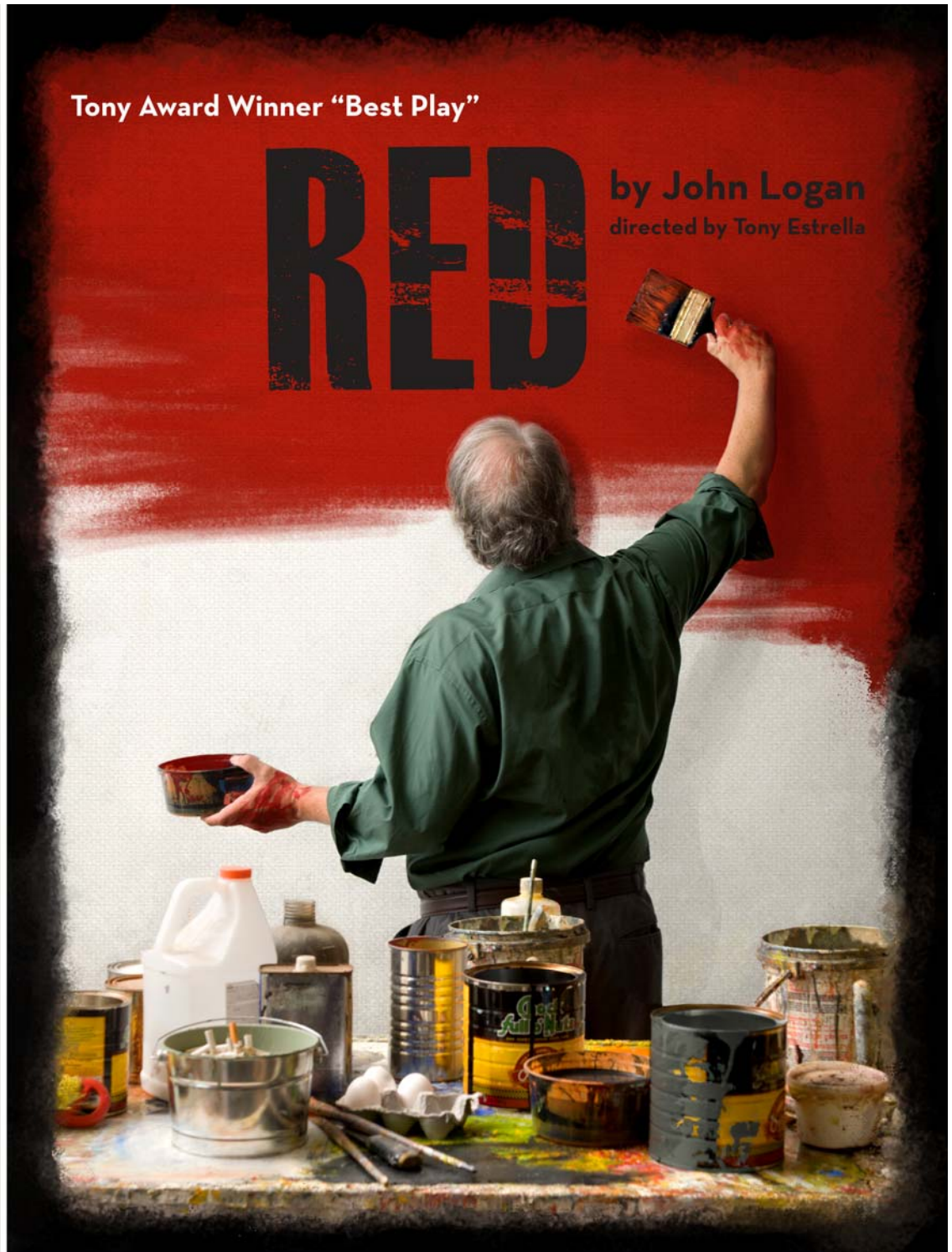


EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT

Tony Award Winner "Best Play"

# RED

by John Logan  
directed by Tony Estrella



sandra feinstein-

**GAM**  
theatre

## STUDY GUIDE

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*This study guide was prepared by  
Tracy Morreo, Susie Schutt and Steve Kidd*

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## Prologue

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Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to share with your students designed to prepare them for our production of *Red* by John Logan.

