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From The President

At the time of this writing, we are saying goodbye to the blustery month of March. I won’t miss the chill, but oh how I have loved the nationwide celebration of Theatre In Our Schools. The great states of Texas, Indiana, Georgia, New York, Illinois, and Virginia/Maryland/DC have all hosted significant Theatre In Our Schools events. Keynote addresses, performances, workshops, resources – it has been a month of empowerment and celebration. From the TIOS Twitter treats from our (über-dynamic) office staff to the national USA Play Daze program on Facebook to the “No Snap Judgments” video competition – our organization that was founded in the era of the manual typewriter is clearly thriving in the 21st century. I feel so grateful to everyone who has worked hard to make Theatre in Our Schools such a success – may we carry the spirit of it with us throughout the year as we work to advance the cause of theatre and drama in the lives of young people.

And as we move forward in this 21st century, it may be helpful for you to be aware of the advocacy tab on our webpage. Need information to help you convince the school board of the value of theatre? Want to build a research-based case for the significance of the arts? Hoping to convince your principal that drama is more than frivolous playtime? There is a treasure trove of information to be found by clicking on this humble, inauspicious tab. And if knowledge is power, my hope is that these advocacy toolkits will be useful to you in your important work. Onward and upward!

Rives Collins
President, AATE

Network News

AATE members are engaged in exciting productions and projects all across the country and “Network News” highlights tidbits sent to us by our Network Chairs. If you don’t see news from your network here, send your Network Chair something for the next issue. All submissions must be received by the Incite/Insight editor by the 10th of the month before publication for consideration.

Playwriting network

D.W. Gregory’s Salvation Road was accepted for the Playwrights in Our Schools residency. He will be in Salt Lake City May 15-18 to workshop the script. His comedy, Molumby’s Million, was produced at Iron Age Theatre Company in Philadelphia in November. Miracle in Mudville has been published by YouthPlays.com and received a production at Tibbits Opera House in Coldwater, MI in October 2010. Radium Girls logged its 150th production in 2010.

Joanna Kraus’s Pilot Christobel (featured in the February issue of Incite/Insight) was accepted for publication by Dramatic Publishing. It is scheduled to be produced at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists in Berkeley, California this fall.

To have your network’s news published in the next issue of Incite/Insight, send it to Editor@aate.com by May 10th.
Theatre In Our Schools/
March 2011- Illinois
by Donna Stone

Exploring the Crossroads was the theme of the Theatre In Our Schools (TIOS) Conference held at Northwestern University in Evanston on March 12, 2011. This theme was echoed in several state conferences during TIOS Month. In Illinois, Keynote Speaker Ernie Nolan, Associate Artistic Director at Chicago’s Emerald City Theatre, asked the conference attendees, “How do we take a ritual (theatre) that is thousands of years old and make it relevant for the 21st Century?” And, for the rest of the day, participants sought answers to that question.

Workshops included ideas and exercises for the classroom. Redmoon Theatre’s Education Director Angela Tilges worked with Evanston students on using overhead projectors in, “Animating the Mundane with Shadow and Light.” Other workshops included:

- The Viewpoints Technique: Developing Embodied Knowledge with Ofer Ravid
- The Red Nose Mask and the Clown State with Tome Wells and Kaycee Alanis
- Creating Shakespeare: Relevance at a Crossroads with Two Pence Shakespeare

Meanwhile, other workshops explored new arts initiatives in Illinois and using action research to explore your teaching. Participants also joined roundtable discussions that ranged from the theoretical to the practical. They were led by experts in each topic. Roundtable topics included:

- Touring Productions to Schools with Nicole Ripley
- Drama and Literacy with Elyzabeth Adler
- Games Swap with Dani Bryant
- Developing a Rich Theatre Program with Rachel Jamieson
- Assessment and Documentation with Ed Erickson
- Media and Drama with Betsy Driver
- Professional Development with Anne Sisson Rezac
- Making Theatre with Special Populations with Norm Engstrom
- 21st Century Skills with Ernie Nolan

Two awards culminated a day full of stimulations and challenges: U.S. Congresswoman, Jan Schakowsky was presented with ITA’s 2010 Award of Honor. Representing Evanston, Schakowsky has long supported and worked for the support of the arts at both the state and national levels. She embraced this honor and pledged to continue the fight for national support from the National Endowment of the Arts. Betsy Quinn, former ITA Board Member and Past President of AATE accepted the ITA 2010 award of Excellence in Creative Dramatics.

It is easy to see why Illinois has become a model for combined state/AATE Theatre In Our Schools celebrations. This conference, now in its 4th year, was well organized, well attended, and well programmed!

Participants went home with new ideas, new friends, and a mission to continue promoting theatre in our schools. As Collins charged, “… May you be affirmed, challenged, inspired, empowered, and renewed…the work you do matters now more than ever…”

Donna Stone has been an educator for over 40 years. She has taught in rural, urban, and suburban setting as a classroom teacher, drama specialist, and gifted facilitator. Currently, she is semi-retired while operating her consulting business: Guided Drama by DramaDonna.net; teaching through drama at Northwestern University’s Center for Talent Development; and teaching Introduction to Theatre at Illinois Valley Community College. You can contact Donna at dbpstone@aol.com.
Theatre In Our Schools
Celebration – Georgia

Fantastic turn-out at the Theatre In Our Schools celebration at the Southeastern Theatre Conference’s K-12 Institute in Atlanta, GA. In addition to hands-on workshops by Tom Key, Nancy Meyer and AATE member, Carol Jones; AATE Executive Director Lynne Kingsley kicked-off Theatre In Our Schools month by motivating K-12 educators to get involved in advocacy with posters, student flyers and buttons.

Theatre In Our Schools
Mini-Conference – DC/MD/VA

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theatre hosted the DC/MD/VA Theatre In Our Schools Mini-Conference where K-12 educators, teaching artists, educational theatre staff and more networked, shared, learned and participated in interactive workshops. Participants enjoyed engaging in workshops such as Shakespeare Theatre Company’s “Text Alive program,” Quest: Arts for All’s “Visual Theatre and Literacy program”, and Arena Stage’s, “Voices of Now”. As one participant stated, “Teaching is a very giving profession and I get so worn out sometimes, so it was great to come here and get re-energized.” Joan Weber, keynote speaker, discussed the importance of advocating for theatre programs at the school board level and provided practical tips for keeping Theatre In Our Schools.

Theatre in Our Schools
Mini-Conference - New York

The New York Theatre In Our Schools Mini-Conference welcomed over sixty educators, teaching artists, and scholars at Roundabout’s American Airlines Theatre. Participants explored the crossroads of theatre education and 21st Century Skills, new media, and advocacy during the day’s breakout sessions. Keynote speaker Paul Sutton from C&T in England shared his innovative work from around the world, integrating new media with theatre to educate, engage and inspire children. One attendee stated, “After his presentation, the whole audience was left shaking in amazement at C&T’s work, and I was certainly left excited and inspired and ready to go to work.”

This page reported by Lynne Kingsley and Kelly Prestel.
Looking Ahead to Lakeside Reflections: Early Childhood Expert Vivian Gussin Paley Confirmed as Keynote

AATE will welcome MacArthur Fellow and early childhood education expert Vivian Gussin Paley as the keynote speaker for the 2011 National Conference in Chicago. Mrs. Paley writes and teaches about the world of young children. She examines their stories and play, their logic and their thinking, searching for meaning in the social and moral landscapes of classroom life. A kindergarten teacher for 37 years, Mrs. Paley brings her storytelling/story acting and discussion techniques to children, teachers, and parents throughout the world. She is the recipient of the 1987 Erikson Institute Award for Service to Children and a MacArthur Fellowship in 1989. She received the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation for Lifetime Achievement in 1998. In 1997, her book, The Girl with the Brown Crayon, was given the Harvard University Press Virginia and Warren Stone Prize as the outstanding book about education and society. In 1999 the same book brought her the NCTE David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English. Mrs. Paley received the John Dewey Society’s Outstanding Achievement Award for the year 2000 and was named Outstanding Educator in the Language Arts by the National Council of Teachers of English in 2001.

Insight Link: For all the latest in AATE news follow Lynne Kingsley, Executive Director on Twitter at http://www.twitter.com/AATELynne


Wear Your Show Shirt Day

On March 11, 2011, nearly 1,500 theatre advocates nation-wide wore a theatre show shirt to work or school to help raise the awareness of and celebrate AATE’s Theatre In Our Schools (TIOS) Month. The first annual Wear-Your-Show-Shirt Day, publicized through press releases, Facebook and Twitter, was just one of three programs this year in which students were involved to help raise the awareness of the important benefits of theatre education. Here are a few of the great photos submitted. Visit the AATE website for more.
Anakin Morris joins AATE for Chicago

Anakin Morris graduated in December from Northwestern University with a B.S. in Performance Studies and Religion, and is really excited by his winter/spring internship at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. He works in Education, with the Performing Arts for Everyone department, helping to produce free performances daily on the Millennium Stage and doing general intern-y things. This summer he will serve on the Technology Committee for the AATE Conference in Chicago, and he hopes to start studies for his M.F.A. this fall. Fingers crossed!

Incite/Insight welcomes new Managing Editor

Elizabeth Brendel Horn is honored to join AATE as the managing editor of Incite/Insight magazine. Elizabeth’s editorial work began with Theatre for Young Audiences/USA, where she spent three years on the staff of TYA Today and served as interim managing editor for the Spring 2011 issue. With a diverse background in performance, education, directing, research, and arts administration, Elizabeth currently teaches high school theatre with the Timber Creek Thespians, where directing credits include Little Shop of Horrors, Metamorphoses, Anything Goes, Doubt: A Parable, and Chicago. Additional teaching experience includes the Orlando Repertory Theatre, Georgia Shakespeare, Great Oaks Village foster care facility, and UCF’s DigitalU, a digital storytelling program for underserved youth. As a scholar, Elizabeth has written and presented on the application of Viewpoints and Composition training with youth, was awarded the UCF College of Arts and Humanities Researcher of the Year Award for a study of feminism and class in Aphra Behn’s The Rover, and was recognized with a UCF Service-Learning award for her application of Shakespeare with youth as an ArtsBridge America scholar. Elizabeth holds a BFA in Theatre from Brenau University and an MFA in Theatre for Young Audiences from the University of Central Florida.

