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REGENERATION:  
RESTORATIVE THEATRE PRACTICE IN THEATRE EDUCATION

By

Sarah Chen Elston  
B.A., Guilford College, 2020  
M.F.A., University of Louisville, 2023

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of  
Louisville  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2023



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A Thesis Approved on

April 7, 2023

by the following Thesis Committee:

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Rachel Carter

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Jennifer Pennington

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Chelsie D. Temmen Ph.D.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my cohort; Latrice Richardson,  
Alicia Fireel, and Sa'id Kelly.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Rachel Carter, for her guidance and patience over the last three years. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Professor Jennifer Pennington, and Dr. Chelsie D. Temmen, for their support and intentionality. I want to extend my gratitude to the Theatre Arts department; the faculty, staff, and students have greatly impacted my praxis and passion for theatre education.

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ABSTRACT

REGENERATION:

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Sarah Chen Elston

April 7, 2023

Regeneration: Restorative Theatre Practice in Theatre Education aims to harness the holistic benefits of theatre as a discipline and create an intentional restorative practice for performers. This thesis serves as a proposal; an attempt to prioritize restorative and self-care practices within the theatre industry, specifically pre-professional training programs. This proposal takes the form of a curriculum that builds upon the current model of theatre training (Voice, Movement, Acting) with the addition of Regeneration. Regeneration provides theatre artists with specific areas of study to offer the psychosocial support a theatre artist may need during their pre-professional training. This thesis will discuss how Regeneration practices are put into action by performers

and how theatre-makers can use Regeneration practices to affect social change.



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## INTRODUCTION

### PANDEMANIA THEATRE

I have not been socializing the way I did before the pandemic hit. To be fair, I have always had a healthy amount of introversion, but I still considered myself sociable. I was always on the lookout for performance art, local theatre, concerts to see, and theatrical projects to collaborate on. I enjoyed meeting new people and learning new things, but lately, I struggle to find the same optimistic energy I once had. Once the pandemic hit and we were all forced into isolation, my healthy dose of introversion turned unhealthy, and I have found it difficult over the last two years to bring myself out of a fog of singularity.

What is affirming, and simultaneously disturbing, is hearing that a lot of people are struggling to re-socialize in these late days of pandemia. I am increasingly intrigued by the number of headlines of rowdy instigators

forcing planes to make emergency landings, the rise of “Karens” destroying retail displays, and even audience members verbally assaulting performers in talkbacks or during theatrical performances. It seems that the effects of the pandemic have raised tensions in all capacities, making social interactions seem dreadful and loaded. Our sense of community is suffering, and we are still working to identify ways to heal it.

I entered my Master of Fine Arts training in the Fall of 2020 in an entirely virtual setting. Unknowingly, I had secured an opportunity to continue practicing my craft during a time when the future of our industry was uncertain. Hundreds of thousands of theatre-makers across the globe were out of work with no prospects of normalcy, but something incredible bloomed out of this darkness. In this time of crisis, theatre-makers shifted into new forms and modes in which the prioritization of creation in which the prioritization of safety was at the forefront. Theatre-makers performed on Zoom calls, learned new skills (such as producing, sound designing, and filming), and found new

spaces, like outdoor settings, to share theatre safely from a distance. Theatre-makers explored ways to share theatre nationwide without sacrificing the integrity of live performance while maintaining the distinction between film and filmed theatre. Even more, when the pandemic required everyone to stay home, it was the arts that people turned to. Popular streaming platforms, such as Netflix and Hulu, reached milestones of over a billion subscriptions as everyone turned to film and television for comfort (Pantell).

As an artist, seeing this shift feels monumental. The bounds by which theatre and performance have been defined prior to the pandemic are now elevated and reimaged as we welcome and normalize new modes and methods of creation (Timplalexi 44). Most importantly, it shows me that the theatre industry is shifting reprioritize safety and autonomy in an accessible manner. The motivation to prioritize health during the pandemic created space for practitioners to examine other potentially harmful

practices that are common in the craft. The theatre industry is entering a new type of Renaissance period.

