

# LATE COMPANY

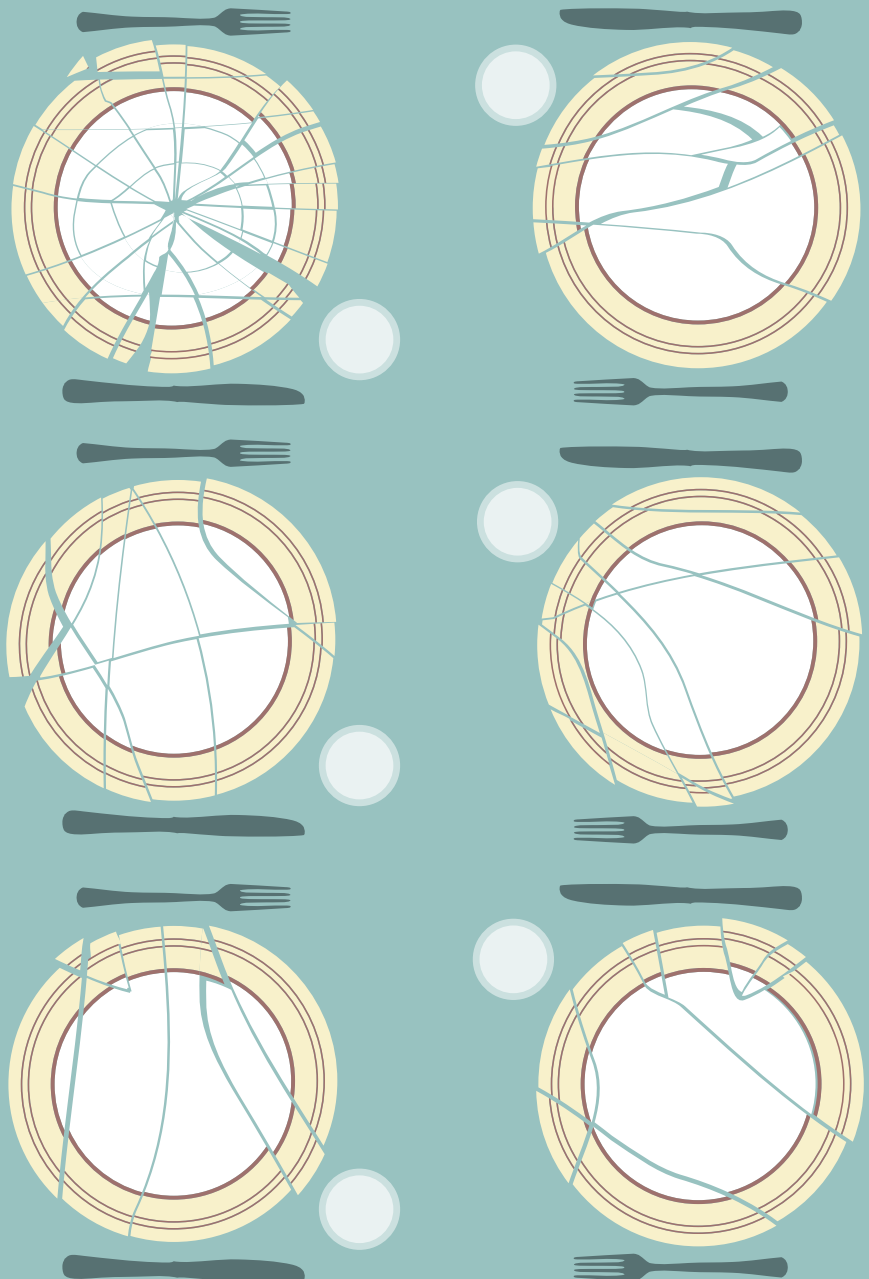
## STUDY GUIDE

MARCH  
5 - 21, 2015

THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES  
GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY

