

# TOURC® Study Guide - Beneath Springhill



# **Beneath Springhill: The Maurice Ruddick Story**

## **Study Guide**

Created and Performed by Beau Dixon

Directed by Linda Kash

Assistant Directed & Co-Produced by Andrea  
Houssin

Music & Lyrics by Susan Newman & Rob Fortin

Produced by Firebrand Theatre

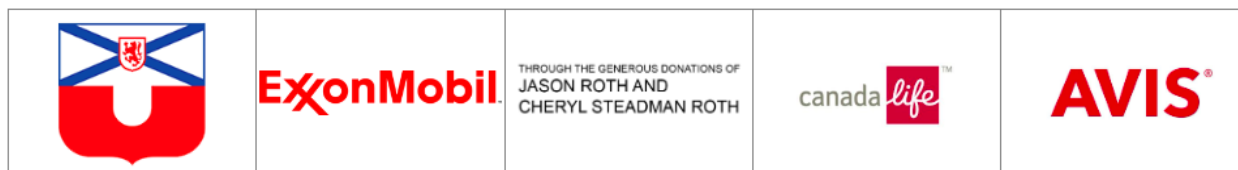
Film Production by Paradigm Pictures

Shared by Neptune Theatre's TourCo

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**A huge round of applause to our sponsors!**



# Playwright's Note - Beau Dixon



In 2010, a friend approached me and told me about an African Canadian coal miner who was named Citizen of the Year for saving the lives of the last six surviving coal miners in the Springhill disaster. His name was Maurice Ruddick. He was a devoted husband to his wife Norma and a loving father of thirteen (their thirteenth baby, Maureen, was born two years after the Bump) living in Springhill, Nova Scotia. Maurice was a man of mixed race- like me. He also had a deep passion for singing- like me- and he had thirteen kids (my father had thirteen siblings). It would be fair to say that it was his singing that kept them alive while trapped two miles beneath the earth's surface for almost nine days. It would also be fair to say that music has saved my life many times over. I knew I was destined to write a play about this heroic unsung hero.

The Springhill mining disaster, which occurred on October 23, 1958, was the most severe bump (earth tremor) in North American history. The Bump devastated the people of Springhill, Nova Scotia due to the casualties they suffered. It also devastated the town, as the coal industry had been its economic lifeblood. The disaster became famous for being the first major international event to appear on live television broadcasts (on the CBC).

As I interviewed friends and relatives of Maurice Ruddick, I learned a great deal about humanity, survival, and the strength of a community. Maurice's story of survival also encouraged me to ask some important questions: How do we deal with life and death decisions? Where does hope lie when we're faced with difficult choices? What does it mean to be human?...

Beneath Springhill has travelled with me throughout Canada. I'm thrilled it's finally being performed 'virtually' in the province where it all happened! I hope Maurice's story inspires you as much as it has inspired me.



# About Neptune Theatre TourCo



An integral part of Neptune Theatre, TourCo visits over seventy schools annually, and has brought theatre for young people to thousands of students all over Nova Scotia. This year we are venturing back into schools, while continuing to share our fantastic digital content.

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## A Message From Laura Caswell, Director of Education



We are thrilled to be returning to schools in Nova Scotia. **Neptune TourCo** had to shift to digital presentations with the Covid-19 pandemic, but we are back bigger and better than ever!

As part of our Digital Package, we bring you *Beneath Springhill: The Maurice Ruddick Story*. A deeply impactful Nova Scotian story expertly told in this one-man show.

We hope this study guide will help you implement discussions, group exercises and student reflection into your classroom. We are passionate about the arts in the education of young people, and no barrier can stop us from doing this work.

