

# Brendan McLeod

## *RIDGE* - STUDY GUIDE



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# RIDGE

Often called the “battle that made Canada,” Vimy Ridge resulted in over 10,000 Canadian casualties. Through direct storytelling, verbatim theatre, and live music, Brendan McLeod examines misconceptions and varying perspectives around the battle, while drawing parallels to other formative events in our nation’s past. Featuring inventive musical interpretations of WWI soldier songs, *Ridge* probes difficult yet necessary questions about how and why we grieve. A vivid, kinetic ride through history, as well as an intimate, personal examination of our connection to the past, *Ridge* is a visceral work that passionately argues against the exploitation of young lives. Read on for great activities to expand on the reach of the show in the classroom.



# Brendan McLeod

Brendan McLeod is an award-winning writer and musician. He is the author of one novel, a poetry book, and five theatre shows. His music group The Fugitives have been nominated for multiple Canadian Folk Music and Western Canada Music Awards, and have toured to ten countries. He is a former Canadian SLAM poetry champion and World SLAM runner-up. He was the Poet of Honour at the 2012 Canadian Festival of Spoken Word and the 2015 Victoria Spoken Word Festival. He has taught spoken word at Langara College, and is an active youth educator with a variety of organizations, including: Prologue Performing Arts (Ontario), the Biennale Project, WordPlay (BC), and the Writer's Guild of Alberta.

## The Fugitives

Trench Songs is The Fugitives fifth record. Their most recent album, "The Promise of Strangers" was nominated for Canadian Folk and Western Canadian Music Awards, and won Best Folk Album of 2019 from the German Music Critic's Association. Their previous album, Everything Will Happen, spent ten weeks on the top ten Canadian folk charts, and earned them a support slot across Western Canada with Buffy Sainte-Marie and an appearance at UK's Glastonbury Festival.

A folk collective headed by songwriters Adrian Glynn and Brendan McLeod, the band has toured extensively through Canada, Western Europe, and the UK. They're joined by banjo player Chris Suen (Viper Central) and violinist Carly Frey (The Coal Porters). Over the past twelve years, they've earned a reputation for unforgettable live shows, brimming with complex harmonies, infectious storytelling and top-notch musicianship. As the CBC has it: "This show is simply brilliant". Performance highlights include major folk festivals across Canada, headlining slots in overseas americana festivals, and a 2019 sold-out run across Germany.

# Pre-Show Activities

Ridge is a multi-media presentation featuring storytelling, recitation of historical texts, and music. Students can be prepared to see very moving direct addresses, visceral firsthand accounts of history, and compelling musical performances.

In order to prepare the students for the performance here are some activities that would be useful:

## **Read First-hand Soldier Accounts of WW1**

*Ridge* is all about re-centering the voice of soldiers, which are often overlooked in favour of military commanders or government leaders. Here are some excerpts from Canadian soldiers to look through. Discuss the ways in which these accounts differ, and are similar to, what students have been taught so far about WW1.

### **Diary of Private Samuel Henry Brown (who fought at Vimy):**

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/diaries-letters-stories/first-world-war/brown>

### **Diary of Bernard Glynn:**

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/diaries-letters-stories/first-world-war/glynn>

### **Poems of Frank Walker:**

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/diaries-letters-stories/first-world-war/walker>

## **Further Readings**

### **Canadian War Museum:**

<https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/after-the-war/history/soldiers-accounts/>

### **Library and Archive Canada:**

<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/personnel-records.aspx>

## **Listen to WW1 songs**

In *Ridge*, *The Fugitives* re-purpose old lyrics from WW1 songs and re-write the melodies to sound more contemporary. Below are some of the songs the students will hear during the performance. It is interesting to listen to the similarities and dissimilarities between the traditional versions and *The Fugitives* versions.

### **Hanging on The Old Barbed Wire**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN0msVzGITw>

### **Bombed Last Night**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV74GPopwGY>

### **Never Mind**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PJjZGL3Ef4>

## **Further Materials**

Here are some further materials the students might find interesting leading up to the performance:

### **Videos of The Fugitives:**

Where Do We Go, Boys: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSkbFUt3BEA>

No Words: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m0X-E2Kkws>

### **Videos of Brendan McLeod**

Exultation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28SkvvGaGv8&t=19s>

Letter on Your Wedding Day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loWyXv0cv0w>

# Post-Show Activities

## Discussion Questions

- What fact that was explained in the show most surprised you?
- Why do you think the group chose to re-write the melodies of the songs?
- Many of the soldiers in WW1 were just 18 years old or younger. What emotions come to mind when you consider that fact?
- The show argues for a different way of remembering history. What are some ways in which we can improve our Remembrance Day ceremonies? What are some aspects of the current ceremonies that you enjoy?
- The show argues that we often forget important aspects of our history. What are some other aspects of Canadian history that are often overlooked? How do we get better at remembering them?

## Writing Prompts

Most of the show is concerned with the first person. How Brendan feels about what he reads, how the band feels about what they read – the yearning to understand soldiers who are so many years removed from our contemporary experience. Here are some writing exercises that might prompt some extra investigation:

### **Pandemic Diary**

WWI was a tragic event. So too is the Covid-19 pandemic. Write a diary of one day in the life of someone who has lived through the pandemic, or try to sum up the last few years in one page.

### **New Music/ Old Music**

The Fugitives re-purpose songs from WWI, using the same lyrics the soldiers wrote. If you sing or play an instrument, consider doing a 'cover' of songs from any other moment in history. Use the words of the songs, but write your own melody. How does it feel to take someone else's words and try to embody them in a different way?

### **Essay on Exploitation**

*Ridge* is deeply concerned with the exploitation of soldiers by their superiors. In what other ways is this happening now? Pick a subject to study where you think exploitation might be at play and write a firsthand account of your research with that topic – what discoveries did you make? How did they make you feel? What can you do about it?

# Learn More

To learn more about Brendan McLeod, visit [www.brendanmcleod.ca](http://www.brendanmcleod.ca)

To learn more about The Fugitives, visit [www.fugitives.ca](http://www.fugitives.ca)

## Social Media

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@fugitivesmusic



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