

studio180 theatre

STUDY GUIDE
2018/19

Oslo

by J.T. Rogers

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A. Guidelines for Brave Classroom Discussion

Thank you for bringing your class to *Oslo*. We hope your students will have the most positive and engaging theatre experience possible. To that end, we have created this **Study Guide** to support your pre-show preparation and post-show follow-up in the classroom.

For the most robust exploration of the characters and themes of *Oslo*, we recommend booking a [Studio 180 IN CLASS](#) workshop led by our experienced Artist Educators. We use drama-based activities to promote empathy and inspire critical thinking in three immersive sessions, delving into the big questions of the play. Please contact [Jessica Greenberg](#) to learn more or to book a workshop.

Studio 180 is known for provocative shows that tackle potentially sensitive, personal and controversial topics and *Oslo* is no exception: it examines power, politics and the volatile dynamics between Israel and Palestine. Even in Toronto, Israel/Palestine relations can be a personal, sensitive and even explosive topic for some. As educators we know that we can never responsibly guarantee that all participants will feel 100% comfortable; however, we have developed the following guidelines to promote a safer space and help you lead brave and productive pre- and post-show sessions aimed at empowering **all students to feel valued, respected and able to contribute openly and honestly to the discussion.**

- Class members should make a commitment to respecting one another. Invite suggestions from students as to what **“respect”** means to them. Some of these guidelines may include commitments to confidentiality, avoiding side chatter, and never ridiculing or putting down participants or their ideas.
- Your class may include students from a wide variety of cultural, racial, religious and national backgrounds, including students who identify as Arab, Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian or Israeli. **Teachers and students must resist the urge to place individuals in the spotlight based on their perceived identity, history or point of view.** Students will engage in the conversation as they feel comfortable.
- Family diversity is important to keep in mind for both teachers and students to **avoid generalizations and assumptions** that could isolate or alienate individuals. Frequent reminders that there will often be as many different perspectives as there are people in the room are useful and help reinforce the value of a multiplicity of ideas and points of view.
- It is the moderator’s role to establish a space of respect and inclusion, and they must take special care to **ensure that students holding a majority opinion do not vilify those “on the other side” who hold a minority view.** The moderator should also pose questions to the class to help keep the conversation on track.
- The point of a classroom discussion about *Oslo* should not be to reach a class consensus. The goal should be to **establish a forum for a free and respectful exchange of ideas.**

C. Introduction to Studio 180 Theatre

Inspired by the belief that people engage more fully in the world through the experience of live performance, Studio 180 Theatre produces socially relevant theatre that provokes public discourse and promotes community engagement. In 2017/18 we celebrated 15 years of bringing Toronto audiences compelling, high quality theatre that inspires us to ask big questions about our world and ourselves. 2018/19 is our sixteenth season.

Our inaugural production of *The Laramie Project* played to sold-out houses at Artword Theatre in Toronto in 2003. Its success led to a 2004 remount at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, which earned two Dora Award nominations. Since then, Studio 180 has continued to stage acclaimed productions of plays that tackle difficult issues and generate powerful audience and community responses. These are often Toronto, Canadian and/or North American premieres of large ensemble pieces that are contemporary, internationally renowned, and unlikely to be produced elsewhere.

As an independent theatre company, we are a nomadic group of artists. We create and produce our work in various spaces and venues across Toronto and we frequently partner with other companies in order to stage our plays. Past partnerships have included collaborations with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Canadian Stage, Coal Mine Theatre, The Musical Stage Company (formerly Acting Up Stage), The Theatre Centre, Tarragon Theatre and The Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company. *Oslo* marks our sixth collaboration with Mirvish Productions and our fifth Off-Mirvish show.

In addition to our producing partners, we have a proud history of collaborating with community and advocacy organizations to raise funds and awareness around issues, causes and communities. Through special events, art exhibits in our theatre lobbies, pre- and post-show conversations, and panel discussions, we work together with artists, community leaders and subject matter experts to bring conversations ignited by our plays [Beyond the Stage](#). Community partners have included Supporting Our Youth, The Triangle Program, Givat Haviva, Palestine House, Democrats Abroad, The 519, AIDS ACTION NOW!, AIDS Committee of Toronto, Toronto People With AIDS Foundation, Positive Youth Outreach, Peace Now, The Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada, Women in Capital Markets, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention, CATIE, Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention, the Cities Centre at U of T, Feminist Art Conference, Shameless Magazine and the Dotsa Bitove Wellness Academy.

Outreach to high school audiences has always been a crucial component of our work. In 2010 we launched [Studio 180 IN CLASS](#), an innovative workshop model that fosters productive dialogue, encourages critical thinking, and promotes empathy by exploring the uniquely humanizing capacity of live theatre. Over the years, our Studio 180 IN CLASS program has grown to reach hundreds of high school students across the GTA annually. We are proud education partners of the Toronto District School Board.

