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Welcome to City Theatre’s second Young Playwrights Festival in one year! It’s been quite a wild ride for our staff at City Theatre. We produced an all virtual version of the festival in February 2021, and decided to move our festival back to our original October time frame again for our 2021-2022 season. In the move back to in-person production, the Young Playwrights Festival has returned to its roots: minimal sets and costumes in order to keep our focus on the playwrights’ stories. We hope that these stories come to you loud and clear and the voices of our playwrights are stronger than ever.

Despite the challenges of the past 18 months, our cycle remains the same: the Festival kicks off our in-classroom residencies, students participate in the residencies, then submit their one-act plays to our contest at the end of March. We read all of the submissions and choose the winners, who work with dramaturgs over the summer to get their plays ready to be produced in the fall.

However, it never gets old. The plays we see submitted every year are exciting and fresh and new and constantly remind the staff at City Theatre how lucky we are to have the privilege to read these stories.

The stories that you’ll see in our 22nd annual Young Playwrights Festival may all look and feel different, but to me, there’s one outstanding theme between them all: resilience. Through humor, magic, or reality, the characters you see in this year’s festival all strive to overcome their conflicts and fears in a resilient manner. Today’s students continue to struggle through the ongoing pandemic. But I have no doubt, after being inspired by these plays (and the many others that were submitted to our contest), our students will recover with resiliency.
The guide that follows is intended to give you a deeper look into the Young Playwrights program and process, the playwrights and their work, as well as dive into the context of their plays. We hope you find this guide useful as we welcome you back to our stage, even if it's virtually!

Fondly,

Katie Trupiano
Director of Education
City Theatre Company
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Timeline of Young Playwrights (in a regular year):

**October:** Young Playwrights Festival

**November:** Young Playwrights Residencies start

**November-March:** Young Playwrights workshops occur

**March 31:** CONTEST DEADLINE

**April:** Plays are distributed to our Literary Committee, made up of theatre professionals in the Pittsburgh area. They are read and evaluated.

**May:** Literary Committee evaluations are received. YPF Winners are chosen

**June-August:** All playwrights receive feedback on their play. Winning playwrights work with a dramaturg to craft their play.

**August:** Professional actors audition for the Young Playwrights Festival. Playwrights hear their plays read out loud by actors and make additional adjustments.

**September:** Rehearsals begin for YPF. Playwrights make their final adjustments to their plays before the scripts are locked for performances.

**October:** Young Playwrights Festival
SOPHIA KHAN (Bird Without A Nest) is a middle schooler at Sewickley Academy. She has a love for first edition books and hopes to obtain a collection of them. This play is dedicated to Snow-white, and to everyone who has ever tried to talk to animals. She would also like to thank her teachers for allowing her to be one of the butterflies in her first-grade play Mariposa (butterfly in Spanish) which began her fondness for plays. She would also like to thank everyone who read and cared about this play, especially her dramaturg who was very patient with her.

ABOUT THE PLAY
Aisha is trying to figure out who she is and when she meets an unlikely friend in the park, an interest in the birds around her is sparked. She finds herself opening to the world around her as she begins to see people and places differently.
Scan above to watch the interview!
Surrealism and Symbolism

Surrealism in theatre is the act of representing subconscious thoughts in reality by placing something absurd or unexpected in realistic situations. Between the characters Aisha meets and her relationship with birds, *Bird Without A Nest* shows Aisha’s inner feelings through many different outlets.

The most prominent symbol used is birds. In many myths, birds represent freedom, their wings proving their ability to fly and travel freely. They also represent the “flight of the soul,” or the soul’s journey after death to the afterlife. Birds as symbols of freedom, as well as symbols of the soul literally finding its place, are essential to Aisha’s story of feeling trapped and searching for belonging in this coming-of-age story.
Narration

The style of narration used in Bird Without A Nest resembles the techniques of distancing and alienation in theatre made popular by Bertolt Brecht in the 1920s. In this technique, a character "breaks the fourth wall" and directly addresses the audience in order to prevent escapism or immersion into the world, reminding listeners that they are watching a play and directly telling them what message to walk away with.