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Jana Sanskriti: Center for Theatre of the Oppressed
by Dr. Manon van de Water

In December 2010, more than 100 people from 29 countries gathered in Badu Itkhola, on the outskirts of Kolkata, West Bengal, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Jana Sanskriti, India’s oldest and most influential center for theatre of the oppressed. The occasion coincided with Jana Sanskriti’s IVth Muktadhara Forum Theatre Festival, which has been held in Kolkata every other year since 2004. From December 8 until December 22, participants of all ages and backgrounds worked, performed, demonstrated, critiqued, discussed, danced, laughed, travelled and on the way built bridges among cultures and established new and sometimes unlikely friendships and respect for differences and commonalities.

Jana Sanskriti, or People’s Culture, was founded in 1985 by Sanjoy Ganguly, a political activist from Kolkata who started working in the villages in West Bengal. Ganguly had no theatre experience, but he recognized the potential of theatre and the performing arts to fight for the plight of the people; fighting for better living conditions and against injustice. With a strong focus on the aesthetic components of performance and including traditional dance and music, Ganguly created propaganda plays which were first and foremost intended to call attention to the issues at hand in the villages and to create dialogue. Because the villagers were oppressed, he called this theatre “theatre of the oppressed.” At the time he had neither heard of nor read Augusto Boal’s work. Boal, of course, on the other side of the world in Brazil, had articulated both a theory and a practice of what became widely known as “theatre of the oppressed.”

Ganguly did not get in contact with Boal and his work until about 1991-92. As it stood, Jana Sanskriti’s work was successful and had spread to several other villages throughout West Bengal where new teams emerged, but the discovery of Boal was in Ganguly’s words “a moment of rebirth” for Jana Sanskriti. Boal’s work was both a revelation and a liberation and it marked the end of conventional stage theatre for Jana Sanskriti. Ganguly and the other members started to devise forum theatre plays in which the oppressed were not passive listeners anymore, who could discuss the issues afterward, but spectators in a Boalian sense, who could intervene in the action seen on stage and try out various acting perspectives. Jana Sanskriti claims that with this kind of theatre it is possible to “build up a cultural movement that is based on humanism and equips people to fight against oppression.” In promotional and other materials Jana Sanskriti states that they believe that the greatest violation of human rights is the violation of the right to think. When he went to the villages, Ganguly recognized both the artistic potential as well the raw intellectual capacity of every human being, formally educated or not. The central focus of the organization, thus, has been to create a democratic space for people to cultivate themselves intellectually through artistic means. By establishing dialogue in society, Jana Sanskriti allows for critical thinking, preventing people from following blindly. Dialogue is seen as an aesthetic experience of life, an internal transformation that inspires action for external transformation.

The movement does not align itself with any political organization...
or religion. It criticizes NGOs (Non Government Organizations) and Theatre for Development, because these movements often have ulterior motives and agendas (as Ganguly said: “Whose development are we talking about?”). Jana Sanskriti operates on profoundly Marxist principles: there are no salaries, all have equal say (despite the fact that Ganguly is the most visible spokesperson), the infamous Indian caste system is rejected, and everyone is accepted. Meanwhile, spread out all over India, each Jana Sanskriti team has two members, a man and a woman, on the General Council that meets once per year and discusses the plan for the upcoming year. This plan is then coordinated by the Central Group of about 15 members, the only members of Jana Sanskriti who are paid, (if funding for salaries is at all available). Their tasks go far beyond overseeing the Forum theatre teams: they organize demonstrations, participate in relief efforts from flooding, resist evictions of farmers, take care of education, lead workshops and do the administrative work.

Jana Sanskriti now has 25 teams in West Bengal alone, and more throughout India. Teams are made up of male and female agricultural laborers; some teams are female only and focus on fighting the nation’s deeply ingrained patriarchy. They devise plays or replay plays that have been devised before. There is a kind of repertory of plays that seem to resonate throughout India. Many of these are devised and written by Ganguly. Themes include domestic violence, illegal alcohol abuse, political violence, dowries, aggressive development, exploitation of workers and farmers, corruption, and arranged marriages. Typically a team goes to the village three times with the same play. Between the performances they distribute the monthly magazine of Jana Sanskriti to those that have attended.

The idea behind this is that people can get used to it, have the time to think over alternatives, bring new spectators to the next performance, and feel empowered to try out alternatives. The plays change too; based on the feedback from the audience and the forum proceedings they are revised to reflect real life situations as clearly as possible. This does not mean realism per se. The plays are heightened performances in their own way with a strong aesthetic component. But the underlying emotions and conflict are unambiguous.

In Ganguly’s own work on Jana Sanskriti, as well as in the writings of others (see bibliography below), there are numerous examples of productions and the audience reactions, but two stand out for me. Both have to do with domestic abuse which, in the plays I watched, resonates profoundly with the audience, male and female. One is an anecdote by Ganguly, which had occurred when he found one of his team members distraught after a performance on domestic abuse. After some prodding, the man confessed he had just beaten his wife this morning; how could he now be in a play against domestic abuse? After consultation and discussion though, he stayed, and presumably stopped abusing his wife. The other one is from a female audience member who proclaimed that, unlike in the Forum theatre she had just seen, her husband was pretty good to her: he only beat her when she deserved it . . . . While this may be taken as specific to India and Indian circumstances, to me these two examples show how complicit we can be in our own perpetuation of violence and abuse, both as a perpetrator and a victim, overtly as in the examples above, or more insidiously.

Augusto Boal (1931-2009) regarded Jana Sanskriti’s work as the best example of Forum Theatre in the world, outside of Brazil. In 2006, Boal, already sick, traveled to the Muktadhara II festival in Kolkata. Boal’s son Julian, who is very close to Ganguly’s family, told him to prepare his heart. The second Muktadhara (which means “free flowing water” symbolic for freedom) festival saw an unprecedented 12,000 spect-actors turn out for the spect-actor rally. Boal gave a speech:

Theatre of the Oppressed gives us the right to speak our minds, and, using the power of Art, to invent solutions to our problems. Through Theatre we discover that we are more capable than we thought, able to free ourselves from our oppressions. Jana Sanskriti . . . is now a movement that is expanding all over this immense country [it] is an example for all of us in our own countries. (quoted in Jana Sanskriti, also on the Jana Sanskriti website)

Nevertheless, as may be clear to the Boal expert, Jana Sanskriti’s methods do not slavishly following Boal’s. The repetition of plays for the same audience and simultaneous performances across the country are unique to Jana Sanskriti. The reliance on traditional art forms to get social content across is also striking. Perhaps the largest deviation, though, is that in the Jana Sanskriti performances
anyone may be replaced, whether it is the oppressed or the oppressor or an ally of either one. This is totally up to the spectator and the joker who facilitates the forum and who sometimes interferes, sometimes not. Unlike some of Boal’s followers Boal had no problems with this, proclaiming that “Methods are for the People, people are not for the method” (Jana Sanskriti 89).

The Muktadhara IV Forum and Festival was intense. We all started with a five day workshop by Sanjoy Ganguly and the members of Jana Sanskriti in Badu, outside of Kolkata. The workshop called “Scripting the Play instead of Playing the Script” led us through a series of games and image exercises, creating stories, replacing characters, halting, replaying, and discussing. At the same time another workshop was given to the members of Jana Sanskriti at Jana Sanskriti’s headquarters, Girish Bhavan, in barrel drumming and puppet making. The groups came together in the evening for presentations and lectures on the rooftop of the building we worked in. One night I counted how many different countries had been represented by the people I had worked with that day: Iran, Spain, Persia, Israel, Austria, Australia, Denmark, United Kingdom, United States, Colombia, Mexico, Italy, France, Argentina . . . and likely more.

After five days we moved to Kolkata. The Muktadhara headquarters were in the local YWCA. Here we had workshops and could have breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Barbara Santos, who worked with Boal from 1991 until 2009, gave a workshop and devised a performance with the women of Jana Sanskriti—across the hall Jean François Martel, a long time theatre of the oppressed practitioner from France, who gave a Rainbow of Desire workshop based on Boal’s book of the same title. Every day from 3-8 pm, we went to Curzon Park for the festival, which included Forum Theatre Productions from Jana Sanskriti teams as well as other teams from abroad. There were also folk music, songs, dances, martial arts and other performances. The fairgrounds were located between the bus station and the tram depot surrounded by several highways and, although the pollution was rampant, the atmosphere was festive. Several thousands of people came every day and some intervened more than once in the various forum theatre productions. The festival opened with a parade of puppets made by the workshop in Girish Bhavan accompanied by the drum barrels. The puppets and the drumming became a kind of leitmotiv for this festival: on the fifth day in Kolkata we held a march for humanity and against blind politics through Kolkata; two days later we all opened another festival with the same puppets and barrels, a festival organized by the human rights protection committee at the village of Tetulia.

The visit to the villages was the last part of the festival. A five-hour bus ride and half-hour ride on the flatbeds of little motorcycles brought us to Digambarpur, one of the first villages where Jana Sanskriti worked. Here the father of one of Jana Sanskriti’s long time members, Satyaranjan Pal, had donated a piece of his property and the villagers had built the Mukta Mancha, the Free Stage. It was an oasis of rest in comparison to Kolkata. We walked, we rested, we played with the children in the Mukta Mancha, we attended some more presentations. But it was not until the day after, in Tetulia, that we could witness the incredible impact Jana Sanskriti has in the villages. There
was no room to sit. There must have been at least 3000 villagers. People were standing on rooftops, kids climbed on anything they could find to climb on. The audience was vocal, active. We could not communicate with them but we could give each other the sort of sideways nod that is customary, and sometimes someone would just grab your hand and smile. As the sun set and only the stage was lit, we leaned back and watched. This was a happening.

After I was invited to come to Muktadhara, I doubted for a long time if I really wanted to go to India and Jana Sanskriti. After all I had to miss the last week of class and finals week. In addition, although I do some forum theatre in my classes I hardly consider myself a TO expert, as I perceived many other attendees to be. Eventually the opportunity to present “after sunset under a mango tree” made me waiver; it just sounded too idyllic (even though the mango tree was replaced by a rooftop).

