

# LETTERS HOME



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## CURRICULUM GUIDE

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A live theatrical experience can leave a memorable impact even after the show is over. *Let Your Imagination Take You Places!*

We are looking forward to your attendance at the show.

Yours in the arts,

*Karen*

Karen Wilson  
Program Director  
Theatre For Youth and Outreach Program

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# ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE: LETTERS HOME



Actors during a performance of *Letters Home*.  
Images courtesy of griffintheatre.com

## Synopsis

Authentic letters written by and to U.S. soldiers serving in the Middle East provide a powerful portrait of the soldier experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. Without politicizing, the letters, which are presented in the form of dramatic monologues, relay the difficulties of training, deployment, combat, occupation duties, and being separated from loved ones. Although the voices are diverse, they are united by their patriotism and commitment to public service— whether through acts of bravery, compassion, or social responsibility. The performance’s authenticity lays bare the humanity within war as seen through the eyes of our brave service men and women.

## Staging

*Letters Home* uses minimal props and set pieces to dramatize the letters. Instead, it employs the use of images and video projected behind the actors as they perform the dramatic monologues. The photos and video used in the production are taken directly from actual soldiers’ blogs and websites.

## Inspiration

*Letters Home* was inspired by a number of sources, including a series of *New York Times* Op-Ed articles from 2003 and 2004 entitled “The Things They Wrote,” the HBO documentary *Last Letters Home*, and selections from Frank Schaeffer’s books *Voices From the Front: Letters Home From America’s Military Family*, *Faith of Our Sons*, and *Keeping Faith*.

## Accolades

An original production of the Griffin Theatre Company in Chicago, *Letters Home* was nominated for a 2007 Joseph Jefferson Award in the category of New Adaptation.

# ABOUT THE COMPANY



## GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY

### History

Celebrating its twenty-second season, the Griffin Theatre Company was established in Chicago in 1988. It is a professional, not-for-profit theatre company headed by Artistic Directors Richard A. Barletta and William J. Massolia.

Griffin Theatre Company's mission is to create extraordinary and meaningful theatrical experiences for both children and adults by building bridges of understanding between generations that instill in audiences an appreciation of the performing arts. Through artistic collaboration, the Griffin Theatre Company produces literary adaptations, original work and classic plays that inspire with wit, style, and compassion for the audience. The Griffin is supported by an ensemble of Artist in Residence with a range of disciplines that include acting, designing, directing and production.

During its history, the Griffin has provided a wide range of work including world and mid-west premieres of acclaimed scripts, critically lauded productions of Shakespeare and original adaptations of novels. The Griffin has received 34 Joseph Jefferson Award nominations for its work and 30 productions have been cited as "Best of the Year" by Chicago area theatre critics.

### Young Audiences

Youth programming at the Griffin consists of original productions, often based on award-winning literature. Many of Griffin's productions for young audiences tour nationally. During the 2009-2010 season, almost 100,000 young people across the country experienced Griffin's work.



# THEATER CONVENTIONS: LETTERS HOME



*Letters Home* is performed in a presentational format using dramatic monologues, minimal props and set pieces, and projected images and video taken by actual soldiers. This style of theater may challenge audiences who are more familiar with representational performances.

To prepare for seeing *Letters Home*, review the following information about types of theater productions and theater conventions

**monologue:** a speech delivered by one person

## Types of Productions

Theater productions can be broadly divided into two categories— presentational and representational— based upon how they convey reality to the audience. Although we know that what happens on stage is not real, when we watch a play we willingly suspend our disbelief. We let ourselves pretend that the characters are real people and that the events we see are actually happening.

In **representational** performance, artists strive to create reality on stage through the use of set designs, props, costumes and acting styles that mimic real life.

Actors in a **presentational** performance make a deliberate attempt to show the theatrical aspects of a production (set design, props, costumes and acting styles) in a non-realistic fashion. In other words, the audience is let in on the ‘secret’ of theater-making, witnessing actions onstage that would normally be performed backstage. The audience takes on a much more active role, shifting with the actors and filling in the gaps with their imaginations

## Theater Conventions

The following theater conventions are used in *Letters Home*

### Direct address—

Actors convey their thoughts, feelings, and/or motives directly to the audience. In *Letters Home*, the actors present each letter in the form of a dramatic monologue that addresses the audience.