THE  
**Great-West Life**  
ASSURANCE  COMPANY

STRONGER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER™



*This guide compiled by Royal MTC, December 2014.*

Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre  
Presents



**BY JORDAN TANNAHILL**

**Director & Choreographer – Steven Schipper**

**Set & Costume Designer – Brian Perchaluk**

**Lighting Designer – Randy Harder**

**Sound Designer – Michael Wright**

**Apprentice Director – Teri-Lynn Friesen**

**Stage Manager – Leslie Sidley**

**Apprentice Stage Manager – Holly LaJambe**

#### **THE CAST**

**Tamara Dermot – Sharon Bajer**

**Deborah Shaun-Hastings – Terri Cherniack**

**Curtis Dermot – Daniel McIntyre-Ridd**

**Michael Shaun-Hastings – Doug McKeag**

**Bill Dermot – Cory Wojcik**

# THEATRE ETIQUETTE

*"The theater is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental. It's so much like life."* – Arthur Miller

**Arrive Early:** Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please ensure you arrive with enough time to find your seat before the performance starts.

**Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices:** Please **TURN OFF** your cell phones/iPods/gaming systems/cameras. We have seen an increase in texting, surfing, and gaming during performances, which is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. The use of cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.

**Talking During the Performance:** You can be heard (even when whispering!) by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait to share your thoughts and opinions with others until after the performance.

**Food/Drinks:** Food and hot drinks are not allowed in the theatre. Where there is an intermission, concessions may be open for purchase of snacks and drinks. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

**Dress:** There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats in the theatre. We also strive to be a scent-free environment, and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

**Leaving During the Performance:** If an audience member leaves the theatre during a performance, they will be readmitted at the discretion of our Front of House staff. Should they be readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in a vacant seat at the back of the auditorium.

**Being Asked to Leave:** The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave the performance if that person is being disruptive. Inappropriate and disruptive behaviour includes, but is not limited to: talking, using electronic devices, cameras, laser pointers, or other light- or sound-emitting devices, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

**Talkbacks:** All Tuesday evening performances and final matinees at MTC feature a talkback with members of the cast following the show. While watching the performance, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors. Questions can be about the story, the interpretation, life in the theatre, etc.

**Enjoy the show:** Laugh, applaud, cheer and respond to the performance appropriately. Make sure to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause during the curtain call.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jordan Tannahill**, born in Ottawa in 1988, is a playwright, theatre director and filmmaker. His work often explores themes of queer identity, youth subculture, and suburbia. Currently based in Toronto, he is a multimedia theatre artist whose award-winning work as a playwright, producer, and performer brings music, video, and spatial experimentation to his plays. His videos have been screened in festivals and galleries across Canada and internationally.



In 2014 Tannahill received the Governor General's Literary Award for his work *Age of Minority: 3 Solo Plays*. At 26, he is the second-youngest winner in the history of the drama category. He was also selected in 2014 as one of the Canadian art world's 30 Under 30 by ARTINFO, an organization that receives input from artists, academics, and writers nationwide.

To see a list of his extensive work and awards, visit <http://www.jordantannahill.com/about>.

## PLOT

**Deborah and Michael Shaun-Hastings** have invited **Tamara and Bill Dermot** and their teenage son **Curtis** over for dinner. One year ago, the host couple's son, 17-year-old **Joel**, committed suicide in the wake of intense bullying at school – bullying that Curtis took part in. Deborah and Michael have now chosen to reach out to their son's tormenter and his parents, this dinner being the start of the reconciliation process.

As the play begins, Deborah and Michael nervously prepare the dinner table and await their guests, who are late. When Tamara, Bill, and Curtis eventually arrive, the two families appear to be on good terms, even though they are gathering together for the first time in what is sure to be an emotionally charged situation.

As dinner is served and the evening wears on, the differences between the two couples and their parenting styles become more apparent, and underlying tensions surface. Revelations about their gay son's life make Deborah and Michael realize that they did not know Joel as well as they thought they did, and their guilt and anger are exacerbated by Tamara and Bill's attitudes and support of Curtis.

Although each side tries to share their perspective and offer a way to move on, it is clear that Deborah and Michael, along with Curtis, are not ready to let go of their pain.



Richard Greenblatt, Rosemary Dunsmore, Paul Fauteux, Mark Correia & Fiona Highet  
in the original production at the SummerWorks Performance Festival, August 2013.

## CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

*“If it takes a village to raise a child, then who’s to blame when one falls by the wayside? That’s the question lurking at the heart of Jordan Tannahill’s searing, unforgettable drama. There are no easy answers to be found here, only the shattered realities of two families struggling to put a terrible ordeal in the past.” - Kevin Scott, Torontoist*

Welcoming relative strangers into one’s home can be a nerve-wracking proposition under the best of circumstances, but, with the right combination of characters and scenario, it can become a tantalizing recipe for drama. *Late Company* capitalizes on the concept’s inherent ability to manufacture awkwardness and tension.

The story is loosely based on that of Jamie Hubley, the gay 15-year-old son of a Conservative politician, who killed himself in 2011 after being bullied at school. *Late Company* imagines what a restorative justice dinner held a year later might have looked like between the parents of a dead gay son (Joel), his chief tormentor (Curtis), and that boy’s parents.

## **Bullying**

Bullying is a form of aggression that unfolds within a relationship. The teen who bullies uses aggression and control to maintain a position of power over the victim. As bullying evolves over time, the power dynamics and inequality in the relationship become stronger. The victimized teen gets caught in an abusive relationship. This problem can also happen between groups of young people.

In schools, bullying occurs in all areas of school. It can occur in nearly any part in or around the school building, though it more often occurs in PE, recess, hallways, bathrooms, on school buses and waiting for buses, classes that require group work and/or after school activities. Bullying in school sometimes consists of a group of students taking advantage of or isolating one student in particular and gaining the loyalty of bystanders who want to avoid becoming the next victim. Bullies taunt and tease their target before physically bullying the target. Targets of bullying in school are often pupils who are considered strange or different by their peers to begin with, making the situation harder for them to deal with.

Bullying consists of three basic types of abuse - emotional, verbal and physical. It typically involves subtle methods of coercion such as intimidation. The “imbalance of power” may be social power and/or physical power. The victim of bullying is sometimes referred to as a “target.” Bullying is abusive treatment, the use of force or coercion to affect others, particularly when habitual and involving an imbalance of power. It may involve verbal harassment, physical assault or coercion and may be directed persistently towards particular victims, perhaps on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexuality or ability.

There is a strong link between bullying and suicide or “bullycide”. Bullying leads to many suicides among young people every year although it is hard to determine exact numbers.

(From <http://www.stopabully.ca>)

## **Teen Suicide**

In recent years, a series of bullying-related suicides in Canada and across the globe have drawn attention to the connection between bullying and suicide. Though too many adults still see bullying as “just part of being a kid,” it is a serious problem that leads to many negative effects for victims, including suicide. Some of the warning signs of suicide can include:

- Showing signs of depression, like ongoing sadness, withdrawal from others, losing interest in favorite activities, or trouble sleeping or eating;
- Talking about or showing an interest in death or dying;
- Engaging in dangerous or harmful activities, including reckless behavior, substance abuse, or self injury;
- Giving away favorite possessions and saying goodbye to people;
- Saying or expressing that they can't handle things anymore;
- Making comments that things would be better without them.



If a person is displaying these symptoms, talk to them about your concerns and get them help right away, such as from a counselor, doctor, or at the emergency room.

In some cases, it may not be obvious that a teen is thinking about suicide, such as when the suicide seems to be triggered by a particularly bad episode of bullying. In several cases where bullying victims killed themselves, bullies had told the teen that he or she should kill him or herself or that the world would be better without them. Others who hear these types of statements should be quick to stop them and explain to the victim that the bully is wrong. (From <http://www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/bullying-and-suicide.html>)

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is an approach that focuses on the needs of the victims and the offenders, as well as the involved community, instead of satisfying abstract legal principles or punishing the offender. Victims take an active role in the process, while offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, and to repair the harm they've done. In addition, it provides help for the offender in order to avoid future offences. It is based on the theory that the particular wrongdoing was an offence against an individual or community, rather than the state. Restorative justice that fosters dialogue between victim and offender has been shown to offer the highest rates of victim satisfaction and offender accountability. (From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restorative\\_justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restorative_justice))



**It Gets Better** <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>

In a conversation between Michael and Bill, an “It Gets Better” video is mentioned. The *It Gets Better* Project is an international support network for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. Many young people face daily tormenting and bullying, leading them to feel like they have nowhere to turn. This is especially true for LGBT kids and teens, who often hide their sexuality for fear of bullying. Because many of these teens can’t see a positive future for themselves, the *It Gets Better* Project was created to show young LGBT people the joy and success they will experience – if they can just get

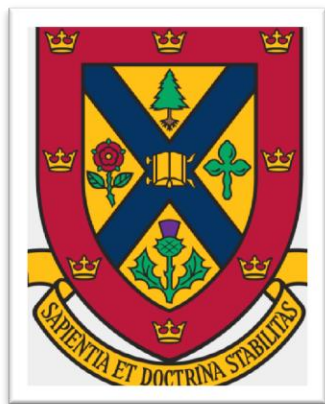
through their teen years. The project wants to remind teenagers in the LGBT community that they are not alone — and it WILL get better.