**Laura Caswell**  
**Director of Education**  
**Producer of TourCo**

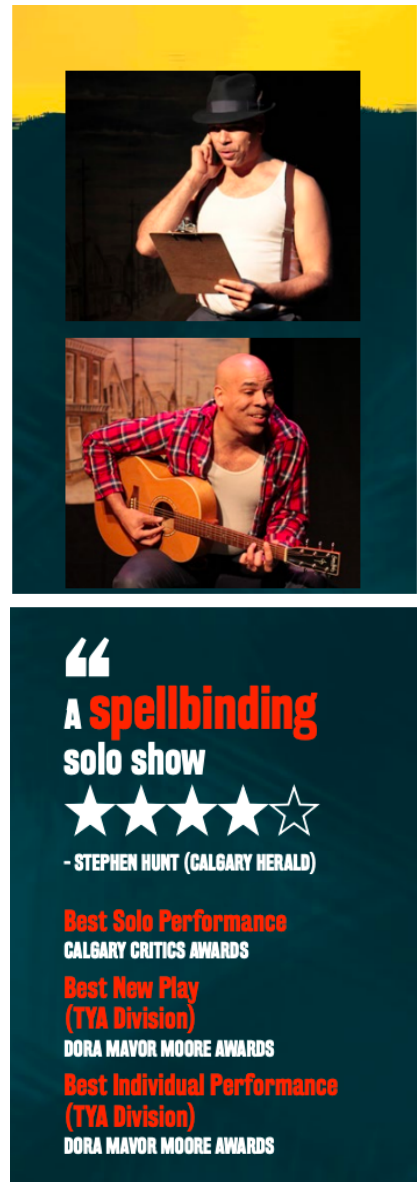
# Synopsis

This sixty minute chamber musical chronicles the life of Maurice Ruddick, an African Canadian who survived the historic mining disaster in Springhill, Nova Scotia in 1958. Ruddick was awarded "Citizen of the Year" for saving the lives of his fellow workers.

This one man show will recall the events of seven miners trapped two miles beneath a small mining town, the effect it had on their rural Canadian community and the racial tension that surfaced as a result.

Actor Beau Dixon portrays 10 characters: Maurice; the six miners whose lives he was credited with saving; a news reporter; Valerie, one of Ruddick's 13 children; and Ruddick's wife, Norma.

Beneath Springhill is a story filled with tragedy, drama and comical - yet conflicting - moments of hope and bravery.



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## Meet the Team



### Beau Dixon Playwright / Performer

Beau is a self-taught, multi award-winning actor, composer, playwright, sound designer, and music director. Beau was inducted into Peterborough's Pathway of Fame for his leadership in the arts. He is also a KM Hunter Award Finalist. He has three recorded solo albums under his name - [www.beaudixon.com](http://www.beaudixon.com)

Selected theatre credits: *Guys 'n' Dolls*, *HMS Pinafore*, *Freedom Cabaret* (Stratford Festival); *Ghost Quartet*, *Road to Paradise* (Crow's Theatre); *Marjorie Prime*, *The Father* (Coalmine Theatre); *The Colour Purple* (Neptune Theatre); *Hamlet*, *Harlem Duet*, *Next to Normal* (Tarragon Theatre); *Ma*

*Rainey's Black Bottom*, *27 Club*, *Secret Chord* (Soulpepper Theatre); *As You Like It / Titus Andronicus* (Canstage / Shakespeare in High Park); *Passing Strange* (Obsidian / Musical Stage Co.). Selected writing credits: *Bloom: A Rock 'n' Roll Fable* (4th Line Theatre); *Beneath Springhill* (Arts Club / Festival Players); *From Here to Africville*, *Once A Flame* (Factory Theatre). Select musical direction: *Stop the World* (Talk is Free Theatre); *Pippin* (Sheridan College); *Freedom: Spirit and Legacy of Black Music* (Stratford Festival). Selected sound design: *The Big Sleep* (Vertigo); *Poison* (Coalmine); *Cottagers and Indians* (Tarragon). Nominations & awards: Two Dora Mavor Moore Awards, Two Toronto Critics Awards, Calgary Critics Award, Betty Mitchell nomination, and a Dora Mavor Moore nomination.



