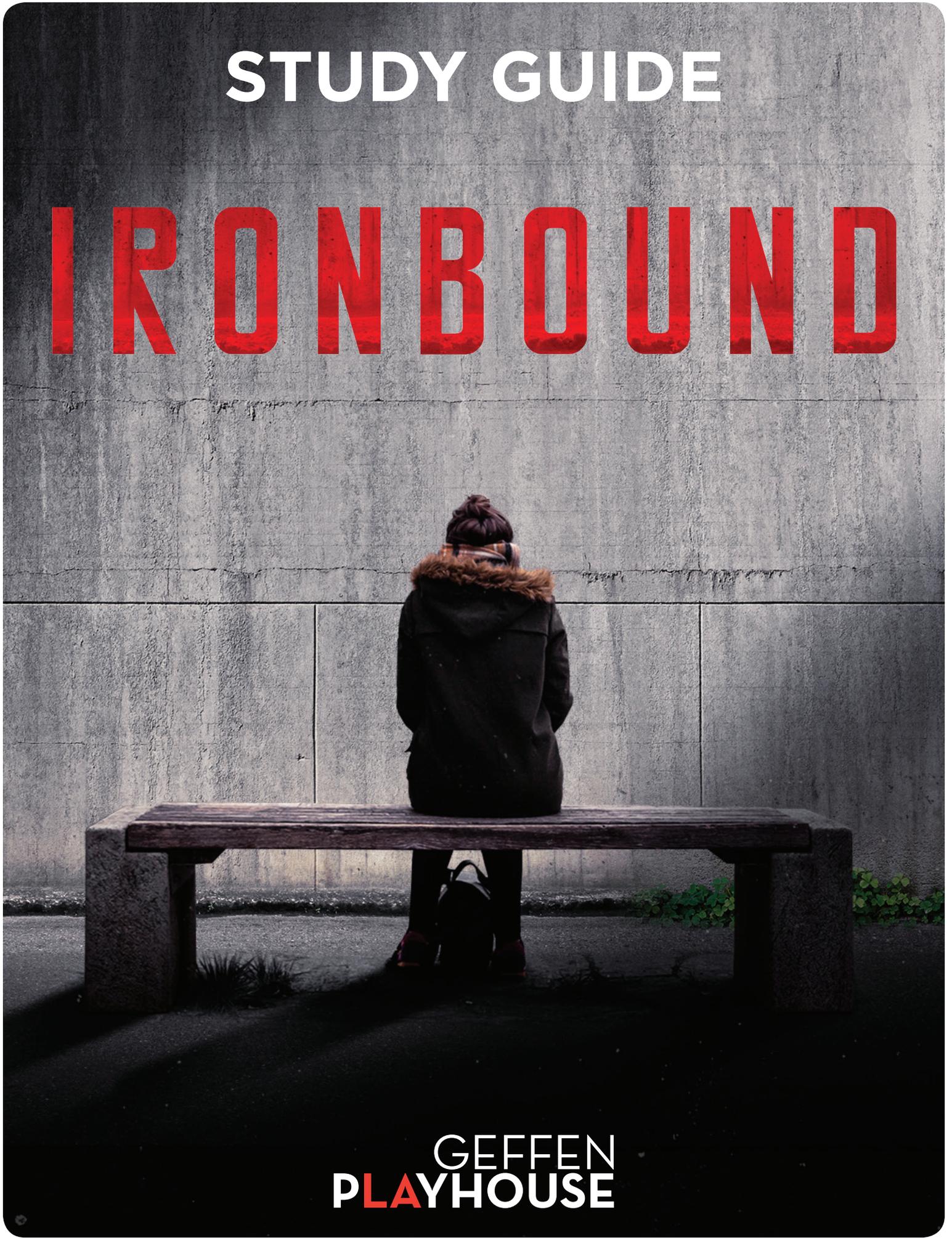


STUDY GUIDE

# IRONBOUND



GEFFEN  
PLAYHOUSE

# IRONBOUND

WEST COAST PREMIERE IN THE  
GIL CATES THEATER AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE  
**JANUARY 30 - MARCH 4, 2018**

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Amy Levinson, Brian Dunning, Rachel Weigardt-Egel, Ramon Garcia, Scott Kriloff,  
Ellen Catania, Jessica Brusilow Rollins and Carolyn Marie Wright.

STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY

**Jennifer Zakkai**

This publication is to be used for educational purposes only.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## SECTION 1

### **ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION**

PRODUCTION & CAST CREDITS.....	<b>4</b>
PLAY SYNOPSIS.....	<b>5</b>
ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES .....	<b>5</b>

## SECTION 2

### **THEMES & TOPICS**

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE – DREAMS & REALITIES.....	<b>6</b>
SURVIVAL SKILLS .....	<b>8</b>
PARENTAL SACRIFICE .....	<b>10</b>
SCENE ANALYSIS .....	<b>11</b>

## SECTION 3

### **PERSONNEL PROFILE**

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAMON GARCIA, VIDEO PRODUCER .....	<b>12</b>
---	-----------

## SECTION 4

<b>AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>14</b>

## SECTION 5

<b>RESOURCES.....</b>	<b>15</b>
-----------------------	-----------

SECTION 1

# ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION



WRITTEN BY

**Martyna Majok**

DIRECTED BY

**Tyne Rafaeli**

SCENIC DESIGNER

**Tim Mackabee**

COSTUME DESIGNER

**Elizabeth Caitlin Ward**

LIGHTING DESIGNER

**Lap Chi Chu**

SOUND DESIGNER

**Leon Rothenberg**

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

**Elizabeth A. Brohm**

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

**Ross Jackson**

CASTING DIRECTOR

**Phyllis Schuringa, CSA**



**Josiah Bania** as Maks



**Christian Camargo** as Tommy



**Marin Ireland** as Darja



**Marcel Spears** as Vic

## SYNOPSIS

In 2014, Polish immigrant Darja is at a bus stop in northern New Jersey, not far from the ruins of a factory in which she once worked. She is arguing with her live-in boyfriend Tommy about his unfaithful ways and what it will take for her to stick with him. As we travel back and forth in time over the course of 22 years, we learn that Darja arrived in the U.S. in 1992 with her first husband Maks, an aspiring blues musician, when factories were thriving. Directly affected by the decline of industry in her region, Darja has made pragmatic choices in order to survive, especially in her relationships with men. Only her devotion to her troubled son Aleks is deep and constant. Along the way, she experiences unexpected generosity from Vic, a high school student who helps her during a moment of great need.

**TIME** 2014, 1992, 2006. Not necessarily in that order.

**SETTING** A bus stop a quarter mile from a factory in Elizabeth, NJ. Or where there used to be a factory, depending on the year.

**RUNNING TIME** Approximately 80 minutes. There will be no intermission.

**PERFORMANCE NOTES** Characters engage in profanity and intimate behavior; one character smokes; there are oblique references to sexual activity; there is evidence of physical assault and one brief moment of violence.

## ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



**MARTYNA MAJOK** (Playwright)

Martyna Majok's plays have been presented at Williamstown Theatre Festival, Manhattan Theatre Club, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, Women's Project Theater and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, among others. Awards include Dramatists Guild's Lanford Wilson Award, Lilly Award, Helen Merrill Emerging Playwright Award, Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding Original New Play (Helen Hayes Awards), The Ashland New Plays Festival Women's Invitational Prize, The Kennedy Center's Jean Kennedy Smith Award, David Calicchio Emerging American Playwright Prize, New York Theatre Workshop's 2050 Fellowship, Aurora Theatre's Global Age Project Prize and the NNPN/Smith Prize for Political Playwriting. Commissions from Lincoln Center Theater, Bush Theatre in London, Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, South Coast Repertory and Manhattan Theatre Club. BA: University of Chicago; MFA: Yale School of Drama; Juilliard. Majok was a 2012-2013 NNPN Playwright-in-Residence and the 2015-2016 PoNY Fellow at the Lark Play Development Center. Upcoming: *queens* at LCT3/Lincoln Center Theater.



