ideology that has rarely been applied to the unique situation of rural schools, until Hernán Cuervo's 2016 book *Understanding Social Justice in Rural Education*. Cuervo's book explores how social justice has been understood in rural Australian schools, arguing for a pluralist understanding of social justice that endeavors to address the disadvantages faced in rural schools.<sup>36</sup> He pushes for not only distributive justice (receiving the same resources as urban schools), but also recognitional justice (a celebration of rural diversity and identity) and associational justice (becoming active participants and shapers of the lives they live).<sup>37</sup> This recent research makes clear the necessity of social justice in rural schools, though it only uses it as a tool to empower rural students. This approach runs the risk of increasing resentment, divisiveness, and perhaps even bigotry as rural students become more informed and aware of their own social inequities. A broader approach that uses social justice in rural schools to understand diversity across the globe is necessary for rural schools. This can occur in rural schools when Cuervo's research on rural social justice education is combined with empathetic reasoning.

In order to combine the intent of multicultural education with a push for social justice, social empathy must be taught in rural schools. Also serving as a nonpartisan approach, social empathy can be defined as “the ability to more deeply understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and

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<sup>35</sup> See Landorf, “Using the Dialectic of Social Justice to Enliven the Dialogue between Global Education and Multicultural Education. Social Justice Perspectives’ (2013), 103 for further discussion on this argument.

<sup>36</sup> This argument is made clear in Cuervo, *Understanding Social Justice in Rural Education* (2016), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

disparities.”<sup>38</sup> A variety of literature suggests different ways in which social empathy can be cultivated, including an article by Gerdes et al. that breaks it down into three components: affective response, cognitive processing, and conscious decision making. The article suggests a number of ways to develop these components, including: practicing mindfulness, using role-plays, advocacy, and social action.<sup>39</sup> One of the main activities suggested is reading *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, writing a monologue as the character, and role-playing a scene between the characters.<sup>40</sup> Segel also notes that we can build social empathy by creating more proximity and familiarity with different groups, ultimately trying to practice perspective taking.<sup>41</sup> However, in homogenous communities, the opportunity to become more familiar with different groups is seldom available. In this scenario, the arts become incredibly helpful in cultivating empathy because their ties to imagination provide an “unlimited source of possibilities for connecting self to other.”<sup>42</sup> Research on building social empathy emphasizes the importance of experiencing something both physical and emotional, such as role-plays. While some research alludes to this possibility, currently no literature looks at how theater can be used as an important tool for teaching social empathy.

Theater has been shown to promote social justice, especially within the context of Theatre of the Oppressed. Invented by Augusto Boal, he theorizes that, similarly to role-playing, this theatrical technique combined with social justice is a rehearsal of revolution.<sup>43</sup> This has

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<sup>38</sup> For discussion on how it’s a nonpartisan response, see Segal and Wagaman, “Social Empathy as a Framework for Teaching Social Justice” (2017), 208. Quote from Segal, “Social Empathy: A Model Built on Empathy, Contextual Understanding, and Social Responsibility That Promotes Social Justice” (2011), 267.

<sup>39</sup> See Gerdes et al., “Teaching Empathy: A Framework Rooted in Social Cognitive Neuroscience and Social Justice” (2011), 117.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> This argument can be found in Segal, “Social Empathy: A Model Built on Empathy, Contextual Understanding, and Social Responsibility That Promotes Social Justice” (2011), 273.

<sup>42</sup> Quote from Stout, “The Art of Empathy: Teaching Students to Care” (199), 33.

<sup>43</sup> For more information about Theatre of the Oppressed, see Boal, “Theater of the Oppressed” (1974), 472.

played out in the actual practice, as one middle school program found that role-playing and simulation was incredibly effective in bullying prevention.<sup>44</sup> The students rehearsed bullying interventions and engaged in perspective-taking and empathy; Boal argued that when individuals empathize, they bridge the difference between self and others and experience the “other” as themselves.<sup>45</sup> In another theater program, minority youth used the Forum Theater technique (an improvisatory style) to unearth and cope with social issues, ultimately providing them with “the methodology to relate across our differences as equals to respond to human differences in new and powerful ways.”<sup>46</sup>

This work also reveals that theater and social empathy have the mobilizing power multicultural education lacks, as students in this program “began to think of ways that social action could change social circumstances” and were moved “from an intransitive form of social consciousness to a transitive one.”<sup>47</sup> Other scholars have interviewed students to understand the effects of Theatre of the Oppressed, finding confirmation that this theatrical technique promotes empathy by showing rather than telling.<sup>48</sup> It is clear that theater can be an incredibly effective tool for promoting social empathy, but none of the literature focuses on its utility in rural communities, where imagination is key to understanding a diverse world. This project has been constructed to fill this exact void in literature and to focus on ways in which applied theatre can promote social empathy in rural communities.

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<sup>44</sup> For more information about this program, see Bhukhanwala, “Theater of the Oppressed in an After-School Program: Middle School Students’ Perspectives on Bullying and Prevention” (2014), 9.

<sup>45</sup> Quote from Bhukhanwala, “Theater of the Oppressed in an After-School Program: Middle School Students’ Perspectives on Bullying and Prevention” (2014), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Quote from Sanders, “Urban Odyssey: Theatre of the Oppressed and Talented Minority Youth” (2004), 237.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>48</sup> See Stahl, “Acting Out to Call In: Practicing Theatre of the Oppressed With High School Students” (2018), 371 for a discussion about the effects of a Theatre of the Oppressed high school program.

## The Activity

This capstone project entailed writing an applied theatre activity (an educational play) to be used and performed in isolated and homogenous rural high school classrooms based on the above topic and research. The script crafted for this activity centers around Jesse, the protagonist,<sup>49</sup> and their experiences growing up in a rural community and venturing far away to attend college. It focuses on the hardships that accompany this transition, and it explores the challenges of empathizing with people very different from oneself while also struggling to be properly understood. The play traverses these same issues of understanding difference and using empathy in the opposite context: a character from an urban community, Blake, moves to Jesse's rural community and struggles with this transition. Through the characters' encounters with differences, assumptions, and conflicts in both rural and urban communities, the activity highlights how both rural and urban individuals can feel misunderstood, lost, and forgotten. At these moments of tension and conflict, the class uses the Forum Theatre technique to role-play different ways towards a resolution and to practice using the social empathy necessary to ultimately bridge the rural-urban divide.

The script for this educational activity is deeply location-based, crafted specifically for a classroom of high school students in northern Maine. This focus is based on the work of educational theorists, social workers, and pedagogy teachers who have found that in order to teach social empathy toward others, educators must first appeal to what students know in their own community. Before we can teach rural students about social justice issues external to their immediate community and identity group, we must first help students understand their own rural identity and the social issues within their own community. Additionally, this method is used as a

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<sup>49</sup> This protagonist can be played by a student of any gender. It is for this reason that we will use "they/them/theirs" pronouns when referring to the protagonist, Jesse.

community-based arts education technique, attempting to make the arts feel relevant to the students' culture and daily lives. Thus, the script makes numerous specific references to the dominant culture and heritage in northern Maine classrooms, most notably in its story about the Acadian ancestor, Francis. Other location-specific aspects of the play include Jesse working on a potato harvester, conversations about various French last names, references to the popular hangout spot (the CPL: Church Parking Lot), and various local phrases and slang words. It is the hope that these aspects of the play will not only increase a codified understanding of students' rural northern Maine identity, but that it will also make the play and the activity feel more relevant and relatable. Due to its specificity, the play is not relevant in other rural communities in these small ways, though it is still relevant in its lessons and role-playing scenarios. However, the lessons and scenarios depicted in the script can be made relevant to rural communities across the United States. As such, the play is a model, rather than a set-in-stone directive, of how to create a community-based Theatre of the Oppressed activity for isolated and homogenous rural communities. It is created with the hope that other educators may be able to use its structural foundation to create their own rural Theatre of the Oppressed best suited for their specific community.

The theatrical activity is designed to be implemented in high school classrooms of any subject—perhaps English, Drama, or Social Studies. It is not targeted toward one academic subject or type of teacher. The activity could likely take anywhere from one to two hours, depending on the length of discussion, and it is written in two acts to provide the option of splitting the activity into two parts: (1) understanding and empathizing with the diversity in the rural community and (2) using those skills to empathize with diverse individuals outside the community. Accompanying the script, I have crafted a teacher's guide that helps educators get a

sense of how to implement the play as an educational activity and how to maximize its potential as a tool for teaching social empathy in the rural-urban divide. The guide features background information on Theatre of the Oppressed and on the intentions behind the play, in addition to scene-by-scene instructions with discussion questions and tips for the classroom. Most importantly, the guide addresses some major questions and issues regarding teaching diversity in primarily all-white spaces. This includes information about how to talk about race, how to cast roles, and how to foster a safe classroom environment in which difficult issues can be explored and discussed. Despite the extensiveness of the teacher's guide, it is ultimately the goal that the classroom teacher merely acts as a facilitator (or in Theatre of the Oppressed terminology, the Joker) for the theatrical activity, steering improvisations towards productive solutions and drawing broader connections through discussion.

## **Conclusion**

In America's current political climate, it is vital that individuals from across the United States not only increase their awareness of our nation's diversity but also build a socially empathetic understanding of one another. When resources for exposure are not available, the arts can step in by stimulating the imagination and appealing to human emotions. This project aims to use theater in the rural classroom as a way for rural students to build social empathy. By theatrically engaging students in encountering their own rural identity and the diverse identities of others, I hope that rural students can feel more prepared to face and fight for the variety of people who inhabit this world. Ultimately, every student, regardless of geographic locale, needs social empathy education in order for this country to overcome its major sociopolitical



divisions. Yet, due to the isolation and homogeneity of so many of their communities and their cultural history of bigotry, rural students must come first.

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## **Appendix A**

### **SOWING SEEDS**

An Applied Theatre Script by Jared Andrew Michaud

Dedicated to Arabelle Schoenberg and Okoduwa Aboiralor

#### CHARACTERS

JESSE, the present-day protagonist

FRANCIS, protagonist from the past

SUE, middle-aged woman working on harvester; her family (non-speaking roles): Emily (daughter-in-law) and Bailey (daughter)

DAD, father of Jesse

MOM, mother of Jesse

NIC, northern Maine high school guy

MAX, Nic's best friend

ISABELLE, friends with Nic and Max

TEACHER, in northern Maine

BLAKE, the new student in northern Maine classroom

EMERSON, Jesse's college roommate

ALEX, friend of Emerson

LOGAN, college student who lives with Emerson and Jesse

#### PLACE

ACT ONE is in a small town in northern Maine. ACT TWO takes place on a college campus in Chicago.

#### TIME

Present day.

#### SUPPLEMENTS

Supplemental documents include a Teacher's Guide, Character Sketches, and "My Acadian Story." These must all be used during this theatrical activity for the full results to be realized.

**ACT ONE****SCENE 1**

*JESSE and FRANCIS are both 17, though living in different places and time periods. JESSE is in a small town in northern Maine in the present day, while FRANCIS is in the colony of Acadia in 1754. They are both working on a farm, though in fairly different contexts. In this scene, they both present monologues to the audience, interwoven with one another. FRANCIS's monologues are from a book that JESSE is currently reading (though not in this opening scene) about Acadians. All of these monologues are compiled into an actual "book" (a small packet) that is distributed to students. Students take turns reading from this book, so they have the same experience as JESSE reading about their ancestors. A slash / is used to demarcate when students should switch off reading/performing FRANCIS's monologue. JESSE's monologues, at least in this scene, will be performed by only one student. While the rest of FRANCIS's scenes in the show are in the form of JESSE reading the book, in this scene, both JESSE and FRANCIS just deliver monologues to the audience about their lives. For the optimal effect (having both JESSE and FRANCIS telling stories about their life to the audience), have just one student play FRANCIS in this opening scene.*

*Throughout this scene and subsequent monologues (particularly by FRANCIS), students are encouraged to use the Story Theater technique. Essentially, this means that a few students who don't want to speak are invited to the stage to act out (pantomime) the scene that is being described in the monologue.*

*Note: Throughout the show, FRANCIS speaks in a way that can be interpreted as anachronistic. This is done intentionally to highlight the similarities between FRANCIS and JESSE and to make this Acadian history feel relevant to the present-day. Students shouldn't change the affect or accent of their normal speaking voice when playing FRANCIS, or for that matter, any other role.*

JESSE

My favorite phrase growing up was *patate pourrie*. It's how we would say "rotten potato." When I was little, the local news channel visited our school to talk about how we were all learning French; they interviewed me and asked me what I learned. I just said *patate pourrie*. My family thinks it's hilarious—we say it all the time and when I was little it was sort of my party trick at family parties. But now, working on this farm, it's the last thing I want to say. And rotten potatoes are actually so much grosser and smellier than you would think. *Patate pourrie* makes them sound so French and elegant, but trust me, they aren't like that at all.

FRANCIS

I loved the animals on our farm growing up. We had oxen, horses, sheep, pigs, chickens, 2 dogs, and also some rabbits. The rabbits were my favorite. I would spend hours kneeling near their

cages, feeding them some fresh vegetables, and I gave little pieces of lettuce to the little ones. / I got to know all of the animals really well growing up too, because of my chores. I fed the pigs and the chickens, and sometimes I was allowed to feed the cows and to curry the horses and the oxen. / I got to milk my first cow the spring before my seventh birthday; I was pretty bad at it at first, but I got better and one of my main chores was to help mother with milking every day. I knew all the animals' names and pretended like we were best friends. Of course, I liked the other guys who worked on our farm during harvest, but the animals were really my favorite company in Acadia.

JESSE

I'm waking up every morning at 5:30 to come out here and work on the harvester. And then we stay until 7 at night sometimes. Working with potatoes before the sun rises and after the sun sets—I mean it's kind of crazy. But on Sundays we only start at 10 so that everyone can go to church. That's a nice break I guess, but this is still a crazy job. At least I'm making money though. I think it'll be around a grand—they never really told me about pay. But either way I'm pretty sure I'm gonna make enough to afford all of my college applications, and then I can get out of this crummy town and never see a potato again. You know Aroostook County is the number one potato producing county in the country? Yeah, more than anywhere in Idaho. Hah, it's pretty cool I guess but it's the only thing we've got going for us...and the loads of potato farms just means that it's sooo boring.

FRANCIS

My dad's *pépère* came to Acadia almost a hundred years ago, working as a seaman on some ship so he could get here. But it was my *mémère* on my mom's side who came from France, and she's actually still alive. Sometimes she tells us stories about France and about how nice their churches were there—it sounds really cool. / I like where we live though; it's about a mile outside of Grand Pre and we have so much land. There are so many wonderful trees: an orchard with apples, plus, and cherries, and also maples to make syrup. / Our farm grows oats, barley, buckwheat, corn, hay, flax, and lots of vegetables. Dad says it's the largest and best kept farm in the area—when new folks come from France, they usually stop by our place to see our land and get ideas about how to make their own farms. / I have five younger siblings and we all really love our parents. We're a close family and we're very religious, so even though the work is sometimes tough, I feel like it's my duty to this family to do my share of the farm work. It's not too bad, just the way we get by.

JESSE

I can't believe my parents did four weeks of this stuff instead of two. And my mom was telling me that back then they picked the potatoes by hand. That probably sucked a lot more than this. But apparently my family has been doing this for ages. I just found this book at my *pépère*'s house actually, and it's about our family history, the Acadians. It's a bunch of diary entries of an



Acadian my age; it sounds pretty cool. Apparently, all these French people came here a long time ago and they lived up here and just like prayed and farmed all the time. So, I guess this type of stuff is my blood.

SCENE 2

*On the potato farm. JESSE works with four other people on the potato harvester: a tough guy who was once their childhood best friend and 3 members of a family. They are a fairly untraditional family. SUE is a single mother and lives with her two children and their significant others. JESSE mainly interacts with SUE, the mother, but also present are: BAILEY, the daughter, and EMILY, the daughter-in-law. SUE works in the local high school's cafeteria, is missing some teeth, and has very messy white hair. JESSE is familiar with SUE from school, where everyone makes fun of her and calls her the local witch. It is another long day on the harvester, but it's still the first week of the harvest so everyone is just getting to know each other. SUE and JESSE are working side-by-side on one side of the harvester, and they begin talking over the noise while flinging rocks off the belt.*

SUE

Is this your first-time out here?

JESSE

In this field? Nah, I live right down the road.

SUE

No, I mean on the harvester. You ever do this before?