Now, months later, I know the experience was far from idyllic but it has affected my life, my teaching, and my research interests. The trip was utterly exhausting, but I met some of the most extraordinary people in my life. Uri Noy Meir from Israel who set up a Theatre of the Oppressed face book group where we all virtually meet; Fabio Fussi from Italy who set up the email list; Hector Aristizabal who performed his own story of being of tortured in Columbia in the 1980s, and whose book I read afterwards, awed by his honesty and sincerity; and Susan Quick, who after a severe car accident in her late 40s pulled herself up, quite literally, and started a TO company for the disabled in the United Kingdom. Her first email ever was to Boal, and Boal visited her and her company several times. She cannot travel alone and travels with her 74 year old companion Tony, but when I met her she had just conducted a Rainbow of Desire workshop in Katmandu, and while the three-day village trip turned out to be too much for many in our group, she was not to be deterred and came along. And then there were the Iranians, who presented a very moving, stylized version of Antigone, set in the 2009 Iranian elections unrest, when people were not allowed to bury their loved ones. I will not forget the hug between the Iranian director and his Israeli friend, questioning why their governments told them they had to be enemies.

Then there were the local members of course. Sanjoy Ganguly and his wife Sima, who eloped with Sanjoy on his motorcycle leaving her upper middle class family behind in Kolkata; Renuka Das who left her abusive family when she was 15 in the late 1980s to join Jana Sanskriti. Now she leads her own team in the village she grew up in; Satyaranjan Pal from Digambapur where the first Mukta Mancha-Open Stage was built in 1997, and whose 77-year old father still directs plays there. The personal journeys of some of the core members of Jana Sanskriti are published in a volume that was released at the festival. The book, Scripting Power: Jana Sanskriti On and Offstage, is a primary testimony to the power and the impact of Jana Sanskriti on the lives of its members and beyond.

Sanjoy Ganguly and his team have traveled all over the world to give workshops and lectures. It may, therefore, be surprising (but then again maybe not) that he has never been in the United States. This will change, though: in July, 2011, he will give a keynote at the 17th annual Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) conference in Chicago, less than a week before the AATE conference. It’ll be worth checking it out.

Manon van de Water is a professor in theatre research and director of the theatre for youth program at the university of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the chair of ITYARN the International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network (ityarn.org).

Insight Link: You can find out more about Jana Sanskriti in these selected works:

Books:


Websites:
Jana Sanskriti www.janasanskriti.org
Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference 2011 www.ptoweb.org

Incite Link: in July, 2011, Sanjoy Ganguly will give a keynote at the 17th annual Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) conference in Chicago, less than a week before the AATE conference. Go to www.ptoweb.org for more information.
YOUR ROAD MAP

In the next 16 pages you will encounter five theatre projects spread out across the country and two one-person shows. You’ll also find a summary at the end of this special thematic section that recaps how each project is “Meeting the Challenge”. How do they find the funds to get the scripts get written or royalties paid, the productions mounted, the tours produced?

You will meet the Improbable Players in Boston, The Albany Park Theater Project in Chicago, and the Purple Crayon Players on the Northwestern Campus. You’ll encounter Delanna Studi in Kick and John Newman in Vincent. On the west coast, you will find out about Kaiser Permanente’s Health Education Theatre initiative and meet three amazing women from the Julia Morgan Project. Although John Newman is an old friend and we encountered Kaiser Permanente and Purple Crayon Players at our conference in San Francisco, most of these organizations and individuals have not appeared on our pages before.

Our hope is that some of their experience will be useful to you. Perhaps a technique they use for development would be helpful in your community. Perhaps a strategy that works for them will work for you. In any case, you’re bound to be inspired by the innovation, the longevity, the courage you will encounter as you read on.

Incite Link: We have featured some amazing TYA companies and projects in past issues --- Dallas Children’s Theatre, Pennsylvania Youth Theatre, StageWrite --- and we’d like to introduce others in the future. If you have an innovative project, or exciting production please let us know at Editor@aate.
In the East:
Nothing Improbable About Improbable Players Success

Improbable Players is a touring theater company that spotlights tough social issues as they relate to substance abuse prevention while they illuminate the many possibilities for change. All of the young professional actors who make up the troupe are in long-term recovery. They model healthy choices and provide information about how to learn more and how to ask for help. All of the plays have been written from the players’ own authentic, poignant, and funny stories. The actors are the company’s greatest resource, bringing together their passion for performing with their compelling enthusiasm for giving back.

After the curtain falls on each performance the actors tell their stories of lives torn apart by alcohol and other drugs, and of their recovery. They talk frankly about the risks they took and the bad decisions they made while drunk or high. They are honest about the consequences they still suffer from. They don’t glorify their painful past. They make sure audiences know that if it had all been so marvelous, they might still be out there. But it wasn’t.

There are clear messages embedded into the performances – you’re never too young to get sober, for one – and it’s something the audience has heard before, but not like this. This is not a boring lecture. The audience appreciates these real people who act out real stories and are available after the program for discussion sessions where they can get their questions answered. A resource guide provided by the Players encourages teachers to continue the dialogue back in the classroom.

Under the artistic direction of founder Lynn Bratley, the company was launched in 1984 with the creation of an original play, “I’ll Never Do That!” that uses the framework of an annual snapshot for a family photo album to depict a story of the downward spiral of a family living with alcoholism. Since then the play has been welcomed by audiences of all ages and has become the company’s signature piece. Everyone can identify with at least one of the characters and the role they act out in this classic story of how addiction affects everyone in the family.

The company earned the Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston’s Arts Excellence Award in 2005, and Director Lynn Bratley (an AATE member) was presented with the Tufts University Graduate School of Arts & Sciences’ Outstanding Career Achievement award in 2003. Improbable Players is a Massachusetts Cultural Council Creative Teaching Partner. In their summary evaluation MCC wrote, Their strong artistic backgrounds and their authentic life experiences make them effective facilitators in workshops that foster critical thinking and creativity in finding solutions to conflicts and pressures around alcohol and other drug abuse issues.

Over the years the company has grown, attracting more actors, winning wider community and philanthropic support, and working to develop new plays to address other issues and other ages affected by substance abuse: the workplace, elderly, very young children, and the court system. The company’s core clients are schools, colleges and conferences throughout the northeast and nationally. Currently there are nine plays in the repertoire and an interactive workshop based on the combined curriculum strands of theater (acting and script writing) and health (tobacco, alcohol and other substance use/abuse). In 1998, five Boston actors relocated to NY to start Improbable Players/New York and perform the repertoire in area schools. Today there are sixteen actors who perform and teach with the two troupes.

Improbable Players’ programs set the stage for prevention with a firm eye on arts and health education standards, and what it means to be an arts enrichment program in the schools.
Actor training
The actors are the Players’ primary resource because of their real life experience with both acting and recovery and their motivation to carry the message. They must be one year clean and sober to audition. They receive a thorough training in rehearsing the plays, learning how to tell their stories for school audiences, becoming an effective liaison with schools, and facilitating drama workshops.

Playwriting
The performances are written and aligned with state learning standards in mind. The Players work closely with each school to make sure the school has the most appropriate program for their community prevention needs.

Before the program, teachers receive a Discussion Guide with pre and post program questions and links for continued learning.

Evaluation
After each program, students and teachers respond to the program on a feedback form provided by the Players to monitor the program’s impact on learning. This feedback helps the Players improve scripts, learn community concerns about alcohol and other drug issues, get new ideas for scenes, and refine their message.

Impact
Alcohol and other drug abuse is America’s Number One health problem, and too often a dark secret. Individuals and families suffer alone because of shame, fear or ignorance. But substance abuse has characteristic patterns, and people play predictable roles. Improbable Players are not ashamed to be clean and sober. They act out the patterns and tell their own stories of change and recovery. One student wrote:

After seeing this program I am more likely to talk with someone, because I would not be afraid to express myself. I saw that alcoholics could look like you or me.

The actors’ honesty and the fact that they speak from the heart make the plays come alive. A teacher wrote:
Your performance talents are outstanding, your rapport with audiences is truly commendable, and your presentations are agonizingly, gut-wrenchingly alive and authentic in every detail.

The Players set the stage for learning: students pay attention, they have fun, they consider what they’re learning to be relevant to their lives, and they are motivated to learn more. A student who later went on to become a member of the troupe said: I can honestly say I remember seeing the program in high school, feeling the way I felt and thinking, “Oh, wow! these people don’t drink and they’re happy. Maybe I can have a life after all.”

The performances make the tragedy of substance abuse real. The actors stand up, speak out, and help to tear down the stigma still associated with the problem. They help people learn more about the patterns of substance abuse, motivate them to talk about the issues raised in the performances, and ask for help.

Improbable Players is non-profit, historically receiving 70% of income from sales for programs and 30% from private foundations designated for free programs to schools and new scene development. A small percentage of donations from individuals help support programs. The recession has taken a bite out of sales, but not foundation funding, so income percentages have shifted for 2010-2011

In the past year Improbable Players presented at a community conference about homelessness in Lowell, MA, a conference for providers for mental health organizations in North Carolina, drama workshops for the National Recovery High School Conference in Boston, and for many young people in their schools.

This April the Players will be teaching a workshop at the NYU Forum on Theatre for Public Health (New York University Steinhardt School).
A highlight of the past year was an evening performance and follow up drama workshop for a private high school in Massachusetts. The school counselor’s goal was to challenge the juniors to think and talk about their attitudes and norms around alcohol and other drug abuse. So after the show and a brief Q&A, each actor took a group of students to a break out room for the workshop.

Adam documented his session. He asked the students to brainstorm about things they hated that happened because of alcohol and drug use – not from their own lives, but things they heard about or read about. Here is their list: I really hate it when...

1. Someone becomes another person when they use.
2. People put using at the top of their priority list.
3. They leave their old friends for new friends that use.
4. They make excuses for their bad behavior by telling everyone that they were under the influence.
5. They get reckless and aggressive when they use.

The group voted to act out scenario 2, and Adam divided them into three groups to create a scene on the topic. One would be performed when the whole group came back into the auditorium at the end of the evening.

Here’s one of the scenes: a teacher gives a student the choice of taking a test now or later. The student chooses later and goes off for the afternoon to smoke pot with her friend. “Later” approaches and the teacher calls the student on her cell phone. He tells her she will receive a failing grade for the class if she doesn’t show up right away to take the test. She tells the teacher she’s not going to take the test.

After each scene, Adam led a discussion: what happened? What choices got made? Who was the protagonist? What did you recognize in each scene that seemed familiar? What should friends do? What can they do?

Back in the auditorium one scene from each actor’s group was presented: I hate it when people get sloppy, when people drink and drive, when people can’t remember what they did. In wrapping up, the school counselor emphasized the importance of classmates taking care of each other in all situations, especially those that involved the safety and health of any fellow student.

