

# ENRICHMENT GUIDE

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2022



## THE RUNNER

By Christopher Morris

A Human Cargo Production

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MANITOBA THEATRE CENTRE

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# The Runner

## Enrichment Guide

Provided by Tarragon Theatre

With Contributions From:  
Ksenia Broda-Milian

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The Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1 land, the traditional territory of the Ininew, Anishinaabe and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, and we are committed to the responsibilities of the Treaty. Hiy Hiy, Miigwetch, Wopida and Maarsii.

## Playwright and Performer

### Christopher Morris

Christopher is an actor, director and the Artistic Director of Human Cargo. His selected playwriting credits include *The Runner* (Human Cargo, Theatre Passe Muraille); *Our Beautiful Sons* (Blyth Festival – 2014 Playwright in Residence); *The Road to Paradise* (co-playwright with Jonathan Garfinkel – Human Cargo, Crow’s Theatre, Buddies in Bad Times); *Night* (commissioned by Human Cargo and premiered at the National Arts Centre, toured nationally and internationally); and *Return: The Sarajevo Project* (co-playwright Theatrefront).



Christopher’s theatre acting includes *Measure for Measure*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Botticelli in the Fire*, *Hedda Gabler* (Canadian Stage); *A Doll’s House*, *Noises Off*, *A Winter’s Tale*, *A Chorus for Disapproval* (Soulpepper); *Oedipus Rex*, *Diary of Anne Frank* (Stratford Festival); *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, *Stuff Happens* (National Arts Centre), and his film acting includes *Frankie Drake*, *The Girlfriend Experience*, *Orphan Black*, *Murdoch Mysteries*, *In Contempt*, *Coroner* (CBC); *Painkiller* (Netflix).

Christopher is currently adapting *The Runner* into a TV series with Sienna Films. His scripts in development are *Éclatée*, and *Annie Pootoogook: Portrait of an Artist*. He has won a Dora Award for *The Runner*, the 2012 Canada Council John Hirsh Prize for Directing, the 2005 KM Hunter Award for Theatre, and earned a Dora nomination for *Return: The Sarajevo Project*.

## About Human Cargo

Human Cargo is a Toronto-based theatre company mandated to the creation, production and touring of new theatrical works. Founded in 2007 by artistic director Christopher Morris, Human Cargo creates innovative, theatrical experiences that provide audiences with a safe environment to engage in a thorough and provocative discussion of ideas.

We collaborate with theatre artists and companies in Canada, and around the world, to create our work. We develop our plays over long periods, in the countries and communities the play is set in, and present these productions in Canada and the places they were developed. To date, Human Cargo has worked in Nunavut, Iceland,

Greenland, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Republic of Georgia, CFB Petawawa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and Central African Republic. We've presented our work in English, Inuktitut, Icelandic and Dari. Committed to removing the geographic/financial/cultural barriers between potential audiences and our work, we implement a touring/presentation model that reaches out to a new generation of viewing public. We believe this is the only way to engage 21st Century audiences in Toronto, Canada and the World.

Projects currently in development are *The China Project* (a collaboration with Beijing playwright Zhuang Yi and Hong Kong born/Canadian playwright Jeff Ho), *Éclatée* (a french-language collaboration with Quebec theatre artists) and *Annie Pootoogook: Portrait of an Artist* (a collaboration with Inuk performers and Montréal's Mirari multidisciplinary creative studio).

You can find more information at [Humancargo.ca](http://Humancargo.ca)

## Playwright's Note

I want to create theatre that explores the extremes of the human condition. I'm interested in what happens to us when we are pushed to our spiritual, moral, and emotional limits because it's at these times we see the best, and worst, of who we are.

The Runner focuses on the pushback a Z.A.K.A. member experiences when his devotion to serve others – regardless of their race or creed – clashes with the divisive beliefs of the community around him. As we slide further down the path of political and social division, now more than ever, we need to champion those who put human decency above tribalism, while knowing full well the consequences they'll face.

This play is dedicated to Jakoff Mueller, a Z.A.K.A. member in Israel who passed away in February 2018. He first welcomed me into his home in 2010 and over the years we spent many hours talking about the experiences he had working with Z.A.K.A., from the harrowing to the profound. He was my beacon of light as I navigated the murky currents of this play. Jakoff was a beautiful soul, full of compassion and self-deprecating humor. While passing away from cancer, he was surrounded by his loving family and friends, and in death, was shown the same tenderness and care he offered to so many.

With love, Jakoff, thank you.

## Content Overview

**This section may contain spoilers.**

*The Runner* contains a few instances of strong language, and much mature content. As a one-person show, events are not depicted realistically onstage, but you will hear descriptions and discussion of war, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, drunkenness (another character drinks heavily to deal with a traumatic incident), a mass grave, antisemitism, anti-Palestinian sentiment and Islamophobia, graphic descriptions of violence and traumatic death, mention of bare breasts, and one incident of description of group sex with men. Sensory advisory: The production contains strobing lights and loud sounds. Topics include conflict, religion, polarization, humanity, and connection.

## Plot Summary

ZAKA is an Orthodox Jewish volunteer force in Israel. They collect the remains of Jews killed in accidents. When Jacob, a ZAKA volunteer, makes a split-second decision to save the life of a suspected stabber instead of the soldier they may have killed, his world is changed forever. Based on a real-life rescue and recovery ZAKA member, the play urges us to consider the value of human connection in a world so profoundly divided. This one-person play is based on the life of a real ZAKA member.

## Listen to the Play

We hope you'll join us in person for this production, but if you can't make it to the theatre or need to hear it again, CBC's PlayME podcast released *The Runner* in May 2020. You can listen to the play here: [Part 1](#) [Part 2](#) [Part 3](#)

## Playwright Insights

Article: from [Broadway World](#), about the impetus for writing the play and research process.