**TYNE RAFAELI** (Director)

Tyne Rafaeli directs classics, new plays and musicals, including the recent world premiere of the Geffen Playhouse's production of *Actually* by Anna Ziegler. Her work has been seen at Classic Stage Company, Playwrights Realm, Atlantic Theater Company, Roundabout Theatre Company, Two River Theater, California Shakespeare Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, New York Stage & Film, PlayMakers Repertory Company, Goodspeed Musicals, Juilliard, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Great Lakes Theater, American Players Theatre, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, the O'Neill Playwrights Conference and PlayPenn, among others. Rafaeli is a 2016-2018 Time Warner Directing Fellow at the Women's Project Theater and was awarded the 2013-2014 SDCF Sir John Gielgud Fellowship for Classical Direction. She previously served as Associate Director to Bartlett Sher on multiple Broadway and West End productions.

## SECTION 2

# THEMES & TOPICS

## THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE — DREAMS & REALITIES

### SOURCES

[tinyurl.com/  
MajokAmerTheatre](http://tinyurl.com/MajokAmerTheatre)

[tinyurl.com/  
LibCongressPollImm](http://tinyurl.com/LibCongressPollImm)

[tinyurl.com/  
NWEPoland1945-89](http://tinyurl.com/NWEPoland1945-89)

[www.nber.org/papers/  
w21906](http://www.nber.org/papers/w21906)

[tinyurl.com/  
PBSAmerDreamDebate](http://tinyurl.com/PBSAmerDreamDebate)

### PHOTO CREDIT

Pixabay/PD



In an interview in *American Theater* magazine, playwright Martyna Majok notes that *Ironbound* explores “Darja’s relation to her dreams over time.” As with many immigrants, the dreams that drew Darja to the United States likely included being able to live an easier life than was possible in her native country of Poland and finding well-paying work that would allow her to create a family. As her story demonstrates, external forces such as changes in a nation’s economy over which workers have little control, often affect the fulfillment of these dreams.

In 1992, Darja and Maks have ridden to the U.S. on what is considered the third wave of immigration from Poland. During the first wave in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Polish national identity was threatened by the occupations of the Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian empires, and many came to America to make a better living and to maintain their cultural and religious ties. During World War II, the Nazis invaded Poland and then were driven out by Soviet forces. After the war was over and before the Soviet Union cemented its domination of Poland, professionals and dissidents fled to the U.S. during the second wave in search of political, economic and religious freedom. Many credit the actions of Polish union leader Lech Wałęsa and Pope John Paul II as leading to the first elections in Poland that helped pave the way for the dismantling of the Soviet Union’s control of Eastern European countries, in 1989. With travel restrictions lifted at the end of Communist rule, the third wave of Polish immigrants came to the U.S. to find work and a better life.

In telling Darja’s story, *Ironbound* traces the changes in fortunes of those in the U.S.—native-born residents and immigrants alike—dependent on factory work to make a decent wage. As Majok observes, “I used the factory as an anchor

**GLOBALIZATION**

The development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets (merriam-webster.com)

**IMMIGRATION & INTOLERANCE**

Throughout U.S. history, groups of immigrants, such as those of Irish, Italian, Jewish and Polish descent, have been treated with prejudice upon their arrival, by those who settled in this country before them. Through hard work and a commitment to our democracy, they have added to and become a part of the economic, civic and cultural fabric of America. In the last year, a vocal minority of citizens of European heritage has promoted deeply intolerant attitudes towards immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. It seems they seek to refute how we are a nation built on the vision, tenacity and contributions of immigrants from all over the world.

of time—because I'd seen what happened with these factories in Jersey over 20 years—as a reflection of what was happening economically...In the '90s, the factories were full and running; in the 2000s, they were starting to shut down and outsource; in 2014, they're gone. They're ghosts. That factory I was writing about is now just rubble." (*American Theater*, 2017)

Many blame the disappearance of manufacturing jobs from certain regions of the U.S. on trade agreements with countries such as China and Mexico that sent jobs to places where labor is much cheaper. Globalization has benefitted corporations, business owners and stockholders because of reduced labor costs, but not the workers here who have lost jobs. Proponents of globalization assumed these laborers would move to better job markets or receive training in new job skills, much of which did not materialize. In regions where industrial jobs have vanished, such as parts of the Northeast and Midwest, there has been steep economic decline. When we meet Darja in 2014, she is cleaning houses.

