

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark beanie, a light-colored hoodie, and a denim jacket, sits on a concrete bench at night. She is positioned in front of a chain-link fence. To her left is a crumpled orange plastic bag, and to her right is a traffic cone. The background shows a city street at night with blurred lights and buildings. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

GAMM
THEATRE

STUDY GUIDE

IRONBOUND

BY MARTYNA MAJOK

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GAMMEDUCATION

We thank the following foundations and corporations for their support of PLAY during our 37th Season: Rhode Island Foundation, Fain Family Foundation, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, Mabel T. Woolley Trust, Ramsey-McClusky Family Foundation, Carter Family Trust, Providence Shelter Fund, and June Rockwell Levy Foundation.

This study guide was prepared by Andy Pollard, Kate Hanson, Susie Schutt, and Jon Del Sesto

ACT I

WELCOME



Dear Educator,

We are so excited to be back! It was difficult for us to be dark, as we say in the business, after shutting down *Assassins* mid-run in March 2020. While we have been busy teaching classes online, nothing beats being in the theatre with you and your students. Thank you for continuing to support our work. We are so glad to have you back!

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *Ironbound* by Martyna Majok and directed by Rachel Walshe. In this guide you will find background information about the play and playwright, an inside look at 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 debrief with your students.

We would like to offer a pre-show visit with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. This will whet students' appetites for the performance and encourage them to question and explore the themes of the play. This visit will last about a half an hour and is offered to your classroom free of charge. Most student matinees are followed by a talkback with the production team and offer students the opportunity to debrief the performance immediately and ask questions of the actors, director, designers or playwright. Talkbacks range in length but we encourage you to stay and participate in the dynamic discussion. 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 ensures students deep comprehension and text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning.

Attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Theatre Arts Standards in 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.

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. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

Susie Schutt,

Director of Education & Drama Therapist, susie@gammtheatre.org

Kate Hanson,

Associate Director of Education, kate@gammtheatre.org

HEALTH & SAFETY

For performances through April 10, 2022, guests will need to be masked as well as fully vaccinated (or provide a verifiable negative COVID-19 test result) in order to be seated. Proof of vaccination or testing must be presented at time of entry (a paper/electronic card or RI DOH test result).

“Fully vaccinated” means your performance date is:

- at least 14 days after your second dose of an FDA/WHO authorized two dose COVID-19 vaccine
- or at least 14 days after your single dose of an FDA/WHO authorized single dose COVID-19 vaccine

Guests who are unvaccinated (including children under 12) must provide proof of either:

- negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of the performance start time, or
- negative COVID-19 antigen “rapid” test taken within 6 hours of the performance start time

For all guests:

- Masking will be required for all in attendance except while actively eating or drinking.
- Please consider mitigating risk factors before the event, and after you leave. While vaccinated people are much less likely to become very sick from COVID-19, recent data has shown some vaccinated people experiencing “breakthrough” infections.
- If you are sick or have COVID-19 symptoms (fever, sore throat, chills, cough, shortness of breath, congestion, nausea, or vomiting), please do not attend your ticketed performance. You may contact the box office to reschedule. If you are unable to attend a different performance of the same show, your ticket may be donated back to The Gamm as a tax-deductible contribution.

Other ways The Gamm is committed to your health and safety:

- Our staff, performers, and volunteers are all fully vaccinated.
- We have adopted contactless mobile ticket scanning to reduce physical touchpoints.
- Face masks are available for those who require them.
- We have installed air filters in our lobby, theater spaces, dressing rooms, and offices.
- Our HVAC system has been serviced and upgraded, as required by Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.
- Drinks only (not food) will be allowed in the theater. You may enjoy food and drink in the lobby.
- Hand sanitizers are available in common spaces, and enhanced cleaning protocols are being implemented.

Thank you for your support and cooperation.



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 encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You, the audience, are mere feet away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience. **The actors can see and hear any distracting behavior such as talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc.** This 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 or making any noise during a performance. *Thank you!*

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.

