



THEATRE / PORTUGAL

By Heart

Teatro Nacional D. Maria II

Education Resources

75 minutes no interval

Suitable for Year 10 students onwards

Compiled by Kimberley Martin, December 2018

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Arts Curriculum subjects, English and areas covered and relevant IB subjects
Suggested curriculum links presented in following colours:

ACARA

Drama
English

SACE

Drama
English

IB

Arts
Language and Literature

CAPABILITIES

Literacy and numeracy come in many forms – non-verbal, visual and embodied, the Arts provide opportunities for students to deepen their literate and numerate experiences. Viewing and experiencing performance requires Critical and Creative Thinking, and challenges Personal & Social viewpoints and Ethical Understandings.

Warnings

Ten people from the audience will be asked to join Tiago Rodrigues on stage to learn a piece of text by heart. They will remain on the stage throughout the performance. Tiago has asked that not all participants be students when there is a majority of schools in the audience. You are asked to monitor the number of student volunteers from your group.

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About

By Heart is a piece about the importance of transmission, of the invisible smuggling of words and ideas that only keeping a text in your memory can provide. It's about a theatre that recognises itself as that place of transmission of what you can't measure in metres, dollars or bytes. It's about the safe hiding-place that forbidden texts have always found in our brains and our hearts, as a guarantee of civilization even in the most barbaric and desolate times. In an interview on a Dutch television program, *Beauty and consolation*, author and academic, Professor George Steiner made the following statement; *Once 10 people know a poem by heart, there's nothing the KGB, the CIA or the Gestapo can do about it. It will survive.*

Synopsis

IB Diploma Theatre Objective: [Learn more](#)

In *By heart*, Portuguese playwright and actor Tiago Rodrigues teaches a poem to 10 people selected from the audience. These 10 people will not have seen the performance and will have no idea which text they will be learning by heart in front of the audience. While teaching them, Rodrigues unfolds a mix of stories of his soon-to-be-blind grandmother and stories of writers and characters from books that are, somehow, connected both to the old lady and him. The books are also there, on stage, inside wooden fruit crates. And as each couple of verses is taught to the group of 10 people, improbable connections emerge between Nobel Prize winner Boris Pasternak, a cook from the north of Portugal and a Dutch TV program called *Beauty and Consolation*, and the mystery behind the choice of the text is slowly solved.

Themes

SACE Stage 1 English KU2: [Learn more](#)

- Literature enabling us to be human even in the face of inhumane circumstances
- Valuing words by committing them to heart
- Connection to place and to community through memory and words



Photo: Magda Bizarro

Production

Style and Conventions

[SACE Stage 1 Drama Ap4: Learn more](#)

By Heart gives students the opportunity to observe creative development as if in a rehearsal and the process required for 'learning lines' in this amazing example of immersive theatre. They and or you may even get the opportunity to be one of the ten invited onto the stage to learn the selected text to explore words and meaning in context.

Venue

Odeon Theatre

The Odeon theatre is an end-on black box theatre that has raked seating for 221 people in the suburb of Norwood, South Australia. This venue suits the intimacy of *By Heart* and lends itself to the simplicity of the minimalistic set and lighting design.



Photo: Magda Bizarro

Curriculum

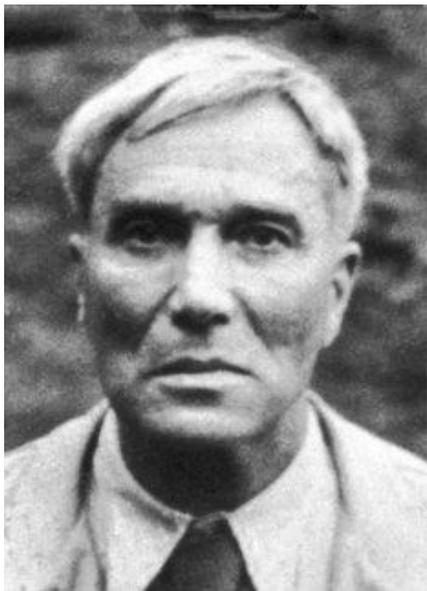
Pre-show

People to Know

Rodrigues mentions the below literary figures within his performance. Students may appreciate some context or brief background on these figures before attending *By Heart*.