The Players challenge is to convey to the public what it means to be both a theater company and a health education program. Some call it applied theater or arts-in-prevention. The dramatizations and testimonials work together to make the health lesson powerful and effective – and definitely not another lecture.

Most public health entities these days, state or federal, will only support “evidence-based prevention”. By that standard, data collected in surveys must prove that students changed their behavior or stopped using drugs or alcohol as a result of seeing a program or participating in one or a series of workshops. Improbable Players has not collected quantitative data to prove the programs change behavior.

Improbable Players, through 27 years of collecting feedback forms and talking with teachers, know that the programs change knowledge and attitudes about alcohol and other drug abuse. Feedback forms are collected after every program from students and teachers. From those, and from observation, the Players know that young people sit up and listen to lessons that come alive for them: they are ready to go back to the classroom and ask more questions, find out more, open up about the topic, and very often, ask for help. The troupe has enormous amounts of qualitative data from students and teachers that testify to impact on student learning. Many schools invite the Players back year after year. A middle school Principal wrote: The response has been overwhelmingly positive from all those who saw the performance. The comment most often stated by the students on their feedback form is “it wasn’t a boring lecture that we wouldn’t pay attention to and these were real
people telling their stories.” In the past few days since the performance, our social worker has had a sharp increase in the number of students asking for appointments “to talk”. Our teachers are asking how they can better support our students emotionally.

Drama Workshops provide an opportunity for youth to create realistic scenes and stories about issues in their communities that they face. The Players work closely with teachers to plan and implement these sessions in which the theater and health education curriculum are mapped out as intertwining lessons, and students demonstrate knowledge and understanding of substance abuse prevention and theater skills through scenes, monologues, journal writing, drawings, photographs, poetry, and questionnaires. Improbable Players are teaching artists who work in a health education milieu. With a new openness about addictions, the company is not so much a “theater of the oppressed”, but of proud recovery advocates who put a real face on recovery to teach and inspire their audiences.

Insight Link: The mission statement for Improbable Players is to inform audiences about the effects of alcohol and other drug abuse – and the real possibility of recovery - through original performances, discussions and workshops with actors in long-term recovery who model healthy choices and provide resources for learning more and getting help. Learn more by going to their website: www.improbableplayers.org.
In the Heartland: Purple Crayon Players
by Abby Schwarz

Imagine a theatre organization that engages and excites not only youth and families, but also college students; an organization that can lead a creative drama workshop with elementary schoolers at 2:00 P.M., and fill seats primarily with 18-22 year olds at 11:00 P.M. that same night. Imagine that, and you have a snapshot of Purple Crayon Players.

Purple Crayon has been one of the most meaningful and enriching parts of my college experience. I first joined the group as a freshman board representative, the only role available to incoming freshmen. Since then I have had the opportunity to work and learn as development and outreach coordinator last year, and literary manager this year. During my time at Purple Crayon I have had the chance to witness and be a part of major growth for the organization. It has gained a positive reputation on campus, it has expanded its programming, and it has received widespread acclaim in the larger TYA community.

One of the aspects of Purple Crayon I love most is the constant flow of new, innovative ideas, and the determination we all have to put them into action. As undergraduate students who work on a volunteer basis, free from the financial concerns that many companies in the professional setting might face, we are in a unique position to incorporate innovative new programming into our consistent lineup.

Purple Crayon Players is entirely student run, yet produces two to three high quality productions a year, one of them a traveling theatre production. In addition we conduct in-school creative drama workshops to prepare local elementary and middle students for the shows and we facilitate other major projects. I have always been passionate about theatre and working with children, but mostly considered them two different aspects of who I was. Part of what drew me to Purple Crayon was the opportunity to combine these two parts of my identity. Plus, I was excited to work and learn alongside the group’s passionate, enthusiastic members.

This Fall Purple Crayon implemented our first ever high school internship program, which ran in tandem with our fall main stage production of Wrestling Season by Laurie Brooks. We are always looking for new ways to engage the community beyond our college campus, particularly the young people for whom the scripts we produce are targeted. Through this project, we hoped to mentor high school students interested in learning more about theatre at the college level and engage them with the themes of the show, and with the production process itself. The program was a huge success, and a testament to the power of innovation in audience engagement strategies for TYA companies.

Robyn Char, part of the Purple Crayon education team has this to say about the new program: From day one I was so impressed with the creativity and professionalism of our interns. They brought enthusiasm and incredible dedication to the project. Their unique perspective as current high-schoolers provided everyone involved—including the audience—with insight into the real issues facing teens today. I am so proud of the Wrestling Season internship program, and I know that it is only the beginning of the innovative methods Purple Crayon will continue to use to engage and enrich our audiences both on and off campus. While all of our interns were primarily actors, they brought a diverse set of skills and interests, including playwriting, direction, and design. By the end of the process the interns had formed a strong feeling of ensemble with one another and with their Purple Crayon Mentors.

Production interns worked alongside members of The Wrestling Season team to learn what goes into designing and creating a full-scale production. Production interns specified an area of interest (costumes, scenery, lighting,
sound, publicity, etc.) to learn about in greater detail and then worked under the guidance of Purple Crayon Players teaching artists and directors. Acting interns wrote, rehearsed and performed a short piece exploring themes found in The Wrestling Season. All interns were paired with Purple Crayon Players team mentors who answered questions, advised, and helped make the internship experience unique for each individual. Says one of the high school student participants: "I've learned a lot about movement in devising, something I've never done before, and about devising as a process...I could probably devise for days, picking out the moments of gold here and there. I love being able to create a common movement vocabulary and seeing what comes of it. It’s almost scary how perfect our different ideas have blended together."

In addition to The Wrestling Season, this past academic year Purple Crayon mounted Le Ballon Rouge, based on the film by Albert Lamorisse, and Doors, by Suzan Zeder, which will be this year’s touring production. In the spring we will produce Luna, by Ramon Esquivel, which is a play for very young audiences.

Our funding comes from the Associated Student Government as we are an officially recognized student group at Northwestern. To be a part of the organization a student must petition, or interview. We have auditions for each production, but that is separate from the board itself. Almost all of us are theatre majors right now, though this is by no means a requirement to be a part of Purple Crayon. I am a Performance Studies major, and in the past we have even had members with majors outside of the School of Communication like English or Psychology.

There are seventeen people on the executive board this year, including the freshman board representatives. But beyond the executive board, countless students are involved with Purple Crayon as we have student directors, producers, casts, and production teams for all of our productions and special projects, plus student teaching artists who work on our educational programming. We have been in existence since 2005 and look forward to many more years of bringing TYA to our community on and off campus.

Abby Schwarz is a student at Northwestern and a member of the executive board of Purple Crayon Players.

Insight Link: The mission statement for PCP states: Purple Crayon Players is a student-run theatre company on the Northwestern University campus committed to creating high quality productions, events, and educational materials regarding all aspects of theatre for young audiences. Purple Crayon Players believes that audiences of all ages can appreciate, be inspired by, and grow through exposure to this unique art form.

To read the mission statement in its entirety and to find out more about PCP, go to their website at www.purplecrayonplayers.org.

Incite link: Purple Crayon will be leading a session at the AATE conference this summer in Chicago about their programming with high school students this past fall. Mark your calendars to attend if this is a subject of interest to you.
In the Heartland:
Albany Park Theatre Project
by Carol Ann Amour

The first time I saw the work of the Albany Park Theatre Project was in March of 2010. Kirsti Collins and I went to see their production of *Feast* and we were blown away. We were immediately struck by the high production values of this show done by high school students. Unbelievable feats of balance, sound that worked perfectly with the script, color that was a feast for the eye.

The students had done interviews to collect the stories that became the script. They reflected the students’ experience and they reflected the surrounding neighborhood. Stories from Mexico, stories from Peru, stories from Puerto Rica and The Philippines, all managed to mingle with stories of being an immigrant in America. This show had humor, it had movement, it had theatricality. It also had deep thought provoking meaning.

I was curious about how the company came into being and how they operate, so I checked out their website. There is a wealth or information and we are reprinting just enough to whet your appetite here (by permission of Director David Feiner).

You can find out more by going to www.aptpchicago.org/art.

This is what I hope my theater work does for people: it takes them inside worlds they’re curious about but have no real access to; it bears witness to truths that many folks-both government leaders and lay people-try aggressively to distort or to ignore; it makes beauty and meaning out of sometimes ugly, sometimes confusing strands of human experience; it is a creative act that, while often standing in for a memory, can actually become a new memory, can become a new truth-that, while telling one story, can actually become a new story and inspire the creation of yet other stories.

- Laura Wiley, APTP Co-Founder

Albany Park Theatre Project is an ensemble of youth artists who collectively write, choreograph, compose, and stage original performance works based on people’s real-life stories.

Since 1997, APTP has created more than 50 performance works integrating theater, music, and dance. We have performed for more than 25,000 people at our 90-seat home theater in Albany Park and at venues throughout Chicago and beyond. Our performances bring together one of the most truly diverse audiences in Chicago.

Our theater comes from the real-life stories we gather from immigrant and working-class Americans. APTP brings to the stage an array of voices often not heard on other stages: our plays have shared the life experiences of Mexican *indocumentados*, Bosnian refugees, Bolivian revolutionaries, persecuted Ukrainian Jews, Palestinian-American Muslims, Persian Sufis, Polish domestics, Vietnamese refugees, and more. Telling the stories of our community means that we examine issues that are important to people in neighborhoods like Albany Park. APTP’s plays have told the stories of people whose lives are impacted by immigration policy, globalization, war, inequalities in public education, poverty, child abuse and neglect, addiction, domestic violence, gang violence, the criminal justice system, prejudice and intolerance, gentrification, and more.

With a focus on storytelling always our artistic hallmark, APTP has become ever more stylistically adventurous and imaginative over our ten-year history, honing our play development process, our sociopolitical acumen, and our skills as actors, dancers, musicians, ethnographers, writers, and directors to tell the stories we collect with ever greater precision and power. Visit What’s On to learn about upcoming performances, delve into our Production Archive, or read on to learn about our creative process….

- Reprinted from the Albany Park Theatre Project website by permission

Interested in what Albany Park is working on now, I talked with Artistic Director David Feiner. He told me that their next production would be in October of this year. The young participants are currently collecting
stories from heroes of the immigrant justice movement during the past 5 years, from public leaders in the movement, and also from “ordinary” people who have been participating in every day acts of resistance. Said Feiner, “Chicago has been an epicenter beginning with the 2006 march in opposition to Sensenbrenner’s anti-immigration rights bill. Last year undocumented youth picked up the torch with their Coming out of the Shadows rallies.”