### Doubling—

Actors may play more than one role in a performance, using costumes, posture, and changes in their voice to transform themselves into different characters. Ten actors portray all the characters in *Letters Home*.

### Freezing—

This theatrical effect occurs when characters become motionless during a scene. Even though the audience can still see them, the motionless characters are removed from the action of the scene. In *Letters Home*, one actor performs a dramatic monologue while the other nine actors onstage remain motionless.

‘Theater Conventions’ was adapted from the ‘Spotlight on Learning: Educator’s Resource Guide’ created for *Letters Home* by the Overture Center for the Arts.

# THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: **BACKGROUND**



ABOVE: U.S. Army soldiers provide security during a mission in Charkh, Afghanistan on October 6, 2006.

Some of the correspondence featured in *Letters Home* was written by and to U.S. soldiers serving in Afghanistan. The United States military has been involved in conflict in Afghanistan since 2001, shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11. The following section gives a brief overview of the United States' continuing combat and presence in Afghanistan through Operation Enduring Freedom.

Prior to the performance, use the summary and maps to familiarize yourself with the events and experiences described in the soldiers' letters.

## **Aftermath of September 11, 2001**

On September 11, 2001 terrorists hijacked airplanes and flew them into the two World Trade Center Towers in New York City and the Pentagon building in Washington, D.C. A fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania, presumably on its way to another target.

Approximately 3,000 people were killed in the attacks. Blame for the incidents was attributed to members of a terrorist group called al-Qaeda, led by wanted criminal Osama bin Laden. At the time of the attacks, the Afghanistan government was controlled by individuals belonging to a repressive and violent extremist Muslim movement called the Taliban. Despite repeated demands by the United States government, the Taliban refused to turn over bin Laden and his followers—who were residing in Afghanistan—to American authorities or to destroy bin Laden's terrorist training facilities.



LEFT: This regional map shows the position of Afghanistan in relation to bordering countries. (Iraq is not shown; it is west of Iran.)

Image courtesy of worldatlas.com

# THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: TIMELINE AND KEY

## Fall of the Taliban Government

### -2001-

In an attempt to force the Taliban to meet to their demands, the U.S. and Britain launched an intensive bombing campaign against the Taliban and provided support to the Northern Alliance forces (Afghan opponents of the Taliban). Devastated by the bombing, Taliban forces were quickly defeated in combat by Northern Alliance troops and U.S. special forces in mid-November.

On December 7, 2001 the Taliban surrendered Kandahar, their base of power and the last city under their control. At nearly the same time, representatives of several anti-Taliban groups met in Germany and, with the help of the international community, established the first of two temporary governments.

### -2004-

Democratic elections, in which women were granted the right to vote, were held in October 2004, and Hamid Karzai, leader of the transitional government, was elected president.

### -2005-

On September 18, 2005, the first legislative elections in Afghanistan in more than 30 years were held.

## Hunt for Osama bin Laden

Although United States and allied forces have been continually searching for Osama bin Laden, he has eluded capture. He is believed to still be alive and in hiding, possibly in Pakistan, which lies along the Afghanistan border.

## Continued Violence

### -2005-

Ongoing violence throughout 2005 increased rapidly at the end of the year and worsened considerably the following year as instability and warfare spread. Attacks and violent exchanges between the U.S.-led coalition and the Taliban forces became more frequent, particularly in the eastern and southern provinces of Afghanistan.

### -2006-

In 2006 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops assumed control of international military operations across the entire country.

### -2008-

Fighting between NATO and Taliban forces continued, and civilian casualties remained numerous; in 2008 they reached their highest levels since the start of the war.

### -2009-

In keeping with campaign statements that the war in Afghanistan would require greater attention and commitment on the part of the United States, newly elected U.S. President Barack Obama announced in February 2009 that 17,000 additional U.S. troops would be sent to Afghanistan in the spring and early summer of that year. In December 2009, President Obama revealed that 30,000 more U.S. troops would be sent to Afghanistan; he also stated that soldiers would begin withdrawing from the country by July 2011.