When Aisha breaks the fourth wall in the play, she directly tells the audience how she feels about the old man, reminding us that there is a larger message at play instead of allowing us to be simply entertained. Similarly, when the Old Man takes over the narration, he reminds the audience to follow Aisha's journey, as well as establishing a wisdom beyond being as “crazy” as Aisha labels him.

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In *Bird Without A Nest*, Aisha learns to accept others and understand the complex world around her through connecting with birds. As a young person dealing with complicated family situations, self-discovery, and independence, Aisha’s journey certainly falls under that of the coming-of-age story.

Navigating the world as someone so young can feel daunting, but all teenagers go through these experiences. However, her first interaction with the Old Man teaches her that listening to others' and acknowledging perspectives other than her own are great ways to not only learn more about the world, but to gain the broad knowledge necessary to coming into adulthood. As she befriends the old man, listens to the birds, vents to her mother, and meets Fred/Red/Ed, she continuously discovers that growing up is realizing how nuanced the world can be. In turn, her insecurity about being a good person, following the rules, and navigating changes to those close to her, is improved by taking risks and acknowledging her thoughts to others.

Aisha leaves home and sets out to find some answers to her confusion, though after coming home from a night of odd adventures and new conversations, she does not get the satisfaction she seeks. Even after meeting so many new people and discovering so much, *Bird Without A Nest* shows that growing up is always a work in progress, and the desire to keep learning is more important than reaching an unattainable destination.

Creating a play that juxtaposes the universality of growing up with the surreal characters Aisha encounters requires a clear sense of world-building. This activity shows how starting with one idea can expand into a larger and more complex world.

**Materials needed:** A partner, a piece of paper, and something to write with.

**Instructions:**

Write on the board:

Did you bring it?
Why?
Don’t you ever listen to me?
Of course I do.

Have pairs of students continue to write the dialogue between these two characters. They should decide between themselves who the characters are, what “it” is, and where they are. The only criteria is that there must be a mythical element to the scene. When finished, have some pairs share their scenes. Have students note how the same dialogue resulted in very different scenes with very different rules of the world.

**SPRING IN THE UNDERWORLD**

by SHELBY POWERS

**PLAYWRIGHT BIO**

SHELBY POWERS (*Spring in the Underworld*) is ecstatic to see her play come to life on stage. She attends Burgettstown middle school. Shelby is involved in 4H and performs in the school drumline. She would like to thank Addy, Leeam, Ic and Mrs. Nonack for helping inspire and bring her play to life, including her wonderful dramaturg, Malic Maat. She would also like to thank City Theater for the wonderful opportunity to share her play with the public. She has a love for Greek mythology, which was the inspiration for the play.

**ABOUT THE PLAY**

When Hades and Zeus hatch a plan to find Hades a goddess, things don’t go quite the way they anticipated. The Underworld has no fury like a mother missing her daughter, and in order to prevent war and pacify the gods, a deal must be made.
Interview with Shelby Powers

Scan above to watch the interview!
**Hymn to Demeter**

The story replicated in *Spring in the Underworld* was first told in the *Hymn to Demeter*, one of 33 surviving hymns written by Homer, author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, each written about a different Greek god. The *Hymn to Demeter* describes Hades falling in love with and abducting Demeter’s daughter, Persephone. Demeter’s grief incites a famn the mortal world, forcing Zeus to listen to her demands to see her daughter and ask Hades to return Persephone. However, after declaring that Persephone can only leave if she has not eaten anything in the Underworld, Hades secretly feeds her a pomegranate seed, ensuring that she stays with him for part of the year, but returns to Demeter for the rest. When Persephone is in the Underworld, she and Hades remain married, and Demeter celebrates the return of her daughter every year with a prosperous spring.

