A supplemental resource for intermediate and high school students and teachers
SUMMARY
Jake’s Gift is a multi-award winning one-woman play that tells the story of a Canadian World War II veteran who reluctantly returns to Normandy, France, for the 60th Anniversary of the D-Day landings. The play was created after writer and performer Julia Mackey travelled to Normandy in June 2004 for the 60th Anniversay Ceremonies. She spent a week touring the Normandy coast, attending many of the ceremonies and interviewing Canadian, British and American veterans, as well as tourists and the local French people.

TECHNICAL INFO/REQUIREMENTS
Set Up Time: 45 minutes
Performance Time: 65 minutes
Performance Space Needs: A drama room or theatre/auditorium is preferable, large classroom/multi-purpose room/gym. Please have fans turned off for the show.
Technical: 1 small table and chair for Stage Manager and access to an outlet for audio equipment.

BIOGRAPHY
Julia Mackey first started writing at the age of 15 when she and her friends decided they wanted to perform a comedy piece at their school’s carnival talent show. Her short sketch was so well received that she continued writing and eventually realized that she wanted to pursue acting and writing as a career.

After completing a Bachelor of Education Degree at McGill University in Montreal, Julia moved to Victoria, BC, to pursue acting and writing. In 1995, she began writing and performing short plays for the award-winning company, Theatre SKAM. Julia has worked as a professional actor since 1997. Since 2007, she has toured Jake’s Gift to theatres, festivals, legions and schools across Canada.

Jake’s Gift was awarded Best New Play (2007), Best Drama, Best Solo Show and Best Female Performer at the 2007 & 2008 Victoria Fringe Festival as well as Best of Fest at The Fringe Festivals in Edmonton (2008) and Winnipeg (2009). Julia currently lives in Wells & Vancouver, BC, with her partner Dirk Van Stralen, an award winning actor, writer, cartoonist, graphic designer and the director of Jake’s Gift.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE
The students will see a one-woman show in which Julia Mackey plays four different characters. Jake’s Gift is a surprisingly funny drama that tells the story of a Canadian WWII veteran named Jake who reluctantly returns to Normandy, France, for the 60th Anniversary of D-Day. Jake’s main goal is to find the grave of his eldest brother, Chester, a Canadian soldier and once promising young musician who was killed during the Battle of Normandy in 1944.

At the beginning of the play we meet Isabelle, a ten-year-old French schoolgirl who is eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Allied soldiers for the 60th anniversary ceremonies. As the remembrance commemoration approaches, Isabelle is swept away with the transformation of her usually sleepy town (Bernieres sur Mer, a.k.a Juno Beach). Isabelle’s grandmother, Grande Isabelle, has taught her much about the war, including her own family’s tragic loss, and Isabelle’s sense of gratitude and remembrance towards the Canadian soldiers becomes evident as the play progresses.

While chatting with her grandmother in front of their house, Grande Isabelle notices Jake staring out at the water on the shores of Juno Beach. Isabelle begs her grandmother for permission to go and speak with the old soldier. Grande Isabelle forbids this request, not wanting her to bother the soldier with questions about the war. Isabelle ignores this order, and once her grandmother is out of sight, Isabelle finds her way over to Jake whose response to her unabashed greeting is less than inviting. Isabelle is not deterred by Jake’s grumpy disposition and continues to pester him. Her charm and boldness eventually soften the old soldier and an unexpected friendship blossoms over the ensuing three days.

At its heart, this powerful play emphasizes the importance of remembrance and personalizes the story behind one soldier’s grave.

NOTES FOR THE AUDIENCE
Jake’s Gift is not appropriate for students under grade 5. Teachers must be in attendance. All cell phones must be turned off and put away. Absolutely no photography or recording is permitted during the performance.

LANGUAGE WARNING
The character of Jake uses the expressions “god-damn” & “what the hell?” in the play. “Bull-shit”, “pissed off” & “smart-ass” are also each used once.

PREPARATORY INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS
For the students to get the most out of Jake’s Gift, it might be helpful for them to be familiar with some of the historical references in the play. Below is an explanation of D-Day and Juno Beach, as well as a glossary of terms/phrases that the students can be introduced to prior to seeing the performance.

