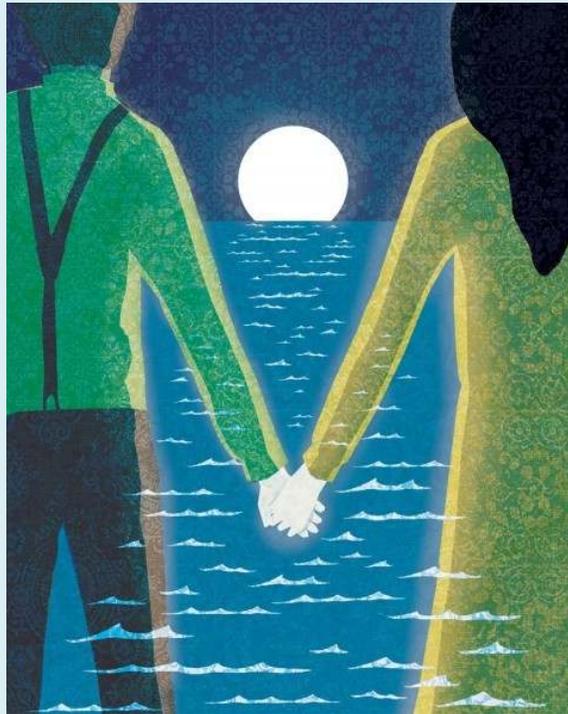


Thousand Islands Playhouse
presents...

SALT-WATER MOON

by David French



STUDY GUIDE

For students from Grades 9-12

**You can download this study guide on our website at:
www.1000islandsplayhouse.com**



Box 241, Gananoque, Ontario, K7G 2T8 p: 613-382-7086 | f: 613-382-7088

About the Study Guide

Welcome to the Study Guide for *Salt-Water Moon*! This guide has been created so that your experience at the Thousand Islands Playhouse is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions in the classroom and at the theatre. 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. Enjoy!

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This Study Guide was written and compiled by Charlotte Gowdy, Assistant Artistic Director at the Thousand Islands Playhouse, October 2013.

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 chats and post-show talkbacks. 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.

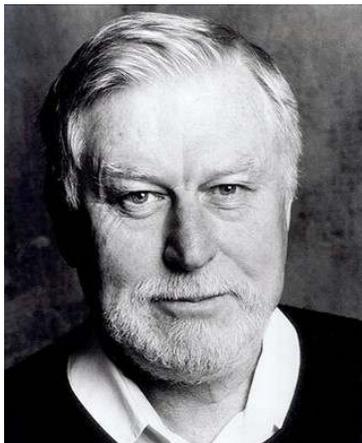
Message from the Artistic Director

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the eighth and final show of our 2013 season - my inaugural season as Artistic Director of the Thousand Islands Playhouse. *Salt-Water Moon* by David French is a classic of the Canadian theatre canon. From the beginning of my journey with the Playhouse, I knew that "Salt-Water Moon" would be part of my inaugural season. In fact, when I applied for the job, I needed to put together a potential season for the search committee - and "Salt-Water Moon" was the final piece!

I specifically chose to schedule this play in our September/October time-slot so that students would have the opportunity to see it with their classmates. To me, this play is about the kinds of decisions we face in our youth - how do we move into the future, while learning from our past. Additionally, the piece deals with historical, geographical, and socio-economic issues that correspond to the Ontario Secondary School curriculum. It is my hope that seeing this play will enrich and enhance your students' learning in a variety of subjects areas. Thank you so much for delving into the magical world of *Salt-Water Moon*. Enjoy the show!



About the Playwright



David French is a critically-acclaimed and widely produced playwright born in Coley's Point, Newfoundland in 1939 who died in Toronto in 2010. David French was one of several playwrights in the 1960s, whose plays about ordinary life in Canada provided long overdue local portraits for Canadian audiences, in their own style of speech and in their own social milieu. He is perhaps best known for his semi-autobiographical "Mercer plays", which track the history of a Newfoundland family living in Toronto through three generations: *Leaving Home* (1972), *Of the Fields, Lately* (1973), *Salt-Water Moon* (1984), *1949* (1989) and *Soldier's Heart* (2002). Other plays include: *One Crack Out* (1975); Canadian English translations of Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1977) and Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (2005); *The Riddle of the World* (1981); and a murder-mystery, *The Silver Dagger* (1993). His comedy about backstage life during the premiere of a new Canadian play, *Jitters* (1979), has enjoyed hundreds of productions across North America and abroad. *That Summer*, a memory play about sisters during the 1950s, premiered at the Blyth Festival in 1999.