While Homer’s *Hymn to Demeter* was likely written 2700 years before *Spring in the Underworld*, the story of a moody boy’s pursuit of a beautiful girl, a meddling but powerful brother, and a grieving and protective mother, remains the same -- just with a youthful and comedic twist.

**The Characters**

In Greek mythology, each god rules over a certain aspect of human life, with some being more powerful than others. The first six gods were:

- **Zeus** - ruler of the gods, god of the sky
- **Poseidon** - god of the sea
- **Hades** - god of the underworld
- **Demeter** - goddess of earth and farming
- **Hera** - goddess of motherhood and marriage

These gods then had children, who became gods or demi-gods. Demeter gave birth to Persephone, goddess of agriculture and the spring. Hermes, son of Zeus, is considered the messenger god.
Greek mythology has found its way into pop culture for centuries, and has become ingrained in modern culture through classic plays such as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Eurydice*, and musicals such as *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *Jasper in Deadland*. Persephone and Hades’ story appears in several pop culture stories, such as:

- *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, book/movie series by Rick Riordan
- *Lore Olympus*, web comic by Rachel Smythe
- *Epicurus the Sage*, comic by William Messner-Loebs and Sam Kieth
- *Hadestown*, musical by Anaïs Mitchell

**Sources**

- https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/hymn-demeter
- https://www.worldhistory.org/collection/58/the-12-olympian-gods/
In Spring in the Underworld, relationships are at the center of the play: mother and daughter, brothers, lovers, etc. Just like relationships were the heart of most ancient Greek plays, they remain one of the most powerful dramatic motifs because of their universality; everyone strives for interpersonal connection and the emotional satisfaction it provides.

Connecting the gods to more relatable tropes instantly makes an ancient story more accessible. It is nearly impossible to describe Zeus and Hades' jobs as rulers of the sky and Underworld in a one-act play, but their familiar sibling banter gives audiences an “in” to the story rather than alienating them with a complicated mythical story.

Similarly, the quest of saving someone from being kidnapped in the Underworld is a somewhat complex story to tell, but a story about a mother willing to do anything to save her daughter is far more relatable. Telling this myth through the lens of a mother-daughter story emphasizes the power love has to overcome something as powerful as the god of the Underworld.
Activity: Modern Myths

Spring in the Underworld is a play that takes an old story and makes it new. In this activity, students will choose their own story to modernize in order to see for themselves how updating a story can make it more relatable or accessible.

Materials: a pen and paper, or a blank document.

Instructions: Each student will choose an old story, whether it be another Greek myth, a Shakespeare play, or a fairytale. Then put their own modern spin on it. What twists or relevant changes can you make to update a classic tale? What aspect of your classic story remains relevant, and what aspects did you feel needed to change and why?

Write a summary or “pitch” of your modernized story in play form -- you may also use visual aids to show costumes or other designs. At the end of the exercise, students will give their pitch to the class.

LUCY POTTS (A Boring Street in the Middle of Nowhere) is thrilled to have her play performed at City Theatre. Lucy is a sophomore literary artist at Pittsburgh CAPA. She has been attending since 2017. During her time at CAPA, she has won a gold Key, a silver key and several honorable mentions for her writing from the Scholastic Art and Writing Contest. Lucy is also a rower and has been rowing with Three Rivers Youth Rowing for three years. She volunteers for adaptive and para rowing in her spare time. Lucy would like to thank her wonderful creative writing teachers for mentoring and supporting her throughout her time at CAPA. She would also like to thank the lovely people in City theatre for helping her play to life. Finally, she would like to thank her parents for encouraging her to write and pursue her passion.