## TODAY

The Afghanistan government is currently headed by President Hamid Karzai, who was re-elected in 2009. Increased numbers of U.S. troops will continue to deploy to the region throughout 2010.



This map of Afghanistan includes the country's major cities and waterways. Image courtesy of lonelyplanet.com

# THE WAR IN IRAQ: BACKGROUND



Many letters featured in *Letters Home* were written by and to soldiers serving in the conflict in Iraq. The following is a brief overview of the war in Iraq from 2003 to the present day. Please note that the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan are two separate wars.

## Iraq in the 1990s

In 1990 the country of Iraq, under the control of Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait, an action that caused a conflict known as the Persian Gulf War (1990-91). Military forces led by the United States defeated Iraq in the war, but Saddam Hussein's political Ba'ath party remained in power in Iraq by harshly repressing uprisings of various political and ethnic groups, including the Kurds and the Shi'ite Muslims.

During the 1990s the United Nations (UN) became increasingly concerned about Iraq's development of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (together known as weapons of mass destruction).

UN inspections in Iraq uncovered a variety of prohibited weapons and technology. Iraq did not respect the UN weapons ban and repeatedly interfered with inspections, causing U.S. President Bill Clinton to order the bombing of several Iraqi military sites in 1998. After the bombing, Iraq refused to allow inspectors to reenter the country.

## Following September 11, 2001

In 2002 U.S. President George W. Bush called upon international leaders to make the removal of weapons from Iraq a priority once again. President Bush claimed that this action was necessary for the following reasons:

- Iraq was continuing to make weapons of mass destruction.
- The U.S. was vulnerable after the attacks of September 11, 2001.
- Iraq supported terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, the group responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The United Nations demanded that Iraq readmit inspectors and respect the weapons ban.

Although Iraq seemed to accept these rules, President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair said in 2003 that Iraq was trying to prevent inspections and continued to have prohibited weapons.

Although other world leaders wanted to give Iraq more time to comply with the inspections, President Bush issued an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein on March 17, 2003: cooperate or leave Iraq within the next 48 hours.



LEFT: A regional map shows the position of Iraq in relation to other countries in the Middle East.

# THE WAR IN IRAQ: TIMELINE AND KEY EVENTS

When Saddam Hussein refused to leave Iraq, President Bush initiated Operation Iraqi Freedom, the name given to the military plan for removing Saddam Hussein from power and ending Iraq's production of weapons of mass destruction.

## The War Begins

### -March 2002-

U.S. and allied forces launched an attack on March 20, 2002. U.S. aircraft bombed an area in which the Iraqi president was believed to be meeting with his staff. This was followed by a series of bombings directed against government and military buildings.

Within days U.S. soldiers had invaded Iraq from Kuwait in the south. While many Iraqi troops retreated, U.S. forces engaged in heavy combat with Saddam Hussein's supporters. British troops— who were fighting near the southern city of Basra— faced similar resistance.

In central Iraq, units of the Republican Guard— a heavily armed paramilitary group connected with Saddam Hussein's party— were deployed to defend the capital of Baghdad.

As U.S. Army and Marine forces moved northwest up the Tigris-Euphrates river valley, they were halted briefly about 60 miles outside of Baghdad. During the pause, U.S. aircraft inflicted great damage on Republican Guard units around the capital. U.S. forces continued to move toward the capital.

### -April 2002-

On April 4, 2002 U.S. forces took control of Baghdad's international airport. Iraqi resistance, though at times vigorous, was highly disorganized.

On April 9, 2002 resistance in Baghdad collapsed, and U.S. soldiers took control of the city. On that same day Basra was secured by British forces.

Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit fell with little resistance on April 13, 2002. Isolated groups of Saddam Hussein's loyalists continued to fight in subsequent days.

### -May 2002-

President Bush declared an end to major combat on May 1, 2002. Iraqi leaders subsequently went into hiding and were the object of an intense search by U.S. troops.