David French was nominated for the Chalmers Award five times, and won it for *Of the Fields, Lately*. He won a Dora Mavor Moore Award and was nominated for a Governor General's Award for *Salt-Water Moon*. In 2001, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada and was the first inductee into the Newfoundland Arts Hall of Honour.

David French lived in Toronto, and spent his summers in his writing cabin on Prince Edward Island, where he also had a playwriting school. He has said of his life spent mostly outside of Newfoundland and of his Newfoundland plays, "I absorbed (the language) through some process of osmosis. When I was growing up it was like Grand Central Station in my house - Newfoundlanders coming through all the time, sitting around, smoking cigarettes and telling stories. And, of course, my father and mother were great storytellers, and I picked it up from them too. I remember the first six years of my life vividly." (*Halifax Herald*, 2 November 1999).

Cast and Creative Team

Directed by: Ashlie Corcoran
Starring: Edward Charette and Shannon Taylor

Set Design:	Elizabeth Nutting
Costume Design:	Jayne Christopher
Lighting Design:	Michael Walton
Sound Design:	John Gzowski
Stage Manager:	Natasha Bean-Smith
Assistant Stage Manager:	Kyle Beres
Assistant Director:	Ari Weinburg



Ashlie Corcoran



Ted Charette



Shannon Taylor



Jayne Christopher



Elizabeth Nutting



Michael Walton



John Gzowski



Natasha Bean-Smith



Kyle Beres



Ari Weinburg

Synopsis

It is a starry August night in rural Newfoundland; the year is 1926. Seventeen year-old Mary Snow is star-gazing under a full moon as she waits for her fiancé, Jerome MacKenzie, to visit. A voice is heard in the distance, and Jacob Mercer, her former beau from the previous summer, appears in the yard. Mary is taken aback to see Jacob, as he had left Newfoundland for Toronto, quite abruptly, one year before.

During Jacob's absence, Mary has become engaged to Jerome McKenzie. Mary reveals her reasons – she feels trapped by her circumstances, and sees her engagement to the wealthier Jerome as a solution to her financial troubles and an opportunity to improve her social status. Upon hearing of her engagement to Jerome, Jacob has returned home, convinced of Mary's love for him and determined to win her back. Mary accuses Jacob of attempting to break up the engagement in order to settle an old score with Will McKenzie, Jerome's father. Hurt and angered by this accusation, Jacob storms off. Mary, suddenly faced with losing Jacob forever, swallows her pride and calls him back. He offers her a gift of silk stockings and the play ends with an insinuation that the two sweethearts are destined to share their future together.



Richard Clarkin & Denise Naples in the original production of **Salt-Water Moon** (1984) by David French, at the Tarragon Theatre. photo: Nir Bareket

Dramaturgical Elements of *Salt-Water Moon*

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 **setting**, 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.

Salt-Water Moon is a one-act play, linear in structure, which unfolds in real time. It starts at the beginning of the story and ends at the end. There are no scene transitions that skip forward or backward in time, no dream sequences, frozen moments and no intermission. And while Jacob and Mary often speak of past and future events, even re-enacting scenes from the past, they are always firmly planted and active in the present moment. There is no direct address to the audience and therefore a fourth wall is created and a suspension of disbelief is required of both actors and audience.

Classroom Discussion - Structure

Pre-show:

What are some advantages and disadvantages of telling a story in a linear or non-linear way?

Post-show:

How does the structure of *Salt-Water Moon* add to your emotional experience of watching the play?