About the Play

Change is never easy, and for Isobel, watching her neighborhood change around her is downright painful. When a new neighbor moves in across the street, Isobel starts to realize that change may not be as bad as she has always thought.
Interview with Lucy Potts

Scan above to watch the interview!
A recurring idea in *A Boring Street in the Middle of Nowhere* is Isobel's resentment towards change in her neighborhood. Change has certainly taken over Pittsburgh neighborhoods in recent years as rents rise for the poor and drop for the rich, especially with the pandemic's effect on the housing market and increased issues of gentrification and construction. According to recent studies, Pittsburgh is the eighth most gentrified city in America, meaning wealthier people are changing poorer areas, leading to the displacement of current inhabitants. This means that formerly quiet and consistent neighborhoods are being built on and renovated. So what is the reason that the value of Pittsburgh neighborhoods are decreasing?

"The neighborhood isn’t what it used to be. People aren’t really interested in living in the suburbs, the outskirts of the city I guess."

- Olive, *A Boring Street in the Middle of Nowhere*

In 2019, Pittsburgh saw a 4.3% jump in rents. However, following the start of the pandemic in 2020, prices dropped again. Many people moved out of the city due to the shift to remote work, or were hoping for more space to quarantine. For those people, it was best to move out sooner rather than later, so they can sell their houses for the most money possible.

Sources


A Boring Street in the Middle of Nowhere follows Isobel learning to cope with her neighborhood changing over the years. A fear of change is normal; humans are wired to find comfort in knowing, and breaking that consistency can make them unsure of what to expect and therefore unable to emotionally prepare themselves. Although we see both Isobel and Olive strive for a sense of consistency, they end up better in the end for learning to accept change.

The theme of change is especially present in Isobel's initial resentment of Olive, who in her mind represents change because of her youth and her chalk drawings physically changing the appearance of her plain and simple sidewalk. However, we find this aversion to change is a result of her estrangement from her daughter -- she copes with her uncertainty by holding onto the predictability of her “boring” street. This is how she connects with Olive, as she too is struggling to grow up whilst constantly moving from place to place.

Together, Isobel and Olive learn to accept change by finding comfort in their friendship with one another. Isobel is able to talk to someone about her feelings and can finally prove her dwindling mother-daughter relationship is not completely outside of her control. Olive, in turn, learns that she can still connect with others even if her proximity to them is not permanent, and uses their friendship to feel a little less alienated in a new and unfamiliar place.

ACTIVITY: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Instructions: Have partners come to the front of the room and play out the following scenarios. Keeping the relationships and situations of the characters in mind, they should try to connect with each other’s characters as much as possible in a way that is realistic to the circumstances. While still building three-dimensional, complex characters.

1. You’ve left a note in your classroom and need to get it back before the person it’s about sees it, but your teacher locks the door during lunch period. Convince the teacher to let you in.
2. Your mother won’t let you have a pet because it’s too expensive to keep and she knows she will have to take care of it in the end. You got a free puppy from a lady at the supermarket. It’s in your bedroom and your mother just came home from work.
3. You want to go to a party. Your parent won’t let you go because the last party wasn’t supervised and the police came. Convince your parent to let you go.
4. A couple: one person wants to break up; the other just purchased concert tickets.
5. Two siblings are trying to decide who gets the larger of two bedrooms in a house they have just moved into. Both want the larger bedroom.
6. Two friends are driving home from college when they realize they are lost. The friend thinks that the only way they will find their way home is to stop and ask for directions, but the driver insists they will soon recognize something, so there is no need to stop and ask for directions.
7. Two patients sit in a dentist’s waiting room. The dentist’s receptionist has mistakenly scheduled both patients for the same appointment time. You both want to put off seeing the dentist for as long as possible, and insist the other go first.
8. A parent and their child are sitting in their living room when they hear a car horn blowing outside. The teen tells their parent that their date has arrived; the two are going to the movies. The father has yet to meet this date and insists on meeting them before they leave. The teen wants to leave immediately because the film starts in ten minutes.