(Timeline cont., pg. 11)

### Weapons of Mass Destruction

President Bush cited Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as one of the central reasons for taking military action against the country, but the weapons were never found. Subsequent evidence suggested that Iraq had stopped any WMD production programs after the Persian Gulf War. However, ingredients that could have been used to produce the weapons were located. Significant looting and destruction of military sites also left open the possibility that WMD or their components had been moved. As a result, there has been much debate about how much of a military threat Iraq posed to other countries.



This map of Iraq includes the country's major cities and waterways.  
Image courtesy of lonelyplanet.com

# THE WAR IN IRAQ: TIMELINE AND KEY EVENTS ,

## Occupation and Continued War Fare

### -2003-

Continued attacks against occupying troops develop into guerrilla warfare. Large amounts of looting, targeted directed at government offices and other public institutions takes place in cities.

In May, one year after President Bush declared an end to major combat, coalition casualties number 150.

Saddam Hussein captured by U.S. troops in December 2003.

### -2004-

Saddam Hussein turned over to Iraqi authorities to stand trial for various crimes in June 2004.

### -2005-

In January 2005, Iraqis vote in elections to form a transitional government. Iraq goes on to hold parliamentary elections and approve a new constitution.

### -2006-

Saddam Hussein executed for crimes against humanity in December 2006.

## The Surge and Withdrawal of U.S. Forces

### -2007-

In January 2007, President Bush announced a controversial plan to temporarily increase the number of U.S. troops in Iraq by more than 20,000, an effort that became known as the surge.

### -2008-

In November 2008, the Iraqi parliament approved an agreement that set a deadline for the final withdrawal of U.S. forces. Under that agreement, all U.S. troops were scheduled to leave the country by early 2012.

### -2009-

In February 2009 newly elected U.S. President Barack Obama announced that U.S. combat forces would be withdrawn from Iraq by August 2010, with remaining troops due to pull out by December 2011.

## SIDE NOTES

After many years of warfare and limited financial exchange with other countries, Iraq's economy was in ruins and only slowly began to recover. Large amounts of debt added to Iraq's economic problems, and oil production—Iraq's greatest source of income—was very low.

Deaths of U.S. troops increased thereafter. As of July 2010 the total number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq was over 4,000. The number of Iraqis killed is uncertain, but the organization Iraq Body Count estimates that between 97,000 and 106,000 civilians had died as of July 2010.

Upon the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, people throughout Iraq began the painful task of seeking loved ones who had fallen victim to the regime; mass graves revealed thousands of victims.

Despite the approval of a new constitution, competing political interests and continuing violence have prevented Iraq from forming a stable government to this day.

Despite heavy casualties at first, the drop in violence that occurred as the year continued was a source of encouragement, and a number of the additional troops were eventually withdrawn. The ultimate success of the surge itself remains a source of debate, however, as the declining levels of violence observed in 2007 seem to be related to a variety of factors.

# U.S. MILITARY BRANCHES



The correspondence featured in *Letters Home* was mainly written by members of the Army and the Army National Guard. In the letters, the soldiers refer to members of and actions taken by other U.S. military branches.



## Army

The United States Army is the main ground-force of the United States. The Army's main function is to protect and

defend the United States by way of ground troops, tanks, artillery, and attack helicopters. The Army is the oldest U.S. Military service.

The Army is supported by two Reserve Forces which can be tapped for trained personnel and equipment during times of need: The Army Reserves, and the Army National Guard.

(Read more about the National Guard and Iowa National Guard on pages 13-14.)



U.S. AIR FORCE

## Air Force

The primary mission of the Air Force is to defend the United States

through use of air and space. The Air Force operates fighter aircraft, tanker aircraft, light and heavy bomber aircraft, transport aircraft, and helicopters. The Air Force is also responsible for all military satellites. The active duty Air Force is supplemented by the Air Force Reserves and the Air National Guard in times of need.



## Marine Corps

The Marines' specialty is to assault, capture, and control "beach heads" from

the sea in order to provide a route to attack the enemy from almost any direction. The Marines also support ground-combat operations. The Marines can generally be deployed quickly and, of the military branches, are often first on the scene.



## Navy

The Navy's primary mission is to maintain the freedom of the seas. In times of conflict, the

Navy helps to supplement Air Force air power as Navy aircraft carriers can often deploy to areas where fixed runways are impossible. The Navy is also primarily responsible for transporting Marines to areas of conflict.