Boris Pasternak

Boris Leonidovich Pasternak (1890-1960), born in Moscow, was the son of talented artists: his father a painter and illustrator of Tolstoy's works, his mother a well-known concert pianist.



Pasternak's education began in a German Gymnasium in Moscow and was continued at the University of Moscow. Under the influence of the composer Scriabin, Pasternak took up the study of musical composition for six years from 1904 to 1910. By 1912 he had renounced music as his calling in life and went to the University of Marburg, Germany, to study philosophy. After four months there and a trip to Italy, he returned to Russia and decided to dedicate himself to literature.

Pasternak's first books of verse went unnoticed. With *Sestra moya zhizn* (My Sister Life), 1922, and *Temy i variatsii* (Themes and Variations), 1923, the latter marked by an extreme, though sober style, Pasternak first gained a place as a leading poet among his Russian contemporaries. In 1924 he published *Vysokaya bolezn* (Sublime Malady), which portrayed the 1905 revolt as he

saw it, and *Detstvo Lyuvers* (The Childhood of Luvers), a lyrical and psychological depiction of a young girl on the threshold of womanhood. A collection of four short stories was published the following year under the title *Vozdushnye puti* (Aerial Ways). In 1927 Pasternak again returned to the revolution of 1905 as a subject for two long works: *Leytenant Shmidt*, a poem expressing threnodic sorrow for the fate of Lieutenant Schmidt, the leader of the mutiny at Sevastopol, and *Devyatsot pyaty god* (The Year 1905), a powerful but diffuse poem which concentrates on the events related to the revolution of 1905. Pasternak's reticent autobiography, *Okhrannaya gramota* (Safe Conduct), appeared in 1931, and was followed the next year by a collection of lyrics, *Vtoroye rozhdenie* (Second Birth), 1932. In 1935 he

published translations of some Georgian poets and subsequently translated the major dramas of Shakespeare, several of the works of Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, and Ben Jonson, and poems by Petöfi, Verlaine, Swinburne, Shelley, and others. *Na rannikh poyezdakh* (In Early Trains), a collection of poems written since 1936, was published in 1943 and enlarged and reissued in 1945 as *Zemnye prostory* (Wide Spaces of the Earth). In 1957 *Doktor Zhivago*, Pasternak's only novel – except for the earlier “novel in verse”, *Spektorsky* (1926) – first appeared in an Italian translation and has been acclaimed by some critics as a successful attempt at combining lyrical-descriptive and epic-dramatic styles. An autobiographical sketch, *Biografichesky ocherk* (An Essay in Autobiography), was published in 1959, first in Italian, and subsequently in English. Pasternak lived in Peredelkino, near Moscow, until his death in 1960.

From [Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967](#), Editor Horst Frenz, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1969

Ray Bradbury

Ray Bradbury, recipient of the 2000 National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, the 2004 National Medal of Arts, and the 2007 Pulitzer Prize Special Citation, died on June 5, 2012, at the age of 91 after a long illness. He lived in Los Angeles.

In a career spanning more than seventy years, Ray Bradbury has inspired generations of readers to dream, think, and create. A prolific author of hundreds of short stories and close to fifty books, as well as numerous poems, essays, operas, plays, teleplays, and screenplays, Bradbury was one of the most celebrated writers of our time. His groundbreaking works include *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. He wrote the screen play for John Huston's classic film adaptation of *Moby Dick*, and was nominated for an Academy Award. He adapted sixty-five of his stories for television's *The Ray Bradbury Theater*, and won an Emmy for his teleplay of *The Halloween Tree*. In 2005, Bradbury published a book of essays titled *Bradbury Speaks*, in which he wrote: In my later years I have looked in the mirror each day and found a happy person staring back. Occasionally I wonder why I can be so happy. The answer is that every day of my life I've worked only for myself and for the joy that comes from writing and creating. The image in my mirror is not optimistic, but the result of optimal behavior.

He is survived by his four daughters, Susan Nixon, Ramona Ostergren, Bettina Karapetian, and Alexandra Bradbury, and eight grandchildren. His wife, Marguerite, predeceased him in 2003, after fifty-seven years of marriage.