## **Linda Kash** **Director / Dramaturg**

Linda began her professional life at the Second City in Toronto. Linda has been a guest on *Seinfeld*, *Third Rock From the Sun*, *Monk*, *Cybill*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Ellen*, and *Sabrina*, but she is primarily known as Canada's beloved Kraft Philadelphia Cream Cheese Angel. She also worked on Ken Finkleman's series for CBC *Hotel Metropolitan* (Gemini Award), *Hatching*, *Matching & Dispatching* with Mary Walsh, *Ron James Show* and *The Mercer Report*. Her list of films include *Waiting for Guffman* and *Best in Show*, the multi nominated *Cinderella Man*, *Man of the Year*, and *Are We Done Yet*. Linda is an ongoing morning co-host for the radio station 96.7 fm and has co-created several shows for TV. Linda also has taught sketch writing and improvisation for Humber College. In 2009 she and her late husband founded The Peterborough Academy of Performing Arts. Daughter of the late great Canadian opera singer Maureen Forrester and the late great violinist/conductor Eugene Kash, married 14 years of the late great Paul O'Sullivan. Her greatest production to date are her 3 beloved children.



## **Rob Fortin & Susan Newman** **Music & Lyrics**

Petersborough, Ontario based husband and wife team. Susan (music) and Rob (lyrics) met singing Gilles Vigneault songs for a production at the Peterborough Summer Theatre in 1977. They honed their skills writing songs for Rehearsal In Progress Theatre Collective (*Pioneer Chainsaw Massacre*, 1988) and Ground Zero Productions (*Rag, Tag and Bobtail*, book by Don Bouzek, published in Canadian Theatre Review, 1999). They spent many seasons performing, music directing, and composing at 4th Line Theatre, including that company's first full length musical *Cavan Casanova* (book by Robert Winslow, 2003). Other credits include: *Hungry: A Musical Hansel & Gretel* (book by Kate Story, produced by Public Energy, 2008), and *A Nine Days' Wonder* (co-written with Susan Spicer and Martha Cockshutt). They are currently working on a new musical, *Freedom of Flight* with Beau Dixon & Michael Coleman, and rehearsing Rob's settings of the Don Marquis Archy and Mehitabel poems for *Damned Be This Transmigration* (book by Kate Story). Susan continues to develop her choral piece, *A Sea Change Suite*, based on text from *The Tempest*. They also perform in the folk band Carried Away, and the jazz vocal trio Chester Babcock.

# Curricular Outcomes

<p><b>Grade 7 &amp; 8 Social Studies GCO</b></p> <p>Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of culture, diversity, and world view, recognizing the similarities and differences reflected in various personal, cultural, racial, and ethnic perspectives.</p>	<p><b>Grade 7-9 English GCOs</b></p> <p>Speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.</p> <p>Use writing and other forms of representation to explore, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and learnings; and to use their imaginations.</p>
<p><b>Grade 9 Citizenship Outcomes</b></p> <p>Who Am I as a Citizen: Learners will evaluate key changes in the citizenship rights of Mi'kmaw and other traditionally disempowered people.</p> <p>Learners will evaluate evolving concepts and attributes of citizenship as members of different kinds of communities</p>	<p><b>Grade 10-12 English GCOs</b></p> <p>Students will be expected to speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.</p> <p>Students will be expected to communicate information and ideas effectively and clearly, and to respond personally and critically.</p> <p>Students will be expected to interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audience, and purpose.</p>
<p><b>Grade 10-12 Social Studies Essential Graduation Outcomes</b></p> <p>Communication: Graduates will be able to use the listening, viewing, speaking, reading, and writing modes of language(s) as well as mathematical and scientific concepts and symbols to think, learn, and communicate effectively.</p>	<p><b>Drama 10 &amp; 11</b></p> <p>Students will use drama to explore, formulate, and express ideas, perceptions, and feelings.</p> <p>Students will be able to interpret how drama celebrates, comments on, and questions issues and events in cultural and historical contexts.</p>