This Study Guide is broken into five acts. In the first act, you will find a few more reminders for you and your students about the nature of performance and what is expected of all audience members attending the theatre. In the second act, you will find a biography of Logan, the history of the play, and a breakdown of the characters. In Act Three, Director Tony Estrella articulates his vision and ideas behind our production. Act Four examines the dominant themes in *Red* and includes ways to integrate the production into your curriculum. Our Study Guide closes with Act Five, which offers activities for the classroom. At the end of our study guide, you will be able to find information on how to learn more about The Gamm's Educational offerings.

As part of our Stage-to-School program, I would like to offer a workshop with your classroom/school before your visit to The Gamm in order to help prepare your students for the play. In these workshops, I will not only discuss the play and the concept(s) in our production, but I will also get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the themes, motifs and language of the play. This type of kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students a deep comprehension and the sort of text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning.

Much of this work was discovered, developed and inspired by the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University. I personally had the good fortune to work with "ArtsLit" and the strategies and models for learning developed by the organization continue to serve as a foundational pedagogical tool for all Gamm Education programming.

Some benefits of ArtsLiteracy learning include:

- **Community Building in Your Classroom** (Applied Learning New Standards: A1; A2; A5)
- **Inspiration and Background on the Artist** (English Language Arts New Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; Applied Learning New Standards: A2; A3; A5)
- **Entering and Comprehending Text** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- **Creating Text for Performance** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- **Performing in Your Class** (Applied Learning Standards: A1; A2; A3; A4; A5)

- **Reflecting on Your Performance** (E2; E3; A1; A2; A5)

Moreover, the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) has developed GSE's (Grade Span Expectations) and GLE's (Grade Level Expectations) to help "capture the "big ideas" of reading that can be assessed."

We believe that all of our Literacy through Performance work helps to develop the following literacy skills.

### **WRITING**

- W-2: Writing in Response to Literary Text (showing understanding of ideas in a text). A "text" covers not only books and plays, but film and other kinds of media.
- W-3: Making Analytical judgments about text (how good was it? What stuck out?)
- W-4: Creating a Storyline
- W-5: Applying Narrative Strategies (how did they tell the story?)
- W-14: Reflective Essay

### **ORAL COMMUNICATION**

- OC-1: Interactive Listening (how well students listen; how much information they pick up hearing something once – asking a student to write a comprehensive account of a play certainly works)
- OC-2: Making Presentations (each senior in Rhode Island will be asked to put on a senior exhibition, capstone project or portfolio that includes a public demonstration on a particular subject. Learning about public performance is an obvious tie-in).

### **READING**

- R-4: Initial Understanding of Literary Texts (where is the climax in a story? How would you set this play in contemporary society?)
- R-5: Analysis and Interpretation of Literary Text/Citing Evidence
- R-11: Reading Fluency and Accuracy (part of the benefits of reading a script out over and over in rehearsal is an increase in reading fluency and accuracy)

Please see more exercises and strategies for ArtsLiteracy learning at [www.artslit.org](http://www.artslit.org). We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year.

Steve Kidd  
Resident Actor/Education Director

## ACT I: Theatre Audience Etiquette

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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 encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors. Thus, you the audience, play an active role in the experience. The actors can see and hear you and any distracting behavior (talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc) can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking during a performance, but welcome your applause and laughter. Thank you!

### **The Nature of Performance**

Controversial British playwright Sarah Kane once observed: "There's always going to be a relationship between the material and that audience that you don't really get with a film... People can walk out or change channels or whatever; it doesn't make any difference to the performance... It's a completely reciprocal relationship between the play and the audience."

