Thousand Islands Playhouse presents...

No Great Mischief

by David S. Young
Adapted from the novel by Alistair MacLeod.
Originally Produced by the Tarragon Theatre, Toronto, Ontario

STUDY GUIDE
(For students from Grades 9-12)
You can download this study guide on our website at:
www.1000islandsplayhouse.com
About the Study Guide

This study guide has been created so that your theatre experience at the Thousand Islands Playhouse is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help you create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions in the classroom. We want to highlight the fact that some elements of the guide are most useful prior to viewing the production and some are most useful post viewing. For example while the structure, character breakdown, and themes set up a context for viewing, the design elements are best understood after viewing. There are also lesson plans included for both pre and post show activities.

Table of Contents

About the Thousand Islands Playhouse ................................................................. 3
Message from the Artistic Director .................................................................. 3
Cast and Creative Team ................................................................................. 4
About the Playwright /About the Author ...................................................... 5
About the Play .................................................................................................. 6
Elements of the Play ....................................................................................... 7
  Structure ....................................................................................................... 7
  Genre ........................................................................................................... 8
  Language ..................................................................................................... 9
  Characters .................................................................................................. 10
  Theme ......................................................................................................... 13
Elements of Design ............................................................................................ 16
  Set ............................................................................................................... 18
  Sound / Music ............................................................................................ 19
  Lighting ..................................................................................................... 20
  Costume .................................................................................................... 21
In the Classroom – Points of Discussion .......................................................... 22
Glossary of Theatre Terms .............................................................................. 23
Lesson Plans and Classroom Activities, Pre-performance ......................... 24
Lesson Plans and Classroom Activities, Post-Performance ....................... 32
Workshop Information, Q&A, Salt-Water Moon ........................................... 33

Note: The No Great Mischief Study Guide was originally co-ordinated and compiled in 2004 by staff at the Tarragon Theatre including: Joanna Falck, Avery Swartz and Mary B. Wood. With permission from the Tarragon Theatre this Study Guide has been revised and edited for the 2013 Thousand Islands Playhouse production by Assistant Artistic Director, Charlotte Gowdy.
About the Thousand Islands Playhouse

“the most charming theatre in Canada” CBC Radio

The Thousand Islands Playhouse is a not-for-profit charitable organization that was founded in 1982 by Greg Wanless. In its thirty-one year history producing world class live professional theatre, the Playhouse has achieved many milestones, including: the founding of its Young Company in 1996, the acquisition and renovation of a production facility in 2003, and the addition of a black box performance space in the former Gananoque Firehall in 2004. This year marks the inaugural season for artistic director Ashlie Corcoran. In 2013 our audiences will enjoy seven shows presented in two separate theatres, a Monday night classical music series and extensive outreach activities (including pre-show talkbacks and post-show chats). Artists are supported through our Playwrights’ Unit and Young Company training; school children experience professional theatre through our touring production of Peg & The Yeti and our autumn student matinees of No Great Mischief and Salt-Water Moon. In this way, over 46,000 people will experience one or more artistic activity at the Playhouse in 2013.

Message from Playhouse Artistic Director – Ashlie Corcoran

I am fortunate to have had a long association with the script of No Great Mischief. When I first graduated from Queen’s University, I worked as the administrative assistant at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. Richard Rose, Artistic Director at Tarragon, knew that I had directorial ambitions and asked me to do some dramaturgical work on the new script. Later, he invited me to be the assistant director on the premiere production. It was a wonderfully rich experience and I have been a great fan of the play ever since.

The adaptation of this well-known and well-loved Canadian novel is superb. Richard’s staging is mesmerizing – simple, theatrical and imaginative. The use of storytelling and direct address to the audience is breathtaking. And the inclusion of East Coast music – played live by the actors on stage – is entertaining and wholly transporting. Most importantly, the play tells the story of the need for family, for love and for connection. Now, after almost a decade since first working on it, I am so very proud to bring this beautiful script – and wonderful production – to our TIP audience.

