

GAMM
THEATRE

DESCRIBE THE NIGHT

BY RAJIV JOSEPH

STUDY GUIDE

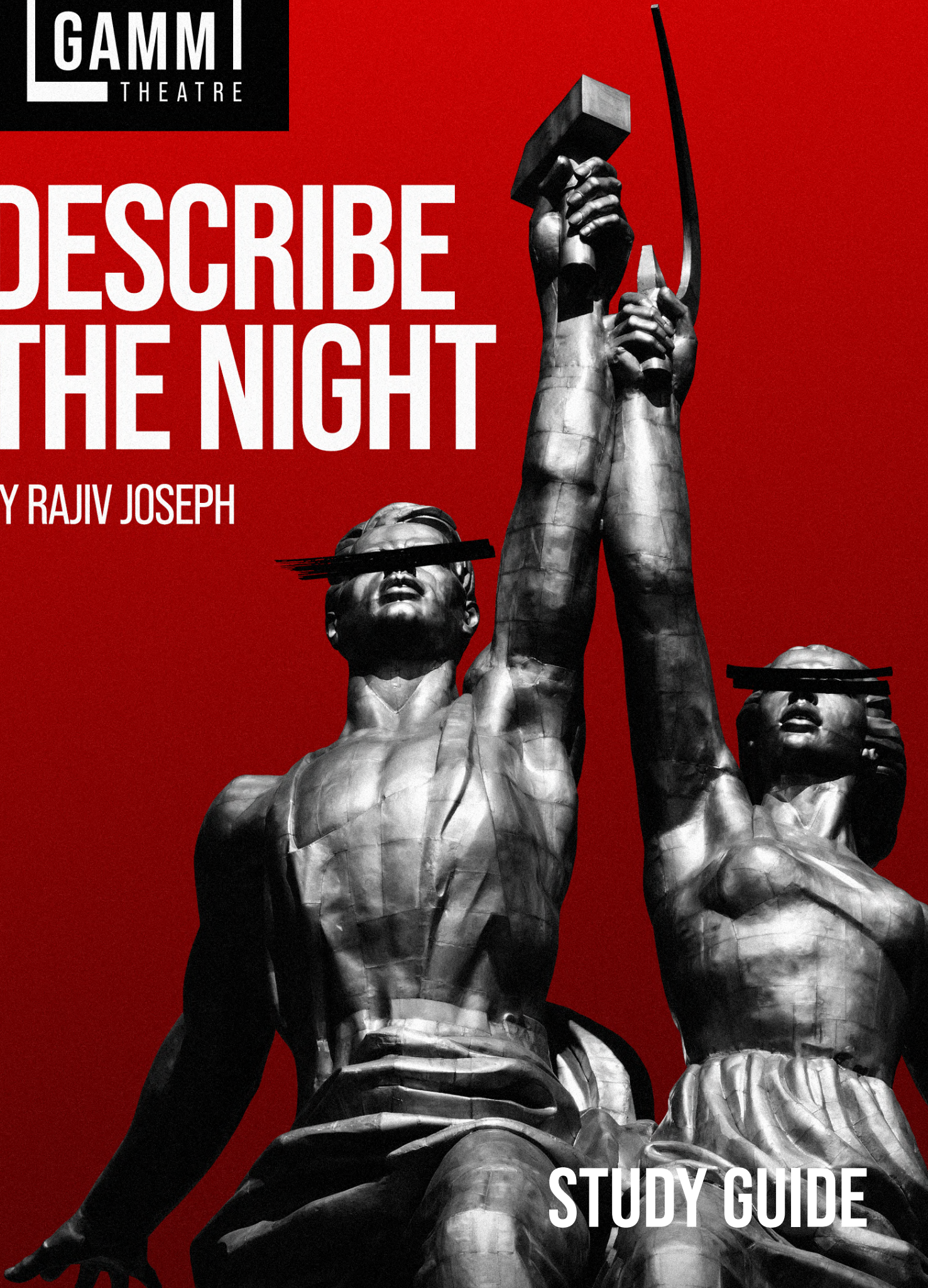


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GAMMEDUCATION 

We thank the following foundations and corporations for their support of the GAMM Student Matinee program: Rhode Island Foundation, Fain Family Foundation, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, Mabel T. Woolley Trust, Carter Family Trust, TACO/White Family Foundation, Nordson Corporation Foundation, and June Rockwell Levy Foundation.

This study guide was prepared by Jon Del Sesto and Sarah Ploskina



ACT I

WELCOME



Welcome back to school and back to the stage! We are delighted that you've chosen to enliven your class and curriculum with live theatre this school year!

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *Describe the Night*, written by Rajiv Joseph and directed by Tony Estrella. In this guide, you will find background information about the play and playwright, an inside conversation about our production, as well as activities for your classroom and questions for discussion. We recommend using this study guide before your visit to The Gamm, as well as after, to process the theatrical experience with your students.