After completing these scenes (or making up some of your own), reflect as a class on what made a scene successful, and what students did to make their relationships believable.
AYANNA BENNETT (*Never Too Late to Change*) is 16 years old. She is a junior at Westinghouse Arts Academy and is also a part of the Teen Ensemble at Alumni Theater Company (ATC). Ayanna has written countless amounts of scenes for ATC but she decided to take a crack at writing a one act play for the Young Playwrights Festival. Her play *Never Too Late To Change* touches on the topic that Black history isn’t taught accurately in schools. She believes that this is a very important topic to bring up as it relates to current events. She hopes that the audience can take away that change isn’t always a bad thing and it’s always important to speak up.

**ABOUT THE PLAY**

Martin Luther King, Jr. Harriet Tubman. Malcolm X. These common Black history figures are not the only people worth learning about during Black History Month. When best friends, Jamila and Elijah, hear these names again, they take it upon themselves to educate their classmates and teacher that there’s a lot more to Black history than slavery and civil rights, and it’s all worth learning.
INTERVIEW WITH AYANNA BENNETT

Scan above to watch the interview!
*Never Too Late To Change* references many iconic Black history activists and events throughout history, such as:

**Martin Luther King, Jr.** - A Black minister and activist, most famous for his “I Have a Dream” speech. A leader of several prominent Civil Rights organizations, he led the first nonviolent demonstration in the U.S. and consequently faced his home getting bombed, arrest, and personal abuse. In 1964, he won the Nobel Peace Prize. While textbooks say he was killed by a white supremacist, a trial in 1999 reveals there were members of the mafia, police, and government who conspired in his assassination.  

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King_Jr.

**Malcolm X** - A Black activist who challenged MLK’s nonviolent approach, leading many speeches and protests through his position in the Islam religious organization intended to empower Black people to fight for their rights. His vision for Black liberation included a racially separated society due to continuous threats from white supremacist groups.  

https://vc.bridgew.edu/hoba/13/

**Rosa Parks vs. Claudette Colvin** - Months before Rosa Parks refused to give her bus seat to a white man, Claudette Colvin had done the same thing. However, people were uncomfortable with a 15-year-old pregnant teenager being the face of the civil rights movement, and instead decided Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old, self-assured adult, would be a better symbol.  

https://vc.bridgew.edu/hoba/13/

**Ruby Bridges** - in 1960, at 6 years old, Bridges made history by being the first black child to integrate into an all-white school. As mentioned in the play, she is now only 67 years old!  


**Black Wall Street** - in 1921 Tulsa, a Black man named Dick Rowland rode an elevator with a white woman named Sarah Page. Stories escalated into rumors of Dick being violent to Sarah, leading to 2 days of white rioters setting fire to the Greenwood district where many Black citizens worked, resulting in 300 dead, 800 injured, and 9,000 homeless.  

https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-a10b-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99

**Nat Turner Rebellion** - in 1831, Nat Turner, a spiritual leader and slave, led 50-60 slaves in a rebellion for liberation in Virginia. As a result, white mobs in North Carolina went searching for slave rebellion plots, innocent slaves were tortured into giving false confessions, and nationwide slave owners increased restrictions on slaves, assuming they were also conspiring.

https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-a10b-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99
Photos - Many photos from the Civil Rights Movement are in black-and-white to create the illusion that the fight for racial justice is long over. Here are some in-color pictures:


Black Lives Matter and Systemic Racism

“And it is still happening to this day. It’s just more subliminal and goes unnoticed. I mean the whole system is built against us.” - Jamilla, Blrd Without A Nest

The Black Lives Matter movement has increased public speculation about Critical Race Theory in the classroom. CRT, which examines systemic racism in America’s laws and public policies, is currently outlawed in 8 states, with another 20 states restricting how much teachers are allowed to discuss racism in history. Jamila’s frustrations about the lack of education she receives is the result of legislations ensuring that teachers and students alike receive selective education about Black history, and therefore remain in the dark about issues of systemic racism that are still active today. https://blacklivesmatter.com/