I invite you and your students to use this study guide to delve deeply into the fascinating world of No Great Mischief, and most of all, enjoy the show!
Cast and Creative Team

Directed by Richard Rose
Starring: David Fox, Daniel Giverin, Stephen Guy-McGrath, Ben Irvine, John Koensgen, Nicola Lipman, Jack Nicholson, Paul Rainville, R.H. Thomson

Set and Costume Design: Charlotte Dean
Music Director: Kate Stevenson
Lighting Design: Graeme S. Thomson
Assistant Lighting Designer: Nick Andison
Sound Design: Todd Charlton
Stage Manager: Kristen Kitcher
Assistant Stage Manager: Emilie Aubin

Tarragon Theatre. Photography by Cylla von Tiedemann
**About the Playwright**

**David S. Young** is an acclaimed Canadian Playwright and novelist. Among his plays are *Fire* (written with Paul Ledoux, winner of four Dora Mavor Moore Awards and a Chalmers Award); *Glenn* (nominated for seven Dora Mavor Moore Awards, the Chalmers Award and the Governor General’s Award); *Inexpressible Island* (a finalist for the Governor General’s Award) and *Clout*. An active screenwriter, author of two novels, and the president of Coach House Press for ten years, David is also the founder of the Writer’s Trust of Canada, a non-profit literary organization that seeks to encourage Canada's writing community, and a trustee of the Griffin Prize for Excellence in Poetry.

**About the Author**

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

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

“All of us are better when we are loved”

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

About the Play

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

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

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

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

All of the components that make up a play are called the dramaturgical elements. These include the **structure** (how the story is ‘built’), the **genre** (comedy, tragedy, mystery etc.), the **language**, the **characters** and the **themes**.

**Structure**

The structure refers to how the playwright has arranged the order of events in his/her story. A story can be told in many different ways. For example, the playwright can begin at the beginning of the story and move forward until the story reaches a logical ending. Or, a play can begin long after the events have happened and, in one character’s memory, unfold in random order jumping backward and forward in time. Shakespeare’s plays always have five acts with the rising action in the first two acts, the climax in the third act and the falling action or denouement in the final two acts. Many modern playwrights reject this structure and arrange the play in a less logical way. How a playwright chooses to arrange the events in the play can tell us how he/she wants the audience to experience the story.

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

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

- The anonymous folk ballad (or popular ballad) was composed to be sung. It was passed along orally from singer to singer, from generation to generation, and from one region to another.
- Primarily based on an older legend of romance, this type of ballad is usually a short, simple song that tells a dramatic story through dialogue and action. It uses simple language, an economy of words, dramatic contrasts, epithets, set phrases, and frequently a stock refrain.
- More than 300 hundred English and Scottish folk ballads exist, dating from the 12th to the 18th century. Although the subject matter varies considerably, five major classes of the ballad can be distinguished – historic, romantic, supernatural, nautical, and the deeds of the folk heroes, such as the Robyn Hood cycle.
- During the mid-20th century in the United States there was a great resurgence of interest in folk music, particularly in ballads. Singers such as Joan Baez and Pete Seeger included ballads in their concert repertoires; composer-performers such as Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan wrote their own ballads.

Genre

Genre is a French word meaning type, species, or class of composition. Determining a play’s genre helps the reader/spectator understand how to view the play – what is the worldview of the playwright? How is s/he asking us to look at the world? Knowing a play’s genre helps us understand better the ‘rules’ of the play – how the play is operating in terms of its portrayal of the world.

Comedy, in general, is defined as a play written “chiefly to amuse its audience...it will normally be closer to the representation of everyday life than a tragedy and will explore common human failings rather than tragedy’s disastrous crimes” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms). Shakespearean comedies are also defined as ending in marriage. The pursuit of love is often a strong element of comedy.

Tragedy, in general, is defined as a “serious play representing the disastrous downfall of a central character.” The central character is led to this disaster through “an error” and “the tragic effect usually depends on our awareness of admirable qualities in the protagonist which are wasted terribly in the fated disaster” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms).