David Feiner stressed that immigration issues are central in their work at Albany Park Theater Project since many immigrants live in the neighborhood where the theater company is located. We are also interested in what the different journeys are that people take to becoming an activist or to standing up for what they believe in.

*Usually,* says Feiner, *in social justice arts work you get either a message that is weak in terms of the artwork or you get artwork that minimizes the message. We have always wanted to make artwork that is outstanding both because of the aesthetics and because of the socio-political impact.*

Funding for APTP comes primarily from foundation and corporation grants, individual contributions, the Illinois Arts Council, the Chicago Department of Cultural Activity, and the Chicago Park District. “We appreciate,” says Feiner, “that the Park District gives us a place to work and rehearse rent-free.”

Albany Park Theater Project has been selected to receive a prestigious award this spring: the Midwest Light of Human Rights Award, presented by the National Immigrant Justice Center. More information at [http://www.immigrantjustice.org/midwestlight.html](http://www.immigrantjustice.org/midwestlight.html). In announcing the award, the executive director of NIJC, Mary Meg McCarthy, said, “Heartland Alliance’s National Immigrant Justice Center is recognizing Albany Park Theater Project for its commitment to using the arts to give voice to the immigrant experience by lending a face and a name to the millions of people who come to the United States seeking a better life. APTP's work plays a critical role in promoting the human rights of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.”

If you ever get the opportunity to see the work of Albany Part Theater Project, don’t miss it. Your time will be well spent and you will be not only entertained, but moved and inspired. It is also important to note that APTP teen participants, according to information on their website, have a 72% better high school graduation rate, 42% higher college matriculation rate, and a 600% higher college graduation rate than the average for students in Chicago’s public schools.

**Insight Link:** Albany Park Theater Project will be presenting at *Lakeside Reflections,* the 2011 annual AATE Conference being held in Chicago from July 27th through 31st.

**Incite Link:** To find out more about how to organize a project like APTP in your community or get dates for their upcoming performances, go to [www.aptpchicago.org](http://www.aptpchicago.org).
Editor’s Note: A one person show can be very challenging for the actor to carry off. Success depends on a good script and a good actor. Because Kick is a one person and very low budget show, Encompass, the producing company, has been able to use professional actors. I have seen Delanna perform in Kick at least a dozen times, and I have been moved each time I see it. She plays thirteen different parts, but one is never confused about which character is speaking at any given time. The set is simple and the show can go on with just Delanna and her colleague Lex Stepping as the sound man, tech crew, and audience facilitator. No matter what age Delanna is performing for, the audience is mesmerized. No matter how many times Delanna performs this play, she is engaged and believable. I have also sat in on many after performance discussions. Audience members need time to cool down before the discussions begin. Timing is crucial. The last five minutes of the play are very powerful emotionally and it is literally true that there is not a dry eye in the house. Neither the play, nor the facilitator tell the audience what to think. The events and speeches of the characters, however, make a compelling argument against the damage done by racism. For the most part, the talk backs have been thought provoking and emotional. I have often heard statements like, “I never understood this issue before. Now I know why it’s such a big deal.” or “I really thought I was seeing thirteen different characters. Delanna is amazing.”

KICK is a one-person show that explores Native American stereotypes and the power of images. KICK tells the story of a week in the life of Grace Greene. It’s a big week—Homecoming Week—when tradition and school spirit become fighting words. An incident of vandalism to her school’s logo—the Newman Brave—begins a chain of events that change Grace, her family and her community. Grace Greene is a runner, and the kick reference relates to the idea of a kick start, which takes on increasing significance as the play progresses.

KICK was written by Cornerstone Theatre Founding Member Peter Howard in 2000. Mr. Howard conducted over 200 interviews in a span of two years, interviewing people in communities with American Indian Mascots. Having just witnessed the Los Angeles Unified School District’s heated battle to remove Native American mascots from public schools, Peter came across an article about a young Wisconsin woman (Chris Munson, Oneida) who was engaged in a similar battle in her small town of Mosinee, Wisconsin. This inspired Peter to create Grace Greene and to tell the story from her perspective.

Mr. Howard had a rough outline of the story he wanted to tell. Since I am a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and since the main character of KICK is Cherokee, Peter was open to hearing our stories and my input. This collaboration created the project we have now using the Cherokee language, a song, and our traditional Tear Dress and its story. In May 2000, our lead actress, the talented Piper Leigh Daniels became ill and had to leave the show. I inherited KICK and have been performing it ever since. Eight hundred shows and audiences later, KICK has become an important educational tool that encourages people to acknowledge and discuss this controversial issue. It has had numerous tours in Wisconsin, California, New Mexico, Washington DC, and Canada. It has been performed for middle schools, high schools, colleges, and community groups.
For several years, KICK was produced by ENCOMPASS, a non-profit organization in Pasadena, California that offers what they call Compassion Plays. The guiding idea behind the Compassion Plays program is a relatively simple one: live theatre has the power to affect our emotional state—to make us feel. In a live theatrical performance, effective writing and the performance of a skilled actor can make us feel experiences of a fictional character, as we connect with that character’s joy, rage or grief. So moved, and with the guidance of a sensitive facilitator, we are in an ideal place to begin a conversation about how these fictional characters and situations might connect to our own lives, our own feelings, our own truths and our own questions of identity. And from there, we can move on to conversation about how our identities connect with and impact one another in the form of community. The work is funded primarily through grants and most recently by an innovative on-line “team” challenge (see Incite link).

KICK was used in conjunction with the lobbying efforts of the ALLiance Against Racial Mascots (ALLARM) to get AB858 (a bill that would eliminate the term and logo “Redskin” from public schools). The bill was the first of its caliber to pass through both the Assembly and Senate, only to be vetoed by the Governor. My proudest moments have always been performing for our Native communities who are in the midst of this battle. I am always hopeful that I am giving them a voice and doing justice to their story. I am honored that I have been trusted to take this show outside the community, as well.

KICK covers a controversial topic. Our biggest challenge is that most members of our audience don’t realize that this is an issue and that the communities who need this show the most are often hesitant to book a performance. The power of theater is that, if done well, the audience can connect on a personal, emotional level with the characters. We have an opportunity to remove this issue from the intellectual level and physically show the impact it has on Native youth.

Delanna Studi is an equity actress who lives in Los Angeles, California. She is currently in residence at the Portland Repertory Theatre. She was the lead in the film Somewhere in America. She can be reached at (310) 528-5352 or delannastudi@gmail.com

Insight Link: For more information on the damage done to both Native and non-Native youth by race based mascots and logos click here to see Dr. Stephanie Fryberg’s An eight minute clip of Delanna’s film Edge of America can be seen by clicking here.

Incite Link: The Encompass Mission Statement is to spark compassion, personal responsibility and an appreciation of differences. Encompass can be reached at www.encompass.org. Talk with Lex Steppling to get ideas for staging thought provoking plays that touch the hearts of your audience members and challenge their beliefs and their thinking.
The One Person Show: Acting Alone
by John Dilworth Newman

As overworked producers and artistic directors of their own companies, high school theatre teachers rarely act in plays. While many teachers are experienced actors, students don’t often get to see their instructors practice on stage what they preach in class.

In 2008, I received a Reba R. Robertson Award from the Children’s Theatre Foundation of America to support my development as an artist and educator. I used some of the funds to perform a one-man play for my students.

I should note that solo performance is not the only way that a high school drama teacher can perform for students. For Sandra Fenichel Asher’s Everything Is Not Enough, a group of my students committed to rehearse the play over the summer and perform it the first week of school. We had enough female actors volunteer for the project but we were two males short. An English teacher and I played the two adult male roles, allowing us to cast the play age appropriately.

In the past, I have understudied male roles and even played some of them on occasion. For our production of Shakespeare’s The Tempest, my understudies were so well prepared that I gave them a chance to perform for an invited audience. I took the opportunity to play the role of Prospero that I had memorized.

Of course, some teachers rehearse and perform at night in plays in the community. Like some of my fellow teachers, I’ve occasionally acted in plays in the summer. However, during the school year, it would be unfair to my family to give up a month or two of evenings after teaching all day and directing all afternoon. Rehearsing a solo play was something I could do at home over six month’s time.

The other reason that I wanted to perform a one-man show was that I had been trying to write a solo play of my own. I soon realized that I couldn’t write a single person show until I’d experienced one from the inside as an actor.

There are a number of one person plays that have been written and performed by well-known actors, but they don’t usually publish their plays if they think they might ever perform them again. However, a few actors, such as Leonard Nimoy, have performed their show for a season and then made them available to others.

I searched the Dramatic Publishing catalogue and found more than a dozen solo performance pieces. Limiting the search to male historical characters, the selection was smaller. I’m not tall enough for Lincoln and can’t play the violin like Einstein, so that narrowed it down to Leonard Nimoy’s Vincent. I don’t bear much resemblance to the impressionist painter, but neither did the original actor. Realizing this, Nimoy established Theo Van Gogh as the primary character who, a few weeks after Vincent’s death, describes and impersonates his artist brother.

Memorization was a challenge, but less so because I did it over an extended period of time. I found it more effective to work for a few minutes several times a day over a long period of time than to “cram.” I made cassette recordings of the lines and played them in the car during my commute. Sometimes my students would see me walking down the hall reciting lines. I found that holding a cell-phone to my ear kept them from worrying about my sanity.

The play Vincent is somewhat forgiving in terms of memorization because about half the text is read from letters. I typed the letters as Word documents and printed them on parchment paper in a handwriting font. I still memorized the entire text, lest my letters should get out of order. The “safety net” of the letters could sometimes become a crutch, and it is challenging to strike the proper balance between actually reading the letters, which the character would be doing, and reciting the letters for memory, which is more theatrically effective.

I performed the play for each of my theatre classes at Highland High School and also offered a couple of public
performances. Over the last eighteen months, I have revived the play and performed it during a playwriting residency in New York, for a community theatre in Utah, and at a theatre convention in Wyoming. Last summer, I performed it at the AATE conference in San Francisco.