Throughout his life, Bradbury liked to recount the story of meeting a carnival magician, Mr. Electrico, in 1932. At the end of his performance Electrico reached out to the twelve-year-old

Bradbury, touched the boy with his sword, and commanded, Live forever! Bradbury later said, I decided that was the greatest idea I had ever heard. I started writing every day. I never stopped.

From www.raybradbury.com

George Steiner

Professor George Steiner was born in Paris on 23 April 1929. His family moved to the United States in 1940 and he was educated at the Universities of Paris, Chicago, Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge. He was a member of the editorial staff at *The Economist* in London during the 1950s before beginning an academic career as a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University in 1956. He was appointed Gauss Lecturer at Princeton in 1959. He has been a fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge, since 1961 and was Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Geneva between 1974 and 1994.

Professor Steiner has held visiting professorships at Yale, New York University, the University of Geneva and Oxford University. He is an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, an honorary fellow of Balliol College Oxford, and has been awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur by the French Government and the King Albert Medal by the Royal Belgian Academy. He received the Truman Capote Lifetime Achievement Award for Literature in 1998 and in the same year was elected Fellow of the British Academy. He is currently Weidenfeld Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Oxford, Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University and Extraordinary Fellow of Churchill College at Cambridge University. His non-fiction includes

Tolstoy or Dostoevsky (1958), a critical analysis of the two great masters of the Russian novel, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture* (1971) and *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-96* (1996). His book on translation, *After Babel* (1975), was televised in 1977 as *The Tongues of Men*. He is also the author of a number of works of fiction including *Proofs and Three Parables* (1992) and *The Portage to San Cristobal of AH* (1981), which was adapted for the stage by Christopher Hampton. A volume of autobiography, *Errata: an Examined Life*, was published in 1997. *Grammars of Creation* (2001) discusses a range of subjects from cosmology to poetry. He is a regular contributor of reviews and articles to journals and newspapers including the *New Yorker*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Guardian*. Professor Steiner lives in Cambridge, England. His latest book is one of memoir, *My Unwritten Books* (2008). A collection of pieces written between 1967 and 1997, *George Steiner at the New Yorker*, was published in 2009.

From: <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/george-steiner>

Possible Prompt Questions for Students

IB MYP Arts Criterion D: [Learn more](#)

SACE Stage 2 Drama An2: [Learn more](#)

- What does knowing something by heart mean to you?
- What is the longest piece of text you can remember by heart? Why do you remember it? Students may respond with ads, jingles, scenes from films, poems, sayings, story e.g. fairy tales or other.
- What is memory?
- Why is memory important?

After The Show

SACE Stage 1 English KU1: [Learn more](#)

ACARA Drama ACADRR052: [Learn more](#)

IB Diploma Literature & Performance Objective 1: [Learn more](#)

Tiago Rodrigues talks about there being a difference between knowing something 'by brain' and knowing something 'by heart'. Students to consider: What does this difference mean? and provide examples

Activity Ideas

Students to choose one story or poem to learn by heart that has current significance to them and share why they have made the choice. Discuss how the text might add to their life and if this would motivate them to memorise it?

Students to research traditional cultures that have relied on oral storytelling to pass down wisdom and information throughout generations. Compare and contrast to ways we pass on cultural knowledge in current times.

Students to discuss: Why does western culture rely on records? Now we are moving to more digital record keeping and multimodal formats of storytelling (television, movies, gaming and even virtual reality) what are some ways we can still value memory and oral traditions? Is this still important to our culture or should it be? View George Steiner speaking on the topic here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXFv4YPmcl8> including his quote, *What you have by heart, the bastards cannot touch; they cannot take it from you.*

Students to create a chart of memories – could be books they have read, films they have seen, objects/toys that have been important to them – chart to start when they were five and then increments of 5 years up to present.

In groups of 5 create a story word by word within a time limit of 10 minutes – thinking about beginning, middle and end.

Students to consider and share strategies that assist memory – i.e. word association, running through the alphabet to find first letter of person's name etc.

Revisit the themes

- Literature enabling us to be human even in the face of inhumane circumstances
- Valuing words by committing them to heart
- Connection to place and to community through memory and words

Students to discuss if having explored them prior to the production did this add/distract from the intent of the performers and the production.