In terms of No Great Mischief there are both comic and tragic elements in the play. If comedy is seen as a search for love, and a triumph of love at the end of the play, then No Great Mischief can be classified as a comedy (the play ends with the words “All of us are better when
we are loved.”) But if tragedy is seen as the forces of fate acting on a character and the disastrous downfall of a central character, then seeing the history of the MacDonald family and its effects on Calum especially, the play can also be called a tragedy. Alexander calls his brother a “self-reliant man overwhelmed by the shadow and storm of his own destiny.”

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

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

**Definition: Gaelic**
A name sometimes given to that dialect of the Celtic which is spoken in the highlands of Scotland – called Gaelic by the Highlanders.

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaelic</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘ille bhig rualdh</td>
<td>little red boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fois do t’anam (Foish toe anam)</td>
<td>Peace to his soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor cu</td>
<td>Poor dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pog Ma’thon</td>
<td>kiss my arse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rach air ais!</td>
<td>Go back!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beannachd leibh</td>
<td>Good bye/Blessings upon you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cu girach!</td>
<td>Foolish dog!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De chuala</td>
<td>What did you hear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cha chuala sion</td>
<td>I didn’t hear anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin agad e</td>
<td>that’s it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M’eudail bheag</td>
<td>My little treasure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sing along with No Great Mischief!

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaelic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi mi bhuam, fada bhuam</td>
<td>I see far, far away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi mi bhuam, ri muir lain</td>
<td>I see far o’er the tide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi mi Ceap Breatuinn mo luaidh</td>
<td>I see Cape Breton my love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fada bhuam thar an t-sail</td>
<td>Far away over the sea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alistair MacLeod (author of the novel) speaking about teenage culture: “I think for the Gaelic speaking people, English was the language of progress...in order to get a job, you had to learn the majority language [English], especially if you were going work for other people.”

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

Characters

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor’s Name</th>
<th>Characters Played</th>
<th>Actor’s Name</th>
<th>Characters Played</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Fox</td>
<td>Calum MacDonald, Calum Ruadh</td>
<td>Nicola Lipman</td>
<td>Grandma, Kid #1, Scottish Woman, Christie the Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Giverin</td>
<td>Brother #1, Dog, Kid #3, Scottish Man #4, Fern Picard</td>
<td>Jack Nicholsen</td>
<td>Serious Grandfather, Kid #2, French Miner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Guy McGrath</td>
<td>Brother #2, Kid #4, Scottish Man #1, Fern Picard’s Hoist Man, Hospital Attendant</td>
<td>Paul Rainville</td>
<td>Grandpa, French Miner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Irvine</td>
<td>Cousin Alexander, Scottish Man #3, Mourner #2, California Cousin, Causeway RCMPC</td>
<td>R.H. Thomson</td>
<td>Alexander MacDonald (September 13 – 29, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Koensgen</td>
<td>Alexander MacDonald (October 1-5, 2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme – Family and History

Calum: ‘Always look after your own blood’, Grandma used to say.

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

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

1314 – Battle of Bannockburn
• A significant battle in the history of Scotland; Robert the Bruce had finally gained the Kingship of Scotland and his rise to power led Edward II, the new king of England, to lead a massive invasion force into Scotland.
• The two armies met at the Battle of Bannockburn where 5000 members of the clan Donald joined the battle. Robert the Bruce sent them into battle with the words, “My hope is constant in thee”, which is now the family motto for the clan MacDonald of Clanranald (and an oft-repeated phrase in the play).
• The Scots were victorious which left Bruce in total military control of Scotland and England forced to recognize their demands.

1689 – Battle of Killiecrankie
• A battle between Highland clans (including clan Donald) who supported the Kingship of the Catholic James II and English troops (though mostly lowland Scots) who supported the Protestant William of Orange.
• The Scots were victorious but it had little overall effect on the outcome of the war.

