

## Family Discussion Guide

*The Laramie Project* invites response. Everyone's response will be different, because it will stir up different things in each person. After you watch the show as a family, it will be important to process it together. Depending on the ages and personalities of your family members, some of these prompts will be more helpful than others. Use whatever prompts work for you!

### Initial Questions

- What did you notice happening in your body as you watched the play?
- What made you uncomfortable? Excited? Angry? Sad?
- What was confusing?
  - Grown-ups: This is a good opportunity for you to admit that you find some things confusing, too! It's okay to not have answers or "fixes" for the confusion here. It's great to just name it.
- Did you ever laugh or cry as you watched it?
- This show isn't a linear telling of the story. See if your household can tell the story together - this may help all of you have some clarity in what the story was!
- There were different spiritual leaders (like pastors) in the play. Which ones do you remember? Do you remember what they said? Their attitudes toward Matthew Shepard?
  - If you have a pastor, how do you think they would respond to something like this?
  - Different people interpret what the Bible says in different ways. And sometimes, those differences in interpretation cause a lot of conflict. There is room for different ways of interpreting things, and it's important to respect differences. But any time people (like Fred Phelps in this play) quote the Bible to incite violence, the Bible is being abused. Jesus is clear that love for God and love for neighbor is the most important thing.
- The Tectonic Theater Project members interviewed some people several times over the year after Matthew's death. Did you notice changes in people? Jedadiah Shultz, the student who usually sat on the front of the stage, is one example. Talk about this. People do change their minds sometimes as their understanding grows.
  - What's something you've changed your opinion about?

### About the Show

- **Docudrama:** *The Laramie Project* is a docudrama, a specific kind of theater. Every word spoken in the show comes from an interview, a journal entry, or a news story. In other words, the "writers" didn't actually write lines for people. They put together the actual words spoken by these real-life people.
  - ***Did the people in this play remind you of any people you know?***
  - ***Look up people portrayed in this show and learn more about them!***
- **The Setting:** At the time of the events of this play, Laramie, Wyoming was about the size of Goshen. It's home to the University of Wyoming. Like Goshen, it has a small-town feel, and also like Goshen, the college plays a big role in the identity of the town.
  - Everyone is connected to everyone in Laramie.

- There is a divide between the “university people” and the “town people.” Sometimes, they don’t trust each other.
- **Hate Crime:** “A crime, typically one involving violence, that is motivated by prejudice on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, or other grounds.” (Oxford Dictionary) In Aaron McKinney’s confession, as well as in interviews with him by the Tectonic Theater Project since this play was written, he is clear that his and Russell’s actions were motivated by hate for Matthew based on his sexuality.
  - ***Look up hate crime legislation, and learn more about the process of its development.***
  - ***How do you think hate crime should be addressed?***
- **Practice Having Conversations:** This is something the whole cast did, and we invite you to try it too! It takes vulnerability to really listen to others. It takes practice to suspend judgment and exercise curiosity. Try these exercises:
  - Interview someone you don’t know well. Ask them questions about their life, their story. Get to know them well.
    - If you want to take it a step further, record your conversation, then take 30-60 seconds of it and perform it, with you portraying the person you interviewed.
  - Do you disagree with someone on something? It might be something as simple as liking cats better when your sister prefers dogs. Have a conversation with each other, really listening to the other person’s reasons for their opinions. Your goal is to understand, even if you don’t agree.
    - Take it a step further and have the conversation again, but this time, switch parts - in other words, be the other person in the conversation.
- **Moment Work:** This play was created by Tectonic Theater Project through a process called Moment Work. It’s very collaborative, and they work with all the elements of theater (props, sound, lights, costumes,...) to create something theatrical. “The technique is our attempt to create theatrical narratives from the ground up—in other words, to ‘write performance’ as opposed to ‘writing text.’ When we start work on a new play, we start with an idea, or a ‘hunch,’ and then we go into the rehearsal room to explore it through Moment Work.” (from tectonictheaterproject.org)
  - Here’s an exercise from Moment Work that we used to create this play. Try it with your household!
    - ***Place a collection of random “props” (chairs, household items...) in the middle of the room.***
    - ***Take turns coming to the props and choosing one to present in a way other than its intended use. When you’re ready, say “I begin,” and utilize the prop. When you’re done, say, “I end,” and set it down. For example, one of our actors picked up a step stool and held it over his head so he was peeking out between the steps. He said, “I begin,” and proceeded to walk like he was in zero-gravity, transforming the prop into an astronaut helmet.” After a few steps, he said, “I end,” and set it down.***

- *After you've found your way with this exercise, add a twist. When a person begins, ask, "How can we further theatricalize this moment?" Add other people/props, sound, and lights. In the example above, maybe you turn the lights off and shine a flashlight on the "astronaut" while making wind sounds.*
- **For more background information:** The Tectonic Theater Project has a guide with background information and exploration ideas in it. See <https://www.tectonictheaterproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/BAMLaramieStudyGuide.pdf>.