JESSE

Oh. No.

SUE

Hah, I didn't think so. This is my third year doing this. Man, it sucks. I'm gettin' way too old for this crap.

JESSE

Ya... then why are you still out here? I feel like you could be doing something else? I mean, isn't this usually like a job for high schoolers.

SUE

Listen kid, sometimes you just need the money.

JESSE

But don't you work at the high school? I've seen you in the caf before.

SUE

Yeah, but that don't cut it. I'm by myself. I mean, we all work in my house but we all got our own crap to pay for.

JESSE

Oh, I see.

SUE

Emily over there works at Gas-N-Go and Bailey just got a job washing dishes at Rock's. You know them?

JESSE

I think Bailey was in my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class and I see her around school.

SUE

Oh yeah, that was the year she got held back. And then again in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She's not totally dumb, but dang the school's tough on her. She was supposed to graduate with you but now she's—what, um—two years behind.

JESSE

*(disbelief, judgmental)* Oh, uh, wow.

SUE

And Emily graduated—what—7 years ago? She just moved in with us last month.

JESSE

Oh, wait, she's not part of your family?

SUE

Well she is now! She's dating my son Lee. They been at it for a few years now and she needed a place, so I said it was fine as long as they helped out more. It's fricken tough—trying to work all the time and feed everyone and take care of the dump we live in—so I guess it's good to have more help.

JESSE

Well...that's nice of you.

SUE

Ha, we have fun together though. Like last week—you remember that Emily?—hah, we got so drunk and then Lee was saying all sorts of crap that didn't make no sense. And Bailey just passed out on top of me. *(laughs)*

JESSE

Uh...doesn't that cost money, though? I thought you said you didn't have much money; so maybe you shouldn't be wasting it on alcohol.

SUE

Oh hush, you prude. It's not like that all the time, just every once and a while. And I'm much better than I used to be. I used to drink all the time and we were so broke and then I would just yell at everyone. Life sucked so I just drank more and then we were even broker. But I stopped drinking like that, so quit worrying. I told myself I had quit because I love my kids and I love Emily too and I don't want their lives to be crap. So I want us to have fun sometimes too. I'm trying the best I can.

JESSE

Are you really though? You didn't even leave this town to go to college and get a better job and all that. It seems like you could've tried a little harder.

SUE

What the heck's that supposed to mean? You don't know what I've done for my family.

JESSE

I mean it's great you quit drinking, but you're still a middle-aged lady working high school jobs and buying your kids alcohol...like, maybe you're trying your best now with the circumstances you're in, but I just feel like you messed up in so many ways before and now your kids suck in school and will just turn into the same thing. Sorry, it's just everyone in this fricken town is like this and I just wished people would try a little harder sometimes.

*[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]*

*JESSE is identified as the oppressor in this situation. Students are asked to volunteer solutions about how to solve this problem between JESSE and SUE. In a brief character sketch on SUE, it becomes clear that she did try to escape the town, but her parents were sick and dying so she had to come back here to take care of them. While this was happening, she fell in love with a guy and got pregnant with him but one day he just got up and drove away in his pick-up. She had plenty of hopes and dreams, but they were all crushed, and she felt trapped in the town. Through this Forum Theatre moment, JESSE and SUE work out their problems and assumptions with another.*

*They bond about both wanting to escape, hating this job, but still thinking that this random place where they live is really beautiful. The scene ends with the lunch break.*

JESSE

Is something wrong with the tractor? Why'd they stop?

SUE

*(playfully)* Nah, doofus, it's time for a lunch break. *(laughs)* Come on, let's go. You wanna come eat your lunch with us in the car?

JESSE

Thanks, but I think I'll sit outside in the sun and read while I eat. I just found this cool book at my pépère's house—it's like letters written by one of our ancestors. It's all about our history, and it's kinda cool actually. I've always wondered about that stuff.

SUE

Wow, nerd. *(chuckles)* Okay, suit yourself, but remember we only got 30 minutes. You'll get yelled at if you're late.

SCENE 3

*Lunch break, JESSE is sitting alone eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich while reading the book he found at his grandfather's house. He reads the text for a little while, but it is soon spoken by FRANCIS, the protagonist from the book. As described in the first scene, students take turns reading FRANCIS's lines (the book). Additionally, there is the option of having some students enact the story that FRANCIS is telling.*

JESSE

*(sighs)* Yikes, what a morning. Well, thank god I have this book. Their lives seem so much simpler.

*(JESSE begins reading and FRANCIS speaks the lines at the same time. After the first few phrases, FRANCIS takes over completely.)*

FRANCIS

I really liked working on the farm, and it's nice to feel like I'm doing something for my family. I love them so much. But I always felt like there was something more in life. Like I was meant to do more. / I talked about this with Father LaBrie and he invited me to visit him whenever so that we could study the bible. I went to see him every few days and we always had really good conversations. After I turned 16, Father LaBrie suggested that I consider the priesthood and he said that I could follow him around to learn about what he does. / It felt like this was the something more that I longed for. Mom and Dad weren't too happy about the idea; since I started visiting Father LaBrie, I spent less time at home on the farm doing work, but at the same time, they admired Father LaBrie and they were proud that I took our religion so seriously. /

I've been training to be a priest for about a year now. Father LaBrie is close with a tribe of Indians nearby, and last week he invited me to join him to visit them and lead a mass with them. I was really scared by the idea; I know that they are sometimes violent and also they look really different from us. / I've only ever really been around Acadians, so I was scared about how these people would look and talk and act. Plus I know that when my ancestors came here they took the Indians' land, so I've always been scared they might want revenge or something. Father LaBrie told me over and over again that they were some of the nicest people he knows and that they won't want to hurt me. / An exchange of information, that's what he called it: he taught them about Jesus and they taught him about different farming and hunting techniques. Well, I went on the trip, despite all my fears. I made sure to kiss Mom and Dad goodbye before I left just in case something went wrong. But Father LaBrie was totally right. / I met Chief Long Foot, who was actually able to speak French. He was very kind to me and translated what the Indians were saying. I met a girl named Dena, who showed me the best way to plow a field for growing potatoes; I couldn't wait to tell father and to try it on our own farm. / I thanked Father LaBrie for

pushing me to join him on the trip—it was totally worth it, and I can't wait to go back to see my new friends again. I was so silly for being so scared of them; all my assumptions were proven wrong.

SUE

*(walking over, interrupting JESSE's reading)*

Hey, come on you, lunch is over. We gotta go back to the harvester.

JESSE

Oh yeah, thanks for getting me. Hey, you think you could tell me some more stories about your life while we work this afternoon?

SUE

Sure, kid. Well, only if you promise to sing along to the radio with me.

JESSE

*(laughs)* Of course.

SCENE 4

*At JESSE's home on the final day of Harvest, a Saturday evening. They finished a day early this year, so JESSE doesn't have to work on Sunday and has a day off before going back to school. JESSE got their check tonight and is excited about how they will spend the money. JESSE's parents are sitting around in the living room watching television. They are very traditional.*

DAD

You get your check Jess?

JESSE

Yeah! Mr. Caron got off the tractor, said we got all the fields, and gave me a check right then and there.

MOM

Oh, that's great! How much did you make?

DAD

Back in my day it was a quarter a barrel and I could only pick about one barrel an hour, so I bet you're making a lot more than we ever did.

JESSE

Oh, I haven't looked yet actually. Let's see... *(opens envelope)* Whoa! It's over a thousand dollars! That's crazy.

MOM

Oh, Jesse, that's wonderful!

JESSE

Well it makes sense. I worked *so* many hours. The hourly wage isn't actually that good.

DAD

It's still great you earned some money. Whadda ya gonna do with it? I bet you could find a cheap pick-up somewhere.

MOM

Or a snowmobile? Or some skis! That'd be fun. You worked hard!

JESSE

Well, actually I was thinking I'd just put it in the bank and save it.



MOM

Oh, that's smart. You're always so responsible.

DAD

Save it for what?

JESSE

Oh, you know, like random things I'll have bills for. Like, college applications are coming up and I'll have to pay some money for those...

MOM

Really? I didn't know you had to pay to apply. I'm pretty sure it's free to apply to the community college here. Isn't it, Marc?

DAD

Yeah, that's what I thought.

JESSE

Well, I'm applying to other schools besides that. Like schools outside of Aroostook County. And those cost money to apply.

DAD

Wait, you are?

MOM

You never told us this! Why are you doing that? The community college here is perfectly fine. Where are you trying to go?

JESSE

I don't know, anywhere else! There's so much more out there, I just know it!

DAD

Oh Jesse, who are you kidding? You have everything you need right here. Where are--

JESSE

*(interrupting)* No I don't! This place is just one big trash hole, full of people without dreams and goals for their future. This place eats the life out of people. I mean, this lady that I worked harvest with tried to make her way out, but she just got trapped here and now her life is ruined and she's missing teeth and is really poor. I can't be like that, I gotta get out of here.

MOM

Your father and I are not like that, Jesse. People struggle everywhere, and people do well everywhere. Not everyone in this town is like this lady you worked with.

DAD

Yeah, and you better watch what you say Jesse. This town has done a lot for you, and everyone here is so nice. The rest of the world isn't like that. It's full of violence and hate, but here, people care about you.

JESSE

But it's boring! And it's so lame. There's never anything cool that happens here. But, Boston... New York... California! Those places are exciting! There's people and there's life, and it's not some dumb little place that no one's ever heard of.

DAD

Come on, Jesse, that's just rude. Our family's been here for generations, and you're just gonna get up and leave? And why? Because you think you're so much better than us?

MOM

Oh Marc, come on, don't be so harsh.

DAD

No, it's true. Jesse, you can do whatever you want with your life, but do not disrespect this community. This community has supported you and held your hand at every stage of your life. This community is in your blood. Go wherever you want, but you're not leaving because you hate it here and you think you're better than this town. That's like hating yourself. You are this town.

MOM

Jesse, what I think your father is trying to say is that we love you and support you very much. I understand why you might want to get out of this town, but I hope you understand how much of a wonderful place this is and how much you would miss out on if you left. People love you here!

JESSE

No, they don't. I don't belong here! I have big dreams and I wanna do big things, and I can't do that here! I'm so different from all the other kids my age. You guys wouldn't understand.

MOM

Oh, Jesse, come on...

JESSE

Anyway, I'm applying to these colleges—I don't care what you think. I earned this money and I get to do whatever I want with it.

*(storms off to bedroom)*

SCENE 5

*JESSE in their room, reading book.*

JESSE

God, my parents suck. No one gets me. Whatever, I guess I'll just read my book.

*(using the same student participation reading method as before)*

FRANCIS

The Red Coats have been in Acadia for a while. One has even been living with us for a couple of months now. We didn't necessarily invite him into our home; he just forced himself in. This is happening to families all over our village. / We didn't plan on this, so it was kind of hard at first making sure there was enough food. And he barely knows French, so it's pretty awkward at times. He gets annoyed because he thinks we're talking about him sometimes, but then also sometimes he speaks English and we get very confused if he is yelling at us or not. / We've gotten used to him though, and sometimes my siblings and I even play games with him. You don't always need the same language to play games. /

Anyway, Father LaBrie stopped by the house today to tell us that there's a problem with the Red Coats. They've wanted us to pledge allegiance to the British crown for a while now, but we have always pledged neutrality—we don't want to take anyone's side. / We Acadians are not a very political people—we just want to live in peace! Anyway, apparently, they have threatened to burn down our village and kick us out of Acadia if we don't become a British colony. I spent the afternoon talking and crying with Mom and Dad; we really don't want to leave Acadia. / We love it here and we love our big farm and our special corner of land. I doubt anywhere is as beautiful and wonderful as Acadia. I know it's not his fault, but this makes me really hate the Red Coat in our house now.

SCENE 6

*First day back at school after harvest break. Students are sitting around a table at the beginning of the day, waiting for class to begin. NIC and MAX are talking to each other. JESSE and ISABELLE sit at the same table but are sitting silently.*

NIC

*(in the middle of a story)* And then his pick-up got stuck right there in the mud, so he called me to come pull him out with my truck. But I couldn't do it. Ha, my truck doesn't have enough horsepower I guess.

MAX

Yeah, we could've all guessed that.

NIC

Hey, shut up. Anyway, so we call up Josh, and he has this nice pick-up right, so after about an hour we were able to finally get the truck out of the mud. *(laughs)* It was so dirty though. We showed up to the CPL<sup>50</sup> and all of our trucks were so dirty and full of mud and everyone was so confused.

MAX

Gross, dude. You should've washed your truck right away, that poor thing.

NIC

Yeah, but it was kinda cool. I didn't see you at the CPL at all over break—where were you?

MAX

Oh I was up in the Allagash most of the time with my dad. He was working on the delimeter and I just hung out. He showed me how to run it and stuff, but I also shot so many squirrels on our breaks. *(laughs)* I skinned them so good and kept the fur.

NIC

Dude, that's nasty but pretty hilarious.

MAX

Yeah, you should see my special fur collection. It's sick.

JESSE

How was your break Isabelle?

---

<sup>50</sup> Church Parking Lot. A common acronym used in northern Maine communities for a popular hangout location.

ISABELLE

Oh it was fine. I didn't really do much. Watched some TV, hung out with Greg. I went to the CPL a few times with him. What did you do, Jesse?

JESSE

I actually worked potato harvest on Lloyd Caron's farm.

ISABELLE

Oh, really? Wow, that kinda sucks.

NIC

*You worked harvest?*

JESSE

Yeah, I did. It was exhausting, but luckily, we got yesterday off and I just slept like all day.

*IF THE STUDENT PLAYING JESSE IS MALE-IDENTIFYING, USE THIS NEXT PORTION OF THE SCENE. IF NOT, PLEASE SKIP TO THE OTHER OPTION FOR THE SCENE.*

MAX

Since when do *you* do stuff like working on a farm? You only seem to have your nose stuck in a book.

NIC

Yeah, I bet you cried when you got dirt on you. *(The two guys laugh)*

JESSE

*(defensive)* No, I didn't... It was fine, it was cool.

ISABELLE

Okay, but it's just that like it's a little surprising that *you* worked harvest. Like you just don't seem like the other guys who would do it.

MAX

Yeah, like did you wear one of those fancy collared shirts on the harvester? *(All laugh at him again)*

NIC

And I bet your little girly car couldn't even drive through the potato fields.

MAX

Yeah, you're just not one of the guys, Jesse.

JESSE

What are you talking about?

NIC

Like we all work in garages and stuff, and Max works in the woods with his dad, and we all hang out in our pick-ups at the CTL, and what do you do?

MAX

Yeah, you like drive this sissy car and do all your homework and dress nice and stuff. It's just not cool.

NIC

So it's just a little hard to believe that *you* worked harvest. *(They laugh.)*

*[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]*

*In this scenario, JESSE is being oppressed by NIC and MAX, while ISABELLE is acting as a bystander. Students volunteer different ideas about how to manage this conflict and act out these options. However they come about finding a resolution, the goal is that the group of students learn that there is a diversity of gender expression in their community—not everyone has to follow the gender norms so strictly. The students hopefully acknowledge that working harvest was outside of JESSE's comfort zone, and it was cool that JESSE tried it.*

A VOICE

Good morning and bienvenue. Please rise for the pledge of allegiance. *(Scene fades as the school day officially begins.)*

*IF THE STUDENT PLAYING JESSE IS FEMALE-IDENTIFYING, PLEASE USE THIS ENDING OF THE SCENE.*

ISABELLE

What I think what Max and Nic are getting at is that usually girls around here don't do that kind of job, so it's a little surprising that *you* worked harvest. Most girls are like me—hanging out with their boyfriends and doing work around the house and stuff, you know?

MAX

Yeah exactly, like did bake everyone cookies and then paint their nails during break? *(All laugh at JESSE again)*

NIC

And how did you even drive in the fields? You don't have a pickup... or did your boyfriend drop you off at work? *(laughs)*

MAX

Yeah, it's just that that's not really a girl's job...

JESSE

Well I did it perfectly fine, so I don't know what the big deal is.

NIC

Well we're just a little confused why you're trying to act like a guy...

JESSE

I'm not trying to act like anything—I was just doing a job! And I did a good job, too.

ISABELLE

Whatever, but if you wanted to have more friends and not always be alone with your book, you should maybe try to be a little more normal. Like I bet my friends think you're cool, but we just don't know how to relate to you, especially since you do all these manly things.