1692 – Massacre of Glencoe
• After William the Orange was secured as King, many Highland clans still swore allegiance to the deposed King James II.
• In 1691, the government issued a proclamation offering to pardon all who had fought against King William, provided they swore an oath of allegiance before January 1st, 1692.
• Maclan of Glencoe, the chief of the MacDonald clan, arrived at Fort William on the 31st of December to give his allegiance. He was told it had to be given at Invernay. In winter
conditions he traveled and arrived January 2\textsuperscript{nd}. The Magistrate was away and arrived back on January 5\textsuperscript{th} and reluctantly accepted his oath.

- The Privy Council never received their oath and orders were given to get rid of this “troublesome” clan and set an example to other disloyal clans.
- As the clan slept, government troops arrived and 38 members of the clan Donald were killed either in their beds or trying to escape.

1746 – Battle of Culloden

- The last full scale battle to take place on British soil and the last stand of the Highland clan system, the Battle of Culloden marked the end of an era for Scotland.
- It was the last attempt of the Jacobites (earlier supporters of James II) to reinstate a Stuart monarch to the throne led by Charles Edward Stuart, also known as Bonnie Prince Charlie.
- At the Battle of Culloden, the Highlanders were defeated and many were hunted down and killed by the government troops.
- Legislation was introduced following the battle banning tartans, kilts and pipes – laws designed to destroy the traditional clan system.
1759 – Plains of Abraham
- The British, under command of Major General James Wolfe, advanced into St. Lawrence River and on September 13th attacked the French.
- Wolfe’s troops scaled the cliffs below the Plains of Abraham and attacked. Wolfe had sent French-speaking soldiers to reply to sentries on the shore before attacking, making the French believe that the incoming crafts were a convoy of supply boats. In the play, Calum tells the story that it was a French-speaking MacDonald who first went up the cliff.
- For General Wolfe, having highland soldiers fighting with him against the French was like having a secret enemy within his own army since these same highlanders had fought against him at the battle of Culloden.
- In a letter to his friend Captain Rickson he wrote of the Highlanders, “They are hardy, intrepid, accustomed to a rough country, and no great mischief if they fall.” The French were defeated and as the Scots did at Culloden, the French lost their land to the English.

1770’s – The Highland Clearances
- Following the Battle of Culloden, the destruction of the Highland clan system continued with English landlords, in partnership with ex-clan chiefs, ‘encouraging’ and often forcing the population to move off of their land which was then given over to more profitable sheep farming. The people were moved to small farms in coastal areas where farming or fishing could not sustain the communities, or they were directly put on emigration ships.
- Many emigrated to North America and particularly Cape Breton Island where, between 1775 and 1860 almost 25,000 immigrants arrived.
- In 1779, Calum Ruadh immigrates to Cape Breton from Moidart with Catriona and his twelve children.

1820 – Cape Breton re-annexed to Nova Scotia

1834 – Calum Ruadh dies at the age of 10

1867 – Confederation of Canada

1877 – Serious Grandfather is born

1961 – start of US involvement in Vietnam War

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

The following section combines general information about areas of design (including information from Tarragon production staff, designers, design websites and the textbook: *Theatrical Design and Production* by J. Michael Gillete) with specific examples of how design elements have been employed in this production. A brief glossary is also included to assist with technical terms used in this section of the guide.

Design Overview

A script can be performed at different times by different people without ever being interpreted the same way. Although the text stays the same from production to production, the overall vision, or the way the piece is conceptualized, changes depending on the artists involved.

Prior to the start of rehearsals the designers (*set, costume, lighting, sound*, etc.) and director thoroughly discuss the play to ensure all parties share a similar vision of the play, and explore how this vision will be presented through design. Design elements should create an environment for the play that supports the production concept: the creative interpretation of the script.

There are some artistic and practical considerations that apply to all areas of design. These include

- Mood and spirit
- Historical period
- Locale of each scene
- Season of the year and time of day for each scene
- Needs of other designers
- Health and safety

Because *No Great Mischief* is a memory play, the overall design reflects Alexander MacDonald’s mind. Changes in thought happen very quickly and the design of the set, costumes, lighting and sound all work together to help the audience understand the quick switches from past to present and from one location to another.
The designers for *No Great Mischief* were inspired, in part, by the paintings of Newfoundland painter David Blackwood. Can you see how these paintings may have influenced the design?