Video: from [Intermission Magazine](#), Morris discusses Human Cargo's mission and the play's imagery. (3 minutes)

Podcast: [CBC's PlayME interview with Morris](#) was recorded early in the pandemic, so they discuss those effects on the play as well as its creation and Human Cargo. This interview contains spoilers. (30 minutes)



## Contextual Background

Provided by Tarragon Theatre

### What is ZAKA?

**Video - Collecting Dead Bodies in Israel for Burial: Z.A.K.A.** A VICE documentary that follows volunteer Eliezer Summit.

**Z.A.K.A.' s Official Website** The official website of the organization provides a great amount of insight into the work that they do, the history of the organization, and news about their current endeavours.

**Article: Grief and anger as families try to identify loved ones killed in Ethiopia Airlines crash** A CBC article about the families of crash victims in Ethiopia and the work done to identify the remains, including two Israeli passengers who ZAKA went to help recover. An opportunity to think about ZAKA's the international scope.

**Article: Volunteer medic group rejects treating terrorists and victims equally** As mentioned in the play, a Times of Israel Article detailing the December 2015 decision by ZAKA, to unequivocally disregard a directive from the Israel Medical Association to triage all casualties at a terror scene — including the terrorists who carried out the attack — according to the severity of their wounds

### Understanding Polarization in the Modern World

As defined by Intercultural Developmental Inventory, polarization is an evaluative mindset that views cultural differences from an “us versus them” perspective. Polarization can take the form of Defense (“My cultural practices are superior to other cultural practices”) or Reversal (“Other cultures are better than mine”). Within Defense, cultural differences are often seen as divisive and threatening to one’s own “way of doing things.” Reversal is a mindset that values and may idealize other cultural practices while denigrating one’s own culture group. Reversal may also support the “cause” of an oppressed group, but this is done with little knowledge of what the “cause” means to people from the oppressed community.

**Video - Us vs Them: Immigration, Empathy and Psychology** From the Brain Craft series, science educator and psychology expert Vanessa Hill helps explain the psychology behind the Us vs. Them mentality.

**Podcast - Tribalism: How we Overcome the "Us" vs. "Them" Mentality** An episode of Alan Alda's Clear + Vivid about the world's increasing polarization. An overview of the topic and suggestions from guests including politicians and comedians. (20 minutes)

**Article: Why the Israel-Palestine Conversation is so Polarized** From Vox; diving into why the conversation around Israel is so polarizing, with a particular focus on some of the psychological factors behind our desire to find information that supports our initial understanding.

**Podcast: Throughline** An NPR podcast outlining the history of the Israel-Palestine region, the settlements and displacement going back to the age of European colonialism. (55 minutes)

**Book: Why We're Polarized** (available as eBook or hard copy from Winnipeg Public Library) A book that looks at the polarization of United States politics not as a new phenomenon but as a result of a system built to be that way. An in-depth and interesting look at this topic by political analyst and journalist Ezra Klein.

### **LGBTQ Rights in Israel**

**LGBTQ History in Israel** A point form list outlining the development and history of LGBTQ rights in Israel.

**Article: Israel Presents Itself as Haven for the Gay Community** A brief NPR article about the current state of LGBTQ rights in Israel.

**The “Gayfication” of Tel Aviv: Investigating Israel’s Pro-gay Brand** This UCLA/NYU academic article provides an in-depth analysis of Tel Aviv’s political move towards LGBT inclusion and its active incorporation of not only gay citizens but the accompanying profitable “gay-tourism.”



Gord Rand as Jacob (photo: Christopher Morris)

## Discussion Questions

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### Pre-Show

- What do you think it looks/sounds like to be a ZAKA volunteer /emergency care provider in a conflict zone?
- What are some of the ethical dilemmas emergency care providers might face?
- What does it mean when we talk about how the world is currently polarized?
- How does that polarization impact you as a resident of Canada?

### Post-Show

- What was the impact of having Jacob constantly in motion for the whole play?
- Why do you think the team chose a treadmill for the design?
- How did the play touch on us vs. them/polarization in the world?
- How did Jacob change from the beginning to the end of the play?
- What questions are you still left with as an audience member?



Gord Rand as Jacob (photo: Christopher Morris)



## Curriculum Connections

Attending the production of *The Runner*, accessing these resources, and/or discussing it, connect to the Manitoba Senior Years curricula in the following ways.

### **Drama/Theatre (Senior Years)**

Responding: The learner uses critical reflection to inform drama/theatre learning and to develop agency and identity.

- DR-R1: The learner generates initial reactions to drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R2: The learner critically observes and describes drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R3: The learner analyzes and interprets drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R4: The learner applies new understandings about drama/ theatre to construct identity and to act in transformative ways.

### **English Language Arts (Senior 1 through 4)**

General Learning Outcome 1: Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.

Express ideas 1.1.1

Consider others' ideas 1.1.2

Develop understanding 1.2.1

Combine ideas 1.2.3

General Learning Outcome 2: Comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts.

Experience various texts 2.2.1

Appreciate the artistry of texts 2.2.3

Forms and genres 2.3.1

General Learning Outcome 3: Manage ideas and information.

Develop new understanding 3.3.4

General Learning Outcome 5: Celebrate and build community.

Relate texts to culture 5.2.2

### **Grade 12 Global Issues**

Area of Inquiry: Peace and Conflict

## Theatre Etiquette

**Arrive Early:** Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please make sure you give yourself 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/smart watches. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is never allowed.

**Talking During the Performance:** Even when you whisper, you can be heard by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Unless you are at a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

**Food/Drinks:** Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

**Dress:** There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully ask you not to wear 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 Front of House staff. If they are readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in an empty 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 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 devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, 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.