We love plays that provoke big questions about our communities and our world, and we have introduced Toronto audiences to a significant number of socially relevant plays from international stages. In 2015, inspired by our eagerness to investigate more locally rooted questions, we launched [Studio 180 IN DEVELOPMENT](#), one of Toronto's newest theatre creation initiatives. Working with both established and emerging playwrights and creators, we provide financial and artistic resources to a broad range of issue-based works at various stages of development. We then invite student and public audiences to hear the work and contribute to the development process.

Studio 180 Theatre's Production History

2003	<i>The Laramie Project</i> , Artword Theatre
2004	<i>The Laramie Project</i> , at and in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre <i>The Passion of the Chris</i> , Toronto Fringe Festival
2006	<i>The Arab-Israeli Cookbook</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Upstairs
2007	<i>Offensive Shadows</i> , SummerWorks Festival
2008	<i>Stuff Happens</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs
2008/09	<i>Offensive Shadows</i> , Tarragon Theatre Extra Space <i>Blackbird</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2009/10	<i>Stuff Happens</i> , Royal Alexandra Theatre, presented by David Mirvish <i>The Overwhelming</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2010/11	<i>Parade</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Upstairs, in association with Acting Up Stage <i>Our Class</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2011/12	<i>The Normal Heart</i> , at and in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre <i>Clybourne Park</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2012/13	<i>The Normal Heart</i> , at and in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre <i>Clybourne Park</i> , Panasonic Theatre, presented by David Mirvish <i>The Laramie Project 10th Anniversary Reading</i> (featuring 50-member ensemble), Panasonic Theatre
2013/14	<i>God of Carnage</i> , Panasonic Theatre, presented by David Mirvish <i>Cock</i> , The Theatre Centre
2014/15	<i>NSFW</i> , The Theatre Centre <i>Love, Dishonor, Marry, Die, Cherish, Perish</i> , Fleck Dance Theatre, co-presented with PANAMANIA presented by CIBC; in association with IFOA
2015/16	<i>You Will Remember Me</i> , at and in co-production with Tarragon Theatre
2016/17	<i>My Night With Reg</i> , Panasonic Theatre, presented by David Mirvish
2017/18	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> , Greenwin Theatre at Toronto Centre for the Arts, in co-production with the Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company <i>King Charles III</i> , CAA Theatre (formerly the Panasonic), presented by David Mirvish
2018/19	<i>The Nether</i> , at and in co-production with the Coal Mine Theatre <i>Oslo</i> , CAA Theatre, presented by David Mirvish

D. Introduction to the Play and the Playwright

The Play – Oslo

At the heart of J.T. Rogers' multi-award-winning drama is the question of how we as people recognize our common humanity. Rogers' meticulously researched, fictionalized account of the secret back-channel peace negotiations that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, provides a glimpse into a fascinating and little-known piece of recent history. As we follow the journey that almost led to peace between Israel and Palestine, we are reminded of the power of empathy to transcend the divisive and violent politics of fear and hate. We meet the courageous visionaries who turned enemies into friends; and ultimately, we reflect upon how essential it is to humanize "the other" and disrupt the binary of "us" versus "them."

Oslo began its development at the PlayPenn New Play Conference in Philadelphia and premiered Off-Broadway at Lincoln Centre in Spring 2016. After receiving widespread critical and audience acclaim and winning a slew of awards, *Oslo* transferred to Broadway the following year, where it earned the Tony Award for Best Play. A few months later, the play received its highly successful UK premiere at London's Royal National Theatre, and soon transferred to the West End. Due to *Oslo*'s overwhelming success internationally, it is no surprise that it has enjoyed numerous regional productions; Studio 180 Theatre is honoured to be partnering with Mirvish to produce the Canadian English-language premiere.

Oslo offers an exciting and engaging theatre education opportunity for senior high school students with curriculum connections to Drama, English, History, Geography, Politics and World Religions.

The Playwright – J.T. Rogers

Studio 180 first met celebrated American playwright J.T. Rogers back in 2010 when we produced the Canadian premiere of his harrowing drama [The Overwhelming](#). *The Overwhelming* examines the lead up to the genocide in Rwanda and challenges audiences to ask of themselves, "What would I do?" if confronted with similar life or death circumstances.

Rogers' other plays include *Blood and Gifts*, *Madagascar*, and *White People*. As one of the original playwrights for the Tricycle Theatre of London's *Great Game: Afghanistan*, he was nominated for a 2009 Olivier Award. His works have been staged throughout the United States and in Germany, Canada, and Israel, and are published by Faber and Faber and Dramatists Play Service. Recent awards include NEA/TCG and NYFA fellowships, the Pinter Review Prize for Drama, the American Theatre Critics Association's Osborne Award, and the William Inge Center for the Arts' New Voices Award. Rogers's essays have appeared in *American Theatre* and in London's *Independent* and *The New Statesman*. He is a member of New Dramatists and the Dramatists Guild and holds an honorary doctorate from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. To learn more about J.T. Rogers we invite you to visit <http://www.jtrogerswriter.com>.