For more information about Blackwood and to see some of his paintings, go to the website of the Art Gallery of Newfoundnland and Labrador at: http://www.heritage.nf.ca/arts/agnl/blackwood.html
Or visit his website at: http://www.davidblackwood.com
Set Design

The set designer’s job is to create a physical world that helps the audience understand and enjoy the play by providing a visual representation of the production concept. Before rehearsals begin, the set designer meets multiple times with the director. From these meetings, design drawings and a maquette are created by the designers and used by the actors, stage managers and production staff to better understand the design goals; to imagine the space the production will be set in; and to build and decorate the set pieces.

Specific practical elements considered by the set designer are:

- The socio-economic level of the characters
- Number and position of entrances and exits needed
- Number and position of entrances and exits already in the theatre space
- The seating formation of the theatre – can it be changed?
- The type of stage that comes with the theatre (i.e. proscenium, thrust, arena, catwalk etc.)

It is interesting to take note of the following:

- Where on stage certain scenes take place
- How the mood and spirit of the production is relayed through set design
- How many different locales are represented on the stage
- What areas are used as exits and entrances
- What information the set gives about the characters

The set, designed by Charlotte Dean, is a simple painted set with six chairs. The open space and minimal furniture allows the actors and the audience’s imagination to transform the space into many different places. Watch for:

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

The sound designer obtains a lot of information directly from the script i.e. “a phone rings”, “it begins to rain”, or “a sad song is heard through the window”. S/he must think about the transitions between scenes and what sound elements will shift the audience from the mood of one scene to the next. Sound design also extends to the elements the audience hears when they first enter the theatre, during the intermission, and even the curtain and post-show music, helping to create an atmosphere for the world of the play.

As well as establishing and reinforcing mood and atmosphere, sound elements also provide information to the audience:

- When you enter a theatre take a minute to listen to the pre-show music or soundscape – does it offer any clues about the nature of the show?
- What sound cues did you hear that helped establish time and place?
- Were there any special effects used? Were they useful in moving the story forward? Why or why not?

Sound and music play an important role in No Great Mischief. Almost all of the live music is played and sung by the actors themselves. The scene at the mines where the French and Scottish miners fight one another begins as a musical battle, each side playing songs from their culture including “The Times, They are A-Changing” by Bob Dylan and “Mon Pays”, (My Country” in English) which was composed by Gilles Vigneault in 1964. The lyrics of the French song talk about winds, cold, snow, and ice of the solitude of wide open spaces and of the ideal of brotherhood. Other familiar fiddle tunes include Devil’s Dream, St. Anne’s Reel and Auntie Mary (Had a Canary).

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

In addition to music, the sound effects designed by Todd Charlton also add to the soundscape of the play. The play begins with the sound of the ocean tapping the shore. Other sound effects include drilling in the mines, a multitude of telephone ringing, thunder and rain, and echo effects on actors’ singing.
Lighting Design

Effective stage lighting not only lets the spectators see the action of the play but also ties together all the visual elements of the production and helps create an appropriate mood and atmosphere to heighten the audience’s understanding and enjoyment of the play.

The lighting designer wants to give information such as time, place, mood, and where the focus of a scene is. Lighting design is often not noticeable because it has been created in such a way as to enhance the mood of the play as unobtrusively as possible. However, many directors will employ unnatural lighting or hyper-realized lighting to add another layer to the production.

Some lighting elements to notice are:

- how lighting indicates a change of time or location
- how lighting changes the focus from one character to another (helps the audience know where to look on stage)
- how lighting interacts with sound elements
- how different colours are used in lighting
- how lighting reinforces mood
- how lighting indicates time of day or time of year

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

Costume design includes all clothing, underclothing, hairdressing, makeup, and accessories such as hats, scarves, fans, umbrellas, and jewellery worn or carried by each character in a production. A costume design suggests specific personal information about each character.