The performance you see will never be precisely the same, for it will never have the same audience; every performance is unique. Theatre scholar Robert Cohen observed the essential paradox of live performance:

- It is unique to the moment, yet it is repeatable.
- It is spontaneous, yet it is rehearsed.
- It is participatory, yet it is presented.
- It is real, yet it is simulated.
- The actors are themselves, yet they are characters.
- The audience is involved, yet it remains apart.

"Theatre is not just another genre, one among many. It is the only genre in which, today and every day, now and always, living human beings address and speak to other human beings... It is a place for human encounter, a space for authentic human existence..."

-Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic and  
Playwright  
(From Robert Cohen's *Theatre: Brief Version*)

**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.**

## **ACT II: John Logan & *Red***

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*John Logan*

### **About John Logan:**

John Logan is an American playwright, screenwriter and film producer born September 24, 1961. His parents emigrated from Northern Ireland via Canada and he was born in San Diego, the youngest of three children. He grew up in California and New Jersey and then moved to Chicago to attend Northwestern University, graduating in 1983. He was a successful playwright in Chicago for many years, with his play, *Never the Sinner* premiering there in 1985. It opened in London's West End five years later and also received the New York Outer Critics Circle award for an off-Broadway play in 1998. Other plays included *Hauptmann*, about the Lindbergh baby kidnapping and also *Riverview*, a musical. He went on to become a successful screenwriter writing and co-writing Academy Award winning films such as *Gladiator* and *The Aviator*. Most recently he has been nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Hugo*. He is noted as "an immensely talented writer with the rare ability to combine drama and action without sacrificing one for the other".

### **About *Red*:**

*Red* is about Russian American artist Mark Rothko. It was produced by the Donmar Warehouse in London in December 2009 starring Alfred Molina

and Eddie Redmayne. They reprised their roles for a limited run in New York which went on to receive six Tony Awards in June of 2010, the most of any play. Fred Sullivan Jr., resident Gamm Director, will make his debut performance on The Gamm stage as Mark Rothko.

### **Characters and Setting:**

Red takes place between 1958 and 1959 in Mark Rothko's studio located at 222 Bowery in New York City. His studio is an old gymnasium where representations of some of Rothko's Seagram Mural paintings (see below) are stacked and displayed about the room. An imaginary painting is also "hanging" right in front of the audience which is studied by Rothko through out the play

*Mark Rothko*, American Painter, 50s or older (Biography below)  
*Ken*, his new assistant, 20s (fictional character)

## **ACT III: Our Production**

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### **Director's Notes:**

By Tony Estrella, *Gamm Theatre Artistic Director and Director of Red*

### **WHAT DO YOU SEE?**

"In the studio, Rothko was a man of resolution; one of the last artists in America to believe, with his entire being, that painting could carry the load of major meanings and possess the same comprehensive *seriousness* as the art of the fresco in the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the novel in 19th century Russia. Outside its door, he dithered." — Robert Hughes, "Rothko in Babylon"

### **Tragedy in Every Brush Stroke**

John Logan and I share very similar first encounters with the art of Mark Rothko. Upon visiting London's Tate Modern, Logan, knowing little of Rothko or his work, was so moved that he left needing to find out more about these extraordinary works and the man who created them. That initial encounter and the need it inspired became the spark that ignited his great play, *Red*. My first visit to the Tate was back in 2005. Having no significant previous knowledge or investment in Rothko's work beyond seeing various prints in art books and being intrigued by their geometry but little moved by their effect, I ventured into the room housing nine of the murals that were initially commissioned for the Four Seasons restaurant in New York City's Seagram building.

Like Logan, I was quite unexpectedly overwhelmed. Two things happened that no mere art book reprint can ever reproduce for a viewer. With no page to flip to impatiently see what's next, they enveloped me and demanded that I give them *time*; and that time let me room to see and feel them *move*. It was visceral. That *time* and *movement* allowed me to *be moved*. As the great art critic Robert Hughes once pointed out, "Yahweh doesn't show his face in reproductions, only in paintings." In other words, if you've ever looked at a Rothko and thought "My kid could paint that," you need to get to your butt to the museum.