E. Attending the Play

Prior to the performance, please ensure that your students are well prepared. The better prepared they are, the more they will gain from the experience. The following guidelines should help you and your students get the most out of attending *Oslo*:

- **Please arrive early.** When travelling in the city, whether by school bus or TTC, it is always best to leave extra time in case of traffic or transit delays. **Weekday matinées begin promptly at 1:30PM.** To avoid disruption, **LATECOMERS may not be admitted.**
- **All photography and recording of the performance is strictly prohibited.**
- Please impress upon your students the importance of **turning off all cell phones** and electronic devices. If students understand *why* it is important to refrain from using electronics, they will be more likely to adhere to this etiquette. **Remind students that they will be seeing people performing live** and, as a rule, if you can see and hear the actors, the actors can see and hear you. Even text messaging – with its distracting, glowing light – is extremely disruptive in the theatre. **Please be courteous.**
- **Outside food and beverages are not permitted in the theatre.** Spills are messy and noisy snacks and bottles can be disruptive for performers and patrons alike. Please ensure that students have the opportunity to eat lunch prior to attending the performance. There are many affordable food options in the immediate vicinity if students wish to arrive early and purchase lunch before the show.
- **We encourage student responses and feedback.** After all performances of *Oslo*, we offer a talkback (Q&A) session. We are interested in hearing what our audiences have to say and engaging in a dialogue inspired by the play. If students are aware of the post-show talkback, they will be better prepared to formulate questions during the performance – and they will remember to remain in their seats following curtain call! After the show, kindly take the time to complete our online [Teacher/Student Response Form \(studio180theatre.com/education-feedback\)](http://studio180theatre.com/education-feedback), or use the forms included in this guide in **Section C**, and ask your students to do the same. Your feedback is extremely valuable to us!

F. Background Information

1. *The Major Players*

All of the main characters in *Oslo* are based on real life people—politicians, bureaucrats, diplomats and academics—who participated in the secret back-channel Oslo negotiations. Here are brief descriptions of the major players.

After seeing *Oslo* you might want to learn more about some of these historical figures – many of whom have been written about extensively and some of whom have written their own books (examples included in **Section H** of this Study Guide). Find out what they say about how the Oslo process impacted their lives and what they went on to accomplish.

Mona Juul

Official in Norway's Foreign Ministry – together with Rød-Larsen she initiates and facilitates the secret Oslo talks; she reports to the Deputy Foreign Minister; in university she was a student of Terje Rød-Larsen and is now married to him

Terje Rød-Larsen

Director of Norwegian think tank Fafo Institute for Applied Social Sciences, which, prior to the events of the play, had been engaged in research in Israel and occupied territories; he is married to Mona Juul

Johan Jorgen Holst

Norway's Foreign Minister; he is married to Marianne Heilberg

Marianne Heilberg

Executive at Fafo—she reports to Rød-Larsen; she is married to Holst

Jan Egeland

Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister

Ahmed Qurie (also called Abu Ala)

Finance Minister for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the senior Palestinian representative throughout Oslo negotiations

Hassan Asfour

Official PLO liaison with Palestinian Delegation at multilateral US-sponsored talks, and the PLO's junior representative in Oslo

Yossi Beilin

Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister—he reports to Shimon Peres and initiates the Oslo negotiations with Rød-Larsen and Juul

Yair Hirschfeld

Senior professor of economics at Israel's University of Haifa—part of Israel's initial negotiation team in Oslo

Ron Pundak

Junior professor of economics at the University of Haifa in Israel—the other member of Israel's initial negotiation team in Oslo

Uri Savir

Israel's Director-General of the Foreign Ministry—he replaces Hirschfeld and Pundak in Oslo

Joel Singer

An Israeli military lawyer—senior partner at Washington law firm, legal advisor to Israel's Foreign Ministry

2. Glossary – some people, places and events mentioned in the play

Yitzhak Rabin

Israel's Prime Minister from 1974-77 and 1992-95; a proponent of Israeli-Palestinian peace, signing the Oslo Accords in 1993 and earning the Nobel Peace Prize together with Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat; he was assassinated in 1995 by a right-wing Israeli protesting the Oslo Accords and peace between Israel and Palestine

Shimon Peres

Peres's political career in Israel spanned 70 years; in 1993 he was the Foreign Minister and together with Rabin and Arafat, earned the Nobel Peace Prize for his involvement in the Oslo negotiations; in 1996 he founded the Peres Center for Peace; he died of a stroke in 2016

Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research

A "think tank" or research organization based in Oslo, Norway, that conducts research locally and internationally; under the direction of Terje Rød-Larsen, Fafo's focus was promoting peace in the Middle East – inspired by a research project in the Palestinian occupied territories, Fafo went on to host the secret Oslo talks

Soviet Empire

Officially independent states, this term refers to those countries subject to cultural, economic and political influence by the powerful Soviet Union during the Cold War period, which lasted from the end of WWII to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 – the play *Oslo* is set soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Empire

