

Shakespeare's Globe

ACTIVITY 517
continued

My Notes

imposter: a deceptive person
 betrothed: engaged to marry

immense: huge
catharsis: the release of built-up emotions

portal: gateway; entrance

transcends: rises above
nuances: slight variations

3 The play focuses less on their romance and more on how families, communities and nations can easily and quickly be torn apart. The story prompts the audience to reflect on how pride, regret, a lack of mutual understanding and interference from the outside are obstacles to resolving conflicts peacefully. Once blood has been spilled, we are never sure if peace can be restored.

4 The play's director, Monadhil Daood, fled Iraq in his 20s after staging a play under Saddam Hussein about the Iran-Iraq war. In 2008, he founded the Iraqi Theatre Company to "bring a contemporary cultural voice of unity and inclusiveness into the civic discourse in Iraq." Monadhil says that "I think my [play] *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* will be a mirror. The audience will see themselves on the stage."

5 In the buzzing auditorium, I saw his prediction come true. The emotional effect the play had on its audience was clear. During the performance, many had eyes filled with tears. At joyous moments, audience members tapped along to the wedding songs and laughed at the inclusion of an old Iraqi folk story about a beetle looking for love.

6 During the most emotional moment of all, I felt almost swept off my chair at the audience's roar of approval as the **imposter**, who was **betrothed** to Juliet against her will, and who had stoked the tension between the two families, was cast out by Juliet's father, Capulet. This character, a miserable hard-liner, represents the presence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Through Capulet's action, the betrothal is reversed and his presence is no longer accepted.

7 The real story of *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* is of the audience, who see their lives played out before their eyes. The drama was a chance to create enough distance from their own stories so that they could look at the effect of the last nine years on their homeland, with its **immense** loss, death, and suffering. It was an opportunity to move on, make sense, find **catharsis**, and even laugh.

8 The play at its heart is a universal story of the birth and development of conflict, stoked by fear, misunderstanding, and pride. It shows how outside forces can stoke conflict and divide groups of people, and reflects on the need for unity.

9 In this case, a love story is a **portal** into a world that audiences might otherwise never be able to begin to understand. By connecting with the story of young lovers—a theme that **transcends** time and culture—we can learn about the **nuances** of today's Iraqi society. The play helps viewers understand tight-knit family structures and the once strong historic relationships between Sunni and Shiite Muslims that are now being broken down. In fact, people around the world might find a lot in common with the ordinary folk of Iraq and their aspirations to bring an end to violence and live better lives.

10 But more importantly, through such plays, we are confronted with universal truths: conflict persists across human societies and it must be addressed before it spirals out of control. But most of all, the aspiration to love and be loved is present in all times and places, whether in Baghdad or Verona, for lovers like Romeo and Juliet, or for brothers like Montague and Capulet.