Student Review

For the student's review, points for them to consider in addition to normal review practice:

- Tiago Rodri chose to have non-trained actors explore his thesis of strategies for teaching a text, how powerful was the experience
- What strategies were most effective in the teaching of the text
- Given the fourth wall is broken, did this impact on your engagement with the production

For review writing format: See Review Writing Guide document

Meet the Company

The Teatro Nacional D. Maria II National Theatre

The company was inaugurated in 1846, its mission to produce leading works of world theatre, staged to the highest standards of artistic and technical quality, in the beautiful neoclassical *teatro* designed by Italian architect Fortunato Lodi. The Theatre was virtually destroyed by fire in 1964 and re-opened, rebuilt and modernised, in 1978.

Mundo Perfeito

Which means 'perfect world', is based in the kitchen of a small apartment in the Lisbon suburb of Amadora. Driven by the work of Tiago Rodrigues, the company has focused on intense work with authors and new dramaturgy. Since its inception in 2003, Mundo Perfeito has

presented its work in theatres and festivals in France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Lebanon and Brazil.

Performer

Tiago Rodrigues

ACARA English ACELY1750: [Learn more](#)

The last thing to leave our dying lips may very well be a poem." This is what essayist Joseph Brodsky wrote. Either this or something quite similar. I'm quoting from memory. Brodsky claims that the poem is born as a device to help us apprehend the world, simplifying the task of apprehending it. So rather than an end in itself, the poem would be a means or a tool to reach the goal of knowing a world by heart. Poetry would thus be the art of creating mnemonics.

"As though it were aware of the fragility and treachery of man's faculties, the poem aims at the target of human memory, because memory is usually the last thing to disappear, even when our whole existence crumbles around us, as if we were trying to keep a memory of the disappearance itself." Again, I quote Joseph Brodsky by heart. And I know what he's talking about when he claims that our physiology is helpless against the poetic invasion. Because of my work as an actor, some texts have got inside me, they have settled in and never left me since. They are discreet tenants who dwell in my memory, although they can be awoken at any time.

*It is precisely because I am the proud landlord to all of these tenants of memory that I embarked on a journey when my grandmother, who is from Trás-os-Montes, was growing blind and asked me to choose a book for her to learn by heart, so she could read it in her mind after she stopped seeing. This literary and labyrinthian journey is still happening. While I was searching for the ultimate book for my grandmother to keep in her memory, I created a show called *By Heart*, where I teach a Shakespeare sonnet to ten members of the audience who volunteer to come on stage.*

In this show, I tell stories related to my grandmother, to Boris Pasternak or to Ray Bradbury. I quote literature professor George Steiner, who refers to the texts we keep in our memory as "the decoration for the house of our interior", perhaps ignorant of the fact that in Portuguese, "decorating" is a synonym of "learning by heart" (although I find it hard to believe that Steiner doesn't know everything). This play is essentially the portrayal of a search for the ultimate book, the only one that my grandmother would keep inside her head once her eyes failed her.

During the show I also recall the story of Nadezhda, Osip Mandelstam's wife. When the Russian poet was arrested and his books confiscated, she started teaching a poem to ten people at a time, in her kitchen. So that her husband would continue to be published in people's memories. And that is what I try to do. I teach William Shakespeare's sonnet 30 to ten audience members at each performance. One of the sonnets from the book that I chose for my grandmother to learn by heart.

Although I have already accomplished the mission of choosing her last book, my journey continues, for such are the ways of memory. For a year now, I have been presenting this show in Portugal, Spain, France, USA and Canada. I will continue in Germany, Switzerland, Norway, etc. A couple of hundred spectators have already learned this sonnet by my side, on stage, in several languages and I hesitate to believe that, even when the play's tour is over, this journey will ever be over. Because I know that it is a journey in search of what might be my grandmother's last words. And perhaps even my own last words. This is how sonnet 30 starts: "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought / I summon up remembrance of things past.

-Tiago Rodrigues

Creative Team

Set props and costume **Magda Bizarro**
English translation **Tiago Rodrigues**, revised by **Joana Frazão**
Executive production on the original creation **Magda Bizarro, Rita Mendes**



Photo: Magda Bizarro

Additional Resources

Sonnet 30 by William Shakespeare

<http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/sonnet/30>

Curriculum Links

SACE Links

ACARA Links

IB Links