For Rothko, painting was *serious*. Abstract Expressionism, the school of artists with whom Rothko is most identified (along with Pollock, Newman, De Kooning etc.), found its voice, as the moniker suggests, in abstraction. With great swathes of color, shapes, ambiguous forms, and pure expression on the canvas, the paintings were deliberately intent on instantaneously evoking emotion in the viewer through bold gesture rather than intellectual content, symbol or story. What set Rothko apart from his contemporaries was his need, his demand that his pictures contain *meaning*.

"A generation that does not aspire to seriousness, to meaning," Logan's Rothko states, "is unworthy to walk in the shadow of those who have gone before." Rothko saw himself as the latest (and just maybe the last) in a continuum of painters stretching back to Michelangelo and Caravaggio, running through his idols Rembrandt and JMW Turner. Great masters all, they could never be accused of lacking content, of peddling a derivative formlessness or a cleverer-than-thou conceptualism so easily dismissible in much of modern art. Indeed, Logan has Rothko rail against the next wave of painters who are more interested in comic books and soup cans, with "zeitgeist art," than in facing the beckoning void.

To Rothko, Logan writes, there was "tragedy in every brush stroke." Without quite knowing it, the visceral reaction that Logan and I, along with countless others, have experienced while engaging Rothko's art is a response to that tragedy: a marrow-deep acknowledgement that it belongs to us, that in those layers of paint and shimmering blocks of color, are doors and windows on the infinite, "inescapable, inexorable, like doom."

### **What the Rabbit Knew**

I was fortunate to visit London again this past October. Sitting with the re-hung Seagram murals (only 6 were available at the Tate this time around) was an even more intense experience, my own investment in Rothko having deepened in the interim. Without a doubt, my work on Logan's play provided both a context and a focus that has made my conversation with the paintings themselves wider-ranging and



meaningful. While on my journey through that extraordinary city, I hopped from the National Gallery – which houses many works of crucial importance to Rothko including two Rembrandt self-portraits and *Belshazzar's Feast*, and several influential works by JMW Turner – to the Tate and back again, listening in on a conversation between these artists and their works.

In *Red*, Rothko opens the second scene intoning his name alongside his forbears, “Rembrandt and Rothko...Rothko and Rembrandt...Rothko and Rembrandt...And Turner.” Though one might argue that it is too early to tell, the Tate has seen fit to make Rothko’s dream roll call a reality. A Turner hangs immediately outside his gallery so that no viewer may enter the Rothko room without beginning the conversation more than a century earlier with a man whose work, though prefiguring even the Impressionists, Rothko considered a spiritual peer. Seeing both artists’ work together, up close, and conversing with each other, validates Rothko’s proclamation however vain it might be. They were both painting at the dawn of cataclysm: Turner in the initial surge of the Industrial Revolution, Rothko in the wake of nuclear annihilation. To see Turner’s *Fighting Temeraire* (1838) in which one of the last of the Napoleonic-era frigates is being tugged via steamship into a harbor to be destroyed or, even more potently, his *Rain, Steam, and Speed- The Great Western Railway* (1844) is to understand that in both form and content these artists, separated by more than a century, are telling versions of the same dark tale. Turner’s world depicted the transition from Constable’s verdant countryside in works like the *Hay Wain* (1821) to the mechanized grime and Dickensian “hard times” of the new industrialized world. Rothko’s pictures chronicled man’s permanent acquiescence to absurdity and meaninglessness. His paintings attempted to answer the essential modernist query, “Now that we can literally destroy the world, what next?” In *Rain, Steam and Speed*, Turner offers an answer. The painting evokes an oncoming train steaming out of a Rothko-like blur of sky and void while, tiny in the foreground, you can just make out the form of a rabbit darting away in primal fear. “Get out of the way,” the rabbit seems to cry. It may be our only hope. Art, of course, tends not to get out of the way. It confronts. It agitates. In Rothko’s case, it stood on the tracks and waited for the blow.