Berlin Wall

This guarded concrete barrier was built in 1961 to separate West (democratic) Germany from East (communist) Germany; when communism fell in 1989, Germany was unified and the wall was destroyed

The Intifada

Now sometimes referred to as the "First Intifada" – the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, beginning in 1987 and continuing to when the play takes place

Jerusalem

Considered a holy city by religious Muslims, Jews and Christians, Jerusalem is highly contested land, which both Israelis and Palestinians claim as their capital – sovereignty over Jerusalem is one of the most contentious issues in peace negotiations between the two nations

Holocaust

The attempted genocide and successful murder of 6,000,000 Jews by Hitler and the Nazis during WWII – frequently cited as justification for the existence of a Jewish state in Israel

Washington-sponsored talks

Official Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations brokered by Bill Clinton and the United States – their lack of success helped inspire the parties to attempt a new approach in Oslo

Tunis

The capital of Tunisia – where Yasser Arafat and the PLO were headquartered during the period of the play, having been expelled from Lebanon in 1982

3. Timeline

The following brief timeline is by no means complete. It is intended to serve as a rudimentary beginner's guide to some key historical events significant in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As with all geopolitical conflicts, the story of Israel and Palestine will change dramatically depending upon who is telling the story. In addition, the question of *when* to begin telling the story is almost as crucial as the telling itself. To start at the beginning would require a document dating back centuries, as there are both Jewish and Arab peoples who hold legitimate ancient claims to this holy and heavily disputed land. For the sake of simplicity, we begin this timeline in the 20th century.

- 1897 Aug.** **First Zionist Congress:** beginning of internationally-organized Jewish political nationalism

- 1917 Nov.** **Balfour Declaration:** after Britain conquers land in Ottoman Palestine during WWI, UK Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour pens document guaranteeing a Jewish National home in Palestine, conditional upon protecting civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities

- 1918** **Palestinian nationalist cultural organizations created:** Muntada al-Adabi and the Damascus-based Nadi al-Arabi

- 1920 Apr.** **Jerusalem Riots:** Jewish population motivated to set up separate governing and security apparatus

San Remo National Conference: divides territories of WWI losers among the victors; Palestine made part of a British Mandate and Britain tasked with implementation of Balfour Declaration

- 1921** **Appointment of Mohammed Amin al-Husseini as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem by the British:** he leads battle against concessions to Jews

- 1922 Jan.** **League of Nations** assigns Britain the Mandate to administer Palestine

- 1929 Aug.** **Arab riots in Jerusalem and Hebron:** 133 Jewish people killed; British kill 116 Arab people in the suppression of the riots

- 1930 Oct.** **Passfield British White Paper:** in wake of riots, paper recommends limiting Jewish immigration and is explicitly anti-Zionist

- 1920-1935** **Black Hand Islamist Group:** terrorism against Jewish community and British rule

- 1936–1939** **Arab uprising** against the British colonial power and Jewish settlers begins in Jaffa and soon engulfs entire country; Britain dissolves Arab High Committee and Grand Mufti Al-Husseini flees to Syria; ancient Jewish community in Hebron is massacred; 5,000 Arabs killed and 15,000 wounded in suppression of the revolt

- 1937 July** **Peel Commission:** British Royal Commission recommends ending British Mandate in Palestine and partitioning land between Jewish and Arab populations;

Commission recommendations are accepted by the Jewish Agency and rejected by the Arab High Command

- 1939–1945** **WWII and the Holocaust:** Nazis kill 6 million European Jewish people; after the war, 300,000 surviving Jews remain in refugee camps as stateless refugees until 1948
- 1946 April** **The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry** publishes report dealing with the region's immigration, land, governance, economic development and security; recommends immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish people and annulment of The Land Transfer Regulations banning the Jewish population from purchasing Arab land; rejected by Zionists for turning the national problem into strictly one of immigration, and by the Arabs for giving key concessions to the Jewish people
- July** **The Morrison-Grady Committee:** joint British-American plan accepts key recommendations of Anglo-American Committee and advocates for partition into one Jewish, one Arab and two other cantons, which include Jerusalem under British control and linked in a federation under a British High Commissioner
- 1947** **UN Special Committee On Palestine (UNSCOP):** 11 independent members from 11 different countries (no major powers) recommend termination of the British Mandate and a tri-partite division into a Palestinian state, a Jewish state and Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* to be placed under international auspices, with the three parts united in an economic union
- Nov.** **UN Resolution 181:** UN accepts partition of Palestine
- 1948 May** **British Mandate of Palestine** ends with no political resolution
- Israel Declares Independence:** United States recognizes Israel
- War of Independence** by Israelis, **Al Nakba (The Disaster)** by Palestinians: Arab armies from Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq oppose Israel
- 1948-1949** **Israeli military victory:** gaining much more land than offered in the Partition Resolution, but the Old City, East Jerusalem and the West Bank remain under Jordanian control and Gaza under Egyptian control
- 1949** **Refugees:** 300,000 Jewish refugees in camps in Europe and 35,000 Jewish refugees from Arab-controlled territories in Palestine resettle in Israel; 720,000 Arab refugees who fled the violence or were forcibly removed end up in refugee camps with 150,000 Arabs remaining in Israel
- 1949-1952:** **750,000 Jewish refugees** fleeing anti-Semitism and violence in surrounding Arab states resettle in Israel
- 1949 Feb.** **Rhodes Agreement** between Israel and Jordan as part of 1949 Armistice Agreement assigns rule over the Old City and East Jerusalem (includes both north and south Jerusalem) to Jordan and rule over West Jerusalem to Israel;