## Coast Guard

The Coast Guard is primarily concerned with law enforcement, boating safety,

and sea rescue along the coast of the United States. However, the President of the United States can transfer part or all of the Coast Guard to the Department of the Navy in times of conflict.

## U.S. MILITARY QUICK FACTS

**Commander-in-Chief:** President Barack Obama

**Age range of military personnel:** 17-62 years old

**Active personnel:** 1.4 million; all have volunteered to serve.

TOP: Members of the United States Joint Service Color Guard at Fort Myer.

# THE NATIONAL GUARD



TOP: Members of the Oregon National Guard work with members of the Afghan National Army to transfer wounded soldiers to a helicopter in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan.

## History and Mission

The history of the National Guard is rooted in the militias created by the British colonies for their own defense in the 1600s. In fact, the National Guard is considered the oldest part of the federal Armed Forces of the United States, but it is also organized on a state level. Today the National Guard has two branches—the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard.

All members of the National Guard have reserve status in the military. This means that they commit to regular training and may be called to serve in combat in any of the United States' military conflicts. They are also on-call to provide emergency relief in the event of a state or national disaster.

The National Guard has been involved in every major U.S. conflict since the Revolutionary War, and its members have coordinated relief efforts for the victims of events such as the attacks of September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Unlike the individuals serving in the other branches of the military, members of the National Guard often work in full time civilian jobs when they are not on active duty.

## Role in Afghanistan and Iraq

The National Guard has played a vital role in the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Approximately one percent of the population of the United States is enlisted in the military. Therefore, in times of armed conflict when no draft is in place (including the current wars in the Middle East), the United States military relies on a relatively small number of individuals to serve in combat or support capacities. For this reason, even though they have reserve status, nearly every member of the National Guard has been deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan.

## BY THE NUMBERS

As of 2008 there were 365,814 members of the Army National Guard and 107,679 members of the Air National Guard.



Members of the Indiana Army National Guard lay sandbags to prevent flood damage in Hazelton, Indiana.

# THE IOWA NATIONAL GUARD



ABOVE: Soldiers salute during a send-off ceremony for Iowa National Guard Detachment 1, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, and Brigade Special Troops Battalion on August 6, 2010 in Marshalltown, Iowa.

Approximately 8,000 members of the Iowa National Guard have been deployed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In the early days of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the periods of mobilization were long (up to two years) and occurred very quickly. Some members only had days to prepare to leave their families and their civilian jobs. Now the deployments occur with much more notice and last about one year.

During the summer of 2010, the Iowa National Guard experienced its largest deployment since World War II. At the end of July, 2,800 men and women in the Iowa Army National Guard began leaving Iowa to train in Mississippi. They will travel to Afghanistan this autumn. Many of the soldiers had known about the upcoming deployment since last October. Although they had more time to prepare, they also had to endure many stressful months of waiting.

## IOWA CONNECTION

During the performance of *Letters Home*, the audience will hear correspondence from Specialist Clint Turnbull, a former member of the Iowa Army National Guard.

## LOCAL RESOURCE

### Iowa Gold Star Military Museum

Camp Dodge—the state headquarters of the Iowa Army and Air National Guard located in Johnston, Iowa—houses the Iowa Gold Star Museum. The museum, which opened in 1985, contains artifacts and information about the service of Iowans in the military on state, national, and international levels. On September 18, 2010, the museum dedicated a recent expansion of its facilities, which now include a main gallery, library, and conference rooms. The museum is free of charge and open to the public throughout the year.



Left: During a send-off ceremony at Sioux City North High School for the Iowa National Guard 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 113<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, and the 334<sup>th</sup> Brigade Battalion, the troops were given an Iowa flag to fly during their mission.

Images courtesy desmoinesregister.com.