As we follow Darja's journey from her hopeful arrival to navigating tough life choices, we might well question if the "American Dream" is still alive. James Truslow Adams, who is credited with first coining the term in 1931, believed that all people, no matter their background, should have an equal opportunity to prosper and the freedom to live as they choose. After World War II, when the U.S. economy grew rapidly, the American Dream became more about achieving material wealth and owning a home, car and appliances. Immigrants who have flocked to the United States have often worked hard and sacrificed their own aspirations to provide an education and other advantages for their children that allow their offspring to be more successful than they have been.

Throughout our country's history, there have been impediments to achieving the American Dream. People of color have been denied access to quality education, high-paying jobs and decent, affordable housing. Also limiting has been the lack of "social capital," the network of friends and colleagues that can help us find work, which often depends on the class into which we are born. Many working and middle class individuals have become saddled with enormous debt, because of expensive housing, health care, and college educations. Those with little education and skills have limited options among low-paying jobs and often struggle from paycheck to paycheck. Also cited in creating barriers to success is the shift to a "service economy," in which workers provide person-to-person services in areas such as technology and finance, which require education and training. Overall, the economic system that once made upward mobility possible, especially from the working class into the middle class, is now considered by many to benefit only the extremely wealthy.

Pursuing higher education can still offer a way out of poverty, especially since the service economy requires the high-level thinking, communication, interpersonal and technology skills that can be cultivated in K-12 education, universities and professional schools. While a network of supporters is a valuable resource, the relentless pursuit of professional goals can also help overcome having little social capital.

We glimpse a bit of the romantic in Darja when she is with Maks, but she ends up being a realist about what is possible for her, given her lack of education and skills. The symbol of her insecure station in life is the bus stop she frequents, even when not seeking transportation, and the object of her greatest desire, in what has become an extremely scaled-down life, is a car and the freedom of movement it affords.

# SURVIVAL SKILLS

**SOURCES**

[tinyurl.com/ForbesGrit](http://tinyurl.com/ForbesGrit)  
[tinyurl.com/HumorSalve](http://tinyurl.com/HumorSalve)  
[tinyurl.com/  
PsychTodayMateSelect](http://tinyurl.com/PsychTodayMateSelect)  
[tinyurl.com/  
NYTPolandSovietRule](http://tinyurl.com/NYTPolandSovietRule)

**PHOTO CREDIT**

Pixabay/PD



While Darja may not be a highly skilled worker, she is an agile survivor, possessing “grit,” a sense of humor and little self-pity, all of which comprise the strength that sees her through the challenges in her life.

Grit is the ability to persevere—manage fear, go forth and bounce back in the face of challenges—and to achieve one’s goals. In most of her encounters, we see Darja ask the next question, come up with the next solution, and rarely give into despair. The sardonic humor that laces many of her exchanges also helps her assert her power:

DARJA

I will find someone. I will find someone else.

TOMMY

Where?

DARJA

I found you. I was not blind person. I was not stupid. I know exactly what was I doing so I was not stupid. I weighed you on scale and I say mm Okay.

TOMMY

“Okay”?

In addition to empowering us, humor can fend off the depression caused by oppressive circumstances. In an article on humor as a “psychological salve,” counselor Nichole Force suggests that “humor often is viewed as an expression of resilience and hope that has the power to soothe suffering.” (PsychCentral, 2016)

When energy flags and humor fails, it is completely normal to feel deeply distressed by unyielding difficulty. At such moments, Darja acts out against Tommy and his lover. Like other hardy survivors, however, she does not wallow in her misfortunes, but presses on.