Conversations on establishing more equitable theatre practices have been entering academic theatre spaces long before the COVID-19 pandemic. For decades, theatre artists in training have had clear calls for action from notable theatre practitioners; theorists such as Peter Brook's deconstruction of the institution of theatre in *The Empty Space*. In Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal combats oppressive structures through participatory theatre, or forum theatre, in order to dismantle power dynamics within performance and offer more agency to viewers (119). These theorists and others alike uplift the idea that implementing equitable theatre practices can radiate positive social change to performers and the communities in which they exist. Witnessing this reckoning within the theatre industry makes me question why the necessary changes had not been previously made. Could there be a correlation between current events and the state of

our industry? Could healing the broken bonds within the craft provide a radiation of healing into our communities?

Theatre-makers in the industry are beginning to prioritize making systemic positive changes in the industry to create safer environments for more meaningful work. With the spark of the #MeToo Movement as well as the reignition of the Black Lives Matter Movement, there has been a reckoning with the ways our institutions perpetuate the oppression dealt to sociocultural groups who have been historically discriminated against. Theatres across the nation, for example, Know Theatre of Cincinnati, have released actions plans to address these structural changes (KTC). Conversations about trauma-informed theatre practices as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion within the casting process have been discussed now more than ever. The theatre industry is moving closer to a more equitable space. I wish to contribute to this movement by developing new frameworks within academic theatre spaces that will challenge the overall oppressive systemic culture of higher education, and furthermore, establish a praxis

for artists to implement self and community nourishment into their craft.

My solution is to develop a curriculum for a course that I call Regeneration. Regeneration is a collegiate-level course that works in tandem with the commonly seen voice, movement, and acting flight plans adopted by most American academic theatre institutions. The purpose of Regeneration is to implement and prioritize ethical self-care practices that work in tandem with traditional theatre arts training. These practices are instrumental in providing artists agency and self-regulation while moving between imagined worlds and our natural world.

Our work as theatre artists requires us to move between two worlds; imagined worlds and our natural world. Imagined worlds are the worlds we create as artists, the world of the play and the world of "play." The natural world is what we consider "the real world," societal implications and all. What remains the common denominator through all of this is our bodies as instruments, our physical bodies, our mental bodies, and our emotional



bodies. Often, as theatre-makers, we are expected to move in and out of these two worlds seamlessly. Many theatre practitioners have offered tools for actors in order to achieve this safely and ethically, but there is a lack of prioritization behind these practices in academia.

Regeneration is how I choose to prioritize these practices. Using the interactions I have had with self-care practices and trauma-informed theatre practices throughout my training, I have developed a curriculum that coincides with pre-professional theatre training programs. In order to affect change within our communities, we must first take responsibility for our part, as artists, in the process.

## THE 411

There is a familiar dichotomy within the arts that questions whether art imitates life or life imitates art. This life-imitating art is also referred to as anti-mimesis, otherwise known as the opposite of Aristotelian mimesis, referring to art as a perfect imitation of life (Fergusson,49). I remain curious about this dichotomy when considering the steady decline in funding for the arts and the incline of political and social unrest over the last decade. I continue to examine the positioning of theatre within American society. Stella Adler, a theatre theorist, explains in Class Two of her book *The Art of Acting* that, "the word theatre comes from the Greeks. It means the seeing place. It is the place people come to see the truth about life and the social situation. The theatre is a spiritual and social X-ray of its time. The theatre was created to tell people the truth about life and the social situation" (30). I can't help but agree with Adler's claim

as I see a clear connectedness between the current unsupported state of the arts and the state of our country. Adler regards theatre as holding a significant role in society. As her former student, Peter Bogdanovich writes in his *New York Times* Article "American Theatre," Adler's praxis was based on the notion that "life beats down and crushes the soul and art reminds you that you have one" (14).