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 *Salt-Water Moon*, there are certainly tragic elements within the lives/circumstances of the two characters but the play's overall structure is more of a comedy. Comedy is seen as a search for love, and a triumph of love at the end of the play and *Salt-Water Moon*, with its uplifting ending, certainly falls into the classification of a comedy.

Classroom Discussion- Genre

Pre-show:

What are your favorite comedies and tragedies? Can you think of any other genres in story-telling?

Post-show:

Discuss moments of comedy in *Salt-Water Moon*. How do they feed into your over-all emotional experience of watching the play?

Setting

The setting of a play is often very influential in terms of understanding the characters and the story. The setting includes everything from, location in the world (country, province etc), outdoors/indoors, time period, time of year, time of day and immediate surroundings. The setting of *Salt-Water Moon* is definitely integral to understanding and enjoying the play.

Salt-Water Moon very specifically takes place in Coley's Point, Newfoundland on an August night in 1926. At that time, Newfoundland was not yet a part of Canada, so the fact that Jacob spends a year in Toronto means that he has come from another country to see Mary, adding weight and meaning to his leaving and to his return. Also relevant to year of 1926 is the aftermath of World War I. As evidenced in Jacob's longer monologues about his father's experiences in the trenches of France, the War has had a profound psychological effect on him.

The front porch and yard of the Dawe's house, where the entire play takes place, is situated right next to the Atlantic Ocean. The culture of living and working on the sea is very influential in the lives of the two characters as they struggle to survive in a time of poverty and scarceness.

Classroom Discussion – Setting

Pre-show:

Consider your own setting at this moment. How does it affect your choices and actions?

Post-show:

Consider the setting of *Salt-Water Moon*. How do elements such as the porch, the night-time, the stars, the moon, the ocean, and the time period influence the actions of Jacob and Mary throughout the play?

Characters

There are two central characters in *Salt-Water Moon*: Jacob Mercer and Mary Snow. The story revolves around their relationship. However, there are many other very important characters within the play that are spoken of at length but never appear.

Secondary (unseen) characters:

Jerome MacKenzie – Mary Snow’s Fiancée

Will MacKenzie – Jerome’s father and a merchant who was the boss of Jacob’s father

Essau Mercer – Jacob’s father who fought in WWI

Dot Snow – Mary’s sister who lives and works in an orphanage

Mrs Snow – Mary’s mother, a widow

Jim Snow – Mary’s father who died in the War

Bob Foote – a local man who has recently died and whose wake is taking place the night that Jacob returns.

The Right Honourable Henry Dawe and Lady Emma – Member of Parliament and his wife; Mary’s employers.

Tommy Ricketts – works at the drug store, a character based on an actual WWI veteran

Other Characters

Dr. Babcock, Betty and Isaac Tucker, Billy Parsons, Wiff Roach, Captain Abe, Miss Snook, Rose, Sam and Lucy Boone, Tom Mix, The Matron

Classroom Discussion – Characters

Post-Show:

- How do the secondary characters affect the actions of Jacob and Mary?
- Was there a real Rose, or is Jacob just making her up?
- What are some of Jacob and Mary’s personality traits and what circumstances in their lives do you think contribute to them having these traits?

Themes

Science vs. superstition

The telescope that Mary uses, her fascination with the stars, Jacob's pocket-watch, the Dawe's touring car and the discussion of astronomy are all sharply contrasted with folkloric stories and superstition, for example the references to the tooth-charmer, ghosts/legends, the ball of light, and the devil.

Newfoundland and World War I

Newfoundland made a significant contribution to World War I and experienced many losses during the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel. The war has affected Jacob and Mary, as well as their families, in many ways.

Courage and Heroism

Courage and heroism are discussed and displayed throughout the play, for example: Mary's desire to rescue her sister from the abusive matron, the references to soldiers at Beaumont-Hamel, Jacob's feelings about his father rocking the empty cradle on William McKenzie's porch, and Mary's visit with Dot to see war hero Tommy Ricketts.

Social Class

Issues of wealth, power and social class are a constant driving force in *Salt-Water Moon* and are represented by: The Dawes, who employ Mary; William McKenzie and his treatment of Jacob's father; Jacob's desire to change social class by leaving for Toronto; Mary's desire to change social class by marrying a young man of stature, Mary's insistence on sitting in first class on the train. There are also many symbols of wealth and class such as the Dawe's touring car, Jacob's pocket-watch, the telescope, perfume, peppermint candies and silk stockings.