NIC

Yeah, and like I know you're friends with some guys, but I just think it's weird you don't have any girl friends. And I bet you didn't make any working on the potato harvester... *(they laugh)*

*[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]*

*In this scenario, JESSE is being oppressed by NIC and MAX, while ISABELLE is acting as a bystander. Students volunteer different ideas about how to manage this conflict and act out these options. However they come about finding a resolution, the goal is that the group of students learn that there is a diversity of gender expression in their community—not everyone has to follow the gender norms so strictly. The students hopefully acknowledge that working harvest was outside of JESSE's comfort zone, and it was cool that JESSE tried it.*

A VOICE

Good morning and bienvenue. Please rise for the pledge of allegiance. *(Scene fades as the school day officially begins.)*



SCENE 7

*JESSE is reading the book again.*

## FRANCIS

It's been about six months since that day Father LaBrie knocked on our door with bad news. And a few weeks ago, during Sunday mass, Father LaBrie—along with some other priests in the area—was arrested, brought to jail, and then deported from the colony. / He was accused of spying for the French and trying to overthrow the English. I knew this wasn't true—I knew him so well, and I spent so much time with him. I miss him so much; I never even got to say goodbye. / Since then, the Red Coats have forced all of the men, including my dad, into the military. If they said no, they were publicly beaten. They've gotten so much more abusive towards us, even to some of the women and children. Luckily, no one in my family has been hurt. /

The English seized our churches to use as bunkers for their troops, so we can't even go celebrate mass anymore. Our family friends have been sneaking over to our house, and we all pray together and have our own sort of ceremony. It's nice, but it's also just really scary. / Just the other day, a proclamation was read in the village square saying that we were no longer allowed to be Catholic and we had to become Anglican. Everyone is fuming, and my family is especially worried—being Catholic is so central to everything we do, and now we can't even do that? / A revolt has been stirring, and Acadia is no longer the happy farming place it used to be. I wish Father LaBrie was still with us—he'd know what to do.

SCENE 8

*A month later at school on a Monday. It is a harsh winter day in northern Maine, though not really in other parts of the country. A new student, BLAKE, is being introduced.*

TEACHER

Good morning, class! Did you guys have a good weekend? *(Various responses from students.)* Did anyone go skiing or snowmobiling? *(Students respond in the affirmative.)* Yeah, the snow was great this weekend.

By the way class, we have a new student! Everyone, this is Blake! Blake just moved here because their father is a new doctor in town. Blake, can you say more about yourself? Where are you from?

BLAKE

Uh, I'm from New Orleans but I've spent most of my life in San Francisco and Chicago. I love going to the beach, and I love playing volleyball, especially on the beach. *(chuckles)* I also play the cello, so maybe I could join the orchestra here.

ISABELLE

Oh, we don't have one of those here.

NIC

Yeah, we don't really have any of that stuff around here.

MAX

Sorry! Also I don't know if you saw outside, but definitely no beaches here! *(class laughs)*

TEACHER

Well, I'm sure you'll get used to the way of life around here, Blake. Everyone is very nice in this little town. And I'm sure your classmates will be very nice to you. *Right class? (Various noises that signal varying levels of agreement)*

*(BLAKE sits next to JESSE. They talk to each other instead of listening as the class continues.)*

JESSE

Wow, San Francisco and Chicago? That's so cool.

BLAKE

Hah, yeah, I guess they're alright. A-roo-STOOK (*pronouncing "Aroostook" incorrectly*)  
County seems pretty cool too.

JESSE

(*Laughs at BLAKE*) Wow, no, it's pronounced A-ROO-stick county. That's hilarious. Also, it's definitely not as cool. We may be the largest county east of the Mississippi River, but we are probably also the most boring county.

BLAKE

Well, that certainly makes the new student feel hopeful...

JESSE

Sorry, but it's just the truth.

TEACHER

Blake and Jesse, are you listening? Can you please stop with the side conversation?

BLAKE

Yes, ma'am. Sorry, ma'am.

(*Class is shocked and audibly reacts. Saying "ma'am" is quite uncommon in the area and most people assume that it is disrespectful, sarcastic, and a form of talking back.*)

TEACHER

Pardon?

BLAKE

What? Do you y'all not say that around here?

MAX

Um, no. And we don't say "y'all" either. (*Class laughs*)

TEACHER

Max, be nice to our new friend.

BLAKE

Oh, sorry. Where I live we say it all the time. I grew up calling my teachers "ma'am" and "sir"; it's a sign of respect.

TEACHER

Ah, I see. Well, no worries, just make sure you're paying attention, please.

BLAKE

Yes, ma'am. *(Class laughs)* Oh, shoot.

JESSE

You don't catch on too fast, city-slicker.

*End of scene.*

SCENE 9

*Same day, lunchtime in the cafeteria. BLAKE sits alone, and JESSE joins them, intrigued.*

JESSE

Hey, can I sit?

BLAKE

Yeah, sure.

JESSE

That was pretty funny what happened in class today, huh?

BLAKE

Uh, yeah, I guess.

JESSE

Blake is such cool name. I've never met a Blake before. It sounds like such a fancy movie star name, like—uh, what's her name?—oh, like Blake Lively.

BLAKE

Well, thanks, I guess?

JESSE

Wayon (*pronounced: way + French nasal -en*), you guess? Come on, it's so cool! You have a movie star name and you're from a big city. You're like the coolest thing to happen to this town.

BLAKE

*(awkward chuckle)* Wait, sorry, wayon?

JESSE

Oh, yeah, that's a thing we say around here. It's French, it means like what the heck or come on or something like that I think.

BLAKE

Oh, okay. Geez, I did not expect to move here and struggle pronouncing everything. Like all the stores and everyone's last names and stuff. How do you say the grocery store's name? Paradis? (*pronounces it like "paradise"*)

JESSE

*(Laughs)* No, no, it's Paradis. *(pronounced para-dee)*

BLAKE

And the gas station? That one is so hard, I don't even want to try. It's like a T-H and then SO many letters.

JESSE

*(laughs)* Yeah, Theriault. *(pronounced terry-oh)* Yeah, you don't say the TH at the beginning, and also the LT at the end either.

BLAKE

Whoa, okay, thanks. And your name is Jesse right?

JESSE

Yeah.

BLAKE

Okay, well I guess that's easy enough. And what's your last name?

JESSE

Ouellette. *(pronounced will-et)*

BLAKE

Ouellette. Oh, I can do that! How do you spell it?

JESSE

O-U-E-L-L-E-T-T-E.

BLAKE

O? What! I never would've expected that!

JESSE

Yeah, well, that's how we do it around here... Wait, what's your last name?

BLAKE

MacMahon. It's spelled M-A-C-M-A-H-O-N.

JESSE

What?! And that's pronounced mick-man?! That's confusing but that's definitely not French.

BLAKE

No, it's Irish. My dad's side of the family is Irish.

JESSE

Wow, you really aren't like the rest of the people around here. (*BLAKE reacts ashamed and awkward*) Oh! No, I mean that in a good way! The people around here suck.

BLAKE

Well they've been pretty nice to me and my family so far! And my little brothers and sisters love it here—we've never really had a backyard they could play in.

JESSE

How many siblings do you have?

BLAKE

3 little brothers and 2 little sisters. The youngest is almost a year old.

JESSE

That's a lot!

BLAKE

Yeah, it is. Dad says it's an Irish thing or something, I don't know. But I help my mom take care of them. They're pretty cute and fun, so it's not too bad.

JESSE

Oh, that's nice. But wait, why are you here anyway? Well, no offense. I just mean like, if your dad is a doctor, couldn't your family have moved anywhere?

BLAKE

Yeah, but there's this government program that pays off med school loans if doctors spend two years working in a rural hospital, so we came here.

JESSE

Our hospital sucks that much, huh?

BLAKE

I don't know, but my dad said it's kind of like doing charity work for two years...and then we'll probably leave after that.

JESSE

*(Taken aback a little)* Oh, I see. Charity—that's a little harsh, we're kinda more than just that. But it does kinda suck here—I'm trying to get out as soon as possible.

BLAKE

Oh really?

JESSE

Yeah. No one ever leaves this place, but I'm gonna be one of the ones who gets out.

BLAKE

Oh, so it's like one of those towns? Well, since we're being honest now...I've been feeling kinda weird about this place actually.

JESSE

Why?

BLAKE

Well it's just like a totally different culture than what I'm used to...

JESSE

Oh the French stuff? Don't worry, you'll get the hang of it!

BLAKE

No, I just mean like the way that people live their lives...it seems like a lot of people aren't the most educated, and like the classes here are pretty easy and none of the other students try that hard.

JESSE

*(becoming more defensive)* Yeah, maybe, but aren't there people like that in Chicago too?

BLAKE

Sure, but there were also people who weren't like that. But I feel like almost everyone around here is like that, even the teachers. Look, sorry, all I'm trying to say is that I feel like I don't really fit in here the best. It's been much easier than this when I moved to other places—this place is just very different and kinda weird.

JESSE

Well maybe that's because you think we're just charity...Look, sure this place sucks, but you don't have to rub it in our faces that you're so much better than us.



BLAKE

That's not what I was trying to do! I didn't mean to be rude or anything, I'm just saying that it's been kind of hard moving here—it's not like the other places I've lived. But you know I hear there's good skiing here and I love skiing, so I bet that will be cool!

JESSE

Yeah, we ski but it's probably not up to your standards. I bet you've skied in like the Alps or something. I get that you're some rich city kid or whatever, and I'm sorry that we're no Chicago, but that's just the way of life up here and everyone is fine with it. Sure, you're not like the rest of us, but that's not our fault. You chose to come here for charity work, and since you're here, let me suggest you watch what you say and do before you start some trouble.

*[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]*

*With countless assumptions and unwelcoming comments, JESSE is oppressing BLAKE in this scenario. Students will try out different ways to solve this conflict, and they will have some information about Blake's background as a resource. It is revealed that BLAKE has led a pretty tough life, constantly moving as her father has pursued medical studies and then a residency. Meanwhile, she has many younger siblings and she is constantly helping her mother take care of them. They lived off of loans and never could afford going on fancy vacations. BLAKE always gets nervous going to a new school because they have had to abandon so many places and people before. BLAKE and JESSE bond about feeling like outsiders: though they are different from one another, in many ways, they feel very different from the rest of the community. The resolution of the conflict brings the scene to a close.*

SCENE 10

*It's months later and JESSE is now about to graduate from high school. It's graduation week and JESSE is in their bedroom. JESSE is still reading their grandfather's book, and then delivers their own thoughts to the audience.*

## FRANCIS

Last week we received word that the English are going to begin deporting all of the men from our colony. We're not really sure where they'll bring them, but we're guessing probably to the other English colonies or back to France. Everyone is really worried, and no one knows what will happen to all of the women and children too. / A few people have revolted, but the Red Coats have fought back by burning their homes in the middle of the night. Mom says to stay hopeful and to keep praying, but Dad thinks that they'll kill most of us or split us all up and deport us all to different places. /

Yesterday I was hunting partridge when Chief Long Foot snuck up on me. I was so scared about it being a Red Coat that I almost shot. But he actually was just trying to help. He says he knows a secret trail that the Red Coats don't know about—it goes to some land west of here where there's another tribe of Indians. / He's been on it once before and he's leading his whole tribe there to get away from the Red Coats, who have threatening to attack their homes as well. He actually invited me and my family to join him, which is really nice because they have every reason to hate the Acadians—we took their land! But now we're joining forces against the English. / Mom and Dad were really hesitant when I told them, but I told them how nice Chief Long Foot is and how he has only ever been helpful. I reminded Dad of the farming tricks they taught me. So, we're doing it. We're packing up all our stuff and sneaking away on this trail in the middle of the night, tonight. / Sure, it's a big risk and I'm sure it'll be tough, but anything is better than Acadia right now. I hate to say goodbye to my home, this place that I have loved so much, but we don't have really have a choice.

## JESSE

*(looks up from book to deliver monologue to audience)* I guess that's kind of like me. I'm about to graduate high school and leave this town, and don't get me wrong! I can't wait, but also I'm pretty scared. I got this great scholarship to a college in Chicago, and I think it'll be pretty cool. I mean, Mom and Dad were pissed—Chicago's pretty far—but they were also happy to hear that it would be really cheap because of my scholarships. Making this leap feels so weird, so unknown. My family has always lived here...I can't believe I'm actually headed out. But man, I can't wait to leave this dump and all of its lame people. There's a whole world out there and I'm finally gonna see it. I really will.

END OF ACT ONE

**ACT TWO**

**SCENE 1**

*JESSE is now at college in Chicago. It is just the second week of school and JESSE is still adjusting to college life in the city. JESSE has a roommate, EMERSON, who is very different in a variety of ways. EMERSON grew up in Los Angeles, went to a fancy STEM school, and is the child of immigrants. EMERSON is also considerably wealthy, as one parent is a doctor and the other is a lawyer. The two are continuing to get to know each other, but it is clear that they are from completely different parts of the country, geographically and ideologically. It's mid-afternoon and JESSE and EMERSON are just getting back to their dorm room after class.*

EMERSON

Hey!

JESSE

Hi.

EMERSON

How was your class?

JESSE

I guess it was pretty good—but this place is *nothing* like where I'm from. I've never been in a class like that!

EMERSON

Yeah, same here.

JESSE

*(silence, JESSE is being super awkward)* So how was your class?

EMERSON

It was cool! It was this lecture on cellular development and stuff, and the professor somehow made it really fun.

JESSE

Ha...cool... *(some more awkward silence)*

EMERSON

So, you've been pretty quiet ever since we got here... are you doing alright?

JESSE

Oh, yeah, I'm alright...It's just, like I said, this place is like *really* different from what I'm used to. I mean, I think it's great, but it's kinda a lot to take in at once I guess.

EMERSON

Yeah, I think we're all feeling that. College is weird and it's *so* new, for everyone.

JESSE

Yeah...

EMERSON

Hey, I know what you should do. A bunch of friends that I made who are also from LA invited me to join them for dinner tonight. You should totally come with us!

JESSE

Oh, cool. In which dining hall?

EMERSON

We were actually gonna go out! Some place called (*in perfect Spanish*) El Pecado—apparently it's new and really good!

JESSE

El Pecado? (*pronounces this very wrong and/or with no Spanish accent at all*) Oh, is that one of those places with like quesadillas (*pronounces both of the Ls*) and enchiladas (*pronounces with a French accent: the -en is made into the French nasal vowel*)?

EMERSON

(*laughs*) Sorry, what? Are you joking?

JESSE

Huh?

EMERSON

You pronounced literally all of those words wrong. Have you never had Mexican food? (*JESSE somewhat stutters an incomprehensible response*) Actually, it's kind of weird... you pronounce a lot of words kind of wrong. It's confusing, like, you're from Maine...you're not a foreigner or anything.

JESSE

Well, actually, where I live it's a lot of French speaking people. My ancestors are French Canadian and before that they were from France. So my parents grew up speaking French and I guess I inherited some of that.

EMERSON

*(scoffs)* Okay, sure. Anyway, do you wanna come out with us tonight?

JESSE

I'd like to, but I really should be saving my money. I don't think I can.

EMERSON

Saving your money? Huh? What are you saving for?

JESSE

Uh, life? Like I have only have so much money... You don't save money?

EMERSON

Well, when I run out of money, my parents just some more onto my card.

JESSE

Ha, must be nice. Yeah, I guess never really realized until I got here, but like I'm kinda poor, so...sorry but I can't go out with you guys—I gotta save my money.

EMERSON

Wait, you're poor? But you're from Maine! Don't you like live in a lighthouse and eat lobster all the time?

JESSE

What? No!

EMERSON

I just thought that Maine was full of really wealthy liberals who live on the ocean and vacation with the Presidents.

JESSE

Yeah, that's not me.

EMERSON

Yeah, no kidding. So apparently, you're like poor and say things wrong cuz you're French? This just doesn't make sense...Are you *sure* you're from Maine?

*[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]*

*In this situation, EMERSON is oppressing JESSE by making assumptions about who he is as a person. Students are invited to improvise solutions to this abundance of false assumptions. The most likely successful option is simply calmly explaining what it was like for JESSE to grow up. Once the students come to a resolution, they segue into this next section where basically JESSE does the same thing to EMERSON (makes multiple assumptions about his life based on identity).*

JESSE

So Maine actually has a lot of different parts to it, and yeah, there are the really rich vacation places, but there are also places like where I'm from. I don't expect you to understand though—you're obviously very rich and only care about your big city life, just like everyone else at this school.