In addition to drawing on her strengths, Darja persists in trying to get what she needs from the men in her life. Her relationship with her first husband Maks is romantic in spirit, but his dreams of moving to Chicago to make his way as a musician come into conflict with her desire to have a family. We never meet her second husband, who was her boss in the factory, but it is not hard to imagine that, at the time and until he abused her, she chose to be with someone in a prominent position at the factory, in order to take care of her child. Tommy has a steady government job, though the revolution in communications and transporting goods brought on by the Internet threatens the viability of the U.S. Postal Service. He seems to need her more than she does him, emotionally, but she is after essentials, such as a place to live, access to a car and some cash to give her son. While we may wonder why Darja takes up with such partners, psychologist Noam Shpancer casts light on her choices: “When choosing a partner, we frequently engage in internal negotiations whereby the value of romantic love is pitted against the value of social status and economic security. If the love is strong, we may sacrifice security or economic status. If the potential partner’s status is high, we may compromise regarding the intensity of our romantic feelings.” (*Psychology Today*, 2014)

Perhaps Darja’s pursuit of economic security is also the result of wanting to move beyond the privation she endured in Poland. Before Soviet domination ended, Polish citizens often lived with several other families in small apartments, had to rely mainly on public transportation because of a shortage of cars and stand for hours in line to get basic food staples like bread. (Members of Poland’s Communist Party, on the other hand, enjoyed Western goods and much better services.) Lifelong poverty and the constant uncertainty it unleashes take enormous physical, mental and emotional tolls on human beings. Darja may be at a point in her life where she sees the promise of a place to live and regular meals as luxuries she cannot afford to turn down.

### DISCUSSION POINT

Which survival skills do you value most, in yourself and others? How have they helped you and others meet challenges in life? Which survival skills would you like to cultivate? Why?

# PARENTAL SACRIFICE



**PHOTO CREDIT**  
Pixabay/PD

The primary focus in Darja's life, and the source of her greatest vulnerability, is her son, Aleks, whom we never meet. As playwright Majok says, "I think Darja makes a choice in that early scene with Maks to commit her life fully to something that belongs to her, to something that can't be taken away from her. And she's gonna work to the bone to ensure its success, its safety, and its happiness." (*American Theater*, 2018)

Unfortunately, by 2014 Aleks has become a drug addict. Parents, especially those who reflexively place their children ahead of their own welfare, struggle mightily when the person they care most about in the world is taken hostage by a mental and physical affliction that has no mercy. Many believe if they had been stronger parents or provided a better life, their child would not have fallen prey to the disease. Perhaps there is one more thing they can say or give their child that will make a difference.

Such loved ones underestimate the power of addiction, which can only be arrested through the readiness of addicts to change. No amount of care or description of dire consequences by others can alter their self-destructive behavior. It is very hard for parents like Darja to accept that their own child will trade on their devotion and even steal from them. Every compromise she has made has been to help Aleks. As Majok notes, "The choices she's made for her son have actually ended up hurting her."

Interestingly, life sometimes hands us surrogates for family members, with whom we can experience the opposite of harm, if not healing. Though we are not quite sure what he is up to when high school student Vic first appears at the bus stop, his generosity provides a bright spot in the bleakness that has enveloped Darja, during this period of her life.

## DISCUSSION POINT

What is the best way to support a loved one who is making self-destructive choices?  
What is the best way to take care of yourself in relation to this loved one?

# SCENE ANALYSIS

## TACTICS

The actions—convince, flatter, plead, scold—actors take to achieve their characters' objectives in a scene.

Playwrights reveal the facets and desires of their characters through dialogue. In addition to identifying characters' personality traits, directors and actors analyze a script to understand the characters' *objectives*—or what the characters seek to achieve in the scenes of the play.

Read silently through the scene below between Darja and Maks. First, register what they are actually saying to each other, and underline key words or phrases. Then note in the margins what each is trying to get the other to understand or do in relation to them. What is each character's objective? Are they the same or different? How?

Join one other person and share your analyses of the scene. Read the scene aloud, each with your character's objective in mind. Then make acting choices, or select *tactics*, to achieve your goal. Read the scene aloud again. Did you each achieve your objective? How do you know?

MAKS

You can burn money. Gone, two seconds. Money it's nothing. Is important. But is nothing. What's most important in this life it's this thing you have what no one can take from you.

DARJA

I can't think what's something can't someone take.

MAKS

Then you make one. One thing what's yours in whole this world. People try to take, you fight.