Classroom Discussion - Themes

Pre-Show:

- **How does your own social class affect your life and your choices?**
- **Talk about a time when you or someone you know was courageous.**

Post-Show

- **What do you think is the most important theme of the play? Why?**

CLASSROOM EXERCISES – BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW

1) David French – Canadian Theatre Icon

Dramatic Arts (Grade 9-12)

Ask your students to watch this interview with playwright David French produced by Theatre Museum Canada:

<http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/playwright/david-french/>

This film offers valuable insight into the writer's early life and career, writing for theatre as opposed to television, his connection with director Bill Glassco, and the idea of success and failure in Canadian Theatre.

Teacher prompts:

- How did David French get his first play produced?
- Why does French prefer writing for the theatre than for television?
- When did French first know he was a writer? What inspired him?
- What aspects of *Salt-Water Moon* are autobiographical? How many characters were originally in *Salt-Water Moon*?
- For whom did David French write plays?
- How long did it take him to write *Salt-Water Moon*?
- Describe how French got his first play produced at the Tarragon Theatre.
- What is French's advice to young playwrights?
- What questions would you ask David French if you had an opportunity to interview him?

Links for Further Research Projects:

- <http://davidfrench.net>
- <http://www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=French%2C%20David>
- <http://www.playwrightsguild.ca/playwright/estate-david-french>

2) A Teen-age War Hero - Tommy Ricketts

Canadian History (Grade 10)

English (Grades 9-12, creative writing)

Have students read one or both of the following articles about Tommy Ricketts:

From the CBC: http://www.cbc.ca/nl/features/theteenage/f_ricketts.html

From the Telegram: <http://www.thetelegram.com/Living/2008-11-11/article-1442528/Unwilling-hero/1>

Ricketts was an unwilling hero; a child soldier, winner of the Victoria Cross, whose life was taken over by well-meaning individuals upon his return to Newfoundland after the war.

- Ask the students to write a letter from Tommy Ricketts in France to his mother in Newfoundland. Imagine what it was like in the trenches of France and use this as a starting point for the letter.
- Ask the students to write a letter from Tommy Ricketts to his dead brother George, or to one of his fallen friends from the Newfoundland regiment. Imagine what it was like to be working in a drug store in Saint John' in 1926, as a local war hero, and use this as your starting point for the letter.

Teacher prompt: How can a person overcome such hardship?

Further Research Project:

- Research child soldiers in other parts of the world and write a report about child soldiers and the impact that fighting wars has on their lives.

Links:

- <http://www.childsoldiers.org/>
- <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/children-s-rights/child-soldiers>
- <http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers>

3) Newfoundland and WWI – The Battle of Beaumont Hamel

Canadian History (Grade 10)

Newfoundlanders played an integral role in World War I. Ask students to visit <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/greatwar/articles/somme.html> and read about/research the battle of the Somme, in particular Beaumont-Hamel. Students can choose one of the following projects:

- 1) Create a time-line of important events and battles, with corresponding dates, which highlights Newfoundland's involvement in WWI.
- 2) Create a collage using images of Newfoundlanders in WWI taken from the Heritage Newfoundland website and other web resources. Be sure to include Newfoundlanders on the home-front as well as in the field.
- 3) Write an essay summarizing and analyzing the battle of Beaumont-Hamel. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the battle-plan? In your opinion, what could have been done differently?



Women's Patriotic Association workers at Gov't House, Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador.



First Five Hundred on board the S.S. Florizel. Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador

CLASSROOM EXERCISES – AFTER SEEING THE SHOW

1) The Blue Star – A Scene Study from *Salt-Water Moon* by David French (Dramatic Arts Grades 9-12)

The attached scene, an excerpt from *Salt-Water Moon*, is a moment of heightened intensity between the two young lovers.