# VOCABULARY



**Allied:** close in association; joined by treaty

**al-Qaeda:** a group of extremist Muslims responsible for acts of terrorism, including the September 11, 2001 attacks

**Ba'ath Party:** the political party that was allied with Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq

**Baghdad:** the capital city of Iraq

**Casualty:** a person killed or injured in war

**Civilian:** someone not part of the military

**Coalition:** a temporary joining of distinct parties

**Convoy:** a group organized for convenience or protection in moving

**Diplomat:** one who oversees negotiations between two or more parties

**Fedayeen:** paramilitary supporters of Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq

**Guerrilla warfare:** unconventional combat, often including ambush or sabotage

**Humvee:** a military vehicle

**Latrine:** a receptacle, often a hole in the earth, used as a toilet

**Northern Alliance:** Afghan military forces that fought against the Taliban

**Operation Enduring Freedom–Afghanistan:** the name given to the United States' military plan in Afghanistan, begun in 2001, to fight the threat of global terrorists hidden in the region

**Operation Iraqi Freedom:** the name given to the United States' military plan, begun in 2003, to remove Saddam Hussein from power and end Iraq's production of weapons of mass destruction

**Osama bin Laden:** the leader of al-Qaeda; considered a wanted criminal for his involvement in multiple terrorist attacks around the world

**Paramilitary:** a group of civilians organized in a military fashion to assist or function in place of traditional soldiers

**Paratrooper:** troops trained and equipped to parachute from an airplane

**Persian Gulf War:** a conflict (1990-1991) in which the United States and the United Kingdom led military action against Iraq in response to its invasion of Kuwait

**Platoon:** a group of soldiers; a subdivision of a larger military company

**Posthumous:** received or occurring after death

**Republican Guard:** a paramilitary group linked to the Ba'ath Party in Iraq

**Saddam Hussein:** the President of Iraq from 1979 until 2003; removed from power following the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003; later executed for crimes against humanity

**Shrapnel:** fragments of a bomb, mine, or bullet shell

**Staging area:** a place where participants prepare for a military operation

**Suture:** to use stitches to close a wound

**Taliban:** a religious and political movement of repressive, extremist Muslims that controlled the government of Afghanistan at the time of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks

**Terrorist:** someone who uses acts of terror to intimidate or try to force others to behave in a certain way

**Weapons of Mass Destructions:** weapons that can kill or injure large numbers of people; usually chemical, biological, or nuclear in nature

**West Point:** the United States Military Academy located in West Point, New York

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Top: Members of the Vermont Army National Guard participate in a deployment ceremony in September 2006. Image courtesy of ng.mil

## ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION

### OVERVIEW

**Goal:** Considering soldiers' emotional ties to their families and the men and women with whom they serve.

**Curriculum Connections:** Social Studies, Literacy

**Explanation:** Through discussion and writing, students will explore the support soldiers receive from their families and the dedication they have to their military comrades.

### BEFORE THE SHOW

1. Lead a class discussion in which students consider how family members may demonstrate their support for loved ones stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan. What means of communication do they use? Do they offer words of encouragement? Would news about home, including trivial events, be comforting? Why or why not?

2. Discuss what it means to be part of a team. Post large pieces of paper at the front of the classroom to record the discussion. Have students share words that come to mind when they think of the word "team." Then ask students to list the qualities of a productive team. Does everyone need to agree all the time? Should there be a common goal? Is it important to like one's teammates? Finally, have students consider what it is like when a goal is accomplished and a team disbands. Is there satisfaction in reaching the goal? Is there relief that the work is over? Can there be sadness associated with leaving one's teammates?

### AFTER THE SHOW

1. Many of the letters featured in the performance have common themes: longing for home, love of family, feelings of loyalty toward fellow soldiers, and the struggle to reconcile the desire to be home with the unique camaraderie of military life. Have students select one of three passages (located on page 17), all of which are taken from letters featured in the performance, and imagine they are a loved one receiving that letter. Based on the passage and what they remember from the performance, ask students to write a letter replying to the soldier. Encourage them to be creative. What is life like at home? How can they express empathy? What would be comforting to hear? To support the soldier, do they need to support the war?

2. After the students have completed their letters, discuss the challenges of returning home from war. Would it be comforting to be home? Could it be difficult to relate to family and friends who haven't experienced combat? Would daily life seem familiar or foreign? Would it be important to stay in touch with the soldiers one served with overseas? Could reactions vary?

### ACCOMPANYING HAND-OUT

After-the-Show, part 1,  
handout located on pg. 17.