That blow came in 1970 when, on the very same day the Seagram Murals arrived at the Tate in London, Rothko was found dead in his New York studio, having flayed his veins with a razor. Gruesomely, as if to balk at the cliché or ensure as swift an exit as possible, he slashed not at the wrist but further up the arm to the elbow. In Hughes’ description, Rothko lay there “fat and exsanguinated, clad in long underwear and black socks, in the middle of a lake of blood.” In *Red*, Logan’s Rothko foretells his own end with a potent description of his “friend Jackson” [Pollock’s] death in a

horrible drunken car wreck years earlier. Rothko offers a sobering reassessment of what was officially labeled an accident: "You tell me what that is" he says, "if not a lazy suicide."

*"He's a schmuck from Wyoming who can paint. Suddenly he's a commodity. He's 'Jackson Pollock.' Let me tell you, kid, that Oldsmobile convertible really did kill him. Not because it crashed, because it existed.... Goya said, 'We have Art that we may not perish from Truth.'... Pollock saw some truth. Then he didn't have art to protect him anymore... Who could survive that?"*

Rothko certainly couldn't.

### **Art and Anti-Art**

Two remarkable coincidences attended my sojourn through London last month. The first occurred when a vandal by the name of Vladimir Umanets, an acolyte of the self-styled school of "Yellowism," defaced one of the Tate Seagram murals a mere 24 hours after I had visited them. He inscribed his name with a paint pen and then scrawled, "This is a potential piece of Yellowism." When I first heard the news via a text message from back home, I thought it was a joke. Certainly Umanets' explication of "Yellowism" sounds like the rantings of a schizophrenic clown:

*"Yellowism is not art, and Yellowism isn't anti-art. It's an element of contemporary visual culture. It's not an artistic movement. It's not art, it's not reality, it's just Yellowism... Maybe I would like to point people's attention on what it's all about, what is Yellowism, what is art?... The main difference between Yellowism and art is that in art you have got freedom of interpretation, in Yellowism you don't have freedom of interpretation, everything is about Yellowism, that's it. I am a Yellowist..."*

How does one reply to such nonsense? After a similar rant from the Dadaist Tristan Tzara in Tom Stoppard's masterpiece *Travesties*, the famous novelist James Joyce retorts:

*"You are an over-excited little man with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of your natural gifts. This is not discreditable. Neither does it make you an artist. An artist is the magician put among men to gratify capriciously their urge for immortality. The temples are built and brought down around him from Troy to the fields of Flanders. If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art..."*

Rothko was indeed a kind of magician. Contemplating the canvas after the one act of on-stage artistic creation in *Red*, Rothko plagiarizes Shakespeare's most famous wizard, *The Tempest's* Prospero, who after offering the sprite Ariel his freedom mutters, "so, so, so." Like Shakespeare's hero with those three short syllables, Rothko acknowledges the pain of letting a piece of him go, a fleeting bit of his soul that would

over time become an avalanche. And as every conjurer must one day break his staff and every writer put down his pen, Rothko reached a point at which having seen "some truth," he didn't have "the art to protect him(self) any more." His brush began to stiffen, though he wouldn't put it down.

This became stunningly obvious with my second London coincidence. Fortuitously, the Pace Gallery just happened to open a brand new space that week, pairing six late Rothkos with works by the contemporary Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto. Rothko's pictures were, frankly, depressing. They felt static, lacking the furious movement and the literal and figurative depth so unmistakable in the Seagram works of ten years earlier. The too-evident brush strokes and flatness of tone seemed to indicate a vague submission. Gone was passion, his "life force." The bold colors were conspicuously absent, the reds had given way to dull browns. At the time, he was suffering from the aftereffects of a debilitating aortic aneurysm, as well as the unrelenting depression that he had endured for much of his life. The pictures seem almost wholly inert, nearly self-parody as if these works were evidence of a kind of artistic suicide, a spiritual self-negation as the clock wound down.