The project is endorsed by politicians, celebrities and other teens, and its website has over 50,000 user-created videos of people sharing their stories with positive messages. Notable submissions include videos from the RCMP and NASA.

## GLOSSARY

The **11<sup>th</sup> hour** is the latest possible time to do something, before it becomes too late.

An **alma mater** is a school, college, or university at which a person has studied and (usually) graduated.



**Antithetical** refers to ideas that are in direct opposition to, or incompatible with, one another.

**Christie Blatchford** is a Canadian newspaper columnist, journalist and broadcaster who has written for all four major Toronto newspapers.

**Margaret Wente** is a columnist for *The Globe and Mail* who provokes heated debate with her views on health care, education, and social issues.

**Guac**, or guacamole, is an avocado-based dip.

To **pathologize** is to treat someone or something as psychologically abnormal or unhealthy.

A **prescient** person is one who has knowledge of events before they take place.

**Steven and Chris** are the hosts of a lifestyle show of the same name on CBC television, offering tips on interior design, fashion, beauty, health, and relationships.



**Ululation** is a long, high-pitched, and wavering vocal sound that is used in different cultures to express strong emotion (for example, to celebrate, cheer, mourn, or signify grief). [Click here](#) for a short video.



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## Discussion

1. As the evening unfolds, it becomes apparent that the two couples, Deborah and Michael, and Tamara and Bill, have different parenting styles. Can you think of some examples that highlight these different styles? How might these differences have played a part in the lives of Joel and Curtis?
2. Michael doesn't easily accept that his son was gay. What do you think drives his reluctance?
3. When Deborah found out that Joel was having trouble with bullies at school, she went to the principal, who said he spoke with Joel's teachers and the parents of the bullies. Tamara and Bill contend that the school never told them there was a problem with Curtis' behaviour. What do you think schools could do to help prevent bullying? How should they best deal with it after it has occurred? What role could restorative justice play in schools?
4. The story in *Late Company* has a "ripped from the headlines" feel to it. Across Canada we have seen a rash of teen suicides which have been precipitated by mental health issues and bullying. Is there anything that we, as individuals and community members, can do to prevent these tragedies?

## Activities

1. Research information and create a document (list, poster, web page, etc.) that informs parents of the signs that their child might be involved in a bullying situation. Include warning signs of suicide, information on where to turn for help, and how parents could get involved. Share your project with the school so it can be distributed to parents and guardians.
2. Do some research into restorative justice and present a case study. Findings could be shared in a report, a dramatization, or a visual representation.
3. Re-imagine the setting of the play – what if, instead of a dinner held in one family's home, the discussion between the two families had been held somewhere else? What impact might a change in setting have? For example, what if the discussion took place somewhere public? Alternatively, how might the story be different if it were daughters that were involved, instead of sons?
4. Write and act in your own scenes that incorporate the themes from *Late Company* (confrontation, reconciliation, parental expectations, etc.). Consider including information that some characters know and others do not.

## REFERENCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

<http://arts.nationalpost.com/2014/11/18/thomas-king-wins-gg/>

<http://www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/bullying-and-suicide.html>

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/gay-ottawa-teen-who-killed-himself-was-bullied-1.1009474>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan\\_Tannahill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Tannahill)

<http://www.mooneyontheatre.com/2013/08/09/late-company-suburban-beast-surfaceunderground-2013-summerworks-review/>

<http://www.stopabully.ca/>

<http://torontoist.com/2013/08/our-10-favourite-things-from-summerworks-2013/>

<http://torontoist.com/2013/08/our-favourite-summerworks-2013-plays/>

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/peacestudies/2012playreading>