Jordan annexes Old City and East Jerusalem

- Dec. **UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)** for Palestinian refugees established
- 1949-1956 **Fedayeen Palestinian guerilla warfare:** launched from Gaza-Egypt against Israel
- 1950 **Jerusalem Annexations Confirmed** by both Israeli and Jordanian Parliaments
- 1956 Oct. **Israel-Egypt War:** Israel, France and Britain attack Egypt, but withdraw under American pressure; UN buffer set up in Sinai and between Israel and Gaza, drastically reducing Fedayeen raids
- 1959 **Fatah:** an independent Palestinian fighting force, established by Yasser Arafat, Salah Khalaf, Khalil al-Wazir and Khaled Yashruti
- 1964 **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)** established by the Arab League as an umbrella organization, including Fatah, with the objective of establishing Palestinian statehood and eliminating Israel
- 1967 June **Six Day War** by Israelis and **June War** by Arabs; Israel defeats Jordan, Syria and Egypt, more than doubling Israel's territory and seizing and occupying the **Gaza Strip** and the **Sinai Peninsula** from Egypt, the **West Bank** of the Jordan River and **East Jerusalem** and the **Old City** from Jordan, and the **Golan Heights** from Syria
- Nov. **UN Security Council Resolution 242** includes the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war," the withdrawal of Israel from territories occupied as a result of the 1967 war, the termination of belligerency and affirmation of all states in the region to live in peace and security
- 1969 **PLO Leadership** assumed by Yasser Arafat, independent of Egypt
- 1970 **Black September:** Palestinians clash with Jordanian government forces; PLO exiled
- 1973 Oct. **Yom Kippur War (Israelis) & Ramadan or October War (Arabs);** Syria and Egypt attack Israel but are driven back after initial success
- 1970-1987 **Terrorism:** airline hijacking and other attacks against Israeli military and civilian targets by PLO and other Palestinian groups
- 1972 **Munich Olympics:** Palestinian **Black September** terrorists hold Israeli Olympic team members hostage, ultimately killing 11 people
- 1974 **PLO:** recognized by the Arab League as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people;" PLO leader **Yasser Arafat** is first non-state leader to address UN General Assembly
- 1975 Nov. **UN General Assembly Resolution 3379** passed 72:35 declaring "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination"

- 1977 May **Menachem Begin** wins Israeli election with platform of encouraging settlements in Gaza, all of Jerusalem and the West Bank
- 1978 March PLO attack from the coast kills 38 civilians, including 13 children, in a bus
- Sept. **Camp David Peace Talks:** negotiations between Egyptian President **Anwar Sadat** and Israeli Prime Minister **Menachem Begin**, brokered by U.S. President Jimmy Carter lead to **Camp David Accords**
- Israel promises enhanced Palestinian self-government**
- 1979 March **Israel and Egypt Peace Treaty:** Israel returns Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in treaty signed by Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin
- 1981 Oct. **President Sadat** assassinated in Egypt by Islamist extremist
- 1982 June **Israel invades Lebanon:** PLO is expelled to Tunis in Africa
- Sept. **Palestinian Massacre:** an estimated 2,000 killed in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut by Lebanese militia allied with Israel
- 1985 **Israel withdraws from most of Lebanon** in stages, maintaining a 12-mile “security zone” in the south
- 1987–1993 **Intifada:** Years of Palestinian uprising and Israeli retaliation, leaving 1,162 Palestinians and 160 Israelis dead
- 1988 Aug. **Jordan** cedes West Bank jurisdiction to PLO
- Nov. **Algiers Declaration:** Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the PLO, proclaims **State of Palestine**, accepts UN Resolution 181, officially recognizing the concept of partition of the land, implicitly recognizing Israel, and renounces use of violence and terrorism
- 1991 Oct. **Madrid Peace Conference:** held between Israel and Palestinians for the first time, with Jordan, Lebanon & Syria
- 1992 April **Norwegian diplomats** broker secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO – ***This historical event is the subject of OSLO by J.T. Rogers***
- 1993 Sept. **Oslo Accords** signed in Washington, DC, the culmination of peace negotiations between Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, brokered by Norway and the U.S.; establishes the **Palestinian Authority**, to which Arafat is soon elected President
- 1994 Feb. **Baruch Goldstein** from the extremist Jewish Kach movement kills 29 Palestinians at prayer at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron
- Nobel Peace Prize awarded** to Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres
- 1995 Nov. **Yitzhak Rabin** assassinated by Jewish Israeli extremist