# Overview of Themes, Context, and Vocabulary Within the Play

Themes	Context	Vocabulary
Mining	Maurice works in the Springhill Mine in 1958 and not only survives a disastrous 'bump' but saves a group of other miners trapped with him.	Bump Geothermal Coalfield Quake
Discrimination	Discrimination against Maurice is most obvious at the end of the show when the Governor of Georgia invites the surviving miners to vacation at a luxury resort. When he found out Maurice was Black he initially rescinds the invitation but when fellow miners came to his defence the invitation was reinstated with the stipulation that Maurice be segregated.	Segregation Discrimination Black Lives Matter Movement Systemic Racism
Workplace Safety	Mining was a difficult occupation and while the Springhill collieries had the first Canadian coal mining trade union, the working conditions were harsh and the job was extremely dangerous.	Unionization Labour Rights Equity VS Equality Risk
Hope	Maurice takes charge and keeps hope alive for himself and the other miners through song and prayer while they're trapped 2 miles below the surface.	Music Therapy Resilience Camaraderie Storytelling

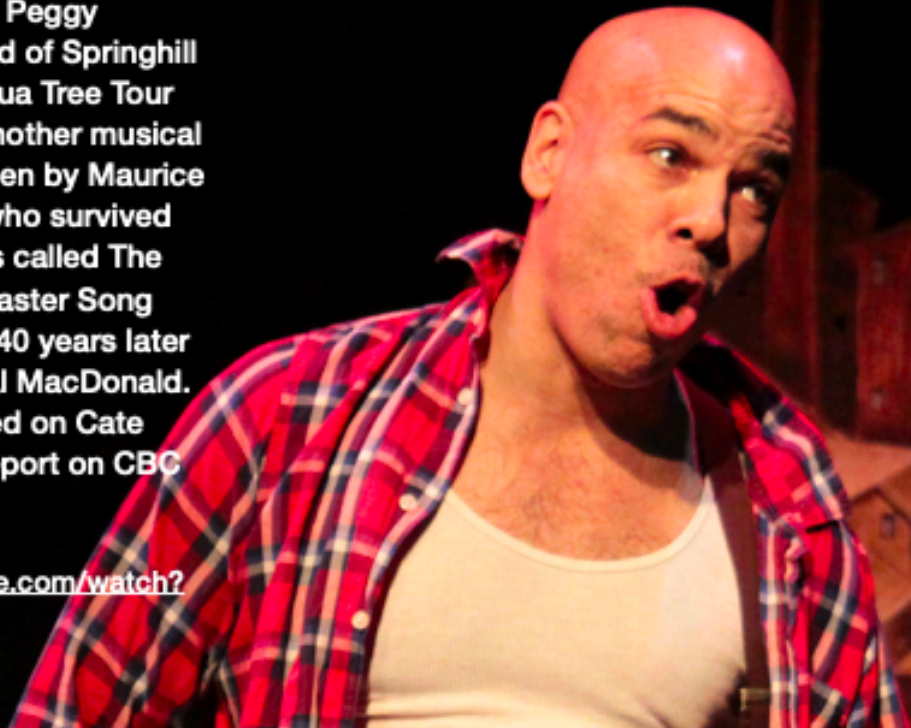


# The Springhill Mine 1958

- The Springhill Mine is located in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia.
- The 1958 bump, occurred on October 23, 1958 and was the most severe "bump" or underground seismic event, in North American mining history.
- The 1958 bump injured Springhill residents and devastated the town's economy.
- Miners not saved by being either inside galleries or some other shelter were immediately crushed during the bump.
- On Saturday, November 1, 1958, a group of survivors were found, including Maurice Ruddick. After that, no other survivors were found. Instead, bodies of the dead were hauled out in airtight aluminium coffins, on account of the advanced stage of decomposition, accelerated by the Earth's heat in the depths of No. 2 mine at 13,000–14,000 feet (4,000–4,300 m) below the mine entrance.
- Of the 174 miners in No. 2 colliery at the time of the bump: 75 died, and 99 were trapped but rescued.

**FUN FACT:** Irish pop stars U2 brought attention to the 1958 disaster when they performed Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger's *The Ballad of Springhill* as part of the Joshua Tree Tour playlist in 1987.. Another musical memorial was written by Maurice Ruddick, a miner who survived the 1958 bump. It's called *The Springhill Mine Disaster Song* and was recorded 40 years later by his daughter, Val MacDonald. The song is featured on Cate Friesen's *Roots Report* on CBC Radio.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03slHda\\_w-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03slHda_w-U)



# Talking to your Students About Race

It is important for teachers to know that the original, unedited production of Beneath Springhill: The Maurice Ruddick Story contains derogatory language near the beginning, and again about 20 minutes into the show. These words are racially charged and students will likely find them unsettling.