EMERSON

What are you talking about? Why would you say that?

JESSE

I just mean you're so lucky; you have it so easy. You're just spoon-fed everything. Your parents just hand you money and I know you went to that fancy high school. Like, I had to work this crazy job in a potato field just to have enough money to apply here! You know *nothing* about that.

*[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]*

*Now the tables have turned, and JESSE is acting as the oppressor. Students improvise how to solve this conflict. Through this interaction, EMERSON shares stories about their parents being refugees—how hard it was for EMERSON and their family at first, how little money they had, and how they worked their way up to the place where they're at now. JESSE learns that the assumptions they held were wrong. It is during this Forum Theatre moment that the teacher makes clear that situations like EMERSON's are often experiences based on race—though the student playing EMERSON may be white, it's important for students to understand that the same thing could happen and deeply affect (likely more so) a person of color. This is a necessary moment of teacher intervention—the effects of this activity will not be fully realized if this point is not highlighted. Segue out of it to draw connections with JESSE's own ancestors (FRANCIS).*

JESSE

I guess I never really thought about what it was like for people *before* they were rich.

EMERSON

Yeah. We're in a good place now, but it definitely wasn't always like this.

JESSE

So your parents literally came here with like *nothing*? That's crazy.

EMERSON

Well I mean they had a few things, but really not much. And they didn't really know anyone or anything about America. They didn't know English either.

JESSE

Wow. Hey, that reminds me of a story I just read about running away to an unknown place... oh yeah, it's in this book of letters that I'm reading!

EMERSON

What book?

JESSE

Oh it's just this book that I found that's about my family's history—a bunch of journal entries written by an Acadian. The Acadians were like a French colony in Canada.

EMERSON

*(skeptical)* And they were...refugees?

JESSE

I don't know. I guess, maybe? Their whole village was destroyed and burned down by the English and so a bunch of them ran away to the town in Maine where I grew up.

EMERSON

Hm, yeah, I guess that is kind of like being refugees.

JESSE

*(finds book)* Listen to this part. This is the main character Francis speaking.

*(As JESSE begins to read, FRANCIS speaks the same words that he is saying, and FRANCIS soon takes over as if he is narrating the book)*

FRANCIS

With the help of Chief Long Foot, we've finally arrived at this place that is apparently our new home. It's so sad—this isn't like Grand Pre at all. We barely have anything now and we have to start our lives all over again from scratch. / Dad says that tomorrow I'm going to help him start building us a cabin. There's a few other Acadian families here who are in the same boat as us, but it's mostly Indians here and we feel really out of place. They all talk to each other and we can't understand a thing. And they don't understand our French either! / Chief Long Foot told me that they're a little scared of interacting with us because the Acadians have done some bad things in the past to them, but hopefully this place starts to feel like a community soon. / I miss my home and our farm and all of our animals, especially the rabbits. This just all so different and tough, but we pray every day as a family that it'll get better.

*(JESSE finishes reading by saying the same words as FRANCIS. FRANCIS disappears as JESSE puts down the book)*

EMERSON

Hm, wow.

JESSE

It's pretty interesting, right?

EMERSON

Yeah. It sounds kind of like the stories I was told about my parents leaving their home and coming here.

JESSE

I guess a lot of people have this story.

EMERSON

Yeah, definitely in America. My friend in LA was from Uruguay but her family basically went through the same thing when they migrated to the States.

JESSE

That's how this country was built, right?

EMERSON

Yeah. Most people, at some point in their history, have been forced out their homes and have struggled to make it. Even people like you, like this book is talking about.



JESSE

So maybe we're not as different as it seems.

EMERSON

I mean, we *are* really different Jesse, and I think we both have totally different experiences of the world and we probably always will, but it's good to know we have more things in common than we thought, or than it might just look like on the outside.

JESSE

Yeah, totally.

EMERSON

Anyway, I'm starving. You sure you don't want to come eat with us?

JESSE

Yeah, you know, gotta save that money...

EMERSON

Oh right. I understand. Well, catch you later!

SCENE 2

*Later that week at night. JESSE comes back to their dorm after a meeting and finds EMERSON with a friend, ALEX. The two are sharing stories about summer camps and vacations as JESSE walks in and sits next to them.*

EMERSON

But I think the Grand Canyon is kind of overrated. We went there as a class trip in middle school...

ALEX

Oh I don't really remember that well, I was like 7 or 8 when my family went.

EMERSON

It's just like this huge hole in the ground! *(EMERSON and ALEX laugh. JESSE sits awkwardly nearby.)*

ALEX

Maybe it'd be cooler if they put some water in it and turned it into some fancy spa. *(They laugh again.)*

EMERSON

Did you go to summer camp, by the way?

ALEX

Of course! Didn't you?

EMERSON

Yeah! Mine was on Lake Tahoe and it was so pretty. There's actually a bunch of kids at this school that I went to camp with. It's so fun. Where was yours?

ALEX

Mine was in Maine, actually. It was on this really pretty lake up in the woods.

EMERSON

Hey, Jesse is from Maine! And he lives in the woods, right!?

JESSE

Yeah...

ALEX

Oh, hey, I'm Alex by the way. I'm from New York City.

JESSE

Hi. Jesse.

ALEX

And you're from Maine? That's so cool! It's so beautiful there.

JESSE

Yeah, I guess...

IF ALEX IS PLAYED BY A MALE-IDENTIFYING STUDENT, USE THE FOLLOWING LINES AND THEN CONTINUE WITH THE SCENE.

ALEX

Anyway, my camp did tons of sports, like more than most camps I think. That's actually why my parents sent me there; they were worried that I was too feminine. They wanted to straighten me out. *(awkwardly laughs about this)*

EMERSON

Oh man, that sucks...Did you at least like it? Like the sports and all that?

ALEX

I mean it wasn't the ideal way to spend my summer, but I still really liked it. And I wasn't too bad at sports! It just—it definitely didn't change the way I felt about guys. *(laughs about this again)* Wait, Jesse, did you go to summer camp too?

IF ALEX IS PLAYED BY A FEMALE-IDENTIFYING STUDENT, USE THE FOLLOWING LINES AND THEN CONTINUE WITH THE SCENE.

ALEX

Anyway, my camp did tons of music and theater and art stuff, like more than most camps I think. That's actually why my parents sent me there; they were worried that I was too much of a tomboy. They wanted to make me more girly. *(awkwardly laughs about this)*

EMERSON

Oh man, that sucks...Did you at least like it? Like the arts and crafts and music and stuff?

ALEX

I mean it wasn't the ideal way to spend my summer, but I still really liked it. And I wasn't too bad at it either! It just—it definitely didn't change the way I felt about girls. (*laughs about this again*) Wait, Jesse, did you go to summer camp too?

CONTINUE WITH THE SCENE...

JESSE

Uh, no.

ALEX

Oh, but have you heard of my camp? Camp Woodburn?

JESSE

No, never heard of it. I only just learned about all these sleepaway summer camps since coming to college. We never did things like that where I'm from.

ALEX

So what did you do during summer then?

JESSE

Uh, I mowed people's lawns. One summer I worked on a green bean farm.

ALEX

Oh.

EMERSON

But what did you do for fun?

JESSE

Normal things! I played a lot of sports with my brothers. Basketball and soccer and stuff. And we went camping a whole lot, sometimes even just in my backyard!

ALEX

Like camping in a cabin, right? Like what we did at camp?

JESSE

(*chuckles*) No! We would just hike somewhere and pitch a tent.

EMERSON

(to ALEX) Jesse is from like the middle of nowhere.

ALEX

(as if this explains things further) Oh... (to JESSE) Wait, did you have electricity?

JESSE

Uh, yeah! Of course. It's not *totally* uncivilized.

ALEX

Oh, right, right. It's just that I watched this documentary about Appalachia and like all the poor people there. Is that what it's like where you're from?

JESSE

Well it's more like that than it is like New York City!

ALEX

Oh, wow. I thought Maine was nice.

JESSE

I never said it wasn't nice...

ALEX

So do you guys like drink Mountain Dew instead of water? I saw that in the documentary, too.

JESSE

What? No. We have plenty of normal water.

ALEX

And did you ever like do or make meth?

EMERSON

Alex.

ALEX

What? I'm pretty sure that's what goes on in these like poor, rural places.

JESSE

I mean, yeah, there were some drug problems, like there are in most places. I was never involved with drugs, though.

ALEX

What about your parents?

JESSE

No!

ALEX

Okay, okay, well either way I bet it's sucky there. Like yikes, I can't believe you lived there. Seems pretty trashy.

JESSE

Whoa, that's just unfair. Look, I didn't go to any fancy summer camps, I wasn't spoiled like you guys, and I'm not from some cool city...and yeah, my town's a little different, but at least I know how to actually work hard and take care of myself. That's actually why you're girly Alex—you've never worked a day in your life. Your parents have always babied you, and they probably still do.

*[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]*

*This is a forum theatre moment where both JESSE and ALEX are being oppressed and are oppressing one another. Insults abounding, students improvise different ways to deal with this conflict. It's revealed that since ALEX became openly queer, their family does not welcome them back in their home. Ideally, this turns into a conversation about why it's harmful to stereotype individuals—ALEX is no longer babied, their estranged, and JESSE's town is not like how ALEX imagined. JESSE is called out for harsh comments at ALEX re: sexuality, admits perhaps to some homophobia, and remembers their own experience with gender stereotypes back at home. The two recall ways in which they have been stereotyped or stereotyped others in the past (in regards to sexuality for ALEX, and perhaps JESSE's first interactions with BLAKE), and this causes them to re-think the ways in which they were both stereotyping each other.*

ALEX

Yeah, when we stereotype each other, it's so much harder to build a community of support and fight for each other's rights. Like, no offense, but I probably would've never cared about the problems in rural towns if I had just continued to stereotype them based on that documentary I saw. So yeah, stereotypes kind of get in the way of humanizing and supporting one another.

EMERSON

You're so right Alex. You know, I've been stereotyped a bunch too.

JESSE

Yeah?

EMERSON

Yeah. Like my family is super super religious, but—I don't know—it never really did much for me. So I always just went along with it for my family and kinda faked it. But when people find out about my church, they always think that I'm some crazy extremist that like judges everyone and hates everything. But that's not me, and that's not my family either—we're good people, and this is just the religion we grew up with.

JESSE

Wow, that sounds hard. People are so quick to judge.

ALEX

We all are. Like we all do it to one another and we all probably experience it too.

EMERSON

Exactly.

JESSE

I just hope college is different. I'm ready for a change.

ALEX

Yeah, me too. I know there are a bunch of queer people here who probably understand me and won't stereotype me, but I still feel like I'm on the outside. They all seem so comfortable being gay, and I'm just not there yet.

JESSE

I also feel like I don't totally fit in. I haven't met other people like me here, so I'm worried the stereotypes might just continue. I thought people here would be more similar to me than the people in my town, but I'm still just the odd one out I guess.

EMERSON

But isn't it good that we're all different?

JESSE

What do you mean?

EMERSON

Can you just imagine what it would be like if we were all the same? Sounds pretty boring.

JESSE

Oh trust me, I know what that's like. Everyone in my town was the same and it was so terrible.

EMERSON

Exactly. Isn't this the reason why we came to college? To learn more about the world? You don't get that only from books and classes; it's also from getting to know different people, keeping an open mind, and not stereotyping.

ALEX

You're right. Maybe we'll always have this feeling, of being different, and maybe that's not a bad thing. We'll probably spend our whole lives feeling like we don't exactly fit in, no matter where we are, because that's just what it means to be human in this super complicated and diverse world.

JESSE

But then how does anyone ever feel comfortable and truly understood? Won't stereotypes just continue? Right now it doesn't feel like a good thing to be different and not belong. I still feel alone.

ALEX

I don't think of it that way. Look, none of us have your same specific identity and I haven't shared the same moments of pain that you have. But I've also struggled with the feeling of being an outsider and the feeling of being stereotyped, remember? So you're not alone with me.

EMERSON

Yeah! I know it's like super cheesy, but I feel like we all have a shared experience of being different from one another. I mean, we all have pretty different identities, but I think to some degree we all have things in life that challenge us, that bring us joy, and so forth. So I think you should just have an open mind and remember that, like, we're all living in the same world here!

JESSE

*(in disbelief)* No but your world was *nothing* like my world, remember? I didn't have fancy camps or nice houses or great high schools or any of that. I get that a lot of people are stereotyped and that it's hurtful, but I don't see how that can make me feel like I fit in, or like people understand me.

EMERSON

*(exasperated)* Oh my gosh... I feel like everything I say is wrong! Why are you so hung up on this? And mad at me for it?



JESSE

Woah woah...I'm not mad at you—it's just that it's pretty hard for me at this school...

EMERSON

Yeah, I get it, but I was only saying good things... that we should all get along and keep an open mind and stuff. I get that you're struggling and all, but I've been trying to make you feel better this whole time, so I don't know what else I can do.

JESSE

I'm—I'm sorry...I didn't mean to frustrate you.

ALEX

Guys, look, I think there is a way that we can work this out, right? You don't want a community with people who are the same as you, so maybe instead it's about a community with people who have lots of different experiences and are willing to learn from each other and support and fight for what everyone needs. All three of us are really different from each other and have faced different hardships, but I think what's important is learning about that and seeing each other fully, not just on the surface. That's what'll bring us closer together, and that's what college is about!

JESSE

Yeah, I guess that makes sense to me.

EMERSON

Sure, but I need some time to think about all of this.

ALEX

Totally. College has certainly been an adjustment—I don't know if anyone is used to it yet...

EMERSON

*(less frustrated, light-heartedly)* True.

SCENE 3

*The next week, in the afternoon. LOGAN, someone JESSE lives with, is sitting in the student lounge trying to get their laptop to work. LOGAN is from a city and their family struggles financially, therefore LOGAN doesn't have the nicest laptop. JESSE walks into the student lounge after class. LOGAN is hitting the laptop in a strange, unnatural way.*

JESSE

Oh, hey Logan. Uh, what are you doing?

LOGAN

*(Sighs)* My laptop isn't working again. Trying to fix it.

JESSE

I'm no expert, but I don't think banging it like that is going to help anything...

LOGAN

Well, I hope it does. It's that or nothing.

JESSE

What do you mean? Wouldn't your parents just buy you a new one?

LOGAN

No, we can't... we can't really afford that.

JESSE

Aren't you from New York?

LOGAN

Yeah, so...?

JESSE

So... aren't you like all the other New York kids here? Prep school and parents with fancy jobs and stuff? I'm sure your parents would buy you a new one in a flash if you just asked.

LOGAN

Not everyone from New York is like that. My family—we're *not* like that.

JESSE

*(awkward, confused)* Oh...

LOGAN

Ever since the recession hit, my family has been struggling. My parents both got laid off and it was really bad for a while. All the factories were closing, so it was like this for a lot of my friends, too. *(beat)* Anyway, you're the one with the really nice fancy laptop so I doubt you understand.

JESSE

No, I got a scholarship that bought that laptop for me. Trust me, I'm not one of those fancy prep school city kids either. My mom lost her job around that time too, and it really sucked for my family. We've never had much money—I feel so lucky this school has such great financial aid.

LOGAN

Yeah, same here. No way I could be here without it. So I guess we're kinda in the same boat.

JESSE

Yeah, I guess. You know, I don't think I've met anyone here who's poor and from a city.

LOGAN

Yep, that's me! We exist too! You're right though, there's a lot of rich city kids at this school. But there are plenty of poor city kids like me out here too.

JESSE

I'm so sorry—all this time I just assumed that you were some spoiled brat from some fancy school in some fancy city.

LOGAN

*(awkward chuckle)* Well, I'm actually a first-gen student. Which means my parents didn't even go to college. So believe me, not all the city kids are like the ones you've met here.

JESSE

*(thinks a bit)* Wait, so, maybe this is weird to ask but where you're from, is it like the rap music talks about?

LOGAN

What?

JESSE

Well, it's just that I don't really know much about cities. But my friend and I used to listen to a

lot of rap music back at home and those songs sometimes talked about being poor in the city. Like... did you live in a ghetto? What are those like?

LOGAN

Oh come on, that's not cool. I mean, yeah I lived in a rough part of town and we listen to rap a lot and some stuff is relatable, but it's not really cool to call it a ghetto and talk about us like some science experiment.