COMMON CORE 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 Resident Scholar's interview with the playwright.*

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 our 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



MARTYNA MAJOK

Martyna Majok was born in Bytom, Poland and raised in New Jersey and Chicago. She was awarded the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for her play *Cost of Living*. Other plays include *Sanctuary City*, *Queens*, and *Ironbound*, which have been produced across American and international stages.

Other awards include Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding New Play, Greenfield Prize (as the first female recipient in drama), Champions of Change Award from the NYC Mayor's Office, Francesca Primus Prize, two Jane Chambers Playwriting Awards, Lanford Wilson Prize, Lilly Award's Stacey Mindich Prize, Helen Merrill Emerging Playwright Award, Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding Original New Play from The Helen Hayes Awards, Jean Kennedy Smith Playwriting Award, ANPF Women's Invitational Prize, David Calicchio Prize, Global Age Project Prize, NYTW 2050 Fellowship, NNPN Smith Prize for Political Playwriting, and Merage Foundation Fellowship for the American Dream.

Martyna studied at Yale School of Drama, Juilliard, University of Chicago, and New Jersey public schools. She was a 2012-2013 NNPN playwright in residence, the 2015-2016 PoNY Fellow at the Lark Play Development Center, and a 2018-2019 Hodder Fellow at Princeton University. Martyna is currently writing a musical adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, with music by Florence Welch and Thomas Bartlett, and developing an original series for HBO based on her play, *Queens*. She lives in New York City.

ABOUT "IRONBOUND"

At a bus stop in a run-down New Jersey town, Darja, a Polish immigrant who gets by on a cleaning job, pragmatism, and sheer will is done talking about feelings. It's time to talk money. Over the course of 22 years and three relationships, Darja negotiates for her future with men who can offer her love or security, but never both. Award-winning playwright Martyna Majok's *Ironbound* is a darkly funny, heartbreaking portrait of a tough woman for whom love is a luxury – and a liability – and survival is the only measure of success.

"You seldom see plays that are both harsh and wonderful...The play never sugarcoats, yet it steers clear of bleakness because Majok's language is so entertainingly alive." WASHINGTON POST

"Intriguing. . . . The play, like life, isn't about easy answers." NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

ACT III

OUR PRODUCTION

by **MARTYNA MAJOK**
directed by **RACHEL WALSH**

SET DESIGN &
PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT
Jessica Hill Kidd

COSTUME DESIGN
Jessie Darrell Jarbadan

LIGHTING DESIGN
David Roy

SOUND DESIGN
Peter Sasha Hurowitz

DIALECT COACHING
Candice Brown

STAGE MANAGEMENT
Kelsey Emry*

THE COMPANY

Darja **Donnla Hughes***
Tommy **Steve Kidd***
Maks **Gunnar Manchester***
Vic **Rodney Witherspoon II***

CREATIVE TEAM

Assistant to the Director **Maria Noriko Cabral**
Technical Director **Max Ramirez**
Assistant Technical Director **Alex Eizenberg**
Technical Production Supervisor **DJ Potter**
Assistant Stage Manager **MacKenzie Kugel**
Production Assistant **Dan Garcia**
Master Electrician **Alex Foley**
Electrician **Michael Cline**
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.



GAMM EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



While actors, directors, and playwrights are the most well-known, there are many jobs and careers that make theater successful. Each of our study guides focus on a different theater career by highlighting a Gamm employee.

BRITTANY COSTELLO | BOX OFFICE SALES MANAGER

What does your job entail?

I research the play and then reach out to members of the community that I believe would benefit from seeing our current show and help them book their tickets. I also reach out to schools in the area that may want to bring their students to our morning Student Matinees (like the one you'll be seeing soon!).

Why is your job important to The Gamm's success?

When a patron calls or comes to our theatre I am usually the first person they speak to. Drew, the Box Office Manager, and myself give patrons their first impression of what it feels like to be one of our patrons. When groups join us, we are creating new conversations in those spaces. When I donate a gift certificate to an organization for a fundraiser, I am inviting new patrons into our space and giving them the chance to experience our theatre, which may not have been accessible to them otherwise.