Regeneration is a series of courses for pre-professional theatre-makers, but the overall reach of this specific training goes beyond the institution of theatre arts. The course sequence begins by empowering young theatre artists to form ethical self-care practices and then transforms into a pedagogical approach for facilitating these practices utilizing drama-based instruction. The goal is for students to engage in practical self-care methods within their craft as well as use their craft to instill these methods into community enrichment. For theatre-makers to use their discipline as a rehabilitative tool to serve the community, they must work

to address the inequities and structural pitfalls of the theatre industry itself.

For theatre-makers, this type of training is crucial as the industry is facing massive burnout. In Lily Janiak's article, "Theater workers aren't just changing jobs during the pandemic. They're leaving the field", *The San Francisco Chronicle* states that, "once-committed arts workers who, during the pandemic, left not only their jobs but the entire industry...reaffirm how broken the arts' employment model is" (3). Many theatre-makers decided to leave the industry during the pandemic after reprioritizing health and safety in their lives. Throughout the article, Janiak names several of the pitfalls that come with the industry. In professional theatre settings across the nation, theatre-makers dedicate more time to their jobs than they are compensated for and are given little time off due to the dependency on the art employment model. Theatre artists began to recognize that the industry was unable to support the very people who dedicate most of their time and labor to sustain it. Those fighting to maintain the craft and

willing to embrace new forms of theatre turned to Pandemia Theatre. Zoom theatre became a popular form of artistic expression at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing artists to film virtual performances via video conferencing much like Triad Stage's virtual series *Blowing Up the Cannon*. Many theatre artists experimented with new methods of virtual theatre creation, though live-performance purists were working hard to maintain the human-to-human engagement, such as the University of Louisville's 2020 production of *The Birds* which was performed on isolated sets and filmed as a live performance. Artists from two different approaches succeeded in reimagining and expanding the possibilities of what theatre can do.

Many theatre practitioners chose to forgo both avenues. In her article "Theatre and Performance Go Massively Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications and Side Effects", Eleni Timplalexi asserts:

"The theatre convention requires the co-presence of an actor and a spectator, despite the fact that, at the dramatic level, it often remains hot and linear, non-participatory. On the other hand, the

computer/smartphone is not only cool phenomenally but also literally: the screen, usually a combination of glass, plastic, and metal--clean and clinical--permits cool blue light to shine through. Can a theatre performance online retain the hotness of live action and pass it through the cool glass of the computer/smartphone? Or does it unavoidably become a computer-mediatized spectacle?" (46).

To thinkers like Timplalexi, theatre is made special by face-to-face communication. These types of artists honor the holistic experience of catharsis that is best achieved within a collective space.

Still, the positioning of theatre in our current society is being questioned. Now, more than ever, we should be uplifting the value of human connection and I believe theatre is the last true art form that is rooted in verbal, emotional, and spiritual connection. Yet, the lack of support for theatre artists is at an all-time low. In Lily Janiak's article, she highlights a 2018 EPI report showing "the annual salary a single, childless San Franciscan needs for a 'modest yet adequate standard of living' is \$64,666; surveying full-time San Francisco theater jobs on the website Theatre Bay Area yields only listings that pay less, including one that pays 'mid-40s'" (4). Theatre

artists are being forced to decide whether they continue to pursue theatre for more labor and less pay or abandon the industry and their passions entirely.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the theatre industry was not the only point of contention. In response to the discriminatory and racist practices within the theatre industry, a collective of over 300 BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) artists, known as We See You White American Theatre, released a statement on their website, "demanding a more equitable and safe space for BIPOC communities in our nation and inside the American Theatre." This movement is heavily influenced by the growing support behind the Black Lives Matter Movement after the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and hundreds of other victims of racially charged murders. The We See You W.A.T. collective asserts that existing as BIPOC artists has "often meant surviving an industry-wide culture of fear poisoned by racism and its intersecting oppressions." The discrimination and inequity experienced by BIPOC artists is an intolerable act and a perpetuation of

white supremacist culture within a craft that has been colonized and stripped of cultural and ritualistic meaning. BIPOC artists deserve art created under the "for-us-by-us" model. BIPOC artists deserve theatre spaces dedicated to their stories and methodologies that represent their experiences. We See You W.A.T. collective extends a clear call to action that names the injustices of the theatre industry and the immediate transformation of the industry's framework.