JESSE

Oh, sorry! I'm just trying to learn more about people and their experiences, like Emerson and Alex were talking about. (*awkward silence, LOGAN is a bit put off*) So...were you in a gang or like a drug dealer? Or did you know people? I see shows about that stuff and it seems pretty wild and scary.

LOGAN

(*annoyed, insulted*) Uh, no, not really—that wasn't my crowd. Look, you keep talking about how no one respects your background...well, you're kinda doing that to me now, and it's really not cool.

JESSE

Oh, uh, you're right...sorry. It's not that I don't like you! I just didn't know about your life—wanted to find out more. But hey, I bet we must have some things in common, right? I've been finding out that even though people are really different they can still have things in common...Oh! I bet there must be some illegal immigrants where you live? (*LOGAN is not pleased with this.*) We have some of those coming into Maine and it's really terrible—I bet you're also annoyed with this...? I just don't understand why people can sneak their way into this country that we work so hard to maintain, and then they steal everything all of the jobs that our poor family can hardly hold onto. I bet that happens a lot where you live...that sucks. My parents hate it too.

LOGAN

Jesse, what?! No, that's not something we have in common. *My* parents were illegal immigrants, okay?

JESSE

Oh my...

[FORUM THEATRE MOMENT]

*In this situation, JESSE is oppressing LOGAN with his assumptions about urban poverty, mirroring the assumptions about rural poverty oppressing JESSE in the previous scene.*

*Moreover, JESSE's views towards immigrants is oppressive, especially since LOGAN's father was an illegal immigrant. This moment isn't about finding common ground, but rather, it's about LOGAN standing up for immigrants and teaching JESSE that their views are oppressive. LOGAN will likely share the struggles their family has gone through, something that JESSE really can't relate to. Hopefully through the resolution the students choose, we see JESSE empathizing with an experience totally unlike their own, and perhaps even taking it on as a call for social justice.*

JESSE

Dang, I was raised to think that immigrants were the enemy, that they were just freeloaders, but I really had no clue about all the things you guys face. It just doesn't seem fair...

LOGAN

Yeah, exactly.

JESSE

And then your parents losing their jobs? Man...like I said, my dad lost his job, but I don't think the stakes were as high.

LOGAN

Well, it's not a competition of oppression. I know you have your own sucky experiences too. Didn't you say a bunch of the farms are closing where you live?

JESSE

Yep.

LOGAN

Yeah, and like all our factories have closed too. Left a lot of people in a tough spot. So I think the point is that there are a lot of things working against a lot of people's success in this world.

JESSE

Yeah, I guess.

LOGAN

And you know what? A lot of immigrants have been moving to rural communities across the country actually—maybe some even in Maine! They do lots of the labor work on farms, but they're *not* taking peoples jobs. They're doing the jobs people don't want to do because they're too trained and stuff. So yeah, post-industrialism has hit both of our communities pretty hard, but immigrants are sometimes the reasons rural economies are still able to survive!

JESSE

I guess I never thought about it like that...*(chuckles and jokes)* Dang, you're such an Econ nerd.

LOGAN

Yeah, yeah, whatever. I just mean that—I don't know—both our families have struggled because of stupid rules and laws and capitalism and all that. And people are fighting about walls and all that when the truth is we need each other and we help each other even though we're different—we shouldn't be fighting that! If we see this and try to understand each other, then we can help each other out, join forces, and fight the power!

JESSE

*(laughing)* Okay, well now you sound like a politician.

LOGAN

Yeah, I've also been considering pursuing that...Anyway, you get what I'm talking about, right?

JESSE

Yeah. Yeah, totally.

SCENE 4

*Later that night. EMERSON and JESSE are in their room doing homework and preparing for bed when they strike up a conversation.*

EMERSON

Hey, Jesse? I've been thinking about the conversations we've been having lately.

JESSE

Oh. Yeah?

EMERSON

Yeah. Well, I guess at first I just didn't realize how different we really are. I mean like, you know what I thought about Maine and stuff...

JESSE

Yeah...

EMERSON

So I wanted to say sorry. In case I made you feel unwelcomed or disrespected or anything.

JESSE

It's okay. People around here just don't care about where I'm from—it's not your fault.

EMERSON

I know, but that must suck. It's not really fair that there aren't a lot of other rural kids at this school.

JESSE

Yeah...

EMERSON

But I would love to try to understand more about your life and you and stuff. And I bet there are other people who would love to learn, too!

JESSE

Oh. Uh, that's really nice of you. You really don't have to try that hard. I'm sure I'll get over it.

EMERSON

Yeah, but I'm your roommate, so I feel like it's really the least I could do.

JESSE

Oh, wow, thanks. *(beat)* You know, I should be the one saying I'm sorry. I feel like I've been so focused on feeling different myself that I didn't really give anyone a chance at first and I just made assumptions about everyone. Like just today I was talking to Logan and I did the same thing. I just assumed Logan was some rich city kid, which was way off base. I guess I'm just realizing how little I know about how other people live and grow up. Like just as little as people know about me. I just mean, I'm sorry if I've offended you also.

EMERSON

Don't worry about it, I understand. I think we're kind of all just figuring this out.

JESSE

Yeah. And like with Logan today, he was telling me about illegal immigration and stuff. You know, I hated those people and so did everyone my town...but I really knew nothing about it. I felt pretty bad. And then we started talking about how we've actually been hurt by the same systems. Like capitalism, or some econ thing like that. I mean we have *totally* different backgrounds, but, uh, something about building a community, fighting the power?

EMERSON

Exactly! This is like what Alex was talking about the other day. We're all going to live pretty different lives, just because of who we are, but we're all going to struggle along the way and we can help each other through it if we at least try to understand where they're coming from.

JESSE

This is all just so new to me. I bet it's easier for you, having grown up in a city. You must meet so many people who are different from you all the time!

EMERSON

Yeah, I guess so...

JESSE

Like didn't you say you had a friend from Brazil?

EMERSON

Uruguay actually, but yeah I guess people were from all over where I'm from.

JESSE

We just didn't have that in my town at all. Everyone is French Catholic and we all basically have the same five last names.



EMERSON

Oh, wow.

JESSE

So I've never really had to work to understand people who were different from me...we were all so similar. And like, even our parents were all friends in high school too.

EMERSON

That's crazy.

JESSE

So all of this—like getting to know people who are so different, and all these city people and people with money and also people without money and stuff—it's just really not what I'm used to. So, I'm sorry if I was ever offensive or if I came across as ignorant... I guess it's just another flaw of the farm land I grew up in, hah.

EMERSON

Well, sure, you're right, there was lots of diversity where I lived, but I bet there was some even where you lived too. Maybe it just looked different...everyone couldn't have been *exactly* the same.

*(EMERSON is cut off by knocking on their bedroom door)*

FRANCIS

*(behind the door)* Jesse? You in there?

JESSE

Did you hear that? Was that a knock on the door?

EMERSON

I didn't hear anything.

JESSE

No, someone knocked. *(speaking up)* Yeah, just a sec!

*(JESSE opens door and finds an apparition of FRANCIS, their ancestor and the main character of the book JESSE has been reading. JESSE has no clue who FRANCIS is and is very confused by the whole situation. EMERSON cannot see FRANCIS.)*

JESSE

Um, hi?

FRANCIS

Did you not learn anything from me?

JESSE

Sorry, what? Who are you?

FRANCIS

I'm Francis!

JESSE

Emerson, do you know a Francis? Do you know who this is?

EMERSON

Jesse, what are you talking about? There's no one there...

JESSE

*(to FRANCIS)* What is going on here? Who are you?

FRANCIS

I'm Francis! From the book! Just come out here and talk to me.

JESSE

*(to EMERSON)* I'll be back in a minute.

EMERSON

*(weirded out)* Are you doing alright? Why do you keep talking to yourself? Who's Francis?

JESSE

Just—just gimme a minute.

*(JESSE closes the door and is alone with FRANCIS in the hallway.)*

JESSE

You said you're from my book? What are you talking about? And why can't my roommate see you!?

FRANCIS

Wow, you ask a lot of questions! Gosh, why don't you calm down a little!

JESSE

No! Tell me who you are! And what you want! This is freaking me out.

FRANCIS

Okay, no need to freak out! I told you: I'm Francis. I'm the person who wrote the letters in the book that you've been reading. About Acadians. That's me! I'm one of your ancestors!

JESSE

Is this a dream?

FRANCIS

That doesn't matter. Listen, I'm here because of what you said! Did you not learn anything from my story?

JESSE

What did I say?

FRANCIS

Well basically you said that it wasn't your fault for being a jerk to people who are different from you because of where you grew up. Because everyone is the same up in northern Maine.

JESSE

Yeah, so? It's true.

FRANCIS

No, it's not! Sure maybe everyone looks the same and they all grew up in the same small town, but that doesn't mean that they're all the same.

JESSE

I'm confused.

FRANCIS

Remember Sue from harvest? And Nic and Max? Oh, and that new student Blake, remember Blake? You had a pretty different life from all of them, but you were still able to forge a community with them. Come on, you must remember that?

JESSE

I guess...But what does that have to do with you?

FRANCIS

Because it was the same for me! Don't you remember from my letters?

JESSE

What? No. Your letters were about like farming and running away from the British and stuff.

FRANCIS

Oh come on, think harder! *(aside)* Man, teenagers these days... *(to JESSE)* Remember when we had the Red Coat living with us? He spoke a different language and was totally different from us, but that didn't stop us from seeing him as another human being and getting along.

JESSE

Yeah, but then you hated him because they were burning down your village. I wouldn't call that a community.

FRANCIS

Okay, sure, but do you remember the Indians? Chief Long Foot?

JESSE

Yeah, so?

FRANCIS

So!?! They were the reason we survived! Remember I was so scared of them? But then we actually became friends—even though Acadians had originally taken their land, we made an effort to understand each other and realized that we could help one other in different ways. And in the end, that made all the difference because they helped us escape the deportation! We learned that no one is free when others are oppressed, so we stuck together when the English started getting destructive!

JESSE

Oh, I remember that.

FRANCIS

Yeah, you better! You see, if we hadn't learned how to empathize with one another and join together in our fight for justice, we would've never escaped the English and made it to Maine. You probably would've never even existed!

JESSE

I think I see where this is going...

FRANCIS

So all of this being closed-minded stuff? Being mean to city kids, making assumptions, and all that? You're betraying your inheritance, Jesse! Empathy, learning from other people, being loving, and fighting the injustices of the world, whether they're against you or your friends—that stuff runs in your blood! It's who we are. It's who we've always been.

JESSE

Yeah, but the people here are way more different from me than the people back at home.

FRANCIS

It doesn't matter! It's the same idea! This is who you are, who you've always been, and you should be doing better! Especially after reading my book.

JESSE

I guess you're right.

FRANCIS

Oh, you bet I'm right! Or else I wouldn't be here right now! This place is so strange...

Everything is so... modern.

*(JESSE chuckles)*

Now get back in there and give a real apology to Emerson. You have such a good roommate who is willing to get to know you and your story. Sure, it's true that college is a new environment for you, but you need to stop blaming your home community for making this difficult for you, when the truth is that love, empathy, compassion, and community are the values that have allowed you and your ancestors to survive in a world that has always been complex and challenging and full of many different kinds of people.

JESSE

Okay, okay, you're right. I can't believe I'm taking advice from like a weird ghost?

FRANCIS

I have to go now! Goodbye, Jesse!

*(FRANCIS disappears, and JESSE returns to their bedroom.)*

JESSE

*(walking in the room)* Um, sorry about that...

EMERSON

Are you alright? I heard you out there talking to yourself...

JESSE

Yeah, that was, uh, nothing. I was, uh, on the phone. *(beat)* Anyway, I just realized that what I said earlier was wrong.

EMERSON

Huh?

JESSE

About like not being exposed to people who were different from me.

EMERSON

Oh?

JESSE

I guess it's not really true. Like, people may look similar at home but there's still difference and diversity and all that, and there always has been. I guess I was just being a jerk.

EMERSON

You don't have to be too hard on yourself.

JESSE

Remember that book we read part of? Well, I just remembered that the main character—and I guess my ancestors—encountered difference, all the time. I don't really have an excuse. I should be doing better.

EMERSON

It's okay...

JESSE

Well anyway, yes, we are pretty different, but I would also like to get to know you better and understand where you're coming from.

EMERSON

Well, great! Sounds like we're on the same page. You know, I'm glad we're roommates.

JESSE

Yeah, me too.

EMERSON

We're gonna survive college, Jesse. I got your back! And hey, anything that you think I should understand about you and your life, feel free to tell me. I'm all ears.

JESSE

*(genuinely smiling)* Yeah, same here. I'm also all ears.

*Students are then encouraged to write down something that they wish people better understood about their life experiences, what societal forces have influenced this, and what causes of injustice they want to band together to fight. These can either be shared in pairs, or the teacher can collect all of them and read them anonymously to the whole class. The point is to highlight that we all have things that make us unique, that influence our identity, and that have oppressed us—if we use more social empathy in our day-to-day life, we may be able to break down barriers between individuals or groups of people and support each other's uniqueness a little more.*

SCENE 5

*Blank stage, with JESSE delivering monologue. All of the other characters appear to join in.*

JESSE

So much has happened in the last year. I left home, moved to Chicago for college, and just in this last week, I learned so much about myself and about my new friends. But I guess through all of it, I'm realizing how important my town is. Not in the grand scheme of world perhaps. It's still just that small little place up in the middle of nowhere, but it's really important to who I am. I spent so much of my life hating it and trying to escape, but I guess it's pretty cool. It's unique, you know, and it makes me who I am today, so I can't really hate that. The same goes with this book I've been reading about my ancestors—what happened to them was hundred years ago, but in a strange way, it seems like their story is still relevant and important to the life I'm living now. Anyway, I guess all of these things—people, and their lives, and where they're from and everything—it's a lot more complicated than I realized. But it seems like at the end of the day...

*(All of the people that JESSE has had "conflicts" with come to the forefront and join in this last scene with their one line finishing JESSE's sentence)*

SUE

We all have something weighing us down.

MOM

We all just want to be happy.

MAX

We all got our own problems ...

NIC

...no matter where we come from or who we are.

BLAKE

We just want to feel like we belong.

EMERSON

We're battling some sort of societal oppression.

ALEX

We all want to feel loved and accepted, regardless of our baggage.



LOGAN

We want someone to walk with us, hand in hand, to help us fight our battles.

JESSE

We want someone to at least try to understand our story.

FRANCIS

This is who we are. And it's who we've always been. This is not only how survive, but how we thrive together.

JESSE

I guess what I'm trying to say is this past year or so has taught me that life is a bit complicated and so are people. But I think that we're all really deserving of support from one another, of a community that fights *for* one another, not *against* one another, to help us figure out this chaotic thing we call life. It's like Francis said: no one is truly free when others are being oppressed.

THE END

## Appendix B

### Teacher's Guide

The Companion to SOWING SEEDS  
by Jared Andrew Michaud

Dear Educator,

In the pages that follow, you will find a variety of resources to help you lead an important applied theatre activity in your classroom. Before using the accompanying script, it is highly recommended that you read through this material to get a sense of how to implement the play as an educational activity and how to maximize its potential as a tool for teaching social empathy in rural schools. Of course, since no two classrooms are alike, the resources that follow are merely a guide—a series of suggestions—about how the play should best be utilized. Thus, the ultimate use and direction of this theatrical activity is up to the discretion of its facilitator, and the activity should be shaped and molded for each classroom in which it is used.

This activity is designed for a high school classroom. It does not have to be a class of a particular subject, as these are skills that are important in all areas of knowledge and being. The activity could run for quite a while depending on the length of discussion, so it is possible to split the activity into two class periods: one class is for the first act of the play, and another class is for the second act.

Additionally, this play has been written specifically for a classroom of high school students in northern Maine. It makes many references to the specific culture and heritage of this area as part of its community-based arts education technique. For that reason, the play is not relevant in other rural communities in its specifics, though it is in its lessons and role-playing scenarios. It is recommended that the play should be adapted to suit the needs of other geographically rural areas. However, it's important to note that because the activity is intensely location-specific, this would likely require an extensive overhaul of the current script.

Whether or not you are teaching in the specific context of rural northern Maine, this script and teacher's guide can be used as a model of how to use Theatre of the Oppressed to teach social empathy in isolated and homogenous rural communities. The ideas that it presents and works with are relevant to all of these types of communities across the country. I invite you to experiment with what works, eliminate what doesn't, and make this project your own. Thank you for your commitment to your students and to this subject, and I hope you find this tool useful in achieving your goals!