- Divide the class into pairs to play Mary and Jacob and hand out the attached scene.
- Begin by having two students read the scene out loud for the class.
- Discuss the importance of this scene within the context of the play. Do students remember (from seeing the play) when and why Jacob reminds Mary of this moment later in the play? What does he say about it?
- What is going on underneath the text? What is the subtext?
- How would physical proximity between two actors affect the dramatic tension of this scene?
- Give the students some time to work on the scene together. Encourage them to attempt different motivations with each line of text.
- Encourage the actor playing Jacob to make specific choices about when he's looking at the sky and when he's looking at Mary.
- Explore the possibility of pauses and moments of silence between the lines.
- Consider what each of the characters want in this scene. What are their desires and objectives? What are their barriers to getting what they want, in this moment? What tactics do they use to get what they want?

SCENE EXCERPT from SALT-WATER MOON by David French

MARY: Come here then, and I'll show you the blue star . . .

(Jacob gets behind her, close.)

MARY: Now pay attention. I'll tell it the way Jerome does, so you'll always find it yourself in future. You watching?

JACOB: Oh I'm all eyes, Mary. *(He breathes in the fragrance of her hair as though bending before a bouquet of wildflowers.)* All eyes, ears and nose

MARY: *(disturbed by his closeness)* All right, now. First off . . . First off, keep your eye on the Big Dipper. That's where we starts from. Now you see those . . . those . . . ?

JACOB: Those what?

MARY: *(takes a step away)* Those two stars that makes up the left side of the bowl? Those two?

JACOB: *(edging closer)* Which two?

MARY: *(impatiently)* Those two!. . . *(Although she remains facing away, she is acutely aware of his closeness.)* Now pretend your finger is a pencil. What you do is you runs a line between those two stars, like this, and you . . . *(She swallows hard)*

JACOB: You what?

MARY: You keeps on going and runs the line straight up like this, up and up and up . . .

JACOB: Up and up and up . . .

MARY: Yes, until you're at the Constellation of the Harp. That's those six stars right there. See? One, two, three, four, five, six . . .

JACOB: Don't look much like a harp to me.

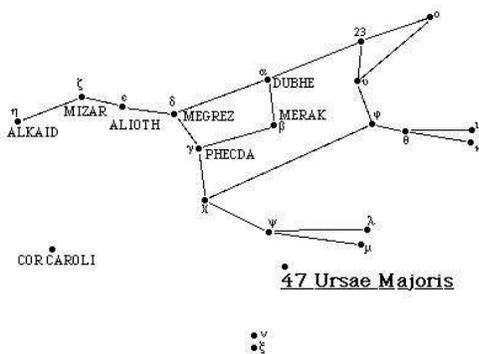
MARY: No odds. That's its name. The Constellation of LYRA. L-y-r-a. That means harp in a dead language.

JACOB: *(Beat)*. What's that you sprinkled on yourself tonight? Smells as nice as fresh bread. What is it, vanilla?

MARY: *(turns on him)* All right, that's it for you, boy! That's it!

END SCENE

Ursa Major, the Great Bear (The Big Dipper)



2) Referendum in a Democracy:

Canadian and World Studies (Grade 10 History; Grade 10 Civics; Grade 12 Politics)