We offer a pre-show visit with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. This will stoke students' interest in the performance and encourage them to connect with the play. This visit will last about a half an hour and is offered to your classroom free of charge. Additionally, most student matinees are followed by talkbacks, which offer students opportunities to ask questions of the actors, director, designers or playwright. Talkbacks range in length and content, but we encourage you to stay and participate in these dynamic discussions.

We also offer longer workshops that will get students out of their seats and up on their feet, engaging in the motifs and the language of the play. Kinesthetic engagement with language and literature fosters text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in the holistic experience of literacy.

Participation in our Student Matinee program addresses State and National Standards in Theatre Arts through Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication; as well as many of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. We have included a list of standards that align with attending a performance and using our study guide.

Prior to attending, please discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. In particular, please take special note that this production of *Describe the Night* contains sudden scenic, sound, and lighting events, such as loud bangs and strobe effects. Sensory-sensitive persons may have difficulty with these moments of the show. Please contact me if you have particular concerns regarding these moments. Students can prepare for live theatre by brainstorming how live performance is different from film, television, and sporting events. We've included language you can use directly in our "A note on Live Theatre Audience Etiquette" section.

We would love to hear about your experiences with our programming. It is a great help to us as we build our education program from year to year, striving to meet the needs of our school communities. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

Sarah Matczak Ploskina

Director of Education, sarah@gammtheatre.org



THEATRE AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

What is so exciting about attending the theatre - especially in a smaller space such as The Gamm - is that it is live! Live theatre is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television, you are a part of a live, collective group experience. You are expected to pay close attention throughout the performance.

You, the audience, are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience of both actors and audience. **The actors can see, hear, and sense all distracting behavior such as talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, and the ringing, or buzzing, of cell phones. This can affect the actor's concentration, the audience's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members.** Because we care deeply about both our audiences and actors, we request that you refrain from using phones, talking or making any noise during a performance. Thank you in advance!

TIP:

Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theatre is different from film, television and sporting events.

STANDARDS GUIDE.

Here is a list of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards that align to the information and activities in our guide:

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2] **See *Themes and Questions for Discussion***

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3] **See *Themes and Questions for Discussion***

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4] **See our *Activity for the Classroom***

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7] **See *examples throughout our study guide*.**

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9] **See our *Extension Resources***

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3] **See *After the Show Discussion Questions***

Activity for the Classroom Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1] **See *Themes and Questions for Discussion***

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2] **See *examples throughout our study guide*.**

ACT II

PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT



RAJIV JOSEPH

Rajiv Joseph's play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* was a 2010 Pulitzer Prize finalist in drama and also was awarded a grant for Outstanding New American Play by the National Endowment for the Arts. He has twice won the Obie Award for Best New American Play, first in 2016 with *Guards at the Taj* (also a 2016 Lortel Winner for Best Play) and then for *Describe the Night*.

Other plays include *Archduke*, *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, *Animals Out of Paper*, *The Lake Effect*, *The North Pool* and *Mr. Wolf*. Joseph has been awarded artistic grants from the Whiting Foundation, United States Artists and the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust.

He is a board member of the Lark Play Development Center in New York City and an ensemble member at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre. Joseph received a B.A. in creative writing from Miami University and an M.F.A. in playwriting from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He served for three years in the Peace Corps in Senegal, West Africa. He now lives in Brooklyn.

ABOUT *DESCRIBE THE NIGHT* (FROM RAJIV JOSEPH)

"My main goal with any play is to entertain and to weave a dream-like story. I want and hope audiences lose themselves in the tales of this play. It's not a history lesson, nor is it a political dissertation of any kind. It's a fairy tale, a collection of myths. I do hope it's thought provoking, and that people can talk about it, discuss it, and find aspects of the story that speak to them long after the curtain has gone down.

About 15 years ago I bought a copy of Isaac Babel's 1920 *Diary*, which survives in fragments, with large portions of it destroyed. I was drawn to this work, and how one could see a creative mind beginning to flourish. I wondered if there might be a play about Babel's artistic process, and his experiences with the Red Cavalry in Poland. But I didn't pursue writing the play; it was on a backlist of ideas.

In 2010 when an aircraft carrying a large swath of the Polish government crashed in Smolensk, Russia, I wondered if there was a way of connecting that event to the Polish-Russo War and Isaac Babel, but that seemed even more unwieldy for a play. But when I was given the opportunity, through the NYU Graduate Acting Class, to develop a new work with the students there, I figured this might be the idea. Through the research efforts of the students, and our collaborative process, I found the third story that fit in the middle: That of a young, confused KGB agent in Dresden in the 1980's, who could be Vladimir Putin. The three stories work as sort of gears, each pushing the others to make the play move."

An interview with DESCRIBE THE NIGHT playwright Rajiv Joseph - Wilma Theater

ACT III

OUR PRODUCTION

by **RAJIV JOSEPH**
directed by **TONY ESTRELLA†**

SET DESIGN
Michael McGarty

COSTUME DESIGN
David T. Howard

LIGHTING DESIGN
Jeff Adelberg†

SOUND DESIGN
Alex Eizenberg

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT
Jessica Hill Kidd

STAGE MANAGEMENT
Robin Grady*

THE COMPANY

∞ denotes actual historical figure.