Sincerely,

Jared Michaud

## **Theatre of the Oppressed: An Introduction**

*“We must all do theatre, to find out who we are and discover who we could become.”*

*– Augusto Boal*

Theatre of the Oppressed is a theatrical form created in the 1970s by Brazilian theater practitioner Augusto Boal. This form uses the audience as “spect-actors” to explore, analyze, and transform the play and their own realities as a means for promoting social and political change. Based on Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Theatre of the Oppressed destroys hierarchies and breaks down the barrier between spectators and actors in the theater—we are all invited to make the theater our own and to become involved in it. This theatrical activity makes use of one of Boal’s most famous Theatre of the Oppressed exercises: Forum Theatre. While it is presented in a slightly different way than intended, the essence of Forum Theatre still shines through in this script and in how this activity is facilitated.

Forum Theatre, at its essence, is a form of interactive theater that allows individuals to tackle oppressive situations on stage themselves, so they can be better prepared for facing them in real life. In almost every scene of this theatrical activity, the script sets up a Forum Theatre moment: a point of conflict between two characters where one is oppressing the other, often through false assumptions and accusations, or where both are oppressing each other. At these moments, students in the audience (since they are in fact “spect-actors”) will volunteer ideas about how to solve the conflict. They will then take the stage to role-play their potential solution and to take matters into their own hands. In this way, no one person embodies each character, and everyone is able to take the matters of characters into their own hands. Students try out their different ideas of resolving the oppressive situation and the other characters improvise how they believe their character might respond—they don’t have to pretend like their character would be willing to solve the conflict if they don’t actually think they would. Forum Theatre is a sort of improvisatory trial-and-error role-playing, as “spect-actors” are invited on stage to replace the protagonist or a bystander to intervene at the event of an injustice and offer solutions to dissolve the conflict.

In addition to the “spect-actor,” the other crucial role in Theatre of the Oppressed is you: the Joker. As the teacher of the classroom, it is your job to facilitate this theatrical activity. However, you must ride a fine line between *teaching* and *leading*. Theatre of the Oppressed is all about empowering individuals who feel like they may not have a voice, and so to rely on the hierarchical power structures already set up by the classroom is antithetical to our purpose. In Boal’s theory, the Joker is the person who breaks the ice between the actors and the spectators, encouraging everyone to be a “spect-actor.” Your job is not to tell your students *how* to handle these conflicts, but rather, it is to help guide them in the process of brainstorming and improvising their solutions. The impact will be much greater if they are the ones in charge of finding ways to diffuse these situations. Once the forum begins, the Joker encourages, invites, regulates, appreciates, explains, concludes, and at times even translates the interventions of a “spect-actor.” In other words, it is your job to facilitate Forum Theatre in a way that is not too pedantic but that makes the lessons clear. This may sound a lot, but don’t worry! This guide will help you along the way.

If you are still a bit confused about Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre, no worries! We understand that the whole idea of it can be quite confusing—it was revolutionary for a reason! To better understand how this all works, we think it's best to see it done in action. Check out the following videos to see how Forum Theatre actually works!

A Sneak Peek from Theatre of the Oppressed-NYC:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi1HfSiMxCU>

A TEDTalk about Forum Theatre and a student theatre troupe using it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcLcXeXJVDU>

The Forum Theatre presented in these videos differs a bit from what it will look like as applied in our classroom activity. This is mainly because their scenes set up conflict right away, while the script we're working with focuses a lot on the backstory and history so that students can connect more with the characters. While the scenes in these videos primarily concern conflict and improve, the scenes in our play sit somewhere between a scripted play/narrative and improvisatory moments of conflict.

### The Rules

Forum Theatre is like a game, and, as with any game there are rules, which must be addressed for the game to be successful. When introducing the concept of this show to your class, feel free to share these rules.

For the spect-actor:

1. First, you will watch a performance, which shows a conflict/issue of oppression.
2. At the moment for Forum Theatre, you are invited to thinking about possible solutions for changing the circumstances and resolving the conflict.
3. The actors will then go back a few lines to repeat what happened. At any time, anyone can call out freeze, come up on stage and take the place of the central character (protagonist), in order to try to change the series of events and resolve the conflict. You need never have experienced drama in your life to take part in this—what you need are ideas of how to change the events to effectively resolve the problem/oppression.
4. You may only swap places with the characters that want to change the circumstances presented. Alternatively, you may introduce characters that may be able to support other characters that wish to change.
5. You may feel nervous about standing up in front of everyone—this is only natural. However, if no one gets up, the performance will continue as it did the first time and therefore the series of events will go unchanged.
6. The Joker is at hand at all times to guide and support anyone who is slightly nervous. If you have an idea for change but do not want to come up on stage, you may still call out freeze and offer your suggestion to the group of actors who will then perform this suggestion.

7. No one may offer violence as a suggestion for change. Likewise, “magic” does not exist in this world—you may not suggest any sort of fantastical solutions. Forum Theatre does not accept these methods of change.

For the Joker:

1. Jokers must avoid all actions, which could manipulate or influence the audience. The audience should never be confronted with the joker’s own personal interpretation of events.
2. Jokers must personally decide nothing. They must keep relaying doubts back to the audience i.e. does this solution work or not? Is this right or wrong?
3. Watch out for “magic” solutions. The Joker may interrupt the spect-actor’s action if they consider an action to be magic. They must not make that decision but must ask the audience if they believe it to be.
4. The Joker is the “midwife,” assisting in the birth of all ideas, of all actions!
5. It is more important to achieve a good debate than a good solution.
6. The Joker should not mingle with the audience or the actors but remain separate from them—physically alert and dynamic at all times.

More generally, the guidelines are as follows:

- The protagonist has options.
- The oppressor can change.
- An ally can change the course of an action.
- Magic, although fun, does not actually work. Or help.

## **SOWING SEEDS: An Introduction**

This play focuses on Jesse, a young adult from northern Maine, and their<sup>51</sup> experiences with differences, assumptions, and conflicts both at home in northern Maine and at college in Chicago. The script that accompanies this guide sets up various scenarios in which Jesse faces conflict—sometimes they are oppressing someone, other times someone is oppressing them, or sometimes both occur simultaneously. For the most part, these conflicts are left unresolved in the written script and are instead left to be figured out in the 7 different improvisatory Forum Theatre moments. Essentially, the idea is that the play sets up scenarios in which students can practice and roleplay encountering difference and using social empathy to resolve conflict.

Social empathy—the ability to more deeply understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gaining insight into structural inequalities and disparities—is at the heart of this theatrical exercise. This script is specifically tailored to equip rural students from isolated and homogenous communities with social empathy skills, as a way to bridge chasms of difference and to break down assumptions and misunderstandings in America’s current rural-urban divide. To do so, this exercise somewhat counterintuitively emphasizes the rural identity: what does it mean to be a rural individual and how does this background affect the ways in which one moves through the world? This focus is based on the work of educational theorists, social workers, and pedagogy teachers who have found that in order to teach social empathy toward others, educators must first appeal to what students know in their own community. Before we can teach rural students about social justice issues external to their immediate community and identity group, we must first help students understand their own rural identity and the social issues within their own community.

It is for this same reason that the script makes a pronounced appeal to French-Canadian cultural history and heritage. This is the ancestry and heritage of a majority of students in rural northern Maine communities. But this play’s exploration of rural identity goes beyond simply embracing a shared heritage to make it feel culturally relevant. By acknowledging diversity and using social empathy within the rural setting of the play, I hope to help rural students realize that their unique experiences growing up in rural communities *can* help them better understand people from elsewhere. The goal is to ultimately dispel the damaging myth that students rural, isolated, and homogenous backgrounds are particularly ill-prepared to engage with the wider world.

### **PRIMARY OBJECTIVES**

- Above all: Students will practice social empathy and understand how and why it is important in interacting with individuals who have very different backgrounds and experiences. By learning to better understand the stories of individuals different from themselves, students will be pushed towards social justice and fighting the oppression that afflicts both themselves and others.

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<sup>51</sup> Throughout the guide and the play, we use “they, them, theirs” pronouns for Jesse because the character is designed to be played by students of all genders.

- Students will gain a greater understanding of their rural identity, which includes: their shared history and background (Acadian, French-Canadian), the effect of isolation on their knowledge of the world, the multiple assumptions individuals make about rural people, and their role in our country's rural-urban divide.
- Students will begin to see that both rural and urban (or any dichotomy, for that matter) individuals struggle in various ways, face oppression, and work staunchly in the pursuit of happiness and justice. A variety of assumptions across the rural-urban divide will be torn down so that there is less animosity between these two types of communities.
- Students will be better prepared and equipped to face a diverse and ever-changing world in which it is important to understand and fight for the equal rights of various diverse identities and backgrounds. The play will expose students to the complicated world outside their isolated and homogenous rural community.

### ROLE-PLAYING AND DIVERSITY

When it comes to cultivating social empathy, direct experience and real-life exposure provide the largest gains in knowledge. However, for the isolated students that this activity is written for, they seldom have the opportunity to encounter the various diverse identities present in a city. While my play argues that rural students are able to gain social empathy skills from their own community, it is my belief that they need to be encouraged to make the leap of using these skills in the context of an urban, more diverse environment. Thus, this play serves as a substitute for direct experience and hopes to mimic what these experiences might actually look like should they happen. It's very important that rural students have a safe classroom space in which to explore these issues prior to real-life exposure. It's not always ethical, responsible, safe, or useful to work out issues of understanding and empathy on real people as one could harm or inflict pain. Role-playing is a useful alternative and preparatory tool that has the added benefit of being in an educational environment where these issues can be discussed and processed.

That being said, a few notes on physically-apparent diversity in this theatrical activity:

If you're teaching in an isolated and homogenous rural community such as the one this activity is geared toward, it's likely that the majority of your students are white. While most of the diverse identities encountered in the second act of the play could be logically envisioned as non-white, students should not in any way attempt to imitate stereotypes—visual, linguistic, or cultural—of racially-categorized individuals. In other words, students are strongly discouraged from profiling a particular character as “black” or “Hispanic” and playing that character based on racial stereotypes they may hold. While these characters could certainly be black or Hispanic, you are suggested to encourage students to play them without any particular performativity and to put aside any ideas or presumptions about the character's race and racial identity. The same can be said with physical disabilities or any other physically-apparent forms of diversity. While this approach may seem to abide by “colorblindness” ideology and ignore racial issues altogether, it's important to note that race and other forms of physically-apparent diversity will be acknowledged in the discussions following Forum Theatre moments throughout the activity. This

teacher's guide will help you navigate these situations. Race is an important part of this activity, of exposing rural students in isolated and homogenous communities to the diversity of the country, but because all the students are white and it would be unfair and traumatic to tokenize any non-white students, it cannot be physically acknowledged on the stage. Thus, we encourage educators to proceed with a racially-conscious mindset, to infuse discussions about race into the activity, and to ensure that students have an understanding of how the diversity and difference in this script can be applied to the racial diversity and conflict that pervade this nation.



## Getting Started

Before diving right into the script, you should warm up your class with some sort of theater game. If you are already familiar with one, or if there is one that you know your class particularly enjoys, go with that! Any activity will do, as long as it gets students active and prepares them to dive into a character.

Below are a few suggested warm up activities, but feel free to consult other resources to find an activity that fits your class best.

### Name & Gesture

The group stands in a circle. The leader begins by introducing herself by her first name accompanied by a physical gesture. The whole group repeats the name and gesture. This process works around the group until everyone has said their name and performed a gesture. This process is then repeated but without the name this time. Then anyone who wishes takes a step forward and the rest of the group must say his or her name and perform that person's gesture.

### Lines of Four

Everyone moves around the space and gets into lines of four. The person in the front is the leader. He or she will listen to the music and make a dance step which the people behind him will mimic and follow. As soon as you change the music, he or she will move to the end of the line and the next person in line is the new leader. Change the music every 10-15 seconds. Play for at least 5 minutes.

### Tangles & Knots

The group stands in a circle. Each person must remember who is standing on his left and his right. The leader then asks the group to spread out around the room and begin to walk freely about. The leader will then call out instructions – walk with those with the same colored hair as you – walk with those with the same colored shoes, or the same colored eyes. Then the leader will give more instructions – create 3 circles, or 4 squares or 2 triangles or one star and individuals must form themselves into groups to make this happen. The leader will then ask everyone to freeze where they are stood; to locate the person who originally stood to their right, and to their left and then point at them both, without moving. Very slowly, people will then begin to stretch and then move towards their two neighbors until the entire group is holding hands. This will be a tangle. The group must then try to untangle themselves, without letting go of their neighbors' hands. Don't worry; it will likely work!

STEP ONE: Introduce Theatre of the Oppressed

Once you have thoroughly prepared your class for fun theatrical work, you should present them with some basic instructions on how Forum Theatre will work. You may do this however you please, referring to the previous pages of this guide for general rules and guidelines. Make sure that students understand how this “game” will work, but do not need to let them know what the underlying objectives are (teaching social empathy, understanding rural identity, etc.).

STEP TWO: Casting

Now to begin, you must first assign students roles. Assure students that they are not putting on a polished performance—they will likely not even have time to look at the script before they take the stage. This activity is not “putting on a play” per se, but rather creating certain scenes based on scripted text to then improvise with their peers. Students should not be afraid of the text or working with an unfamiliar role—make it clear that the whole class is working through this script together. Ask for volunteers for each role, and do not assign based on “type-casting” or the supposed talent of your students. All students are eligible for each role. Please note: all characters besides Sue, the parents, Isabelle, Nic, and Max, have unisex names and can be played by all gender identities. Options for pronouns are presented at various times throughout the script. Additionally, as the Joker, you will play the role of the teacher and the voice.

The role of Jesse can be (and it is suggested that it should be) played by multiple students. The frequency of changing who plays Jesse is up to your discretion, but it could be as frequently as every scene. This way, all students are able to feel like they have some ownership over the protagonist, and they all get to share some of the work of acting since Jesse has a multitude of speaking lines. Each of the other characters in the show should be played by one student.

STEP THREE: Character Sketches

Once students have assigned roles, provide each student with their accompanying character sketch. These are brief blocks of text written about each character to provide the students with a bit of background on the character they’re playing. This will prove helpful in the Forum Theatre moments. Students needn’t read their character sketches to the class, but all students will have a copy of all of the sketches to help them during the Forum Theatre moments. Jesse and Francis do not have character sketches since most of their background is made apparent in the script.

STEP FOUR: Francis’s Letters

The role of Francis is unique because, while one student is assigned to the role, the entire class partakes in telling Francis’s story. Francis is a character that exists in the past, a character from a book that Jesse is currently reading. However, Francis speaks in large monologues on stage, as if performing the text that Francis has written in their book. The student assigned to play Francis should begin each of these monologues (and play the dialogue with Jesse at the end of the play), but once you reach a slash /, the monologue should be read by another student within the class. At the next slash /, a different student should continue reading the monologue, and so on and so forth. Each student in the class will receive a small booklet with the compilation of Francis’s monologues, to give them the experience of “reading” this book just like Jesse. Essentially, the effect is that the whole class is reading this book about Francis’s life, alongside Jesse, but one person gets to embody the actual role. In this way, students play an active role in reading and

digesting a lot of the historical narrative background of the script. To reiterate: while one student plays Francis, the whole class shares in reading aloud Francis's monologues.

In addition, you have the option of using the Story Theater technique to bring these monologues to life. If you have students willing to do this, you can invite them to enact the monologues with their bodies as the text is being spoken. Students pantomime the actions that Francis speaks about to add excitement to the text and create an interesting vivid picture on stage.

Now you are ready to begin! Now that all the preparation is complete, you can dive into the script and the Forum Theatre moments. What follows is a scene-by-scene outline on how to successfully implement the script, including discussions points for each Forum Theatre moment.

## Scene-by-Scene Notes & Discussion Questions

### ACT ONE

#### Scene 1

Introduce the scene using some of the italicized text, then have Jesse and Francis deliver their monologues to the audience. Incorporate Story Theater if you and the students would like to. Be sure to observe the slashes / in Francis's monologues by having students alternate reading their part, as if they are reading Francis's book.

Optional discussion: *Have any of you worked potato harvest? Or on a farm? Have your parents? What stories do you know about your families and farming? What do you know about the Acadians and your French ancestors?*

#### Scene 2

Introduce the scene. Be sure that the character playing Sue has read her character sketch. Encourage students to act out what it's like working on the harvester (i.e. standing at a conveyer belt throwing off rocks).