## AFTER-THE-SHOW ACTIVITY HANDOUT



Select one of the passages below that was featured during the performance of *Letters Home*. Imagine you are a loved one who has just received that letter. Based on the passage and what you remember from the performance, write a letter replying to the soldier. What is life like at home? How can you express empathy for what your soldier is experiencing? What can you say to provide support and comfort?

---

### Passage 1

*Through everything I have done in my life, be it good or bad, you guys have always supported me. I know I can never repay you for what you have given me in my short 23 years...I know I don't say it enough, but I love you more than anything in this world and I would do anything for you. I'm glad I joined the Marine Corps, also that I could make you so proud of me, because that's all I want is for you guys to be able to say, "That is our son," with pride.*  
--Cpt. Matthew Mertz

### Passage 2

*I look around me at the people that I have spent the last five months with, lived, slept, ate, fought with. They don't know my whole story about my loving family and wife, and I don't know their complete story, either. Everyone knows, however, that each of us has a story and a home and a mother. And for that reason, we share an unspoken kinship that carries us together though each day.*  
--Lt. Leonard Cowherd III

### Passage 3

*I've never seen anyone die before...I don't know if I've ever talked about him before, but he was probably one of the best Marines and men I've ever known...But we've pushed on and I hate to say this, but I think we've grown stronger. We have a new form of motivation. Instead of "let's win this so we can go home," it's "let's win this so this [lieutenant] didn't die for naught." Still it's the worst thing I've ever seen in my life.*  
--LCpl. Matthew Webster

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TOP: Soldiers walk through a dust storm in Afghanistan.  
Photo courtesy of [blogs.afp.com](http://blogs.afp.com)

## ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION

### OVERVIEW

**Goal:** Understanding Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

**Curriculum Connections:** Social Studies, Literacy, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

**Explanation:** Students will research PTSD, specifically related to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, connect their findings to the performance, and consider the challenges that some veterans face when attempting to receive mental health care.

### PASSAGE

The following is an excerpt from a letter featured in *Letters Home*:

*Matt was gone for almost a year. When he came back he was angry and bitter and shell shocked. He blows up so easily now. I talked to him just yesterday and he told me that he is not authorized by command to go to counseling because of his short time in service. In his words, "Just three months ago, I trusted these guys to keep me alive and now they couldn't care less about me"...As a result of the war, I have lost the son I had...so deep is the pain he feels, it is the elephant in the room that all of us tiptoe around.*

--Nancy M. Dickinson

### BEFORE THE SHOW

1. Ask students to read the excerpt included above. Have students share their reactions to the passage in a brief class discussion.
2. Have students research PTSD. Ask them to identify the causes of PTSD, its symptoms, and how it can be treated. Students should focus their research on PTSD as experienced by war veterans. (Helpful resources are included on page 21).
3. Have a class discussion in which students share the results of their research. After discussing PTSD, reexamine the passage. Is Matt [the soldier in the passage above] displaying symptoms of PTSD? How do these symptoms seem to be affecting his life and the lives of his family members? Could Matt's mental issues be as difficult to treat as any physical problems he might have? Why or why not?
4. Have students research the prevalence of PTSD among veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and the challenges some of these individuals face in receiving treatment. (Helpful resources are included on page 21).

### AFTER THE SHOW

1. Ask each student to write a 1-2 page reflection piece about PTSD and how it relates to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The student should use what he/she has learned about PTSD among recent war veterans and his/her thoughts about the performance to address the following questions:
  - Based on the soldiers' letters presented in the performance, what types of experiences might lead some of the Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans to experience PTSD?
  - Does the military face legitimate obstacles in treating veterans with PTSD? Why or why not?
  - A recent online article from the BBC stated that Iraq veterans "face invisible wounds." What does this mean? What long term effects might these "invisible wounds" have on the veterans' lives, the lives of their family and friends, and on our country as a whole?