Through discussion with the director, the costume designer will decide whether or not to make the costumes ‘period accurate’. The designer researches clothes of a period by looking through store catalogues of that era (i.e. Sears or Eaton’s); going to a reference library, art gallery and/or museum; perusing picture archives; or even looking at old family photographs. Similarly, if the costumes are contemporary, designers look to current fashion magazines, TV and film, and stores for research.

The designer also works from indications within the play’s script looking for hints into the characters’ personality. They then make artistic choices for the colour of the costumes, their shape, and the fabrics used.

Finally the designer works with the wardrobe team and the actors in fittings to make certain that the costumes are comfortable and as easy as possible to manipulate.

Some practical considerations in costume design include:

- the background and personality of the characters
- the limitations created by the set or staging (i.e. a raked stage makes spiked shoes impractical)
- that actors can move about on the stage as required (i.e. run up a set of stairs or engage in stage combat)
- the costumes remain effective under stage lighting
- costumes that need to be changed into and out of quickly are built accordingly (i.e. zippers instead of buttons, elastics instead of laces)
- costumes that can last for an entire run and be laundered

In *No Great Mischief*, many of the actors play multiple characters and must quickly switch between them, usually without leaving the stage. This makes it impossible for the actors to have a complete costume change for each character. Therefore, each actor wears a costume that can be adapted for each character they play.

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

Points of Discussion
The following are questions you can use to begin discussion with your students. The questions relate to both the play and the production. Some of them are better to discuss before seeing the show and some are better post show.

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

- Do you think the play is a tragedy or comedy? Is it both? Use specific examples from the play to support your argument. Can a play be both tragedy and comedy?

- Why would a playwright use another language in a play, especially one many people in the audience may not understand? Are there benefits to doing so? What would it be like to see a play where you didn’t understand any of the language?

- Do you see connections between the characters one actor is playing? ie. Are there any similarities between Calum MacDonald and Calum Ruadh? Or Cousin Alexander and California Cousin? Or Dog and Fern Picard?

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

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

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

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

- How did each design element (lighting, set, costumes, sound) help the audience to understand the story?
### Glossary of Technical Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acoustics</strong></td>
<td>The sound transmission characteristics of a room, space or material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cue</strong></td>
<td>A directive for action (i.e. a change in lighting, sound or an actor’s entrance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cyclorama</strong></td>
<td>A large piece of scenic material used to surround the stage on to which colour can be projected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gel</strong></td>
<td>Generic name for the film used in lighting instruments to change colour. It can also be used as a verb (i.e. to ‘gel’ the lights)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gobo</strong></td>
<td>A thick metal template inserted into a lighting instrument in order to cut a pattern into the light that is projected onstage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flyhouse</strong></td>
<td>A theatre space with the ability to fly set pieces and/or backdrops from a gallery located high above the stage using ropes and cables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maquette</strong></td>
<td>A small-scale model (3D representation) of the set design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plot</strong></td>
<td>A scale drawing showing the placement of various elements (i.e. lighting instruments) relative to the stage configuration and theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prompt book</strong></td>
<td>A copy of the script with each actor’s blocking, all the technical cues, and details/lists of all technical elements involved in the production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raked Stage</strong></td>
<td>A stage floor built on an angle that is higher at the back than at the front.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scrim</strong></td>
<td>A scenic panel made from translucent gauze-like material.</td>
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### Stage Configurations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arena Stage</strong></td>
<td>A stage configuration where the audience completely surrounds the playing scene, also called “theatre in the round.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Catwalk Stage</strong></td>
<td>A stage configuration where the audience sits on two sides of the stage – also known as “alleyway.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thrust Stage</strong></td>
<td>A stage configuration where the audience surrounds the playing space on 3 sides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proscenium</strong></td>
<td>A stage configuration where the audience watches the action through a rectangular opening that resembles a picture frame (proscenium arch).</td>
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PRE SHOW Lesson Plan #1
Family History Elevated to Myth