Please review the **Content/Trigger Warning Guide**, and watch these points in the film before sharing with your class. Make use of the edited version of this production where these words are censored if you wish. We highly recommend still having a discussion about race and discrimination with your class, as these are key elements and themes of this story.

It is best to have a discussion with your class about the presence of these words prior to watching the performance. As an educator, we recommend reaching out to the school's African-Nova Scotian Student Support Worker and working with them to facilitate a discussion with your class.

*"Educators play a crucial role in helping students talk openly about the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of social inequality and discrimination. Learning how to communicate about such topics as white privilege, police violence, economic inequality and mass incarceration requires practice, and facilitating difficult conversations demands courage and skill— regardless of who we are, our intentions or how long we've been teaching."*

## **Reflection Activity for Teachers and Students:**

Consider these statements and select the one that best describes how you feel.

- I would rather not talk about race/ racism.
- I am very uncomfortable talking about race/racism.
- I am usually uncomfortable talking about race/racism.
- I am sometimes uncomfortable talking about race/racism.
- I am usually comfortable talking about race/racism.
- I am very comfortable talking about race/racism.

Then use a sentence-stem activity to self-reflect:

1. The hard part of talking about race/ racism is...
2. The beneficial part of talking about race/racism is ...

## **In Class Resources:**

- Another production of Beneath Springhill Starring Jeremiah Sparks, features an interview with Director Bobby Garcia where he discusses the current relevance of a show about coming through darkness to find the light ([link here](#)).
- Teachers and students might also benefit from the following article by Sean Price, where he interviews Arizona State University professor Neal A. Lester on discussing the n-word in class:
  - Straight Talk about the N-Word ([link here](#)).
  - Dr. Neal A. Lester also speaks in an interview "on the Power of Words and the Danger of Slurs" ([link here](#)).

[Source here](#)

# Pre-Show Questions

## Discussion Questions:

- What is the significance of storytelling (through film, theatre, books, music, art, etc.) in our society / culture?
- Today, with our abundance of technology, do you think mining is a safe profession?
- Is our society becoming more open and accepting of different cultures, genders, and races?



## Research Questions:

- Is a mining disaster a natural disaster or a human made one?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of mining for coal? What is the impact on the environment?
- What was the treatment of miners like in 1958?



# Pre-Show Class Activity #1

## Instructions:

This activity could be done individually, as a whole class, or as a Jigsaw in small groups.

As a Jigsaw, teachers should group students and assign them with the terms (green group, purple group, yellow group, etc). The small group of students would find the definition and an example for the words in their colour group. Then, the teacher would put the students into new groups, by numbers, making sure that each group has a student who can define each term. In their new groups students will explain the three definitions from their colour group to their new number group.

Students may need to double up on definitions depending on class sizes.

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## Define the following terms:

<b>Coalfield</b>	<b>Survivor's Guilt</b>	<b>One-Man Show</b>
<b>Geothermal</b>	<b>Systemic Racism</b>	<b>Colliery</b>
<b>Mining Shaft</b>	<b>Chamber Musical</b>	<b>Pillars</b>
<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>Theatre</b>	<b>Equity</b>
<b>Racial Bias</b>	<b>Trade Union</b>	<b>Cumberland Railway &amp; Coal Co.</b>
<b>Labour Rights</b>	<b>Faith</b>	<b>Biracial</b>

# Show Activity #2



## Letter to the Director or Performer / Playwright

While watching the production, ask students to write out 3 questions about the show to include in a letter to either the performer/playwright or to the director.

Some examples:

- What kind of research did you do while creating the show?
- Was directing the show for film different than directing it for the stage?
- Why did you choose to tell Maurice Ruddick's story?

After watching the production students will write a letter (minimum 300 words) to either the performer/playwright, Beau Dixon, or to the director, Linda Kash, expressing their thoughts and feelings about the show, what they liked and didn't like, and why. In this letter students will pose their three questions.