Another shift in the industry is the rise of intimacy training. Intimacy direction is a relatively new practice within the theatre industry that has recently become highly favored in the midst of the #MeToo Movement. The first book on Intimacy practices was Chelsea Pace's *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy* published in 2020. Much of what we know about intimacy practices are thanks to her organization Theatrical Intimacy Education as well as another organization, Intimacy Directors, and Coordinators. Intimacy direction originally served as a type of choreographer who would



provide specific and safe direction during an intimate scene in a film or live performance (Fairfield, et al. 77). In 2015, performers and directors Tonia Sina and Alicia Rodis, founded the Intimacy Directors International organization, now known as Intimacy Directors and Coordinators, with the goal of creating a network of theatre artists who were passionate about developing safety protocols for intimate scenes (Fairfield, et al. 80). During its initial stages, intimacy direction was focused on developing safe physical practices. Intimate scenes, meaning mostly sex scenes or on-stage kisses, were staged like fight choreography (Fairfield, et al. 77). In 2017, after the Weinstein Scandal and the #MeToo Movement gained global attention for naming the mistreatment of women and sexual violence regularly experienced by female-identifying artists, the demand for intimacy direction grew exponentially (Fairfield, et al. 78).

Conversations on intimacy direction are still new to the industry. There are several practitioners who are contributing to new discoveries in the field for safe and

effective intimacy practices, but intimacy direction is not safe from criticism. Professional theatre artists in the field have mixed feelings about the new practice. In November, I attended a talk-back with two of my peers after a performance of the 2022 revival of *A Raisin in The Sun* directed by Robert O'Hara in collaboration with intimacy and fight director Teniece Divya Johnson, who is the first Black nonbinary intimacy director on Broadway. A cohort member asked the performers how the process has changed now that intimacy practices are becoming an industry standard. The actors conducted a beautiful conversation between the more seasoned actors and the younger performers. It seemed that everyone was working toward a more safe and more inclusive industry but had different ideas on how we can work ethically without hindering the instinctual response of the actor, which has been popularized in Eurocentric methods of acting.

Recently several well-known actors have shared their thoughts on intimacy direction. Sir Ian McKellen has made comments about the necessity of an intimacy coordination

and the scope of responsibilities of directors. In an LBC's Tonight with Andrew Marr, Dame Emma Thompson has responded with a perspective shift, "It's all very well, if you're a bloke it's a different kind of thing." I am proud to see the theatre industry's acceptance of intimacy direction as a new industry standard, but intimacy direction is still a work in process. Intimacy directors continue to adapt and refocus through trial and error (Fairfield, et al. 80). Intimacy direction is a practice that should be implemented at the beginning of academic theatre training so theatre artists can be equipped with the resources they need to grow throughout their careers.

The American theatre has upheld harmful, exclusionary, and discriminatory practices for far too long. The industry's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was the final straw for many theatre practitioners. The frameworks that define the American theatre no longer serve or represent the people within the industry. As theatre artists, it is critical that we acknowledge the shift happening in our industry and how it corresponds with the world around us.

If we take advantage of this shift, we can reprioritize as an industry and establish our craft as an irreplaceable role in community rehabilitation.

This is where I expand upon the importance of Regeneration practices for spectators. In my pedagogy, I refer to spectators as the final scene partner. I encourage my students to view a monologue presentation as a courageously shared experience rather than a performance in front of their peers. The energetic exchange from an audience can influence the performance of an actor. Theatre practitioner Augusto Boal coined the term "spect-actor," referring to the dual role of spectator and actor (119). Boal had a mission to move audience members from passive spectators to active "spect-actors," to physically act towards the injustices, staged as oppressive scenarios. Live performance is dependent on being witnessed; spectators play a substantial role in performance. When theatre artists alter their process, it will alter how the spectator receives the performance. Theatre has the potential to transform the spectator, so as to transform

how the spectator relates to the natural world. What positive social change can occur when we examine theatre as a holistic experience?