Subject(s)/Grades:
English, Arts (Drama) / 9-10, 11-12, Social Sciences (HHSM4)/12

Strands:
English – Oral Communication, Language
Drama – Creating & Presenting, Reflecting, Responding & Analysing, Foundations
Family Studies – Individuals and Societies in a Diverse Society

Overall Expectations:
English - Listening to Understand, Speaking to Communicate, Reflecting on Skills and Strategies
Drama - The Creative Process, Elements and Conventions, Presentation Techniques & Technologies, Drama and Society, Connections Beyond the Classroom

Materials:
Students’ individual writing materials, pencils/pens, paper, etc

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

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

I am from...maple syrup drizzled crepes stuffed with whipped cream & chocolate sauce
Farm fields that smell like manure, tim hortons and squawking Canada geese
My Aunt Myriam who always manages to trick me on April Fool’s
“well if Bob ain’t your uncle then Fanny’s your Aunt”
Beary the bear from Eaton’s I received at aged three
Underneath my duvet on a Sunday night watching a cheesy movie of the week
My grandparent’s farm in southwestern France, a rolling vineyard and the cool empty stone house they no longer live in
Always forgetting to turn off the bathroom light
Waking from a nap to the warm kiss of my mother

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

Main Activity:

Turning Family Story into Myths

In No Great Mischief Alexander says that he carries:

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

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

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

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

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

Journal:
- Ask a parent or other relative to tell you their favorite family story, Write a dramatized version of the story as a short scene.
**PRE SHOW Lesson Plan #2**

*Adapting for the Stage*

**Subject(s) / Grades:**
English, Arts (Drama) / 9-12

**Strands:**

**Overall Expectations:**
English - Listening to Understand, Speaking to Communicate, Reflecting on Skills and Strategies, Reading for Meaning, Reading With Fluency, Developing and Organizing Content, Using Knowledge of Form and Style, Applying Knowledge of Conventions

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

**Warm-up:**

*Follow the Leader*

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

Materials: No Great Mischief by Alistair MacLeod, McClelland & Stewart, 1999

*No Great Mischief* at the Thousand Islands Playhouse is David S. Young’s interpretation of Alistair MacLeod’s novel. David S. Young read the book and went through a lengthy process working with various actors and artists to create the original Tarragon Theatre production in 2004.

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

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

Remind the students of the following:
- One actor can play multiple characters
- Do not use a narrator (however a character can use direct address with the audience)
- Try to “show” as much as possible and keep “telling” to a minimum
- The scene should have a beginning, middle and an end.

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

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

Journal:
- What did you learn about adaptation from today’s exercise? Be specific. Give examples.
**Subject(s) / Grades:**
English, Arts (Drama) / 9-12

**Strands:**
English – Oral Communication, Reading & Literature Studies, Language
Drama – Creating & Presenting, Reflecting, Responding & Analysing, Foundations

**Overall Expectations:**
English - Listening to Understand, Speaking to Communicate, Reflecting on Skills and Strategies, Reading for Meaning, Reading With Fluency

**Materials:**
Scene excerpt from *No Great Mischief*. See attached.

**Warm-up:**
Lead the students in a physical body stretch.
Lead the students in the following tongue twisters with particular focus on enunciation of the consonants:

- A pale pink proud peacock pompously preened it’s pretty plumage.
- A big black bug bit a big black bear and the big black bear bled blood.
- Two toads totally tired, trying to trot to Tewksberry.
- Twelve Typological topographers were typically translating terrain.
- You need unique New York

**Main Activity:**

*Scene performance – working with intentions*

- Divide the students into groups of two.
- In their pairs, the students decide who will play Grandma and who will play Alexander
- Students read the scene aloud twice, each time with a different intention/objective:

  - Alexander= Using only the words in the script: Make Grandma remember.
  Grandma= Using only the words in the script: Make Alexander leave you alone.