- 2000 July **Camp David Peace Talks II** involving Yasser Arafat, Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton
- Sept. **al-Aqsa Intifada begins**
- 2001 June **Operation Defensive Shield** launched as reprisal to Tel Aviv Dolphinarium Discotheque suicide bombing
- Israel Barrier or Apartheid Wall** initiated
- 2002 March **Road Map for Peace:** process proposed by the US, UN, EU and Russia, endorsing a “two-state solution” for Israel and Palestine
- Arab League** endorses Road Map for Peace, conditional on the establishment of a Palestinian state, a freeze on Israeli settlements and offers eventual recognition to Israel in exchange for withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967
- 2004 March **Israeli forces** kill Sheikh Yassin, founder and leader of Hamas
- Nov. **Death of Yasser Arafat** in Paris after a lengthy illness
- 2005 Jan. **Palestinian Elections: Mahmoud Abbas** is elected President of the Palestinian Authority
- Aug. **Israel withdraws all settlers from the Gaza Strip**
- 2006 Jan. **Palestinian and Israeli Elections:** Radical Hamas and Centrist party Kadima win respective parliamentary elections
- Clashes in Gaza** between Hamas and PLO continue until May 2007 with over 600 Palestinians killed
- July **Second Lebanon War:** Hezbollah guerilla fighters and rockets battle Israel’s ground, air and naval forces for over a month, resulting in 1,000 Lebanese and 160 Israeli casualties
- 2007 **Hamas militants** seize Gaza, capturing Fatah headquarters; in the West Bank, Palestinian President Abbas swears in an emergency Fatah government, which Hamas decries as illegitimate
- Sept. **Israeli blockade of Gaza:** threats to Palestinian water, electricity, sewage treatment and telecommunications supplies
- Nov. **Annapolis Peace Conference:** George W. Bush announces plans for a **two-state solution** between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas
- 2008 Dec. **Operation Cast Lead** (for Israelis), **Gaza War** or **Gaza Massacre** (for Palestinians): After months of relative calm, tensions escalate between Hamas and Israel; Hamas rocket fire is met with an Israeli bombardment, an invasion of Gaza and occupation of Gaza; more than 1,000 Palestinian and 13 Israeli casualties

- 2009 Jan.** **Escalation of violence in Gaza:** Israeli assault on Hamas in Gaza kills 1,300 Palestinians and devastates infrastructure and thousands of Palestinian homes; Israel reports 10 military (4 from friendly fire) and 3 civilian casualties before their withdrawal from Gaza
- Feb.** **Benjamin Netanyahu becomes Prime Minister of Israel:** forms a coalition government between his right-leaning Likud party and the Centrist Kadima after a close election
- May** **U.S. President Barack Obama** makes a landmark speech condemning Israel's expansion of settlements in the West Bank and endorses the existence of Palestine through a two-state solution. Ten days later, Netanyahu endorses a Palestinian State conditional upon demilitarization and no right to return for Palestinian refugees
- 2011 May** **Fatah-Hamas Reconciliation:** Egypt brokers agreement between rival factions
- 2012 May** **Cairo Agreement:** Fatah and Hamas commit to using only non-violent resistance to Israeli occupation
- Nov.** **Operation Pillar of Defense:** tensions and cross-border violence between Israel and Gaza escalate into the most intense military bombardment against Gaza in four years
- UN grants Palestine non-Member Observer status:** Canada and the U.S. are two of the nine countries in the General Assembly opposed
- 2013 July** **US Secretary of State John Kerry** launches Israeli-Palestinian peace talks to reach a framework agreement
- Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi** overthrown, dashing hopes of lifting Egyptian blockade of border with Gaza
- 2014 June** **Three teenaged Israeli settlers kidnapped and murdered in the West Bank;** Israel responds with a crackdown on Hamas, igniting a **new wave of violence** – heavy rocket fire from Gaza matched by Israel's significant aerial and ground invasions resulting in **2,000 Palestinian casualties** and 67 Israeli military and six civilian deaths
- Aug. 26** Egypt successfully brokers a ceasefire
- 2015 May** **Netanyahu** forms his fourth Israeli government in coalition with two other right-wing parties
- 2016 Sept** **President Obama** commits \$38 billion over 10 years in military aid to Israel – the largest military assistance deal in US history – with a guarantee that all aid money will be spent on US military industries
- 2017 Jan.** **Donald Trump** sworn in as President of the US, celebrated by **Netanyahu**

- Feb.** **Hamas** elects **Yahya Sanwar** – a known military extremist – as its leader
- Dec.** **Trump** recognizes Jerusalem as capital of Israel
- 2018 May** **US embassy** relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem amidst condemnation from the international community; Gaza protest met with Israeli military retaliation

G. Major Themes & Discussion Questions

1. *Theatrical Presentation*

a) ISSUE-BASED THEATRE

Studio 180 Theatre produces plays that speak to socially and politically relevant issues. With your class, examine the company's Vision and Mission statements.

