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Newport High School Presents *The Laramie Project*

BELLEVUE, Wash. – Newport High School’s Drama Program takes on a timely social issue in their immersive production of *The Laramie Project* this month.

In 1998, Matthew Shepard a college student and gay man in the small town of Laramie, Wyoming was brutally murdered. The disturbing incident threw the town into a very public self-examination, helped to accelerate the rising gay rights movement, and spurred on a push for national hate crime legislation. Ever since, the full motive for Shepard’s murder has been the subject of passionate debate, even as *The Laramie Project*, a play based on the event and its aftermath, has been continuously and widely performed throughout the United States and Great Britain. Created by the New York-based Tectonic Theatre Project, the play is an unconventional collage of “moments,” based on interviews and testimony about the murder and its effect on the people of Laramie.

Newport’s upcoming production of *The Laramie Project* focuses on the struggle of a community to accept and respond to a horrific incident in a supposedly tolerant environment. Director Katherine Klekas cites Newport’s diverse student body as one of the features that drew her to the school three years ago, so she was surprised and dismayed to hear members of the school’s Black Student Union (BSU) report last year that they continued to experience racist speech and attitudes at school. Like the residents of Laramie, some staff members found themselves thinking, “that can’t happen here...but apparently it does.”

Newport’s production emphasizes the need for a full-community discussion by staging the play in-the-round, with cast members sitting among the audience and the audience at times becoming involved in the action. The multi-generational cast includes 29 students, a school administrator, three teachers and a parent.

The Laramie Project will be performed in the Newport High School Theatre April 20, 21, 27 and 28 at 7 p.m. and a matinee on April 28 at 2 p.m. Tickets will be available at the door. For more information contact Katherine Klekas at klekask@bsd405.org.