This fall, I began a professorship at Utah Valley University and I performed the show on campus to introduce myself to the students. My department chair, James Arrington, is the local master of the one-man genre. For decades, he has performed as Brigham Young and in December, his multi-character show, Farley Family Xmas, draws a perennial family audience. While I did not work with a director in preparing Vincent, Arrington advised me to do so in the future if I wanted to take my performance to the next level. He reminded me that it is impossible for an actor to monitor from the inside how he is coming across on the outside. Among other things, a self-directed solo performer will hold back in moments of highest emotion. Without a director’s prompting, a solo actor will fear the silence and rush on when a dramatic pause would be more effective.

I believe that by returning to acting, I have become a better director, as I am more conscious of the way that actors think and feel their way through a play. I’ve reminded myself how an actor has to take the energy and anxiety of performance and channel it productively. I’ve also gained a greater appreciation of how an actor must listen to and respond to his fellow performers and to the audience. Perhaps the most important thing my acting experiences have reminded me is that even in a solo performance, one is never acting alone.

Dr. John Newman teaches playwriting and theatre and drama for young people at Utah Valley University. He also serves as the director of the University’s Noorda Center for Theatre for Children and Youth. For the previous eighteen years, he taught and directed theatre at Highland High School in Salt Lake City. He currently serves on AATE’s Board of Directors.
On the West Coast:
The Julia Morgan Project

Editor’s note: Shortly after moving to Berkeley, I had the opportunity to see the premiere of Becoming Julia Morgan at the Berkeley City Club. Although it was advertised as general theatre, it is very appropriate for a middle and high school audience. It is included in this TYA themed edition of Incite/Insight because it is a wonderful example of using theatre to bring history to life and to inspire young people to follow their dreams. Efforts have been, and continue to be made to mount a touring production of Becoming Julia Morgan to schools in the Bay area. I observed several middle and high school students in the audience who were mesmerized by the production. When I talked with one student after the show, she told me that she really enjoyed it and would like to have it performed at her school. Becoming Julia Morgan has been nominated for five awards by the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle: Best Play, Best Playwright, Best Director, Best Lead Actress, and Best Ensemble.

The Julia Morgan Project was developed by an ad hoc organization comprised of Belinda Taylor (playwright), Barbra Oliver (director) and Sabrina Klein (commissioner and producer). This project was formed specifically to produce Becoming Julia Morgan. The Playwrights Foundation in San Francisco serves as its fiscal sponsor. The Julia Morgan Project was formed by its three principals in 2009 to raise funds to produce Becoming Julia Morgan at the Berkeley City Club, among Julia Morgan’s most gracious architectural achievements. Completed in 1930 near the UC-Berkeley campus, it combines Gothic-Romanesque elements reminiscent of a Spanish castle. Often referred to as Julia Morgan’s Little Castle, the architect herself affectionately called it “my gem.”

As California’s first female architect, with 800 plus buildings to her name, Julia Morgan (b. 1872--d.1957) was an elusive and fascinating personality who pursued ambitious career goals at a time when architecture was exclusively a man’s profession. She left behind a unique legacy of architecture that inspires us today, including the spectacular Hearst Castle, San Simeon, on the central California coast.

Julia Morgan was a prominent figure in the arts and crafts movement in California, yet she shunned the spotlight—almost too well—and left little written evidence of her architectural ideas or inner life. “My buildings speak for me,” she often said, and that’s true. They speak eloquently. But we want to know more, to know the person. This is what drove Taylor in her research that culminated in the writing of Becoming Julia Morgan, a play that requires a minimal set. One actor plays Julia Morgan, while an ensemble of three actors play multiple roles, gliding from one character into another with few props and lightning fast costume changes. Talented actors are essential to pulling this off effectively. Lighting and sound provide needed effects to suggest time and location changes.

Becoming Julia Morgan is grounded in factual research, but imagines Julia’s life as being full of juice and life, drama and humor, illuminating a tenacious will to succeed against monumental barriers. The play shines a light on Morgan’s sphinx-like genius, her bravery, fears, eccentricities, generosity and dedication to craftsmanship. The proof
of her “confounding ability to conjure up beauty” is that today we yearn to experience her buildings, be inside them, absorb the exciting visual elements and the harmony that are hallmarks of her artistry. Morgan was utterly unique and highly talented, yet remains little known, even in California. Becoming Julia Morgan is intended to remedy that. To that end, Sabrina Klein commissioned the play when she was Executive Director of The Julia Morgan Center for the Arts in Berkeley.

With fiscal sponsorship from the Playwrights Foundation, the Julia Morgan Project held two fund-raisers: the first was a silent auction in a beautiful Julia Morgan designed home in Berkeley. We served donated food/wine/coffee (a Julia Morgan blend created exclusively for us by Peets Coffee) and solicited auction items from local establishments; we invited our friends and colleagues and raised about 1/3 of basic seed money. The second fund-raiser, an afternoon tea in a private home for invited donors, raised another third. At both fund-raisers our leading lady Janis Stevens – in her Julia Morgan costume -- performed scenes from the play. A personal bridge loan carried us into production. Box office receipts from the sold-out run covered remaining expenses, and allowed us to pay back the loan.

Becoming Julia Morgan enjoyed a critically acclaimed, sold out run with a list of more than 400 would-be patrons remaining on a waiting list for tickets. The small venue – just 50 seats in a small theatre space at the Berkeley City Club – could not accommodate the demand for tickets over the six week run. So we are currently in conversation with various venues to produce a second run in Berkeley later this year. Additionally, Sabrina Klein and Belinda Taylor sit on a state committee – Julia Morgan 2012, formed by the California Cultural Heritage Endowment -- intending to celebrate the life and achievements of this great California architect next year.

Our biggest challenges were two-fold: raising the funds to produce the play, and mustering within ourselves the capacity to meet the many production challenges we encountered without having a producing infrastructure in place. What allowed us to succeed ultimately was our personal reputations and many contacts in the Bay Area theatre world to which we turned for help, our supportive families, and the high regard in which Julia Morgan is held locally.

Underlying all our activities is our belief in what women can accomplish when we put our minds to it. It matters to us that Julia was a woman (though she hated to be called a “woman architect.”) She inspires women today in all artistic and artisan endeavors. Our mission might be considered three-fold: 1. to extend and enhance knowledge of Julia Morgan’s unique talents and contributions to American architecture; 2. to share an inspiring personal story of one woman’s achievements against great odds. 3. to bring to the stage a wonderfully crafted and performed work of theatre

Information provided by Belinda Taylor, playwright for Becoming Julia Morgan.

Insight Link: Belinda Taylor, Sabrina Klein and Barbara Oliver continue to work individually in Bay Area theatre while exploring emerging opportunities to re-mount Becoming Julia Morgan. Go to their website at www.becomingjuliamorgan.com for more information.

Incite Link: To find out what’s next for Becoming Julia Morgan, to arrange to review the script, or to book a show, contact Belinda Taylor at Belinda@mac.com.
On the West Coast: Kaiser Permanente/California

Editor’s Note: We had the opportunity to see one of Kaiser Permanente’s productions, A Nightmare on Puberty Street, at the AATE annual conference in San Francisco this past summer. Kaiser Permanente was one of the sponsor’s of the 2010 convention.

For over 25 years Educational Theatre Programs (ETP) has been inspiring children, teens, and adults to make better decisions for a healthier life by offering free live theatre programs to schools and communities. Whether we’re with you for a one-hour assembly or a multi-day program, it’s all part of Kaiser Permanente’s tradition of community involvement.

Our live theatre performances feature contemporary music, humor, dance, and dialogue loaded with age-appropriate health information.

Our youthful performer/educators reflect our communities’ diversity. Their realistic portrayals of young people’s lives will pull your audience members into the performance and have them wanting to make healthy choices, too.

Our performer/educators are trained extensively in health issues and peer counseling. Performances and programs are created and updated by medical professionals, educators, parents, and theatre professionals.

Kaiser Permanente is a total health care provider and provides these programs free of charge as a service to the community.

Information taken from Kaiser Permanente’s website. To learn more to: www.kaiserpermanente/california.com
Meeting the Challenge

Each of the TYA companies, productions, and/or projects we have taken a look at in this issue of Incite/Insight has found creative ways to meet the challenge of paying the bills. We recap some of those ways here with contact information for each and some additional resources for raising the funds or finding the in-kind services to make your TYA dreams come true.

Fund Raising Sources Identified by Articles in This Issue OF Incite/Insight

The Improbable Players: Improbable Players is non-profit, historically receiving 70% of income from sales for programs and 30% from private foundations designated for free programs to schools and new scene development. A small percentage of donations from individuals help support programs. The recession has taken a bite out of sales, but not foundation funding, so income percentages have shifted for 2010-2011.

Contact Information: contact Director Lynn Bratley; M.Ed., Director
   Phone: 617-926-8124 or 800-437-4303
   Fax: 617-926-8315
   Email: players@improbableplayers.org
   Website: www.improbableplayers.org
   Improbable Players is on Facebook and Twitter

Purple Crayon Players: PCP is funded through their university via the Associated Student Government.

Albany Park Theatre Project: Funding for APTP comes primarily from foundation and corporation grants, individual contributions, the Illinois Arts Council, and the Chicago Department of Cultural Activity. The Chicago Park District provides APTP space rent free.

Kick: KICK is currently produced by ENCOMPASS, a non-profit organization in Pasadena, California. Funds come primarily through grants and most recently by an innovative on-line “e-team” challenge.

Vincent: John Newman received a Reba R. Robertson Award from the Children’s Theatre Foundation of America to support his development as an artist and educator. He used some of the funds to perform a one-man play for his students.

The Julia Morgan Project: The Playwrights Foundation in San Francisco serves as the fiscal sponsor. The Project also held two fund-raisers: the first was a silent auction in a beautiful Julia Morgan designed home in Berkeley. They served donated food/wine/coffee (a Julia Morgan blend created exclusively for us by Peets Coffee) and solicited auction items from local establishments; they invited friends and colleagues and raised about 1/3 of basic seed money. The second fund-raiser, an afternoon tea in a private home for invited donors, raised another third. At both fund-raisers the leading lady Janis Stevens – in her Julia Morgan costume -- performed scenes from the play. A personal bridge loan carried them into production. Box office receipts from the sold-out run covered remaining expenses, and allowed them to pay back their loan.


Kaiser Permanente Educational Theatre Program: This program is an integral part of a corporate structure. Actors are employees of Kaiser Permanente.

Contact Information: www.kaiserpermanente/california.com

Fund Raising Ideas from Other Issues of Incite/Insight

See the December 2010 issue of Incite/Insight. Sandy Asher’s excellent article, “The Work of Sandy Asher” provides many good ideas for getting things done through a combination of partnerships, bartering, and more traditional fund raising avenues.