DARJA

I am fighting.

MAKS

Cars break. ... I have music. People need to know this.

DARJA

I know this.

MAKS

People in this country need to know this so I don't fall from this world like nothing ever happen.

DARJA

I know this. And I know you. I know only you here. In whole country. In whole country, really, I have only you.

## SECTION 3

# PERSONNEL PROFILE

## AN INTERVIEW WITH RAMON GARCIA

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**What is your title and how long have you worked at the Geffen?**

My title is Video Producer, and I've been with the Geffen since December of 2016.

**Which departments do you work with? What are your primary responsibilities?**

I work in the Marketing department conceptualizing and publishing video content, which supports the organization's institutional objectives. The Geffen's plays are diverse and marketing videos provide insight into the motivations of the playwrights and cast, which brings the work to life. With the Development department, videos detail the inner workings of the theater to promote the continued support of donors and sponsors. With the Education department, videos display the impact Geffen programs have on communities with little access to the arts. These videos are circulated both privately to our subscribers, donors and community partners, and publicly through social media platforms.

**How did you become a videographer?**

In the Army, I began using retinal scan biometric cameras for their unintended purposes of recording intricate videos. I started by using the cameras to add critical details to the written analysis I provided Task Forces, and their responses were overwhelmingly positive, because incorporating a visual element into their strategic planning provided a safety net for them. Working with video also became my creative outlet.

**How have your experiences as a military veteran contributed to the dispositions and skills you use in your current line of work?**

In the culture of small teams in the military, it was considered a sign of weakness and grievance to ask the leadership for guidance. We pulled together to creatively find purpose and calculate our way through problems. So, I continue to apply that critical thinking. It's refreshing to collaborate and to continue to evolve in an environment like the Geffen Playhouse, where the staff as a whole genuinely cares and is willing to help, both professionally and personally.

**How did you come to the Geffen?**

After my military service I surfed across the world, and spent a year in the Indonesian islands. After that, I moved



to Los Angeles, and worked freelance in a myriad of pre- and post-production projects. After an intense production, which spanned across thirteen states, I volunteered with Mission Continues—an organization that places veterans in internships—and ended up bringing my video services to the Geffen. Fairly soon after arriving, I filmed the Veterans Writing & Performing Project, which gives fellow veterans the opportunity to express themselves through monologues shared from the stage.

**What do you find most challenging about your work?**

Time is always the greatest challenge. When camera time with our actors is extremely limited, the show must go on and content must be produced, usually with strict delivery deadlines.

**What excites you most about working at the Geffen?**

The video department is new and is still evolving to find the best way to serve the Geffen. There are many great ideas that are helping to shape our approach. One particular idea that is finally coming to fruition, is isolating a scene within any given play, and filming it as if it were a scene in a movie as opposed to on stage. In essence, we are presenting the viewers with a sneak peak of how each play could look if it were commissioned as a film, which may give the play a life beyond the stage. ■

## SECTION 4

# AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Going to the theater is a unique experience, and we all need to be mindful of “audience etiquette,” or how to behave at the theater.

**The Audience’s Role:** The audience plays an essential role at the performance of a play. Without an audience, the actors are only rehearsing. Audience members’ concentrated silence and responses, such as laughing and applauding, provide energy to the actors as they bring the performance to life.

**Behaviors to Avoid:** Since the actors can hear the audience so clearly, it is important not to engage in behaviors that might disturb or distract them—and fellow audience members.

These actions include:

- Talking
- Texting
- Allowing cell phones to ring
- Taking photographs or video
- Getting up to leave before intermission or the end of the show (unless it is a true emergency)
- Eating or drinking
- Unwrapping candy or cough drops.

**Use of Social Media:** We appreciate you sharing your Geffen Playhouse experience via social media, but ask that you **do not do so inside the theater, where the use of electronic devices is prohibited.**

We recommend that you post your status **in the lobby after the performance**, and invite you to tag @GeffenPlayhouse and use #GeffenPlayhouse to share your experience and continue the conversation with us online.

**Audience Awareness Activity:** Before going to the Geffen Playhouse for the first time, compare and contrast the experience of seeing a live play with:

- going to the movies
- attending a live sporting event
- watching television.

