The Laramie Project Cycle FAQs

What is Tectonic Theater Project?
Tectonic Theater Project is a developmental company that creates and produces works for the stage that rigorously explore theatrical language and form. Based in New York City, we build plays from the ground up and bring new life to existing scripts on stages across the United States and around the world.

The company is behind such plays as Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde, The Laramie Project Cycle, I Am My Own Wife, One Arm, El Gato con Botas, 33 Variations (5 Tony nominations, including a Best Actress nomination for Jane Fonda), The Tallest Tree in the Forest, and Uncommon Sense.

Tectonic has received numerous awards including the Humanitas Prize, the Obie, the Lucille Lortel Award, The Outer Critics Circle Award, the GLAAD Media Award, the Artistic Integrity Award from HRC, and the Making a Difference Award from the Matthew Shepard Foundation.

What is The Laramie Project?
A month after the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, the members of Tectonic Theater Project traveled to Laramie, Wyoming to conduct interviews with the people of the town. From these interviews, they wrote The Laramie Project, which has become one of the most performed plays in America in the last decade. The company later collaborated with HBO in 2002 to create a film version of the play starring Peter Fonda, Laura Linney, Christina Ricci, and Steve Buscemi, and members of the original company, among others. It opened the 2002 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for 4 Emmys (Outstanding Made for TV Movie, Outstanding Directing of a TV Movie, Outstanding Writing, Outstanding Casting). Combined, the play and the movie have been seen by more than 20 million people around the world.

What inspired Tectonic to go to Laramie in 1998?
There are thousands of anti-gay hate crimes a year, yet in 1998 this crime captured America’s attention. The members of Tectonic went to Laramie to record how this event had affected the town and its residents. The hope was that this would shed light on the ideas and beliefs that were shaping our nation.
There was also a polarization that took place in the national conversation that led to: a) an oversimplification of vastly complicated ideas, like prejudice, class issues, gender issues, and b) many bigoted people being allowed to take center stage, as the media found it necessary to spotlight two sides in a debate about homosexuality. Tectonic’s goal was to find the story of the people of Laramie in their own words.

From a theatrical perspective, Tectonic was curious about what role theater artists can have in a national dialogue about current events.

Why did Tectonic return in 2008?
The murder of Matthew Shepard had such a seismic impact on this small town in America, that the company wanted to try to observe what, if any, were the long-lasting effects of such a crime. How does a town look 10 years after an episode of this magnitude? Have the attitudes changed? The mythologies? Has change occurred that’s concrete and lasting?

For these reasons, the group returned to re-interview past participants, conduct new interviews with Laramie residents and most significantly, interview Judy Shepard and Aaron McKinney (one of Matthew Shepard’s murderers).

Which of the company members returned in 2008?

On October 12, 2009, the 11th anniversary of the death of Matthew Shepard, Tectonic Theater Project premiered The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later at Alice Tully Hall at New York’s Lincoln Center. The play was simultaneously performed in 150 theaters in all 50 states and 8 countries.

What was the motivation for this event?
The Laramie Project is a play with a tremendous historical and cultural impact. Tectonic is proud to have initiated a nationwide unveiling of the epilogue as a reminder to itself, its audiences, and its communities that Matthew Shepard’s story still reverberates, and that, unfortunately, many of the issues the murder brought up are still unresolved.

Tectonic also wanted to participate in a great experiment reminiscent of The Federal Theatre
Project. The Federal Theatre Project would perform the same play in dozens of theaters across the country simultaneously. Tectonic’s nationwide performance event was a nod to that period to show how theater can play a role in a national dialogue. To help facilitate that conversation, a pre- and post-show component was also broadcast live to all the participating theaters, with an introduction by the writers, as well as appearances from special guests, and a post-show Question and Answer session.

Why does Tectonic think these plays are important?

The Laramie Project portrayed one town in America at the end of the millennium. In doing so, it also managed to capture something profoundly American, something about social injustices, about beliefs, and about idiosyncrasies. While it told the story of one American town, it also spoke to America as a whole.

The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later looks at what has and has not changed in Laramie since Matthew’s 1998 murder. It also explores how people construct stories and history, both on an individual level and on a societal level. The two plays together attempt to promote dialogue about equality and justice, and examine how people and communities construct and reconstruct narrative and perspective.

These plays generate a lot of controversy, protests, and calls for cancellation. How do you respond to that?

It is okay for theater to be controversial. The goal of The Laramie Project Cycle is to promote thoughtful discussion and give audiences the opportunity to hear many different points-of-view from those who knew Matthew Shepard and the town of Laramie best. Yes, there have been protests, but they only demonstrate the need for more education and conversation about the issues that are explored in the plays.

If a production in which you’re involved is receiving negative press, please reach out to Bree Luck, Director of the Moment Work Institute at bree@tectonictheaterproject.org for support.

How does one get permission to stage The Laramie Project?

Contact Dramatists Play Service. Go here for more information and to apply online.

Is there a shorter version or can the play be cut to a shorter length?

No. The play may not be altered in any way without the express written permission of Tectonic
Can obscenities be edited from the script?
In the case of school productions, we understand that obscenities need to be edited. Permission can be granted by sending a request to education@tectonictheaterproject.org

Can performances of The Laramie Project be taped?
No. Audiotapes or videotapes of any production of The Laramie Project are not permitted.

Is the original design of the poster for The Laramie Project available for use?
Yes. To obtain the licensing rights to use the image, please contact Theatre Logos Agency at http://www.theatrelogos.com