See the February 2011 issue for Tim Ortman’s “No Money, No Time.”

Other Ways to Find Out About Funding

Be sure to read the AATE updates every time they come out. Each one has many sources of grants, competitions, and other possibilities for funding projects. Be sure to watch for future issues of Incite/Insight. And, if you have innovative ways to make things happen, send your article idea to editor@aate.com.
No to the Naysayers

From time to time, Incite/Insight receives questions from the field which we ask respected and experienced members to answer. The expert for this issue is Gai Jones, CETA Membership VP. If you have a question you would like answered, submit it to editor@aate.com.

I am the only drama teacher at my middle school. Sometimes other staff don’t seem to understand how important creative drama and theatre arts can be. How can I stand up for what we do?

In my theatre education experience with students, pre-kindergarten through senior citizens, my middle school theatre tenure provided the ultimate learning curve, not only because of the age of the students, but also because I realized that I need to be my own advocate. It is a prerequisite that I believe in myself and in my subject area, even on those days when it is challenging. I have to incorporate daily the natural high which educational theatre provides for teachers and students who are empowered with life skills. Teaching to the national and state standards and expectations are important to my students’ education. I need to make sure the students, parents, and other teachers know that theatre is a core subject and it is important for the development of America’s creative future. I have to be a positive, knowledgeable agent for educational theatre.

Techniques which I and other middle school and junior high theatre educators employ:

- offering to lead a short portion of the faculty meetings or PDIs, having other staff experience some kind of imagination exercise, such as nonthreatening group improvisation story ball;
- agreeing to work with second language learners for development of spoken skills;
- volunteering to work with other teachers’ students in life skills experiences, such as problem solving, cooperative learning, nonverbal and verbal communication, and creative thinking;
- communicating the statistics, such as SAT evidence that students with an arts background score substantially higher on their SATs in both the math and verbal areas than students without an arts background;
- becoming a member theatre education associations, attending conferences which provide me with information such as “Critical Evidence,” and up-to-date theatre education innovations needed for my students;
- being visible in the school; volunteering to do short PTA programs, lunchtime improv shows, etc.
- having my “ 30 second elevator” speech ready to communicate the importance of equity and access for every student, pre-k through high school, to experience sequential standards-based theatre education.
- and, finally, giving myself a standing ovation each day.

Gai Jones is an associate professor and professional Theatre educator who works with elementary through senior citizens, including college and university students at CA State University, East Bay and Ventura College. The black box theater at El Dorado High School, Placentia is named The Gai Jones Theatre. She is known as the author of two theatre ed textbooks Raising the Curtain published by www.perfectionlearning.com and Break a Leg, Tips and Truisms for Theatre Educators, a self-published love letter to Theatre educators, at www.gaijones.com. She is Membership VP of CA Thespians, and Drama Teachers of SO CA, and serves on the Policy Council of CAAE and the National Board of EdTA. She teaches ensemble building workshops for professional development and theatre associations around the world. She is a past AATE California representative.
Fight or Flight: Coping With The Anxiety of An Inner City Theatre Teacher
by Michele Miller

Every Monday the butterflies in my stomach churned as my alarm clock screamed 6:45 A.M. I knew there would be a full week ahead at the charter high school where I taught theatre and dance. The possible challenges that might arise throughout the week popped into my head as I threw on my clothes and swallowed the anxiety of the challenges to come. As I settled into my Jetta, I thought back to my orientation week when the executive director referred to our school learning environment as a war zone, an ER, and my stamina. However there were other mornings where my anxiety was washed away by discoveries brighter than the sun peeking its head through the smoggy city air. Coping with the ever changing anxiety level of being an inner city theatre teacher always had me asking, “fight or flight?”

During my orientation week, I was frequently informed about the difficulty of the students, almost to the point that I would be shaking as I dreamed about my first day of teaching. I ventured into my first with no major problems and thought everything I was being told was just a scare tactic. However, when the bell rang on my second week, I realized the honeymoon was over as my classroom walls echoed with whines, confrontation, and disrespectful attitudes. I had students complain about almost everything from participation, to standing up, to writing their names on a piece of paper. I was nearly crushed when I asked a student I wanted to bring opportunities to the class, and he responded by saying, “I don’t want your opportunities!” All I was trying to do was to show my students that I wanted to be there for them. All they were trying to tell me, or at least I thought, they were trying to tell me, was that they did not care. I wanted to hide behind a barricade and pray for a rescue plane. Would my response be fight or flight?

My own assumption regarding the disrespectful behavior was that there was a lack of guidance and structure in my students’ lives. Throughout the year, I realized that poverty, family, and living environment played a much larger role in behavioral problems than I had thought. Even the quiet ones, the shy ones, the students getting good grades had environmental issues weighing heavy on their hearts.

At times I would end up crawling under the sheets and crying because of some of the stories I heard. No sooner after crying over one student’s loss of a family member or other crisis, would a discipline problem appear on my plate. When this happened in the middle of a lesson, I would send the student to the main office and appear as though the confrontation did not phase me so that I could continue my lesson with the rest of the class. As a performer I was trained to be vulnerable and emotionally available, therefore letting a confrontation just roll off my back was extremely difficult for me. How could I just forget that Student A had nowhere to sleep at night? How could I let it go that Student X had called me a degrading name and threw a chair down on the floor in frustration? At these times it seemed like flight was the easiest option for me. I mean, how could my theatre lessons be engaging if my students had to worry about a roof over their heads?

The first day of school I had a female student, C, in my first period class who came in late with a sassy attitude. I could not pronounce her name correctly, and I started sweating as she snapped at me every time I got it wrong. C interrupted while I gave directions, she shouted out, and snapped at me multiple times when I asked more than once how to pronounce her name.

When I started to lead some theatre games, I noticed that her confusion in some of the games came across as anger. I tended to her needs by demonstrating and reminding her that there was no wrong answer in the game. During the rest of the period, I taught a small hip hop combination. This was easy for some students and difficult for others.

C was showing enthusiasm for the dance, but when there was a challenging step, her frustration was delivered in an angry manner. I broke down the steps in various ways and met with students individually to work out any kinks. I picked up on how enthusiastic C was about learning the dance and how dancing seemed to make her
be poems, scenes, monologues, dances, anything. C wrote beautifully and delivered her poetry with perfect iambic pentameter, without even knowing it. This student who had 30 absences as a sophomore, went to 7 absences as a junior. I noticed her anger dissipating and a calmer, more centered individual was unveiled. Theatre was transforming her.

In the wintertime I approached her about auditioning for a performing arts high school. We rehearsed almost every day after school for her audition. Some days I would be having a rough afternoon and C would rehearse with me and all my exhaustion would disappear. C revealed to me that she was a cutter and that her parents were going through a nasty divorce and that when she came to theatre class or rehearsal no matter how difficult her problems were on the outside, everything would go away when she was doing theatre. I realized flight was not an option anymore for me. I was making a difference.

Throughout the next year C became my motivation as a teacher. She taught me not to give up, regardless of how difficult teaching could be in this environment. I remember holding an after school rehearsal for the first after school production and receiving a phone call from the performing arts high school where C had auditioned. C was accepted. I felt so proud. I never thought I could feel so excited for a student's achievement. I did a Russian toe touch in the middle of the hallway. That’s how happy I was. To think that the student whom I thought would be my nemesis turned out to be my motivation for fighting to be a good theatre teacher!

There were moments I did not understand why I stayed at the school, it would be small things or big that would set me off. No faculty bathrooms, security guard numbers slimming because of budget cuts, no raises for teachers, inconsistency in discipline procedures, and lack of resources; all aspects that most inner city school teachers are unfortunately accustomed to. However I decided to replace each negative aspect with a positive aspect I could bring to the performing arts department. I called upon every connection I could to make the program exciting and appealing to my students. Within a year and a half we have had four artist in residency programs (three which were free), local press that highlighted the students work, and multiple collaborative projects with universities in the tri-state area.

The struggles of working in an inner city school left me feeling incredibly rewarded and sometimes depleted. The anxiety at times outweighed my excitement for facilitating theatre and I almost thought I could not make it. With every storm, though, there was a brighter rainbow that showed me why I stayed. During a documentary project with a neighboring college, one of my male students, when asked about me, said that I definitely love what I do, that sometimes they gave me a hard time, but that I never left them like some other teachers would.

The student’s statement about other teachers and their choice of flight shook me from my fears of failing. At times it felt like I was not reaching students, but when I heard this, I realized that by making myself available to the students and their goals, I was succeeding in my work. In creating a safe supportive space, where some students had never experienced one before, creativity began to blossom, and my choice of flight over flight was the only way to allow it to continue to grow.

Incite Link: Have you had an experience similar to Michelle’s. Do you agree or disagree with her conclusions? Write an essay in response or a letter to the editor. Let’s keep the dialogue going.
A New Model for Commissioning Plays: My Dream Experience  
by Sandy Asher

Once upon a time, when I was working with his troupe on a new adaptation of Little Women, Tom Ballmer, artistic director of Stebbens Children’s Theatre in Mason City, Iowa, shared with me a dream he had for commissioning new scripts for youth theaters like his own. It seemed to me a great idea at the time, and an even better one now—a model suited to youth theaters, professional theaters, community theaters, university theaters, and secondary school groups as well.

Tom’s plan is simple. Any three theater groups of similar make-up and interests get together and decide:

1) What they need in a new script, in terms of topic, length, cast size, etc.,
2) Which playwright they will contact about writing the script,
3) How much each theater will contribute toward the commissioning fee and playwright’s travel expenses,
4) When each theater will produce the play and bring in the playwright.

The benefits to theater groups and playwrights are clear and huge. The theaters get the kinds of scripts they can and will produce. They participate in the developmental process with the playwright at one-third the commissioning cost plus expenses. They enjoy the added excitement and PR buzz of having the playwright on hand during some or all of the rehearsals and/or performances.

The playwright, in turn, earns a commission for writing a play with three productions at the very kinds of theaters most likely to continue to produce them.

Tom’s hopes for a new play included the following:

1. A title that would bring in audiences,
2. A large, flexible cast with plenty of female roles and roles for teenagers,
3. A full length, non-musical work.

At the time, he had no particular title in mind and no collaborators for a commission.