  - Alexander= Using only the words in the script: Cheer Grandma up.
Grandma= Using only the words in the script: Investigate exactly what’s going on.

- Try the scene both ways and experiment with blocking (i.e. moving around the playing area)
- Invent a third way to play the scene with clear objectives for each character
- Remember to really listen to your partner and let their words affect your reactions.
- Students can perform the scene in front of their peers and analyze the similarities and differences.

Journal:
- Which of the intentions that you performed in the scene felt the most honest and fun? Why or why not?

Extension possibilities:
- Be sure to ask students to remember this scene in order to see how director Richard Rose and the actors interpret the same scene.

ALEXANDER: Hello, grandma, how are we doing?

GRANDMA: We? We’re doing just fine.

ALEXANDER: Happy birthday, Grandma.

GRANDMA: Do you work here? There’s so many new people in and out saying happy birthday, grandma, it’s hard to keep track of the faces.

ALEXANDER: Are they treating you well?

GRANDMA: I’m just visiting. (pause) Are you from around here?

ALEXANDER: Yes, not originally but now, yes.

GRANDMA: You have lovely clothes. You must have a job where they can’t fire you.

ALEXANDER: I’m a dentist.

GRANDMA: One of my sons has a good job. He’s the lighthouse keeper out there on the island. You can see it from the window.

ALEXANDER: We’re in Windsor, Ontario, grandma.

GRANDMA: My grandson lives there. He married a lovely girl. They had six beautiful children.

ALEXANDER: Three. Catriona is named after you.

Pause.

GRANDMA: (glimmering) Oh.

Alexander holds her hands.

Alexander: Happy Birthday Grandma. You lived to be a hundred just like you promised.
POST SHOW Lesson Plan #1
Ensemble Role Play based on *No Great Mischief*

**Subject(s) / Grades:**
English, Arts (Drama) / 9-12

**Strands:**
English – Oral Communication, Language
Drama – Creating & Presenting, Reflecting, Responding & Analysing, Foundations

**Overall Expectations – The Ontario Curriculum:**
English - Listening to Understand, Speaking to Communicate, Reflecting on Skills and Strategies
Drama - The Creative Process, Elements and Conventions, Presentation Techniques & Technologies, Drama and Society, Connections Beyond the Classroom

**Materials:**
- *No Great Mischief* program from the Thousand Islands Playhouse

**Warm-up:**
Review with students the important elements of creating a whole group role-play:
  a. Maintaining focus throughout the role play.
  b. Maintaining the physicality of your character throughout the role-play
  c. Sustaining the vocal quality of your character throughout the role –play
  d. Ability to take on, and commit to, your characters’ attitudes and beliefs.

**Main Activity:**
*Ensemble Role Play*
- Distribute two pieces of paper to each student.
- Ask students to write down a question on each piece of paper that they have for any member of the *No Great Mischief* production team (writer, actors, designer).
- Collect questions.
- Divide the class into two groups. Group ‘A” and “B”.
- Take group “A” and assign the following roles to students: actor(s), set designer, costume designer, director, lighting designer, sound designer, playwright etc.
- Ask group “A” students to discuss quietly and prepare for their role as a member of the *No Great Mischief* production team in one part of the Drama room.
- Distribute half of the (already collected) questions to Group B students.
- Group B are told that they are “media” at a press conference.
- The “media” must ask the “artists’ their already drawn up question (additional questions are encouraged and everyone on the artist panel must answer at least one question).
- After all questions have been asked, reverse Group “A” and “B” roles and distribute remaining questions.

In this activity students develop role-playing, reflective thinking, focusing and application of knowledge skills. Students discover that through their own creative work, experience in Drama class and viewing the production, they inherently know some of the answers to the artistic choices being asked.

Journal:
- What surprised you about your character? List two things and give examples. What was your favorite part of the role play? Use specific examples from the exercise.

Extension Possibilities:
- Repeat the exercise, this time assigning two or three students the role of camera operators. Play the video of the recorded press-conference for the class, analysing the results.
SALT-WATER MOON
by David French

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