

WORLD PREMIÈRE

1939

1939

By **Jani Lauzon and Kaitlyn Riordan**

Directed by **Jani Lauzon**

Born of both family legacy and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *1939* has been guided by Indigenous Elders, Survivors and ceremony throughout its development.

GRADE RECOMMENDATION 7+

CONTENT ADVISORY

The play is set in a residential school in 1939. While ultimately a story of hope and resilience that locates spaces in which Indigenous youth demonstrate agency and change, it explores the systemic erasure of Indigenous cultures by these institutions and its agents by way of racism, discrimination, colonial violence and family separation.

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SYNOPSIS

At a residential school in northern Ontario, five students are ordered to gather in a classroom. Two of them, Joseph Summers and his sister, Beth, have been at the school for seven years, but its policy of separating siblings has largely kept them apart – till now. Susan Blackbird, an orphan who has been there since she was four, struggles to connect with her barely remembered Cree heritage, while newcomer Evelyne Rice tries to avoid punishment by repressing her Mohawk culture and language. Jean Delorme, as a Métis student, is a rarity at the school and struggles to fit in.

English teacher Sian Ap Dafydd explains the reason for their summons: they have been chosen to entertain King George VI and his Queen on their forthcoming visit with a student performance of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*. Firmly colonial in her notions and intentions, Ap Dafydd is as determined to get her young actors to deliver the "big round vowels" she considers essential to speaking Shakespeare as she is to show the royal couple how the students are learning to be "good little Canadians."

But as rehearsals proceed, the students' agency erupts as they learn about each other and discover parallels between the play's characters and their own experiences. >>



From left: Tara Sky as Beth Summers, John Wamsley as Jean Delorme, Richard Comeau as Joseph Summers, Kathleen MacLean as Susan Blackbird and Wahsont'io Kirby as Evelyne Rice in 1939. Photo by David Hou.

Confronting individual and collective tragedy with humour and strength, the students undertake a journey of self-discovery and empowerment – their resilience evoking Helena's line in *All's Well That Ends Well*: "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie."

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Global Competencies
 - ◆ Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Learning to Learn/Self-Awareness
- Grade 8
 - ◆ Indigenous Languages
 - ◆ The Arts
 - ◆ Social Studies
 - ◆ Language
- Grades 9-12
 - ◆ First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies
 - ◆ Indigenous Languages
 - ◆ The Arts
 - ◆ Canadian and World Studies
 - ◆ English
 - ◆ Health and Physical Education
- Grades 11-12
 - ◆ Social Sciences and Humanities
- Post-Secondary
 - ◆ Suitable for courses in disciplines such as Indigenous Studies, Arts, Canadian Studies, Cultural Studies, Drama, English, Fine Arts, History, Human Rights, Religious Studies, Social Development Studies, Teacher Education and Theatre

THEMES

- The Art of Resilience
- Collective Agency and First Nations, Métis and Inuit Activism
- Colonialism and the War on Indigenous Peoples
- The Doctrine of Discovery
- Indigeneity and Gender
- Giving Voice to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Children
- The Influence of the Written Word in Media and from Government
- Language as Culture, Language as Identity, Language as Power
- Loneliness and Isolation
- The Power of Storytelling and Theatre
- Residential Schools

THEMES

- The Role of Humour in Navigating Racism, Trauma and Systemic Oppression
- Shakespeare and Adaptation, Disrupting the Myth That There is a “Right Way” to Perform Shakespeare
- Truth and Reconciliation
- 1939: History and Significance

STUDY GUIDES

Study Guides for all 2022 productions are available free of charge online on our website.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Take time to look up the definition of resilience. What does resilience mean to you? Think about a time when you were resilient. In what ways do you recognize resilience in the young people in the play? Which specific scene or character stands out to you?

- What is colonialism? How does Shakespeare represent colonialism? Why does it become both important and challenging for the students in the play to disrupt/decolonize the colonial models of Shakespeare? What happens when they do?
- What does it mean to remember and honour Survivors of the residential school system today? Think of three actions you will take to do so in your own life.
- How did the elements of humour in *1939* impact your experience? What effect do the combined genres of comedy and tragedy have on the play? What role do you think humour plays in exploring issues of racism and discrimination?
- In what ways does *1939* respond to the 83rd Call to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Why might it be important for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to work together on projects that contribute to rebuilding relationships among non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, communities and Nations? What might this approach be missing?

BOOKING INFORMATION: TICKETS, WORKSHOPS, CHATS AND TOURS

STUDENT MATINÉES

You may book any available date, but selected student matinée performances for this show are at 2 p.m. on the following dates:

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| ● Thursday, October 6th | ● Friday, October 14th | ● Tuesday, October 25th |
| ● Friday, October 7th | ● Wednesday, October 19th | ● Wednesday, October 26th |
| ● Wednesday, October 12th | ● Thursday, October 20th | ● Thursday, October 27th |
| ● Thursday, October 13th | ● Friday, October 21st | |

WORKSHOPS, CHATS AND TOURS

Pre or Post-Show Workshops, Chats and Tours (virtual, onsite or at your school/centre) can be booked by calling the Box Office at 1.800.567.1600.

SOCIAL MEDIA



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TOOLS FOR TEACHERS SPONSORED BY



Tools for Teachers include Prologues, Study Guides and Stratford Shorts.

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