#### FORUM THEATRE MOMENT #1

When you arrive to this moment, say freeze and step in to facilitate discussion about the interaction. Ask questions such as: *what's going on here? Is one character oppressing another character? How so? What does oppression mean and what can it look like?*

Now encourage students to think about, and perhaps discuss with their classmates, different ways that this conflict could be resolved. Tell students that they can "freeze" the scene whenever they like and join in as Sue or another character (a reminder that Sue's children are on the harvester as well acting as bystanders). Replay the scene starting with the Sue's line "I'm trying the best I can."

As previously mentioned, you should not tell students how to solve this conflict. You can, however, lead them in a direction that can help them be successful. For example, you can remind them that there are other people present in the scene who are not talking, hinting at the possibility of one of Sue's children sticking up for her against Jesse. Another possible hint is to remind students to review the character sketches. Sue's talks about how she did try to leave the town but how she returned when her parents were sick. Essentially one of the primary solutions here is fighting Jesse's assumptions and making Sue's truth known.

Allow students to try out different solutions, even if one is successful. You should make clear that there are many different ways to solve this conflict. When the time is right, move into a brief discussion and perhaps use some of the following discussion questions:

*What didn't Jesse understand about Sue? What sort of forces in the world were working against Sue's goals in life? What do Jesse and Sue share in common and why do they seem so different*

*from one another? What are some ways in which we see economic diversity in our own community?*

As the discussion wraps up, use the dialogue in the script to close off the scene.

### Scene 3

Introduce the scene. Have the student playing Jesse speak the opening lines of Francis’s monologue along with the character playing Francis. Proceed with the whole class sharing Francis’s monologue as in the previous scenes, switching at every slash /, and Story Theater if you choose to use this technique.

### Scene 4

Introduce the scene.

Optional discussion questions at the end of the scene: *Why is Jesse frustrated with his parents? What don’t they understand? Do any of you ever feel like your parents don’t understand you? Have any of you had a similar conversation with your parents? Why do you think it’s especially hard for students from rural places—places like our own—to go far away for college?*

### Scene 5

Same as Scene 3.

### Scene 6

Introduce the scene. Have the characters interact at a table with four chairs, if possible.

#### FORUM THEATRE MOMENT #2

Proceed in a similar way to the FTM in Scene 2. Repeat the scene starting with Max’s line “Yeah, you’re just not one of the guys, Jesse,” and invite students to freeze and jump in where they see fit.

Some possible solutions: Isabelle, who is acting as a bystander, speaks up; Jesse talks about how guys can express themselves different, maybe referencing a TV show where this is the case or a local person who also doesn’t fall under the typical stereotypes of a “man”; a conversation about how Jesse did it to save money for college, one of his dreams, just like how Max and Nic work jobs they don’t like so they can buy themselves a truck or a snowmobile.

Possible discussion questions: *Why did this conflict come about? Why do you think Nic and Max have such a strict idea of what it means to be a man/woman in their community? What are some other ways in which people express who they are? What are some ways that we can make sure that everyone feels comfortable to express themselves? Why did Jesse work in the potato fields if that’s not really their thing? What goals do you have and what would you do to reach them? How can Nic and Max, like Jesse working potato harvest, go outside their comfort zones to*

*understand Jesse's experiences? What are some other non-physical forms of diversity in our community?*

As the scene comes to end, you should play the voice.

### Scene 7

Same as the other scenes in which Jesse is reading the Francis's book.

### Scene 8

Introduce the scene, and don't forget that you're playing the teacher.

### Scene 9

Introduce the scene. If necessary, help students with the different pronunciation moments in the scene.

### FORUM THEATRE MOMENT #3

Proceed like the other FTMs thus far, and repeat the scene starting with Jesse's line "Well maybe that's because you think we're just charity..."

Encourage students to look at Blake's character sketch because this is another situation in which the conflict can be resolved by simply enlightening Jesse to Blake's actual narrative and past. It is important in this scene to highlight the differences between urban and rural identities, emphasizing the assumptions that we may have about the other.

Possible discussion questions: *What assumptions or stereotypes do you think rural people have about city people? Where the assumptions that Jesse had about Blake true? What sort of things does Blake and their family struggle with? Do you think people in communities like our own also struggle with these things? How do you think Blake felt moving to this rural community knowing that they were very different from everyone else? Do you ever feel like an outsider even though it seems like you are similar to the people here? What are some physically-apparent forms of diversity that Blake might have that would make them feel even more like an outsider? How should diversity influence the way that we welcome people into our community?*

The discussion brings the scene to a close.

### Scene 10

Introduce the scene. Be sure to emphasize the fact that time has passed, and Jesse is now about to graduate high school and leave for college in Chicago.

Proceed with the reading of Francis's book in the same way as scenes past.

If necessary, you may pause the activity here and continue it in another class period.

ACT TWOScene 1

Introduce the scene, emphasizing the time and location change. Introduce the new character, Emerson, and how they are very different from Jesse. Be sure to note that this difference could also be in a physically-apparent form, such as race, though they will not subscribe to any racial stereotypes of characters in this activity.

Help guide students through the pronunciation of words in this scene as well. It is important to the scene that students pronounce them correctly and incorrectly at different points.

## FORUM THEATRE MOMENT #4

Proceed like the other FTMs thus far, and repeat the scene starting with Emerson's line "But you're from Maine?..."

The most likely successful solution is having Jesse explain their actual situation growing up without being too defensive or off-putting to Emerson. You should make sure that if this option is used, students don't merely attack Emerson for not understanding. This shouldn't be a solution that works out in the end; it only adds fire to the fight.

Possible discussion questions: *Why do you think Emerson had these assumptions about Maine? In what ways are Emerson and Jesse different from each in this scene? Why do you think Emerson is surprised that Jesse says things differently/doesn't know how to pronounce certain words? What role do you think race (the fact that Jesse is white) plays in this conflict? Why do you think Jesse would find these assumptions insulting?*

Once this discussion wraps up, proceed with the dialogue and the next FTM.

## FORUM THEATRE MOMENT #5

Proceed like the other FTMs thus far, and repeat the scene starting with Jesse's line "I just mean you're so lucky..."

Encourage students to look at Emerson's character sketch. An important solution for this FTM is having Emerson teach Jesse about how his family has struggled.

Possible discussion questions: *What sort of societal forces were working against Emerson's family as they moved to this country? What are refugees and why do you think they come to America? Why is Emerson's wealth more complicated than just being a rich person? Though we have a white person playing Emerson, how could situations like Emerson's be influenced by race?*

It is necessary to draw connections with race in this discussion. Emerson's family likely would have struggled not only because they were refugees but also because they were not white. Be sure to mention how difficult it is for people of color in this country to climb the socioeconomic ladder, and how this may influence the way that Emerson's family treats money—from their humble beginnings, they are proud of their financial situation and don't mind spending lavishly.

Segue out of this FTM into the dialogue and then the Francis monologue, having the class share in reading this part as before.

## Scene 2

Introduce the scene and the new character, Alex.

### FORUM THEATRE MOMENT #6

Proceed like the other FTMs thus far, and repeat the scene starting with Alex's line "And did you ever like do or make meth?"

This FTM is unique because both characters are being oppressed and acting as oppressors. Encourage students to read Alex's character sketch and keep in mind what Alex has already said about his background. One idea is revealing that Alex is no longer welcome in their home since coming out, and Alex and Jesse bonding over not feeling welcomed in their homes. Students are encouraged to think back to the scene with Jesse's parents and how Jesse felt out of place at home—like Jesse's parents didn't understand them. Additionally, you can remind students that Emerson is a silent bystander in this situation and could do something to intervene. Ideally, the conversation isn't just about finding common ground, but turns into a conversation about why it's harmful to stereotype individuals. Jesse's slightly homophobic comments should be acknowledged and challenged, and you can encourage students to think about Jesse's encounters and experiences with gender expression back at home.

Hopefully the students come up with a solution similar to this, as it guides the following dialogue. However, as previously mentioned, you should not force a solution upon the students. Should the students find an alternative successful option, edit the following dialogue as you see fit.

Wait to have a discussion until the scene is finished, as the dialogue at the end of the scene will help frame this conversation. Try the following questions:

*What do Jesse, Alex, and Emerson learn from this interaction? Why does Jesse continue to struggle with differences at college? How do we make sure that we don't feel totally out of place and alone while being surrounded by people who are very different from ourselves? Why do you think sharing stories of oppression help bring people closer together? What does it take to actually understand another person's background and story? How is social empathy (bring in the definition) useful in handling these interactions? How can stereotyping individuals make social empathy difficult to achieve? Why do you think Emerson became frustrated with Alex at the end of the scene? Why didn't Emerson's solution satisfy Jesse? What was Emerson overlooking?*

## Scene 3

Introduce the scene and the new character, Logan. If a laptop is not readily available to use as a prop, try using a textbook and open the cover horizontally as if it is the lid of a laptop.



## FORUM THEATRE MOMENT #7

Proceed like the other FTMs thus far, and repeat the scene starting with Jesse's line "So...were you in a gang or like a drug dealer?"

Encourage students to read Logan's character sketch and to think about the things that Logan has said in this scene that might be helpful in finding a solution. Jesse's anti-immigrant views should be acknowledged and challenged in this FTM. It's important to note that this FTM is *not* about finding common ground, but rather, it's about Logan standing up for immigrants and teaching Jesse that their views are oppressive. One possible solution is having Logan tell Jesse about the closing of factories, the effects of the recession, and their family's struggles. Jesse may struggle to relate, but this FTM should be an opportunity for students to empathize without leaning on shared struggle. Jesse's epiphany should really be focused around the ways in which their views and opinions are hurtful and part of a larger history of oppression. Whichever way the students choose to solve it, this FTM should be about Jesse learning about and coming to terms with urban poverty, immigration, and the ways in which they are complicit in oppression.

Possible discussion questions: *Why did Jesse struggle to understand what it was like to be poor in a city? Why might characters like Jesse have these opinions about immigration? What didn't Jesse understand? Even though Jesse didn't grow up knowing any immigrants, how were they still oppressive growing up? What role do you think race played in Logan's experience growing up? (This is a particularly important point to make in the discussion. Logan could possibly be a non-white character and that could've influenced the experience of their family.) How can we best support and empathize with people who are completely different from ourselves?*

Segue this conversation into the dialogue that finishes up the scene.

Scene 4

Introduce the scene and let the students just act the script to the best of their ability. You may want to prepare students for the less-than-realistic appearance of Francis in the scene, but this can just be a quick comment laughing at the use of fantasy to teach a lesson.

You may want to add a small discussion at the end of the scene if you don't think students are picking up on the lessons from the dialogue. These questions might be something like: *Why did Francis make an appearance? What can we learn from the stories about our ancestors, the Acadians? How does that factor into Jesse's encounters with difference at college? And most importantly, why is it so important to learn how to empathize with individuals different from yourself?*

After this has wrapped up, begin an activity with the students about what they wish people better understood about their life experiences, what societal forces have influenced this, and how they will take action to make sure people better understand one another. This can be done in various ways, but we recommend handing out small slips of paper to each student and asking them to write on it answers to the following questions:

1. What do you wish people better understood about your life and/or the experiences you've had?
2. What forces, perhaps outside your control, helped cause this to happen to you or your family?
3. How can you create a community of social empathy? What causes of injustice do you want to band together to fight?

Then, you can collect these cards and read some of them anonymously to the class. If you do this, ensure students beforehand that they don't have to write their names and that their answers are anonymous. By reading them to the whole class, students may feel like their voices are being more broadly heard and other students may be able to relate to these same sorts of things. Alternatively, you can have students group up to share with one another. Either way, the point is to highlight that we all have stories and experiences that make us unique, that influence our identity, and that have caused some sort of oppression. If we use more social empathy in our day-to-day life, we may be able to break down barriers between individuals and groups of people to better support each person's uniqueness.

### Scene 5

As this activity begins to wrap up, segue into the final scene of the play. If the activity didn't really spark interest or discussion or if it instead caused a bit of a ruckus, this last scene is a way to bring everyone back together and center the lesson of this whole activity.

As Jesse concludes their monologue, all of the other characters from the play should be on stage ready to say their line. In the end, most of your class may be on stage, and this is a good thing! This emphasizes the idea that we are all struggling with some sort of oppression.

You may choose to wrap up this whole theatrical activity with a bit of processing, asking the students the following questions:

*What did you learn from this experience? Are there things that you think you should do differently in your day-to-day life? How should we deal with the assumptions that we have about other people? What types of diversity exist in our community? What types of diversity exist in the world? What does our community teach us about how to deal with difference and diversity? What does Jesse mean in the last line: no one is truly free when others are being oppressed? How can we support people who are being oppressed? If you are ever being oppressed or you are witnessing someone else being oppressed, what will you do to solve the situation? How can you avoid being an oppressor?*

THE END

Thank you very much for using this theatrical activity. We hope it has been an enriching experience for both you and your class!

## Appendix C

### Character Sketches

#### The Companion to SOWING SEEDS

SUE

I'm almost 50 years old, and I've lived a pretty tough life, but I'm trying to make the most of it. I work in the high school cafeteria, and I'm one of the youngest ones there. It's a bunch of sweet old ladies just doing it for fun, but I'm there trying to make enough to support my family. I have a daughter, Bailey, and a son, Lee. Lee has a girlfriend now and she's living with us—her name is Emily. Bailey and Emily are working potato harvest with me. It's the third year we all do it together, but it's my fifth year on the job. I'm going to have to stop sometime soon; I'm getting way too old and tired for this. But I guess that's also because I still smoke. I've been smoking for a while—it calms me down—and I know I should quit, but it's just so hard. Plus, I already quit drinking, and that was hard to do. But I did it because I knew it was best for my kids.

I wish I had never gotten stuck in this lame town. This is not the life that I expected to live. Trust me, I tried to leave—I really did. I mean, I sucked in high school, but I was still going to go to the vocational college and get some sort of degree, and then my goal was to move to Bangor and live in the city with a real job. But after just a few months at school I found out that my mother was really sick, and she really didn't have anyone to take care of her. My dad had died when I was younger—he had also been really sick. So I dropped out of school and moved back to take care of my mom. I worked some odd jobs so I made some money—usually graveyard shifts so I could take care of mom during the day and then work at night. I was so tired. I did that for about a year, and then mom passed. It was when I moved back for mom that I met Gene, and we fell in love pretty fast. It was nice because he would help me take care of mom, but then I got pregnant with Lee and sadly mom never got to meet him. Then we had Bailey and it was nice for a while. I lost my mom but at least I had Gene and our two kids—it felt like I finally had a normal family life. But Gene and I fought a bit and one day he just got up and left. He didn't say much, just that he couldn't do it anymore. And that's how I got stuck here, trying to raise these kids, without a college degree, working a bunch of odd jobs. It really sucks, but at least I still have my kids. And I love the hell out of them.

DAD (Marc)

I've lived in this town my whole life and I don't regret it for a second. I've known Sheila my whole life and now we're married. We weren't close as kids but of course I knew her—everyone knows everyone around here. She lived down the road from me and her family has also been here forever. We got married right after high school ended and she worked at the hospital and I worked in my dad's garage. Then we had Jesse—that sure has been fun. Now I own my dad's shop and life is pretty great I'd say. It's crazy that Jesse's growing up so fast, and I love them so much, even though I don't always show it. I guess that's just how men act around here, or maybe everywhere, I don't know. My dad always showed tough love to me and my siblings and I guess

I'm the same way to Jesse. I don't know what it's going to be like without Jesse at home all the time, and I just hope that they live close enough, so we get to see them all the time.

MOM (Sheila)

I don't think I could ask for a better life. Everyone is so nice in this town, and I think that's why my family has always been here. Who would want to leave? I married my high school sweetheart, Marc, and we've stuck together through thick and thin. My job at the hospital is hard, and sometimes I work weird hours, but it pays better than a lot of other things around here, and I love that I get to interact with so many people in town. It's so nice to know everyone who lives around here. It feels like a real community, like one big family kind of. Back when the recession hit I was actually laid off and we struggled for a while without that money. I started working some odd jobs, but eventually the hospital rehired me—thank god. Anyway, my family is lovely. My parents live in the next town over so we get to see them a lot, and my sister and her family live in our town too. And you can't forget about Jesse, our pride and joy. Marc and I are so lucky to have such a wonderful child. We never have to worry about Jesse, they're always so responsible and on top of everything. Jesse's been a lot more distant as a teenager, but I think it's just a phase. We fight sometimes, but Jesse knows I love them, and I try my hardest to be as supportive as possible. I just hope that Jesse grows up to have as happy of a family and community as we do now.