Isaac∞	Michael Liebhauser
Nikolai∞	Sean McConaghy*
Yevgenia∞	Donnla Hughes*
Vova∞	Jeff Church*
Urzula	Gabrielle McCauley
Feliks	Dan Garcia
Mariya/Mrs. Petrovna	Sophia Blum*

CREATIVE TEAM

Assistant Stage Manager	Jessica Corsentino
Dramaturg	Rachel Walshe
Vocal Coach	Candice Brown
Weapons Consultant	Normand Beauregard
Technical Director	Max Ramirez
Assistant Technical Director	DJ Potter
Production Assistant	Kavi Gasper
Master Electrician	Alex Foley
Carpenter	Erin Doyle

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

TIP:

Before coming to the theater, discuss with your students the various professions in the theater. It takes more than just actors! When they arrive, ask them to notice evidence of those professions at work.

ACT IV

STUDENT DISCUSSION & WRITING



TIP:

Assign these questions for homework or in-class writing and then discuss your students' answers before and after the show.

BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW

- What is Magic Realism?
- Who was Isaac Babel? Why was his writing and career noteworthy?
- Where is the city of Smolensk? What is significant about that city, historically?
- Who is Vladimir Putin? What current events involve him? Describe 2 or more possible points of view about him.

AFTER SEEING THE SHOW

- How does this play utilize Magic Realism?
- How did the moments of Magic Realism affect you, the audience, differently when you are seeing a live theatrical performance, versus reading literature or seeing a movie?
- Which facts about Isaac Babel became most compelling as you experienced this play?
- What big questions does this play ask of you, the audience? Why do you think the playwright wants you to grapple with these questions?

STEAM CONNECTIONS

- What technical elements did the production employ in order to communicate compelling moments clearly?
- What did you see and hear?
- How did sensory experiences shape your emotional response to the play?

MORE DISCOVERY OF MAGICAL REALISM

Gabriel García Márquez: The Master Of Magical Realism & Nobel Prize Winner

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

“A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” A short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

<https://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~cinichol/CreativeWriting/323/MarquezManwithWings.htm>

Big Fish, film (2003) directed by Tim Burton; John August(screenplay); Daniel Wallace novel “Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions”).

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0319061/>



Gabriel García Márquez



RESOURCES CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES & MEDIA RESOURCES

MORE MEDIA FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

**AMERICAN
THEATRE**
A PUBLICATION OF THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

Interview with Rajiv Joseph

Podcast episode from American Theatre Magazine:

<https://www.americantheatre.org/2022/03/15/the-subtext-rajiv-joseph-on-putin-and-basketball/>

PERTINENT SECTIONS:

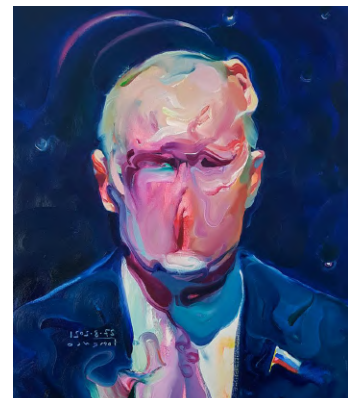
1. 9:00 - 11:58 (expletives used)
 2. 11:58 - 16:55
 3. 16:55 - 21:29
- What did you hear from Rajiv Joseph that felt surprising to you, in this interview?
 - Joseph says that the internet was “born to create second guessing” and this leads to a state of confusion that his play also explores. Evaluate your own experiences with the internet, and consider whether you agree or disagree.

“Stories about Vladimir Putin. Did he come to power in 1999 by killing hundreds of innocent Russians? How’s he really seen in his home country?”

Podcast episode from This American Life

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/763/the-other-mr-president>

- How, in some ways, is *Describe the Night* an even more important play now, in 2022, than in 2014 when it originally premiered? How does that shift speak to the nature of live theatre and new plays?



ACT VI

EPILOGUE

THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining us for *Describe the Night* and for working with this Study Guide to expand your theatrical and educational experiences. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *Describe the Night*.

Our Education Department provides classes and camps for students and adults. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

To book a matinee, contact Brittany at brittany@gammtheatre.org 401-723-4266 ext. 112. To learn more about Gamm Education, find us on the web at www.gammtheatre.org or reach Sarah Ploskina at 401-723-4266 ext. 111.



COMING NEXT

NOV 3 - 27

SWEAT



Life is hard but reassuringly predictable for a tight-knit group of friends in blue-collar Reading, PA. On the factory floor and in the local bar, bonds are forged, drinks are downed, and gossip flows. But when layoffs and picket lines chip away at their trust, friends find themselves pitted against each other in a primal fight for survival. From its slow-burn opening to its electrifying end, Nottage's Pulitzer Prize-winning play confronts race, deindustrialization, and the ever-shrinking middle class with humor and heart.