Leaving the Pace that rainy Monday with admittedly less spring in my step, I headed for my hotel and happened on Trafalgar Square. Rather than continue down the Strand, I took the stairs two at a time and made my way into the National Gallery for another look at the Rembrandts. Among the collection are two self-portraits. The first is the great artist at 34 years old (1640), sober, stern but not unkind, already a bit weary, the child father of the man, with the most penetrating gaze I've ever tried to hold; confident without a hint of arrogance, still watchful, knowing, longing and capable of knowing the world's name. The second was painted 29 years later (1669) and exactly 300 years before Rothko's Pace paintings (coincidentally both men were in the last years of life). Rembrandt is physically diminished, heavier, worn down by time. The weariness hinted at in the 34-year-old is now in full withering bloom. The blight that will soon choke out its life evident in that slightly hooded, rheumy gaze though all the petals have yet to fall.

The contrast was stark but restorative both to my sagging spirits and my understanding of the Rothkos. For all their ennui they, like the Rembrandt, evoked something powerful and harrowingly honest. No, they weren't as accomplished or revelatory as the Seagram murals; but even with too much water in the wine, the pictures retained a kick. For two decades Rothko had worked in this 'style' that would become his signature. The end being nigh, he seemed to run out of anything else to say which is, I realized, *exactly what he was saying*. An astonishing message from any

artist, to face down that terror, that encroaching darkness and admit finally that, “the black has swallowed the red.”

## ACT IV: Background, Themes, & Questions for Discussion

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*Mark Rothko*

### About Mark Rothko:

Born Marcus Rothkowitz in Russia, 1903, **Mark Rothko** is classified as an abstract expressionist painter. Rothko himself rejected this label and resisted any classification as an abstract painter.



*Red, Orange, Tan, and Purple, (1949)*

His family emigrated to the United States when Rothko was a child. He received a scholarship to Yale based on academic performance; however, he dropped out in his second year. Forty-six years later he received an honorary degree from Yale. Over the years, Rothko tried his hand at acting and writing but it wasn't until he took a course with still life artist Max Weber that he began to see art as a tool of emotional and religious expression. Rothko went on to work with Milton Avery, another artist who greatly influenced Rothko's art.



*Untitled (Deep Red on Maroon) (1959), "Seagram Mural Sketch"*

Rothko went through many phases as an artist, often suffering from depression, which is reflected in his work. Rothko's paintings matured from representation and mythological subjects into rectangular fields of color and light: in 1946, he began to develop his signature color block style. He was heavily influenced by the writings of Freud, Jung, and Nietzsche. Throughout his career, Rothko was extremely successful, having shows all over the world and watching the prices of his work rise over his lifetime.



*Maroon and Orange, (1958), from "The Seagrams Murals"*

In February of 1970, Rothko was found dead by his assistant. He had sliced his arms with a razor found lying at this side but during the autopsy it was discovered that he had overdosed on anti-depressants as well. He was 66 years old.



*Black on Maroon, Mural, Section 3 (1959), from "The Seagram Murals"*

*A note about the art: These images do not do Rothko's work justice. The colors and size of the paintings when seen in person have much more impact. For more information about Rothko's painting technique visit:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=vSiu8qzHV6c#!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=vSiu8qzHV6c#!)

### **The Seagram's Murals:**

*Red* is based on the true story of Seagram and Son's commissioning of Rothko's works to hang in their Four Season's Restaurant in 1958. After visiting the nearly completed restaurant, Rothko refused to continue the project and returned the cash advance to the Seagram and Sons Company. He kept the commissioned paintings in storage until 1968. They are now dispersed and hang in three locations: London's Tate Modern, Japan's Kawamura Memorial Museum and The National Gallery of Art in Washington DC.