What led you to your position at The Gamm?

I graduated in 2015 with a BFA in Theatre Technology and Design from URI and a BA in Writing and Rhetoric. After graduation I worked at a few local theatres until I went on a national tour in 2019. When I returned from California I decided to take a break before stage managing my next show. Little did I know, that would be my last show for the next two years. I had started to question if my time in the arts was over when a friend let me know she would be leaving her position at The Gamm, and I applied that night.

Why theater?

It was an accident really; I wanted to be a writer or an editor growing up. In middle school we were doing Little Shop of Horrors and they needed more puppeteers for the plant, and I haven't been able to escape Audrey II's grasp ever since. The theatre is a wonderful combination of magic and mystery.

What, if any, other professions are you curious about?

I would love nothing more than to buy a large ranch with lots of space to begin rescuing animals.

What special skills does your position entail?

Since I take the box office calls about purchasing single tickets and making exchanges, my position requires a lot of patience and understanding. I need to be organized while tracking donations and contracts and personable when talking with patrons.

What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?

Oh French Vanilla, 100%. I am a plain-Jane when it comes to desserts. Yes, my second favorite is chocolate.

Titles are so wonderful, aren't they? We connect word to image and a whole universe of associations unravels before us. The best titles offer us many ways to read them and *Ironbound* is no exception! On one layer, *Ironbound* is a literal place referring to a particular neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey. This multi-ethnic, deeply working-class neighborhood, is the setting of Majok's play. The name derives from the fact that this neighborhood is "bound" on most sides by railroad tracks, and perhaps because it was formerly a thriving economy driven by the metalwork industry. Then there are myriad images and themes conjured by thrusting these two words together. What resonates most deeply for me is the paradox of being both bound and liberated by brute strength. *Ironbound* reminds us that steeliness, or in this case iron-ess, can wall us in just as much as it can propel us forward. Given that the protagonist, Darja, emigrated from Communist Poland, the title also has echoes of the Iron Curtain.

We've talked a lot in rehearsal about hidden worlds in *Ironbound*. The audience is privy to only five snapshots of Darja's life, all of which emanate from her waiting at a bus stop. The ways in which these hidden worlds operate on her is critical to understanding Darja's story and the men, particularly Maks, who intersect with her life. Violence, displacement, fear, insecurity, and loss all bind the characters whom we meet in this play. But it's also these hidden worlds that steel each of them against the cruelties of the visible world. Watching a mostly volunteer army of Ukrainian citizens take up arms to resist a global superpower shows us a bravery that I imagine is fueled by feeling deeply bound to country, sovereignty, identity, and a way of life. To resist the cruelties of tyranny and fascism is to signal to the world an iron resolve that we all ought to embrace.

Darja jokes with Maks, “The [Berlin] Wall falls down; American dream falls in.” On the one hand she is teasing Maks about his romanticizing the American Dream. On the other hand, her pseudo-cynicism is the voice of marginalized, immigrant women who do much of the labor in holding this world up. They are the low-wage caregivers for children and elderly. They do the emotional labor of keeping families intact in the face of extraordinary insecurity. Darja, like countless immigrant women, holds down a corner of the economy with her job as a cleaning woman, a factory worker, a caregiver for a wealthy woman with dementia, all while fighting ferociously for her son’s life. Her story reminds us that these women and their unrecognized, underpaid labor underpin what we consider to be the American Dream.

Jessica Hill Kidd, our extraordinary set designer, honed in on an idea that made so much sense to me in thinking about *Ironbound*. She saw the bus stop as an intersection. It's both literal, as we see in her design, and figurative. This helped me unpack so much of what the play is asking our audience: What does it mean to find yourself at the intersection of two choices? Where are the critical intersections of our own lives in which we might have chosen the wrong route? What are the intersections we might be stuck at right now, unable to choose a new route? In that sense, I find the bus stop a perfect metaphor for examining the symphony of insights and experiences *Ironbound* has to offer.