# GOING TO THE THEATER . . .



## YOUR ROLE AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

Attending a live performance is a unique and exciting opportunity. Unlike the passive experience of watching a movie, audience members play an important role in every live performance. As they act, sing, dance, or play instruments, the performers on stage are very aware of the audience's mood and level of engagement. Each performance calls for a different response from audience members. Lively bands, musicians, and dancers may desire the audience to focus silently on the stage and applaud only during natural breaks in the performance. Audience members can often take cues from performers on how to respond to the performance appropriately. For example, performers will often pause or bow for applause at a specific time.

As you experience the performance, consider the following questions:

- What kind of live performance is this (a play, a dance, a concert, etc.)?
- What is the mood of the performance? Is the subject matter serious or lighthearted?
- What is the mood of the performers? Are they happy and smiling or somber and reserved?
- Are the performers encouraging the audience to clap to the music or move to the beat?
- Are there natural breaks in the performance where applause seems appropriate?

## THEATER ETIQUETTE

Here is a checklist of general guidelines to follow when you visit the Civic Center:

- Leave all food, drinks, and chewing gum at school or on the bus.
- Cameras, recording devices, and personal listening devices are not permitted in the theater.
- Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices before the performance begins.
- When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- **Talk before and after the performance only.** Remember, the theater is designed to amplify sound, so the other audience members and the performers on stage can hear your voice!
- Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists on stage—they will let you know what is appropriate.
- Open your eyes, ears, mind, and heart to the entire experience. Enjoy yourself!

\*GOING TO THE THEATER information is adapted from the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts study guide materials.

# **RESOURCES AND SOURCES, PG. 1**

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## **Classroom Resources**

*Note: We encourage educators to thoroughly screen all resources to determine sections/pages appropriate for their students.*

### **Books:**

*The following book inspired Griffin Theatre Company's production of Letters Home.*

Schaeffer, Frank. *Voices from the Front: Letters Home from America's Military Family*. Da Capo Press, 2005.

### **Video:**

*The following documentary inspired Griffin Theatre Company's production of Letters Home.*

*Last Letters Home: Voices of American Troops from the Battlefields of Iraq*, dir. Bill Couturie, HBO, 2004.

### **Newspaper:**

*The following three articles contain letters from soldiers in Iraq to their families.*

'The Things They Wrote.' Opinion. *New York Times* online, 11 November 2003.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/11/opinion/11INTRO.html>

'The Things They Wrote.' Opinion. *New York Times* online, 21 March 2004.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/21/opinion/the-things-they-wrote-869910.html>

'The Things They Wrote.' Opinion. *New York Times* online, 11 November 2004.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/11/opinion/11intro.html>

### **Websites:**

*Information about PTSD*

National Center for PTSD:  
<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>

National Institute on Mental Health:  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>

New York Times:  
<http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/disease/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/overview.html>

*Information on Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans with PTSD and their mental health care*

USA Today:  
[http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-02-28-cover-iraq-injuries\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-02-28-cover-iraq-injuries_x.htm)

Washington Post:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/28/AR2006022801712.html>

Washington Post:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/17/AR2008041701749.html>

# **RESOURCES AND SOURCES, PG. 2**

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## **Study Guide Sources**

'Afghanistan' from *Encyclopedia Britannica* via History.com:

<http://www.history.com/topics/afghanistan/page7>

'Bush Announces Launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom' at History.com:

<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/bush-announces-the-launch-of-operation-iraqi-freedom>

Griffin Theatre Company:

<http://www.griffintheatre.com/>

Iowa National Guard:

<http://www.iowanationalguard.com/>

'Iowa National Guard Members Prepare to Leave Families Behind' at DesMoinesRegister.com:

<http://blogs.desmoinesregister.com/dmr/index.php/2010/07/13/iowa-national-guard-members-prepare-to-leave-families-behind/>

'Iraq Timeline' at BBC News online:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/737483.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/737483.stm)

'Iraq War' from *Encyclopedia Britannica* via History.com:

<http://www.history.com/topics/iraq-war>

'Iraq War in Figures' at BBC News online:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11107739>

Merriam-Webster online:

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

National Guard:

<http://www.ng.mil/default.aspx>

'Spotlight on Learning: Educator's Resource Guide for *Letters Home*.' Overture Center for the Performing Arts.

'US National Guard Bears Iraq Burden' at BBC News online:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6585217.stm>