D-DAY AND JUNO BEACH
In the early morning hours of June 6th, 1944, thousands of ships and planes, carrying thousands of Allied troops, left the southern coast of England, crossed the English Channel and arrived hours later on the coast of Normandy, France. The Allied troops were made up of soldiers from many different countries, but the majority of soldiers who landed on D-Day were from Britain, Canada and the U.S.A. What ensued was Operation Overlord, the code name for the Allied forces invasion to free Western Europe from four years of Nazi occupation. To date, it is still the largest offensive attack in modern day history. 150,000 troops would land on the Normandy coastline, which had been divided into five sections, each given a code name by the Allied commanders.
These five code names were: Omaha Beach and Utah Beach (US Troops), Gold and Sword Beach (British Troops) and Juno Beach, where Canadian Troops landed.

Juno Beach was situated between Sword Beach and Gold Beach. Juno Beach was approximately 8 KM long stretching from Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer on the east to Courseulles-sur-Mer on the west. Juno Beach was known as the Canadian beach as it was assigned to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division (with the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade).

The first wave of Canadian Infantry to land on Juno Beach were comprised of the following regiments: The Queen's Own Rifles, The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, The Regina Rifles, The Royal Winnipeg Rifles and The Canadian Scottish.

D-DAY OBJECTIVE

After Omaha Beach, Juno was the most heavily defended of the five landing sites. German General Wilhelm Richter was in charge of the 716th Division guarding Juno beach. The German soldiers had 11 heavy batteries (a unit of guns, men & vehicles) of 155 mm guns and 9 medium batteries of 75 mm guns at their disposal. Additionally, pillboxes (partially enclosed concrete forts) and other fortifications were present all along the beach. These were most concentrated in the Courseulles-sur-Mer region. The Juno seawall was twice the height of Omaha’s, and the sea was heavily mined.
The aerial bombardment of Juno Beach in the days leading up to D-Day did not cause significant damage to the German fortifications. Naval bombardment ran from 6:00 AM to 7:30 AM. It included everything from battleship barrages to fire from tanks and artillery sitting on transport ship decks, and destroyed only 14 percent of the German bunkers guarding the beach. Bad weather delays gave the Germans half an hour to regroup between the start of the aerial bombardment and the landing of Canadian troops.

Canadian troops were scheduled to land on Juno Beach at 7:30 AM, following the aerial bombardment, but they were forced to postpone the landing by fifteen minutes because of bad weather. None of the Allied assault divisions, including the 3rd Canadian Division, managed to secure their D-Day objectives, although the Canadians came closer than any other Allied formation. By day’s end, Canada suffered 1074 casualties, 339 of these were fatal, and thousands more Canadian soldiers would lose their lives in the ensuing two months it would take to liberate France.

VOCABULARY AND TERMS USED IN JAKE’S GIFT

The Allies:
The term used to describe the countries that officially opposed Adolf Hitler’s invasion of Europe. The main Allied forces were comprised of Britain, Canada, USA, Russia (then the U.S.S.R) France, Poland as well as another 20 countries world-wide.

Bény sur Mer Cemetery:
In this beautifully kept cemetery are the graves of over 2000 Canadian soldiers who gave their lives in the landings in Normandy and in the earlier stages of the subsequent fighting.

Burlington Teen Tour Band:
A youth marching band from Burlington, Ontario, comprised of talented brass musicians ranging in age from 12 to 18 years old. The BTTB often play at official parades and commemorative events in Canada and abroad. In June, 2004, they were invited by the Minister of Veterans Affairs to play at the 60th Anniversary Ceremonies in Normandy, France.

D-Day:
D-Day refers to June 6, 1944, the first day of the Allied invasion to liberate Europe from Nazi occupation. The D in D-Day is redundant as it simply means “The Day”. Allied forces left the south coast of England at 1 AM, crossed the English Channel, and by 6 AM the first of 150,000 troops were landing on the coast of Normandy.

French Resistance Fighters:
The French Resistance played a vital part in aiding the Allies to success in Western Europe, especially leading up to D-Day. The French Resistance supplied the Allies with vital intelligence reports as well as doing a huge amount of work to disrupt the German supply and communication lines within France.