*Questions for discussion:*

- *What do you think of Rothko's painting? Why do you think he is a popular artist?*
- *What do you see when you look at Rothko's work? How do his paintings make you feel? (there is no right answer!) What do they remind you of?*
- *Compare Rothko's work to other artists painting at the time. What are some similarities? What are some differences?*

- *Why do you think Rothko returned the paintings commissioned by the Four Seasons?*

### **Mentorship**

A mentor is someone who counsels, offers advice, or guides another person, often younger and less experienced, in a shared field. For example, many new painters or artists seek out an established artist (or find one by accident) to help navigate the art scene, to ask advice about their work, to get recommendations for galleries and art shows, etc.

Ken is hired to work for Rothko as his assistant. We soon learn that Ken has brought some of his own paintings to show to Rothko, so it seems Ken is seeking a mentor. However, near the top of the play, Rothko says to Ken *"I am not your rabbi, I am not your father, I am not your shrink, I am not your friend, I am not your teacher-I am your employer."*

*Questions for discussion:*

- *What are some differences and similarities between the roles Rothko lists above?*
- *After seeing the play, do you think Rothko is Ken's mentor? Why or why not?*
- *Rothko describes artists as needing to be well versed in many fields. Why do you think that is? Are there other professions that require this?*

## **ACT V: Activities for the Classroom**

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### **Research:**

#### *Rothko in the News*

Mark Rothko and the Seagram's paintings were recently in the news. Have your students research this current event and report back to the class through newscast, written report, or class discussion.

#### *Abstract Expressionism*

What is it? How does it differ from the art movements that came before it? What brought this new movement on? Why do you think Rothko resisted this label? Have your students research this artistic movement and present their findings to the class.

### **Personal Writing**

*Writing Prompts:*

- *Describe your ideal mentor. Have you ever mentored anyone? Do you consider anyone your mentor? If so, who?*
- *What is the role of art in your life? (don't forget about magazines, commercials, advertisements, street art, etc.)*

## **The Basic Tableau**

### Description:

A **tableau** is a frozen image of an event, activity, or concept. Students create tableaus to represent their varied interpretations of a given text. Students work from words, phrases, or larger narratives where they form images of the "big events."

### Preparation:

Select themes, concepts or phrases from the play or this study guide for students to work from or have students brainstorm words relating to "ART". The words should be up for interpretation. For example, a tableau representing "HAPPY" will differ from group to group, but a tableaux representing "PHONE CALL" will all be very similar.

### Procedure:

1. Explain to students the concept of a tableau. Tell them they will be creating a tableau either as a cooperative group or with one "sculptor" and a group of "clay." Offer a simple set of guidelines suggesting that everyone in the tableau is physically connected or positioned at different levels (sitting, kneeling, standing) in space. Remind students these are interpretations of words and that there are no right or wrong answers.
2. Break students into groups of four to six students.
3. Have students form a tableau that either reflect the vision of a single "sculptor" or a collective creation of the group. Give students about 3 minutes to create a tableau based on a word of their choice or an assigned word.
4. When all the groups have completed their tableaus, have them take turns sharing them for the class. Debrief each tableau immediately following each group presentation.

### Discussion:

- *Where did we see similarities across the images? Where did we see variations?*
- *What are the limitations of tableaus? Did those limitations help you or hinder you?*



- *What is visually interesting to you about these tableaux?*
- *How would your tableau have been different then those of your classmates?*

## Epilogue

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Thank you for joining us for *Red* and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best, most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *Red*. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm. Our education program also provides classes for students in elementary, junior high and high school and our GSI Pawtucket is the thing to do for summer time theatre fun. To learn more, find us on the web at [www.gammtheatre.org](http://www.gammtheatre.org) or reach Steve Kidd at 401 723 4266 ext. 17.