How to Create Safe Spaces in Classrooms

In the play, Jamila demonstrates creating a safe conversation by giving trigger warnings for violent topics and checking in on the class after giving unsettling information. Such practices are an excellent model for leading conversations about troubling issues, whether it be in a classroom, lecture, theatre, or just with friends. Other resources:
https://educators4sc.org/classroom-practices/teaching-in-safe-spaces/
https://simmonslis.libguides.com/teen_datingviolence_awareness/warnings

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http://www.core-online.org/History/colvin.htm
https://cwnce.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu/exhibits/show/slaverebellion-enemies/introduction/introduction

https://daily.jstor.org/the-devastation-of-black-wall-street/
“Power. It’s always been about power”

“...they aren’t gonna want people to learn what really happened because that would take away from the power that they have over us.”

The two main characters in Never Too Late to Change define issues of racism in America as a fight for power. White people in history sought to maintain power over black Americans, while most civil rights issues consisted of black populations seeking to reclaim power over their identities.

In the play, Jamila cites many abuses of power over Black people throughout history, such as torturing slaves, white citizens rioting in Black neighborhoods, and taking rightful resources away from Black citizens. At the same time, she acknowledges that whitewashing American history and selecting what aspects of Black history are taught in schools is in itself a way for whiteness to maintain power over our society by sugar-coating significant events of racism.
ACTIVITY: THE UNTOLD STORIES OF BLACK HISTORY

*Never Too Late to Change* calls out the many aspects of Black history that are swept under the rug in both the education system and daily life. With this activity, we ask you to discover something new that might broaden your knowledge on Black figures whose effect on history have gone unrecognized by American culture.

**Materials:** a device to research with.

**Instructions:** Research a notable Black American figure, past or present. Create a visual presentation about their life and accomplishments. You may create a poster, PowerPoint, or other visual medium, but you must include photos or other images that highlight important aspects of your figure’s life. Compile information you can use to talk about their life in relation to the photos, and share the information with the class. Presentations can be individual, or students can take turns visiting stations, or whatever system works best for your class. Try to have everyone research a different figure.

You may consider researching figures mentioned, like Claudette Colvin or Dick Rowland, or find someone you don’t know much about! You may also research more modern examples, or even present on who the prominent BLM leaders of today are.

Afterwards, discuss as a class what you learned from this activity. What impacts have these and other figures had on our country and the world? Why do you think these stories may not have appeared in your history books?
City Theatre’s Student Matinee Performance and Educator Resource Guide fulfills the following PA Common Core and Academic Standards:

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

1.2 Students will read, understand, and respond to informational text – with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among idea and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

1.3 Students will respond to works of dramatic literature – with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among ideas and between text with focus on textual evidence.

1.4 Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

1.5 Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

**CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT**

5.2 Students will evaluate an individual’s civic rights, responsibilities and duties in various governments, and evaluate participation in government and civic life.

**HISTORY**

8.1 Students will compare patterns of continuity and change over time, applying context of events.

8.3 Students will identify, examine, and evaluate individuals and groups who have made significant political and cultural contributions to United States history.

**ARTS & HUMANITIES**

9.1 Students will analyze works of art influenced by experiences or historical and cultural events through production and performance.

9.2 Students will analyze the historical, cultural and social context of an individual work in the arts and apply appropriate vocabulary used between social studies and the arts and humanities.

9.3 Students will apply systems of classification for interpreting works in the arts and forming a critical response.

9.4 Students will evaluate an individual’s philosophical statement in a work in the arts and its relationship to one’s own life based on knowledge and experience and describe and analyze the effects that works in the arts have on groups, individuals and culture.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Educator Resource Guide was created by Julia Levine, Literary and Education Intern, Fall 2021.

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Any questions or comments about the Young Playwrights Festival or this guide, please contact Katie Trupiano, Director of Education, at ktrupiano@citytheatrecompany.org