Vision: The experience of live performance inspires people to engage more fully in the world.

Mission: To produce socially relevant theatre that provokes public discourse and promotes community engagement.

1. What do these statements mean to you? How effectively do you think the company's Mission serves its Vision? How does this production of *Oslo* work toward fulfilling this Mission?
2. Why live theatre? There have been countless books written about the Oslo Accords and recently, some acclaimed documentary films have been released. What makes theatre an effective art form through which to explore themes, issues and human behaviour? Consider what is specific about your intellectual, emotional and communal responses to attending live theatre compared to engaging in other forms of art, such as reading a novel, watching a movie or looking at a painting.

HINT: How does live theatre HUMANIZE issues and why is the humanization of social and political issues important?

3. Brainstorm issues that you would like to see turned into a piece of theatre. If you were going to see another play, or write a play yourself, what would you want it to be about? This question may serve as a jumping off point for drama students to begin their own issue-based theatre projects around stories and topics of particular relevance to them.

b) PLAYING STYLE – DIRECT ADDRESS

Studio 180 Theatre has a history of producing plays that employ this performance style – when actors break the “fourth wall” and speak directly to the audience. This device or convention is common in political theatre and various forms of “documentary” plays that tell stories based on current or historical events (such as *Oslo*). Which characters speak directly to the audience and why do you think the playwright chose to employ this device? What is the impact on the audience? How does this device establish a specific relationship between the audience and the character?

c) POINTS OF VIEW – CHARACTERS

How effective was *Oslo* at exploring multiple perspectives or points of view? Which points of view came into direct conflict with one another? Did that conflict propel compelling drama? Was the play even-handed? Did you feel that a multitude of opinions and points of view were expressed? Were the characters portrayed fairly? Do you believe an even-handed or fair portrayal is important when it comes to seeing a play? Which characters and stories were the most memorable? Which voices remained with you the longest and why? Which moments had the greatest impact? Which characters surprised you? Did the play create questions for you regarding the characters or their circumstances? Did you form an emotional attachment to any of the characters? Who were you rooting for? Who did you want to see more of? Did you disagree with what some of the characters were saying or doing? What would you ask those characters, given the opportunity?

d) POINTS OF VIEW – PLAYWRIGHT

What is the playwright's point of view regarding the characters and their circumstances? After seeing *Oslo* can you determine J.T. Rogers' point of view regarding Israel and Palestine? Is he taking sides? What do you think inspired J.T. Rogers to write *Oslo*? What big, open-ended questions might have inspired him?

e) DESIGN

How did the design of the production affect the presentation of the piece? How effective was the set in defining the space? What mood or ambience was created? How did colour, texture and space add to the theatrical experience? How was lighting used to create mood or ambience? How did lighting work to define space and setting? How did the set and lights work in combination with one another? How was sound used to affect the presentation? How were costumes used to define characters? How did the costume designer make use of colour, texture and style? How did the sound designer utilize sound and music to create ambience and mood? Did sound design help define location for any of the scenes?

2. Power

- a) **Who in the play has power and who does not?** Consider this question on both a **political** and **personal** scale. Does someone's power or status shift depending on where they are and/or who they are with?
- b) From whence is power derived? As a class, brainstorm the **different ways we obtain power** and make connections to the major players in *Oslo* (examples include nationality, gender and wealth... what else?)
- c) What about qualities that are murkier to define, such as popularity, personal contacts and charisma? Do these factors influence a person's power or status? How do you see this playing out in *Oslo*? How can you recognize this playing out in your own school or communities?
- d) In a play, the drama comes out of competing objectives, desires and needs – each character has a series of objectives and they are all fighting to get what they want or need. **How does each major character utilize their power to get what they want over the course of the play?** What tactics do they use? What do they do when they know they are failing?
- e) As an audience member, how are you able to recognize that certain characters are powerful? **How do you know when a character has high or low status?** *Hint: consider acting techniques such as vocal and physical choices, consider the way the other characters respond to them as well as costume design choices.*
- f) Consider **Terje Rød-Larsen** – when does he have power and when is he powerless? What does Terje understand about the nature of power and how does he hope to transcend power and politics? What is his vision? Is he successful? *Hint: recall one of Terje's favourite sayings: "Well, what is a throne but a stool covered in velvet?" Consider what this indicates about his relationship to people in power.*
- g) **Whose story is this?** We can learn a lot about who has power in our world by noticing whose story gets told. When it comes to Israel and Palestine, whose stories get told the most? Consider mainstream news and social media stories, books, movies, plays, etc. What about the stories in our own country? Whose histories and stories do we learn in school? Do we learn Indigenous or colonial history? What are the gender, racial, sexual and class identities of the major players in our history and current events lessons? What does this say about who gets a voice in our society and who holds the power?