NIC

Max and I, we're just some classic dudes around here. I love my truck, maybe a little more than Max, but I'll never forget the day I got her. Damn, she's a nice truck. She always looks so much better than all the other ones in the parking lot. I worked really hard to buy her—I paid for it all myself. No help from no one! I'm making monthly payments and all that, which is cool. Well I don't mean I think paying is cool, but I think the whole finances thing is pretty cool. I have actually started thinking about maybe trying to be an accountant or something like that. I don't know, but managing money sounds cool. Don't tell anyone though, I don't really think my friends would think it's cool. For now, I just pretend like I don't care about anything but my truck. I'm not totally lying—I like my truck a lot! But I do think some other things are cool. Whatever, it's fine because I've got a great truck, some cool friends, and I think I'm about to ask this really pretty girl out. Nothing to really complain about here.

MAX

Nic and I are close buds. We get along well and we like a lot of the same things: trucks, snowmobiles, dirt bikes, basically anything with an engine and wheels. Nic is obsessed with how his truck looks, but I'm a little more into how it all works. I think it's so cool, like what goes on under the hood. In my free time, I love to just take apart old engines and stuff. My dad thinks it's a waste of time—he's really set on me taking over his business. He runs a logging business and he makes good money, but he also works a lot—sometimes crazy hours. And the truth is, I don't really care about trees that much. I told him that once and he said he also doesn't give a crap about them—it's just his job and it's what we do. I don't know though—I think it'd be a lot cooler to be a mechanic. I have a little brother, so maybe he could be the one to eventually take

over the business. I don't know if he'd really want that either though...he's really different from me. Like I don't think he'll be a real man like me and my dad. We call him a little girl sometimes and I know that bothers him, but he likes so many girly things. He loves dancing around the house and baking with my mom and all that sort of crap. We thought it was a phase, but I guess it's not. I love that little guy, I really do—he's just pretty different from me and my dad. I hope that doesn't ruin my chances of me getting to do what I really love: mechanics.

#### ISABELLE

I feel like I'm a little different than most girls around here. People have called me a tomboy before, but I don't know, I don't really like that word or think that's me. I'm still really girly...like, I would never work harvest! I just prefer to hang out with guys I guess, like Nic and Max. I don't really have that much in common with them—I definitely don't care about trucks and stuff as much as they do—but it feels normal to be their friend. Maybe this is why Greg and I get along so well. Greg's my boyfriend, and I think he's one of the greatest guys. He's so sweet and treats me really well. My parents aren't the best and we have some problems at home, so I spend most of my time at Greg's place. His parents are super nice and really like me—maybe that's where Greg learned to be so sweet. Anyway, I feel so lucky to have him and to have the friends I do. I don't know what I'd do without their support.

#### BLAKE

It's been pretty hard, moving around so much, but I guess it's been cool to see so many places. And I have a great family. My parents are so fun and hip, and my dad works so hard. That's why none of us put up a fuss when we have to move—he's going to be a doctor and he came from almost nothing, so it's really inspiring! My mom works really hard too though, don't get me wrong. There are six of us kids and she's the best mom in the world. I'm the oldest by a quite a bit though—my parents had me when they were young—so I help out around the house a lot and help my mom with the youngest kids. It's kind of exhausting for both of us, and I feel like I haven't really lived the life of a normal teenager because I'm always having to babysit and look after my siblings. I guess it's alright though, because they're so cute and fun. Anyway, I'm really thankful for my family, but it's been hard at times. I don't feel like we've been a normal family. My dad has had to take out so many loans to pay for med school and to help pay for moving all the time, so we really never had extra money to go on vacation or anything like that. And we have to eat really cheap too. I guess it's the price you pay for having a big family while trying to become a doctor. I think it'll all work out in the end—hopefully dad gets a great job somewhere and we'll finally be in the clear. I'm just worried about what happens when I graduate...I want to leave and go to college like other kids, but I also don't want to abandon my mom. I don't know how she would take care of the five kids without my help. Maybe things will change or get better—I hope so.

#### EMERSON

I realize it may look like I live a glamorous life—I live in a nice house in LA, my mom is a lawyer and my dad is a doctor, and I went to a pretty nice high school—but I promise life was not always like this for us. I mean, we were refugees. Well, my parents. They literally had no

place to go, they had like no money, and they weren't even that good at speaking English. I was just a baby when this was all happening, so I don't really remember much, but from the stories that I've heard, it was pretty bad. You would never guess that from looking at us now—money is not even a concern anymore. I realize that I'm lucky, and I think it's kind of weird how different our life is now, but my parents are really proud...and they worked so hard! They always remind me that it wasn't luck that gave us all of this. It was hard work, so I better embrace it. They say this is what love looks like. They really do love me, at least I think so. We're not a very emotional family and we never actually ever said the words "I love you," but my parents have spent their lives working so hard just so my siblings and I could have a better future. That sounds like love to me. The problem is that now I feel kind of obligated to doing something great, making a lot of money or something, to live up to my parents' expectations and legacy. This is how we show love in my family I guess, so I know that I need to work really hard to make a lot of money and take care of my parents, even if I don't like my job. Anyway, I'm really proud of my parents and all they've done. It must've been so hard. People were so mean to them when they got here and they really struggled to get a job, open a bank account, and even just get a cell phone. But they did it, and now look where I am! I'm so lucky to have such inspiring parents, and I just hope that I can be half as hardworking as they are so I can also care and love for my family.

ALEX

I've led a pretty normal life I'd say. I grew up in New York City in a nice apartment in a nice neighborhood. I went to a good private school, had lots of great friends, and I was kind of popular too even. I have really cool parents and also the most fun little sister. Oh, and I can't forget: I have probably the cutest dog on the planet. Everything about my life has awesome and normal, except for one thing: I'm queer. I had a feeling at the beginning of high school, but I didn't tell anyone. Then I was pretty certain, and the secret was just eating me up inside, so one day I just burst and told my parents. They did not take it very well. I was pretty surprised—they're pretty progressive, and I mean, we live in New York! But my parents were not about it. They both grew up in the Midwest in very conservative Christian houses, so I guess some of that stuff stayed with them. They were really pissed. They were so worried about what other families would think of them, knowing that their child was queer. So they told me that as long as I lived with them I couldn't be queer. So I left. If I can't be me in my own home, then it's not a home. This was senior year of high school. I ended up living with one of my friends for a while, which was nice but mainly weird and sad. I really loved my family, and it feels terrible to be so separated from them. I feel like a stranger now, you know? I still meet up with my little sister sometimes, and that's nice, but still pretty awkward. She doesn't really understand why I can't come home. I really want to, I do, but I also want to feel like my parents love me for who I am. I've come out to so many other people now, and everyone is super supportive about it, so I really don't understand why they're reacting this way. It hurts when other people talk about their families and how much they love them and how close they are and all that—that used to be me, but now there's just a huge hole. At least I have some great friends who are helping me get through it.

## LOGAN

I grew up in New York City, but not the fancy part of it. Don't get me wrong, I love where I grew up. I'm friends with the guy at the Deli and all the people on my block. It feels like home, but it's certainly not anything extravagant. It's just what my family could afford. My dad came here years ago (illegally) and then my mom came maybe like 5 years after that (legally). They've lived in this neighborhood the whole time they've been here. They're a really cute couple, at least I think so. They've had a few rough patches and there was a time when my mom kicked my dad out for a few weeks, but they worked it out. They've always supported each other. The drama was actually because my dad lost his job and my mom was freaking out about how we would survive. It's so expensive to live in New York, and our place is really not that nice. It's so cramped and crowded and ugly, and I have 4 siblings! It's a tight space: my siblings have to share beds and I usually sleep on the couch. But yeah, my dad lost his job during the recession and then my family was really struggling. We were living on food stamps and government help, but that only got us so far. Things have been getting a little better—my dad has been able to find some work here and there—but still we struggle. It's alright though, we're a close family. We laugh together a lot. My friends used to tease me at school, they said that they always knew if my family was around because we laughed so loud. Speaking of that, my school was mainly a bunch of rich white kids, so I didn't really fit in. And most people disliked me, maybe because of that, but also because I got better grades than they did. It was hard, and I hated it most of the time, but I knew that if I worked hard I could do anything—that's how my parents got here and started their life here. They're my biggest role models, so that's why I work hard. I've been trying to make some money on the side during school, in whatever way I can, so I can send some home to my family. I think they need it right now more than I need some new sneakers or a new laptop.

## Appendix D

### **My Acadian Story: Letters from Francis Thibodeau, a Young Acadian Man**

The Companion to SOWING SEEDS  
Inspired by *The Acadian*, a book by Gilbert Michaud

#### Letter One

I loved the animals on our farm growing up. We had oxen, horses, sheep, pigs, chickens, 2 dogs, and also some rabbits. The rabbits were my favorite. I would spend hours kneeling near their cages, feeding them some fresh vegetables, and I gave little pieces of lettuce to the little ones. / I got to know all of the animals really well growing up too, because of my chores. I fed the pigs and the chickens, and sometimes I was allowed to feed the cows and to curry the horses and the oxen. / I got to milk my first cow the spring before my seventh birthday; I was pretty bad at it at first, but I got better and one of my main chores was to help mother with milking every day. I knew all the animals' names and pretended like we were best friends. Of course, I liked the other guys who worked on our farm during harvest, but the animals were really my favorite company in Acadia.

#### Letter Two

My dad's p p re came to Acadia almost a hundred years ago, working as a seaman on some ship so he could get here. But it was my m m re on my mom's side who came from France, and she's actually still alive. Sometimes she tells us stories about France and about how nice their churches were there—it sounds really cool. / I like where we live though; it's about a mile outside of Grand Pre and we have so much land. There are so many wonderful trees: an orchard with apples, plus, and cherries, and also maples to make syrup. / Our farm grows oats, barley, buckwheat, corn, hay, flax, and lots of vegetables. Dad says it's the largest and best kept farm in the area—when new folks come from France, they usually stop by our place to see our land and get ideas about how to make their own farms. / I have five younger siblings and we all really love our parents. We're a close family and we're very religious, so even though the work is sometimes tough, I feel like it's my duty to this family to do my share of the farm work. It's not too bad, just the way we get by.

#### Letter Three

I really liked working on the farm, and it's nice to feel like I'm doing something for my family. I love them so much. But I always felt like there was something more in life. Like I was meant to do more. / I talked about this with Father LaBrie and he invited me to visit him whenever so that we could study the bible. I went to see him every few days and we always had really good conversations. After I turned 16, Father LaBrie suggested that I consider the priesthood and he said that I could follow him around to learn about what he does. / It felt like this was the something more that I longed for. Mom and Dad weren't too happy about the idea; since I started



visiting Father LaBrie, I spent less time at home on the farm doing work, but at the same time, they admired Father LaBrie and they were proud that I took our religion so seriously. /

I've been training to be a priest for about a year now. Father LaBrie is close with a tribe of Indians nearby, and last week he invited me to join him to visit them and lead a mass with them. I was really scared by the idea; I know that they are sometimes violent and also they look really different from us. / I've only ever really been around Acadians, so I was scared about how these people would look and talk and act. Plus I know that when my ancestors came here they took the Indians' land, so I've always been scared they might want revenge or something. Father LaBrie told me over and over again that they were some of the nicest people he knows and that they won't want to hurt me. / An exchange of information, that's what he called it: he taught them about Jesus and they taught him about different farming and hunting techniques. Well, I went on the trip, despite all my fears. I made sure to kiss Mom and Dad goodbye before I left just in case something went wrong. But Father LaBrie was totally right. / I met Chief Long Foot, who was actually able to speak French. He was very kind to me and translated what the Indians were saying. I met a girl named Dena, who showed me the best way to plow a field for growing potatoes; I couldn't wait to tell father and to try it on our own farm. / I thanked Father LaBrie for pushing me to join him on the trip—it was totally worth it, and I can't wait to go back to see my new friends again. I was so silly for being so scared of them; all my assumptions were proven wrong.

#### Letter Four

The Red Coats have been in Acadia for a while. One has even been living with us for a couple of months now. We didn't necessarily invite him into our home; he just forced himself in. This is happening to families all over our village. / We didn't plan on this, so it was kind of hard at first making sure there was enough food. And he barely knows French, so it's pretty awkward at times. He gets annoyed because he thinks we're talking about him sometimes, but then also sometimes he speaks English and we get very confused if he is yelling at us or not. / We've gotten used to him though, and sometimes my siblings and I even play games with him. You don't always need the same language to play games. /

Anyway, Father LaBrie stopped by the house today to tell us that there's a problem with the Red Coats. They've wanted us to pledge allegiance to the British crown for a while now, but we have always pledged neutrality—we don't want to take anyone's side. / We Acadians are not a very political people—we just want to live in peace! Anyway, apparently, they have threatened to burn down our village and kick us out of Acadia if we don't become a British colony. I spent the afternoon talking and crying with Mom and Dad; we really don't want to leave Acadia. / We love it here and we love our big farm and our special corner of land. I doubt anywhere is as beautiful and wonderful as Acadia. I know it's not his fault, but this makes me really hate the Red Coat in our house now.

#### Letter Five

It's been about six months since that day Father LaBrie knocked on our door with bad news. And a few weeks ago, during Sunday mass, Father LaBrie—along with some other priests in the

area—was arrested, brought to jail, and then deported from the colony. / He was accused of spying for the French and trying to overthrow the English. I knew this wasn't true—I knew him so well, and I spent so much time with him. I miss him so much; I never even got to say goodbye. / Since then, the Red Coats have forced all of the men, including my dad, into the military. If they said no, they were publicly beaten. They've gotten so much more abusive towards us, even to some of the women and children. Luckily, no one in my family has been hurt. /

The English seized our churches to use as bunkers for their troops, so we can't even go celebrate mass anymore. Our family friends have been sneaking over to our house, and we all pray together and have our own sort of ceremony. It's nice, but it's also just really scary. / Just the other day, a proclamation was read in the village square saying that we were no longer allowed to be Catholic and we had to become Anglican. Everyone is fuming, and my family is especially worried—being Catholic is so central to everything we do, and now we can't even do that? / A revolt has been stirring, and Acadia is no longer the happy farming place it used to be. I wish Father LaBrie was still with us—he'd know what to do.

### Letter Six

Last week we received word that the English are going to begin deporting all of the men from our colony. We're not really sure where they'll bring them, but we're guessing probably to the other English colonies or back to France. Everyone is really worried, and no one knows what will happen to all of the women and children too. / A few people have revolted, but the Red Coats have fought back by burning their homes in the middle of the night. Mom says to stay hopeful and to keep praying, but Dad thinks that they'll kill most of us or split us all up and deport us all to different places. /

Yesterday I was hunting partridge when Chief Long Foot snuck up on me. I was so scared about it being a Red Coat that I almost shot. But he actually was just trying to help. He says he knows a secret trail that the Red Coats don't know about—it goes to some land west of here where there's another tribe of Indians. / He's been on it once before and he's leading his whole tribe there to get away from the Red Coats, who have threatening to attack their homes as well. He actually invited me and my family to join him, which is really nice because they have every reason to hate the Acadians—we took their land! But now we're joining forces against the English. / Mom and Dad were really hesitant when I told them, but I told them how nice Chief Long Foot is and how he has only ever been helpful. I reminded Dad of the farming tricks they taught me. So, we're doing it. We're packing up all our stuff and sneaking away on this trail in the middle of the night, tonight. / Sure, it's a big risk and I'm sure it'll be tough, but anything is better than Acadia right now. I hate to say goodbye to my home, this place that I have loved so much, but we don't have really have a choice.

### Letter Seven

With the help of Chief Long Foot, we've finally arrived at this place that is apparently our new home. It's so sad—this isn't like Grand Pre at all. We barely have anything now and we have to start our lives all over again from scratch. / Dad says that tomorrow I'm going to help him start

building us a cabin. There's a few other Acadian families here who are in the same boat as us, but it's mostly Indians here and we feel really out of place. They all talk to each other and we can't understand a thing. And they don't understand our French either! / Chief Long Foot told me that they're a little scared of interacting with us because the Acadians have done some bad things in the past to them, but hopefully this place starts to feel like a community soon. / I miss my home and our farm and all of our animals, especially the rabbits. This just all so different and tough, but we pray every day as a family that it'll get better.