Tommy is not Darja's first rodeo. When we meet her in the summer of 1992 with her first husband, Maks, whom she followed to America from Poland, a younger Darja is also counting—this time in a game where coins determine who'll pleasure the other that night. After work, Darja and Maks process what happened to their factory co-worker Ania, who lost her arm in a moment of distraction. Rather than dwell on the horror of the accident, Darja starts to compute with weird logic: "Ania lose her arm and she have job. Is because she have job that she lose her arm. And because she lose her arm, she keep her job. Funny mathematics."

By 2006, however, material stability has abandoned Darja in the shadow of the now closed factory she chose over Maks. Seeking to escape another beating by husband #2, who lost his job when the factory closed, Darja encounters Vic, a loquacious teen of curious compassion. She tries at first to reduce him to a quantity of sorts (“You are many questions”), but eventually gives him her name and a hesitant fist bump. Vic breaks into a happy rap rhyme and Darja sort of joins in.

“We are not just body,” Maks had argued. “Lift. Pull. Push. We are more than this.” Things come full circle when Tommy once again begs for understanding in a final resistance to measuring. “Everyone’s capable of understanding everything. We got all the same parts,” he says. Those parts include the ones that turn counting up things into measures of music and singing.

ACT IV

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

TIP:

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

THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING

1. How did the set design aid in the telling of the story? What would you change and why?
2. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting, sound, and music?
3. What does the Gamm poster (also the cover of this study guide) tell you about the play? What sort of poster would you design for this play and why?
4. Why do you think the playwright chose this title? How does the title relate to the story?

IRONBOUND

Ironbound is a district of Newark, New Jersey, named after the complex railroads and the plethora of metalworking factories that set up in the area during the industrial revolution. While the name reflects the historically prominent industries of the area, playwright Martyna Majok chose this title for her play not only to describe the setting, but to invoke a sense of enchainment, bleakness, and inescapability brought by the word.

Questions

- As the district began to host ironworking and metalsmith factories back in the industrial revolution, people came to the area in need of work, no matter how gruesome the conditions were, and started their families there. Who do you think named the district “Ironbound”? Was it the employers, employees, families, or passers-by? Why do you think that the name stuck?
- When talking about people in New Jersey, the playwright says that “Almost everyone is from somewhere else. And yes, there’s a reason they’re not living in New York”. Why is Darja there? Why do you think she stays when given the opportunity to go to Chicago?
- What does it mean to be “bound” to one’s job or to one’s work? Summarize what you believe is Martyna Majok’s commentary on the relationship between American work and American people?

TIME

The script of *Ironbound* dictates that Darja be onstage for the entire play. While the scenes in the play span between 22 years, jumping back and forth through time, the actress playing Darja cannot exit the stage to change her appearance. This anachronism, the unconventional sequencing of time, may not be how we experience time in reality, but can help to provide context for a fictional character's life as the story unfolds. As time moves around Darja, the production team is forced to get creative in illustrating changes in Darja and the world around her.

Questions

- Why do you think the playwright demands that Darja remain on stage the entire performance?
- What were some of the ways that the Gamm's production made the setting and timing of each scene clear to the audience? As an audience member, what choices did you find effective in establishing the timeline of the show and the trajectory of Darja's life and why?
- The script clarifies the specific year in which the scenes take place. Do you think it's necessary that the audience knows these dates, or how many years have passed between each event? Why or why not?

INTERSECTIONS

Intersections are places full of opportunity and danger, which often force people to make big decisions regardless of their preparedness. The crossroads has long been used in western literature as a liminal space (being neither "here" nor "there"), where weary travelers make tired decisions, or succumb to highway criminals who take advantage of their vulnerability in indecisiveness. This idea of "intersection" was helpful for the director in creating their vision for the Gamm's production. On a literal and material level, the play features intersections of travel between streets, busses, cars, and railroads. On a metaphorical level, the audience witnesses Darja at several intersections of her own life, in which she seems to make critical choices about which paths to pursue, and with whom.