3. Gender

- a) What is the relationship between **gender** and **power** in *Oslo*?
- b) The vast majority of characters in *Oslo* are men. This is not surprising since globally, the vast majority of political leaders are men. The events of the play occurred 25 years ago and while things have improved somewhat for women in terms of political representation over the past few decades, we are still a long way from achieving gender parity in government.

How is masculinity presented in the play? Do you think these characters have specific ideas about what it means to be a man? Do these characters have a narrow or broad concept of masculinity? **What is the relationship between masculinity and power in the play?**

- c) **Mona Juul** is the only major female character in *Oslo*. How is she distinct from the other characters in the play? Do you think this distinctness is tied to her gender in any ways? What do you think the playwright is communicating by giving Mona Juul this central role?
- d) **How are femininity and female identities presented in the play?** Do you think it is a coincidence that every female character in the play has an intimate relationship with one of the men in the play? What is the relationship between power and sexuality in *Oslo*? Do you think Mona Juul has greater or lesser power because of her gender? **Does she use sexuality as a tactic to get what she wants?**
- e) Consider the place of **food** in humanizing relationships in *Oslo* and discuss the ways in which food comes into play. Who provides the food for the major characters throughout the play? What is the relationship between food and gender in the play?
Hint: Remember the waffles?

4. Empathy

- a) What does **empathy** mean to you and how does *Oslo* explore this theme? Which characters believe in the power of empathy and what do they think can be achieved by fostering empathy? Have you experienced the power of empathy to transform or progress in your own life? Share stories from your own city, country, school, community, family, etc. in which you witnessed or experienced the power of empathy.
- b) In the play, Terje Rød-Larsen says: **"I saw one side of this man and assumed this meant I knew all of him."** How does this quotation resonate within the play as a whole? What can we learn from this lesson? How might you apply this lesson to your own life? Have you ever made assumptions about a person based on one thing you knew about them? Share your stories.
- c) In the play, Terje Rød-Larsen says: **"...it is only through the sharing of the personal that we can see each other for who we truly are."** Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How did this belief inform the Oslo negotiations and do you think this strategy was successful? Why or why not?
- d) Considering the above series of questions, reflect on the different ways that the negotiators access the personal amidst the politics. **Hint:** *what roles do food and family play?*
- e) **Do we have more that unites or divides us?** Discuss.

5. Roles & Responsibilities of the Outsider

- a) **“No, we are in this; you are watching. So don’t tell us how we should think or act.”** What do you think of Uri Savir’s admonishment of Larsen? Do you agree or disagree with him? During the process, what right do you think Larsen has to intervene or insert his opinion? Discuss your responses and then take on the characters’ point of view by improvising a scene between Savir and Larsen.
- b) Whether it’s the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or other geopolitical conflicts, third party states and politicians frequently participate in the negotiations. **Do you think countries have the right to intervene in the affairs of other nations? Do we have the responsibility to intervene when we believe another country is acting unjustly?**
- c) **How do these principles apply to individual interactions?** If we are not directly involved in a conflict between other people, should we intervene? Why or why not? When do we have a responsibility to intervene? What are the risks of intervening?
- d) On more than one occasion in the play a character is told, **“It’s not about you.”** What does this statement mean to you and how does it apply to *Oslo*? When do the themes of **selflessness** and **sacrifice** emerge in the play and how do they resonate for you? When are characters’ **egos** especially present and what are the consequences?

H. Recommended Resources

Video

We highly recommend this **accessible video** by Palestinian-Israeli social media sensation Nuseir Yassin. This brief **Nas Daily** video speaks to the heart of *Oslo* – the importance of empathy and the need to find the humanity in “the other”:

<https://www.facebook.com/nasdaily/videos/jews-vs-arabs/977587759060043/>

Documentary

The Oslo Diaries is an excellent feature length documentary by Israeli filmmakers Mor Loushy and Daniel Sivan with great insight into the secret Oslo negotiations. For more information about the film and how to access a copy visit:

<https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/the-oslo-diaries>

The Price of Oslo is an excellent two-part documentary offering a Palestinian perspective on the Oslo negotiations and their impact, by Palestinian filmmaker Rawan Damen. You can learn more about the film and access parts I and II for free here:

<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/Palestineremix/the-price-of-oslo.html#/15>

Books

Those interested in learning more and going deeper into the Oslo process and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might be interested in the following books – some of which are authored by main characters in *Oslo*:

Gaza First: The Secret Norway Channel to Peace Between Israel and The PLO by Jane Corbin

The Process: 1,100 Days That Changed the Middle East by Uri Savir, Israel’s chief negotiator

My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel by Ari Shavit

From Oslo to Jerusalem: The Palestinian Story of the Secret Negotiations by Ahmed Qurie (‘Abu Ala’)