# Post-Show Class Activity

## Create a News Report



### Individual Assignment:

Create a Front Page Newspaper report about the Springhill Mining Disaster. Write a detailed 300 word report to update the nation about the occurrence, include facts and quotes from the resources provided below, and a drawing for the front page image.

**OR**

### Group Assignment:

Create a Live News Report to be 'broadcast' worldwide. This activity can be completed in groups of two or more, and written out as a script to be performed as a skit for the class.



Students can include multiple reporters who are each reporting on different aspects of the disaster (eg. Springhill's economy, the heroic efforts of Maurice Ruddick, an update from the rescuers, or an exposé with the Cumberland Coal's owner about the working conditions in the mines, etc.). Include facts and quotes from the resources provided below.

### Useful Resources:

- <https://www.cbc.ca/search?q=what%27s%20ahead%20for%20springhill&section=all&sortOrder=relevance&media=all>
- <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/commentary/60-years-ago-springhill-mining-disaster-hero-maurice-ruddick-went-to-georgia-where-he-couldnt-stay-with-his-fellow-white-miners/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC-rhSTckho>

# Post-Show Reflection Questions

To be answered individually or as a class discussion:



- 1. Do you think that this play addressed relevant topics? Why or why not?**
- 2. What is the significance of Maurice Ruddick's story?**
- 3. How was Maurice's heroism rewarded?**
- 4. In what ways can a workplace implement antiracist practices that contribute to dismantling systemic racism? What can we do in our own classroom?**
- 5. How did the actor switch convincingly between characters?**
- 6. Maurice took charge in a life-or-death situation. Describe a time that you took initiative to help someone.**
- 7. Can you think of another example from history where having hope was essential to survival?**
- 8. How did Maurice help himself and the other miners cope with their situation?**
- 9. What role did music, prayer, and song play in this story?**
- 10. How does music impact your life?**



# Other Class Activities

## Videos to Share with your Class:

*Disasters of the Century; Season 3, Episode 33: Springhill Mining Disaster*

- <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>

*Canadian Heritage Minute about Maurice Ruddick*

- <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>
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## Music:

Read the following PDF and listen to *Springhill Disaster* by Maurice Ruddick covered by Bill Clifton.

- <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>

Ask students to write a review or write their own song about an event in their life.

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## Human Rights Activity & Action Plan:

As students to individually visit the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission website and read the listed milestones for Nova Scotia.

<https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>

Then in groups of 2-4 ask students to discuss what milestones should be added to this list and what action Nova Scotia needs to make a priority in order to approve the lives of its citizens.

If you'd like to take this activity a step further, have students narrow their focus to one issue and create an action plan.

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## Additional Resources:

- <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/whats-ahead-for-springhill>

# Question Rubric

Name:

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<b>1</b>	<b>The student made little to no attempt to answer the questions provided for them / didn't participate in any class discussions.</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The student participated in class discussions / attempted to answer questions, but either did not give full answers or answered inappropriately.</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The student participated in class discussions / answered questions appropriately and fully.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The student fully participated in class discussions / offered insightful answers to the provided questions.</b>

# Report Rubric

**Name:**

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**Group:**

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<b>1</b>	<b>The student made little to no attempt to create or participate in the news report assignment and / or addressed the given topic inappropriately.</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The student participated in the news report and attempted to address the given topic but the assignment was incomplete and/or they did not address the topic appropriately.</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The student participated in and created a report which they presented to the class or turned in. The report appropriately commented on the given topic.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The student fully participated in and created a complete report which offered an insightful and thoughtful commentary on the topic. The student worked well within their group.</b>

# Letter Rubric

Name:

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<b>1</b>	<b>The student made little to no attempt to complete the Create a Letter assignment / or addressed the given topic inappropriately.</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The student attempted to complete the Create a Letter assignment but the assignment was incomplete and / or they did not address the topic appropriately.</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The student completed the Create a Letter assignment which they turned in. The letter appropriately commented on the given topic.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The student fully participated in the and created a complete letter which offered an insightful and thoughtful commentary on the topic.</b>