Nazism:
The body of political and economic doctrines held and put into effect by the Nazis in Germany from 1933 to 1945 including the totalitarian principle of government, (controls all aspects of its citizen’s lives, with a single charismatic leader as the ultimate authority), predominance of especially Germanic groups assumed to be racially superior, and supremacy of the führer (Adolf Hitler).

The Nazis:
A German fascist political party controlling Germany from 1933 to 1945 under the rule of Adolf Hitler.

Normandy:
The northern most province in France, with a 580 km coastline. The capital city is Caen, which was the destination of the Canadian troops. The Allies fought for control over Caen for two months before liberating it from the Nazis on August 19th, 1944.

The Queen’s Own Rifles:
A Canadian Infantry regiment whose soldiers were among the first assault wave to land on Juno Beach on D-Day. The Queen’s Own Rifles suffered the highest casualties of any Canadian regiment on D-Day.

The Tannoy:
“It came over the Tannoy.” The Tannoy was a wireless mobile communications radio used by the troops in the battlefields to receive information and orders from commanding officers. It was via this radio that Canadian troops heard the words, “Empty guns, cease fire,” on May 5th, 1945, letting them know WWII was over. Three days later, May 8th, 1945 was declared VE Day – Victory in Europe Day.
The War Brides:
The term refers to the thousands of young women who met and married Canadian servicemen during the Second World War. These war brides were mostly from Britain, but a few thousand were from other areas of Europe, including the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy and Germany. During the Second World War, there were an estimated 48,000 war brides and, when the war ended, most of these young women and their children (nearly 22,000) followed their husbands to a new life in Canada.

Vera Lynn:
Considered one of the major entertainers during WWII, Vera Lynn was a popular British vocalist whose career flourished when she was nicknamed “The Forces’ Sweetheart.” Her best loved and most popular songs were *We’ll Meet Again* and *The White Cliffs of Dover*. She was considered one of the major entertainers during the war years. Amazingly, in 2009, at the age of 92, Vera topped the British charts again with her release of *We’ll Meet Again: The Very Best of Vera Lynn*.

**POST SHOW SUGGESTIONS**

**QUESTION & ANSWER**
Time permitting, Julia is happy to have a Question & Answer discussion after the performance. Students are welcome to make any comments and ask any questions they may have about the show and its development.

As a playwright and actor, Julia is keen to discuss the process of creating work – this may be of particular interest to drama students.

**POSSIBLE POST SHOW IN CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
- Does the play make you think more reflectively about Remembrance Day?
- Did seeing the play make you more curious about WWII and Canada’s role within it, and of your own family’s possible connection to the World Wars?
- Did seeing the play change your viewpoint about soldiers? About veterans? Explain.
- Did the play trigger any questions for you regarding Canada’s past and/or present Military service?
- How did Canada’s involvement in the World Wars create its current global image?

**SUGGESTED POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES**
- What was your favourite part of the play? Discuss or write about a section of the play or draw an image from the play you enjoyed and explain why you were compelled by it.
- Take a personal or historical event and write a two-to-three minute monologue about it. (one-to-two pages)

**USEFUL WEB SITES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**
- Jake’s Gift web site: www.jakesgift.com
- The Juno Beach Centre in Normandy, France: www.junobeach.org/Centre/index.html
- Canadian Post Secondary Students who speak both French and English can apply to work in Normandy, France, at the Juno Centre as Tour Guide Operators. Applications can be found at the above website under Guide Program.
- Veteran’s Affairs Canada: http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/
- The Canadian Virtual Memorial: http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/collections/virtualmem
- Memory Project: http://www.thememoryproject.com/
- Storming Juno: Docu-Drama Film: http://www.stormingjuno.com/
- CBC Archives: http://archives.cbc.ca/
- Canadian War Museum: http://www.warmuseum.ca/splash.html

The SkyHawks – Canadian Forces Parachute Team – salute a veteran after their landing on Juno Beach during the 60th anniversary D-Day celebrations. photo by: Julia Mackey