



Discussion Questions: ***The Laramie Project*** by Moisés Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theatre Project

On October 7, 1998, a young man was discovered bound to a fence in the hills outside of Laramie, Wyoming, savagely beaten and left to die in an act of brutality and hate that shocked a nation. Matthew Shepard's death became a national symbol of intolerance, but for the people of Laramie the event was deeply personal, and it is their voices we hear in this stunningly effective theater piece.

1. Why did Kaufman not produce a traditional documentary? What advantages does this form have over a documentary?
2. Is it possible for a "constructed" account of an event like *The Laramie Project* to provide greater insight into an event than a traditional documentary? Compare with the fictionalized accounts in *Last Standing Woman*.
3. In what way is a traditional documentary more "true" than a performance like *The Laramie Project*? In what way might it be less "true"?
4. Contrast the reactions of the Father Roger Schmidt and the Baptist minister. How do these two "men of God" see the Christian message in relation to Matthew Shepard's death?
5. Sherry Johnson says that "A hate crime is a hate crime. If you murder somebody you hate'em. It has nothing to do with if you're gay ...". What is a hate crime? Should we punish someone more severely if they commit a "hate crime"?
6. Reggie Fluty explains that she may have contracted AIDS because she didn't have protective gloves when she tried to assist Matthew Shepard. She says "your mind tells you all the time -- Don't hesitate -- and so you just keep moving and you try to help Matthew..." Is this a foolish or courageous act?
7. Matthew Shepard's father recommends against the death penalty even though he says he believes in it. Why? Is the sentence given to Matthew Shepard's killers just?
8. Why isn't Matthew Shepard shown in the film?

9. What role does the media play in the story of Matthew Shepard? Contrast the reactions of Matt Galloway with those of other residents of Laramie?
10. Cantwell recalls treating both Matthew Shepard and Aaron Kinney on the same night. He says he has "compassion for both of them". What does he mean by this? Are either of them deserving or in need of compassion?
11. Jedediah Shultz and his parents disagree about his appearance in "Angels in America". How do you feel about this argument? Is Jedediah's analogy with Macbeth reasonable?
12. The defense in the Matthew Shepard case used the argument of "Gay Panic"? Can such a defense be justified? If so how does one come to suffer from "gay panic"? Is it a mental disorder, religious position or cultural value?
13. A sign in the town reads "Hate is not a Laramie value." Do you agree?

Note: A movie version is available via MHLS libraries.