### DISCUSSION POINT

If you were onstage performing a play, how would you want the audience to behave?

# POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the time available and your group members' interests, guide them to respond to questions selected from those suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, while having respect for differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Ask for several volunteers to share their groups' answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching *Ironbound*? Engaged? Distanced? Entertained? Bored? Conflicted? Moved? Inspired? What made you feel this way?
- What did you enjoy most about the play? When did you have trouble connecting? Why? (Provide evidence from the production.)
- In what ways did you, or might a family member or ancestor, identify with Darja's experience as an immigrant to the United States?
- What impressed you most about Darja? What concerned you the most? Touched you the most?
- How were the economic fortunes of the United States reflected in Darja's story?
- Do you believe in the American Dream? If so, why? If not, why not?
- If you were Darja's best friend, what advice would you give to her about her relationships with men? Why?
- How do you think Darja's life unfolded, after the end of the play?
- What did you appreciate most about the performances by the actors?
- How did the set, costumes and lighting contribute to the impact of the play?
- Would you recommend this production of *Ironbound* to other theatergoers? Why, or why not?

## SECTION 5

# RESOURCES

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**HEAR** from playwright Martyna Majok as she discusses *Ironbound* in an interview in *American Theater* magazine at [tinyurl.com/MajokAmerTheatre](https://www.tinyurl.com/MajokAmerTheatre).

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**LEARN** about the history of Polish immigration to the United States at [tinyurl.com/LibCongressPollImm](https://www.tinyurl.com/LibCongressPollImm) and life in Poland between 1945 and 1989 at [tinyurl.com/NWEPoland1945-89](https://www.tinyurl.com/NWEPoland1945-89).

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**LEARN** about China’s advancing economic power at [tinyurl.com/NBCChinaPower](https://www.tinyurl.com/NBCChinaPower).

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**WATCH** a debate on the state of the American Dream on PBS at [tinyurl.com/PBSAmerDreamDebate](https://www.tinyurl.com/PBSAmerDreamDebate).

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**VISIT** the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, a Jewish cultural center that welcomes “people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.” Information available at [www.skirball.org](http://www.skirball.org).

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**LEARN** about “grit” and the help it can provide in your life at [tinyurl.com/ForbesGrit](https://www.tinyurl.com/ForbesGrit) and the negative affects of self-pity at [tinyurl.com/PsychCentSelf-Pity](https://www.tinyurl.com/PsychCentSelf-Pity).

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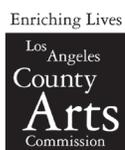
**LEARN** about script analysis for actors at [tinyurl.com/BackstageScriptAnalysis](https://www.tinyurl.com/BackstageScriptAnalysis).

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Goldman Sachs  
Greater Los Angeles New Car Dealers Association  
The Adi & Jerry Greenberg Foundation  
Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman & Machtinger, LLP  
Guggenheim Partners  
Joseph Drown Foundation  
K Period Media  
Keyes Automotive Group  
KIND Bars  
Kissick Family Foundation  
L&N Andreas Foundation  
Latham & Watkins, LLP  
Lear Family Foundation  
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors  
Los Angeles City Department of Cultural Affairs  
Los Angeles County Arts Commission  
Lowell Milken Family Foundation  
Marilyn & Jeffrey Katzenberg Fund  
for Arts Education at the Geffen Playhouse  
Maurice Amado Foundation  
Moss Foundation  
MOCA Foundation  
Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation  
Northern Trust  
Olympus Theatricals  
Paradigm Talent Agency  
Paramount Pictures  
Ralph M. Parsons Foundation  
Rosenthal Family Foundation  
Thomas Safran & Associates  
The Sheri & Les Biller Family Foundation  
Shay Family Foundation  
Simms/Mann Family Foundation  
Simon-Strauss Foundation  
Singer Family Foundation  
Smith Family Foundation  
Sondheim Foundation  
Stone Family Foundation  
Twentieth Century Fox  
UCLA  
US Bank  
The Walt Disney Company  
Warner Bros. Entertainment  
Westfield Group

And many more!



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