Questions

- Why does Darja gravitate back towards the bus stop time and time again? We never see the bus come, so why does she still wait for it?
- What makes each scene an "intersection" in Darja's life? Do they involve choices that she can actually make herself, or is she forced to pick before she's ready?
- How does the set design reflect the idea of intersections?

MUSIC

Both of Darja's lovers in *Ironbound* attempt to connect with her through music. Maks creates his own music with the harmonica and Tommy plays music from his car speaker. Darja herself sings to the audience as the play wraps up its final scene. For a play about the tangible struggles of working life, music provides levity and escape from the harsh realities of the Ironbound district.

Questions

- How would you describe Darja's relationship with music? How does it differ from the other characters'?
- Why do characters like Tommy and Maks try to connect to Darja and get through to her by playing music? Do you think it's effective? Why or why not?
- How does the music in this show interact with the anachronistic timeline of the plot?
- Do you think that there is room in this production for music to be used in other moments that are not necessarily prescribed in the script (scene transitions, background, etc)? When and why?



ACTIVITY: BE A LIGHTING DESIGNER



The lighting designer for *Ironbound* has many challenges that require creative solutions. The stage has to evoke a street in the nighttime while keeping the actors visible to the audience and allowing for transitions between scenes while the actors remain onstage.

In this activity, you'll be figuring out how to replicate the lighting of either a car driving by the bus stop or the lighting of a car that moves toward and stops in front of Darja. You can work in teams or individually to figure out how to light specific moments in the play. Get creative about where the source of the light is coming from and what you can use to make the illusion that the light is attached to a moving vehicle. You'll have to consider the limitations of backstage space, the audience's viewpoints, and how the backstage crew will control your lights. Depending on your available space and supplies, set up either a diorama of a stage, actors, and audience members, or make a full scale life sized playing area with room for "actors" and "audience members". After watching the production of *Ironbound*, think about how The Gamm's lighting designer, David Roy, tackled these obstacles.

ACTIVITY: NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The script begins with the following two quotes that the playwright selected:

“There is an old story about a worker suspected of stealing: every evening, as he leaves the factory, the wheelbarrow he rolls in front of him is carefully inspected. The guards can find nothing. It is always empty. Finally, the penny drops: what the worker is stealing are the wheelbarrows themselves.”

Slavoj Žižek, “Violence”

*“Now near the end of the middle stretch of road
What have I learned? Some earthly wiles. An art.
That often I cannot tell good fortune from bad,
That once had seemed so easy to tell apart.”*

Robert Pinsky, “Jersey Rain”

Many works of literature include carefully curated quotations from famous writers. They’re meant to tease your brain and stimulate enough curiosity to move forward, searching for reasons as to why the quotes were featured so prominently before the story has even begun.

In this activity, you’ll write your own notes from the playwright for your own story. First, pick a story that you’ve enjoyed telling at some point in your life. It can be a funny piece of gossip you’ve been sharing recently, a travel anecdote, something you witnessed at home or out and about, you could even steal and retell a story that someone else has told you that has stuck in your memory. Whatever you choose, find 2-3 quotes from other works of literature, philosophy, history, or any other published material that will provide an alluring frame to your story. They can be ironic additions or genuine insights, but there has to be a reason you choose them for your specific story. Once you’ve collected your quotes, with a partner or group, share your quotes followed immediately by your story, and ask your peers why they think you selected each quote. Discuss what your intentions were and how each quote influenced your audience’s experience of the story.



ACT VI

EPILOGUE

THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining us for *Ironbound* 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 *Ironbound*.

Our Education Department provides classes and camps for students of various grade levels. 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. 111. To learn more about Gamm Education, find us on the web at www.gammtheatre.org or reach Susie Schutt at 401- 723- 4266 ext. 121.





COMING NEXT

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**DIRECTED BY FRED SULLIVAN, JR.
MAY 5 - MAY 29**

Navigant
CREDIT UNION