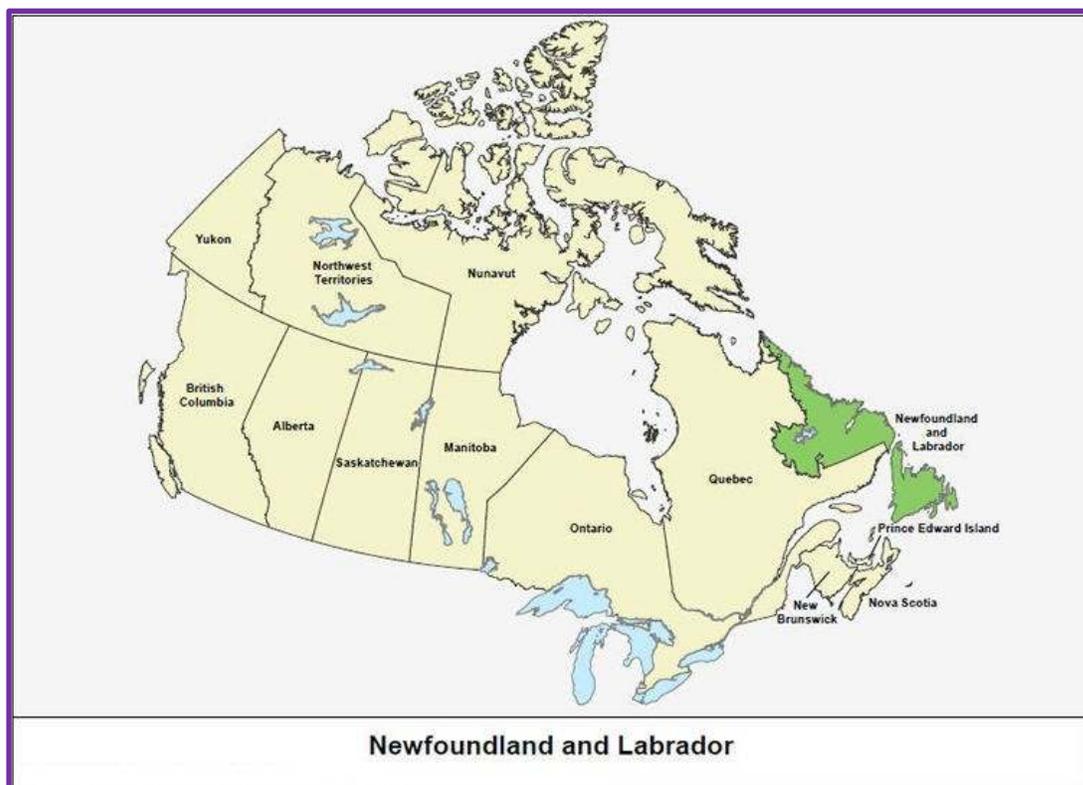
Compare Newfoundland's two referendums on Confederation to Quebec's two referendums on separation. Write an essay about both events, and remember to include "who, what, when, where and why".

Teacher prompt:

- Are referendums a good way for a society to settle important questions, or should we just let our elected officials decide?
- There are some people who believe that Newfoundland should separate from Canada and become its own country. In your opinion, is this a good idea? Why or why not?

Useful Links

- <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/confed.html>



3) What Happens Next? – *Salt-Water Moon*, the Sequel

English (Grades 9-12, creative writing)

Dramatic Arts (Grades 9-12)

At the end of the play it seems that Mary will finally accept Jacob's proposal and agree to share a life/future with him. What will happen next? How will she tell Jerome?

- Write a scene that takes place after the end of the play. Does Jerome finally show up to visit Mary later that evening? What does Mary say to him? Is Jacob there when Jerome shows up? How does Jerome react? What do Mary and Jacob plan to do the next day? Or do they take off into the night before Jerome arrives?
- Write a scene that takes place five or ten years later between Mary and Jacob. Where do they live? How are they living? Do they have children? Are they still in love? Try to incorporate some of the secondary characters from *Salt-Water Moon*, for example Dot Snow or Essau mercer.

Teacher Prompts:

- Are Jacob and Mary destined to be together?
- How are Jacob and Mary influenced by both fantasy and reality?

Drama Workshops

Treat your students to a one-hour drama workshop led by professional Artist Educators. Designed and tailored according to grade-level, these fun-filled classes are a great way to learn the basics of theatre while incorporating the unique themes of each play. Available in the theatre or in your school!

Cost: \$120

FREE Post-Show Q&A with Cast

Meet the entire cast after the performance. Facilitated by Playhouse staff, the Talkback is an opportunity for the students to ask questions, hear backstage stories and engage with professional actors from the show. Time: 15- 20 mins.

FREE

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 <p>EDUCATING RITA A Clever Comedy September 26 – October 18 SPRINGER THEATRE</p>	 <p>BIRD BRAIN A Fable About Being a Little Bit Different YOUNG COMPANY TOURING SHOW</p>



For more information on educational opportunities at the Playhouse, or to reserve your school's tickets for our special school matinees, please contact:

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