Just the dream. Having enjoyed my work with Stebbens Youth Theatre, I left Mason City with a promise to think about a project that might fit the bill. It was important to both of us that the project be as interesting and challenging to me as a playwright as it was artistically and financially beneficial to the theater.

Over the next few months, we tossed a few ideas back and forth, but nothing excited either one of us enough to proceed. One day, while I was in my local library browsing the Young Adult collection, a title of one of Avi’s novels all but leaped off the shelf at me: Romeo and Juliet—Together (And Alive!) at Last. I sat down with the book and began reading. It was a middle-school story – lots of teenagers – with a hilarious premise and a wealth of comical characters and dialogue. Its farcical plot grew naturally out of the collision between its modern school setting and the original Shakespearean play, and much of the action took place on a stage.

Granted, it wasn’t a “title” in the “Cinderella” sense of unbeatable familiarity, but it had a title sure to arouse a potential audience’s curiosity. It had certainly piqued mine!

I knew I had a story I wanted to adapt for the stage and believed it could be the play Tom was hoping for. Tom read the book and agreed.

Could the dream of a joint commission and three developmental productions come true? As it turned out, Tom was not able to commit to a commissioning fee at that time, but he could manage a full production and travel expenses.

Joe Lauderdale, then at Laguna Playhouse, read the book and offered to share the commission and bring me in for rehearsals and opening week. Thanks to an introduction from John Newman, David Dynak and Amy Oakeson signed on for the University of Utah’s Youth Theatre at the U as co-commissioner. Tom would do the third production at Stebbens Youth Theatre.

What followed next was a dream-come-true scenario for all concerned. Encouraged by the interest of three producing companies, Gayle Sergel of Dramatic Publishing made arrangements with Avi to acquire the underlying rights to the novel. I wrote knowing I had three eager and capable directors and an editor ready to read the script and offer comments and encouragement. Joe scheduled the first production in October of that year with two trips to Laguna Beach for me – one early in the rehearsal process and one during opening week. Amy and Tom followed with two productions of the continually revised script in February, with me in residence for late rehearsals and early performances.

I should mention here the terrific cooperative spirit among the three
groups. Many theaters commission with a “world premiere” in mind and jealously guard that distinction, even against a production halfway across the continent. These three organizations were in the game for the development of a play worthy of their young casts and staged their productions in the best interests of the script’s growth. Nothing that happened in Laguna Beach, Salt Lake City, or Mason City detracted in any way from local excitement about developing a new script and bringing the playwright to the community to work with the company, visit schools, run workshops, and meet with the young people and adults who support each group.

From my vantage point as playwright, this was a heavenly experience. What normally takes forever – the scheduling and presentation of three developmental productions – took only about a year. I saw three casts who differed in age and experience; tested the script against production values that reflected budgets large, medium, and small; and revised with insights provided by professional, university, and youth theater experts. It just doesn’t get any better than that.

The new script at the center of all of this activity has enjoyed many productions since, but it’s not for all groups or all tastes. That’s why I am offering this experience as a model and encouraging other kinds of theater groups to come together in a joint commission. What kinds of plays do you need? Which playwrights would you like to work with? Can you find two other theater organizations to dream with you? Can the three of you work with a playwright (preferably an AATE or ATHE member playwright, of course!) to make your dream come true?

Together we can do more and better than any one of us can do alone.

Sandra Fenichel Asher has published twenty-four books for young readers (as Sandy Asher) and over two dozen plays, including Across the Plains; Dancing with Strangers; Emma; I Will Sing Life; Little Women: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy; Once, in the Time of Trolls; The Wise Men of Chelm, A Woman Called Truth, and The Wolf and Its Shadows. Among her many honors are the AATE Distinguished Play Award and Charlotte Chorpenning Award for a distinguished body of work in children’s theater, the IUPUI/Bonderman Award, an ASSITEJ Outstanding Play for Young Audiences citation, the The Open Eye Theater’s Joseph Campbell Memorial Award, a National Endowment for the Arts grant in playwriting, the New England Theater Conference’s Aurand Harris Memorial Playwriting Award, and an Aurand Harris Fellowship grant from the Children’s Theatre Foundation of America. Writer-in-residence at Drury University in Springfield, Mo., from 1986 to 2003, Asher now lives in Lancaster, Pa., with her husband, two cats, and a dog. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild and co-founder of the website USA Plays for Kids.
The Beauty of the Bonderman

by Kelby Siddons

It is not for chronology or the alphabet that the Bonderman tops the list of TYA script development opportunities. Rather, it is how the workshop, now in its twenty-eighth year of existence, rewards artistic merit and risk-taking, makes young audiences a priority, and constantly learns from and customizes its process for the benefit of the playwright. As I prepare to attend the symposium at the Indiana Repertory this year, I spoke with founding artistic director Dorothy Webb about what makes the Bonderman successful and this year’s winning scripts unique.

Artistic Merit and Risk-taking…

With Two Wings by Anne Negri of Chicago, IL (for grades 3-5)

After sensing the selection process left behind plays for the younger side of TYA, the Bonderman this year devoted a slot exclusively to scripts suited for grades 3-5. Anne Negri’s tale of a bird and his parents who rule the nest explores what it means to be different, part of a family, and – sometimes – overprotected. Anne Negri is a former Bonderman intern.

The Lost Princess by Nicole Atkins of Studio City, CA (for grades 6-8)

Atkins’ story, in which an illegitimate princess is thrust into royal life upon her caretaker’s death, is highly theatrical, featuring a dancing chorus of Lippizzaner stallions and paintings whose subjects travel and change.

A Taste of Sunlight in December by Janis Craft of Seattle, WA (for grades 9+)

Craft’s play is part of a trilogy, the Rain, Stars, Sunlight cycle, whose sister script has been previously honored as a Bonderman semi-finalist. Its teen cast grapples with big questions and elusive answers in a style as evocative as its title.

Red Animal by Melissa Cooper of New York, NY (for grades 9+)

Cooper’s script, while not strictly an adaptation, draws on the literary classic Red Badge of Courage as it follows young soldiers in the moments before, after, and between battle, grappling with the themes of the novel the protagonist reads. Cooper’s Little Medea was a finalist last year.

Making Young Audiences a Priority (while involving all ages)…

A crucial addition to the Bonderman came in 1997 when scripts became linked with classrooms of target audience age students. After the staging of a script featuring age-appropriate actors, playwrights field target-age viewers’ responses first before addressing the remainder of the audience, which can include producers, directors, playwrights, educators, and – in increasing numbers each year – students. “Students,” Webb says, “are the lifeblood of our profession.” She describes the profession itself as “a family,” where inclusion of all generations is necessary to support the work at hand. This year, from its linked classrooms to first and first-time attending college-age intern, from an intern returning as playwright to past honorees, the community spirit behind the Bonderman is evident.

Learning from and Customizing the Process…

In Bonderman-linked local classrooms, teaching artists (usually visiting graduate school interns) lead exercises to develop ideas and solve dramaturgical dilemmas, playwrights and young people ask questions of each other and the script... Webb is quick to point out that whatever serves the playwright's goals and script's interest is what the Bonderman's nine day focus is on, so every experience is as unique as the art and its contributors. Playwright development goals are essential and thus acquired at a second interval of the selection process to be given their own assessment by committee. The festival and its operators constantly strive to customize and analyze the workshop process and response methods, none more so than Webb, whose keen assessments of script and championing of playwrights drive the semi-annual Bonderman forward; truly, a beautiful thing.

Insight Link: For more information on the Bonderman and to register for this year’s April 7-10 symposium, see http://www.irtlive.com/artists_information/playwrights/attend_the_bonderman/.

Join AATE Now!
Click Here
As I leave my position of Managing Editor at *Incite/Insight*, I want to thank everyone with whom I have worked in this past year. The writers have been a dream: great ideas, willingness to rethink and revise, willingness to find photos, willingness always to go the extra mile. The Advisory Board has also been a dream as well: experienced, enthusiastic, far thinking, and wise. I wish I could continue.

But, life takes strange twists and turns, and when my daughter had twins and gave me the opportunity to help her care for them, I couldn’t refuse. Especially when she also threw in a beautiful house and studio where I can read, write, and play the piano to my heart’s content.

So I moved from Chicago to Berkeley, California in November. I help my daughter with the twins during the day at her house, and then return to my lovely nest each evening. But, I cannot also spend the hours on our publication that are needed. And, truth to tell, when I get home, I’m exhausted! It’s been a long time since I’ve cared for babies.

I will, of course, continue as an AATE member. I will submit articles to our magazine. And, I will continue to be a passionate advocate for creative drama and theatre in our schools and for TYA. I look forward to visiting with many of you at our upcoming conference in Chicago.

Meantime, we hope you enjoy this issue which focuses on exciting TYA programs across the country. We encourage you to tell your story, share your ideas, ask questions, let us know what you think. *Incite/Insight* is for all of us. The more we submit and respond, the more opportunity we have to learn from and support each other. Best of luck to my successor. See you at the lake.

- Carol Ann Amour

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**Incite/Insight Submissions Policy**

*Incite/Insight* is the membership e-magazine of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE). We welcome unsolicited submissions by and about those working in the field of theatre for youth and education. We are interested particularly in articles and essays about the following:

- Drama in the classroom
- Theatre for Young Audiences
- Playwrighting
- Advocacy
- Green Theatre
- Theatre for Diverse Audiences
- Reviews of Resources
- Celebrating Diversity
- Innovative Higher Education Programs
- Teacher Preparation related to Drama and Theatre
- Technical Aspects of our Craft
- Youth Theatre Programs and Productions
- Other Relevant Topics

We are also interested in featuring exemplary work by established and emerging playwrights and in play script, production, or relevant book reviews. We are interested in exemplary programs, groundbreaking work, cutting edge techniques, and clear thought provoking writing.

We accept electronic submissions only. Manuscripts should be double spaced with one-inch margins and pages numbered. Essays and reviews should run between 650 and 750 words. Feature articles should run 1,800 to 2,000 words. Electronic links and other web-friendly possibilities are especially welcome.

The author is responsible for obtaining permission for the use of all photographs and non-original materials. Photos are highly desirable to help tell the story. Cover photos must be 800KB or greater. Hi-res photos are preferred, but not necessary unless a cover shot. The author is responsible for photo identifications. There is no monetary compensation for writers. Publication is at the sole discretion of the Editor and the AATE Editorial Advisory Board.

To see a copy of *Incite/Insight* log on to [www.aate.com](http://www.aate.com). Send queries or manuscript submissions to editor@aate.com.