## THEATRE AND THERAPY

Dr. Rachel Zoffness (MS, Ph.D.) is a pain psychologist, leading global pain expert, and author of *The Pain Management Workbook*; a workbook that provides individuals with the tools and vocabulary to develop an effective biopsychosocial program for treating chronic pain. According to Dr. Zoffness, "Over one hundred million Americans currently live with chronic pain, and almost all human beings experience pain over the course of their lifetimes" (3). Dr. Zoffness seems to understand pain in different capacities. She suggests pain fits within the biopsychosocial medical model, meaning that there are three equally important domains of pain (biological, psychological, and social) that overlap to produce and reduce pain symptoms (4). The biological domain refers to pain felt physically in the body, like a headache for example. The psychological domain refers to mental and emotional health, and the social domain refers to social

development. Thanks to Dr. Zoffness and others in her field we understand that pain is managed best when all three pain domains are receiving care.

This research gave me a new perspective on pain. Pain is still "ouch my back hurts!" but it is also the overall feeling of "ouch." It is that warning signal from the brain that something is off kilter. To me, this definition of pain extends beyond the self. If 1 hundred million Americans are experiencing that type of pain consistently- it points to a real societal issue. I cannot help but think of the collective pain in our society due to COVID-19; biologically, psychologically, and socially. Luckily, Zoffness offers realistic solutions; if we want to treat chronic pain, we must treat all three components of it. When moving through the workbook, I became curious about the social domain of pain. It seemed strange to me that both the biological and psychological domains offered legitimized spaces such as medical offices and therapists in which you can seek specific care. Where is that equivalent in the social domain?

I see theatre as the space in which we nourish and enrich this social health. Theatre can be used to examine and heal possible societal diagnoses. Theatre can have real and lasting effects on health and livelihood. Going to the theatre and being surrounded by other people in the room can pump oxytocin, serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins through your body; all without even having to participate in the performance. Performing in the theatre helps maintain social practices through rehearsals, classes, and shows. Theatre training provides a skillset that expands your emotional range and your overall awareness of self. These practices can be beneficial in developing something like a pain plan and identifying what you need and when you need it. Theatre can offer a shift in perspective and a growing sense of empathy—which allows performers and spectators the opportunity to disidentify and reidentify; no longer having to be defined by chronic pain. Freedom from this chronic pain allows individuals to reimagine themselves, the lives they live, and how they respond to others.



I have heard many times throughout my training that theatre is therapeutic, but not therapy. I acknowledge and value the benefits of more traditional forms of mental health care such as talk therapy, but there is a reality behind the inaccessibility of receiving mental health care. Clinical psychology is guarded by its own institutional barriers; making it impossible to receive care unless you have a certain amount of privilege, or you are in danger of harming yourself or others. These institutional barriers discriminate against age, ability, economic status, and race. In Charlotte Huff's article "Psychology's Diversity Problem," Huff notes that "Black and Hispanic/Latinx students enroll in psychology doctoral programs at rates below their composition in the general population" (3). With sparse numbers of representation of BIPOC psychologists, BIPOC patients face another barrier to receiving the care they need from someone who shares similar lived experiences. Huff also claims:

"The path to becoming a psychologist has been very steep and thorny and created by the psychologist community...It's a bottleneck that we've created where only the most prepared, the most organized, and those

who have the most knowledge and the most resources are the ones who get through that bottleneck" (2-3).

So, the more privilege you have, the higher chance you have of receiving care, and the less privilege you have may lead to harmful mental and emotional states.

Another obstacle to receiving mental health care is that there are not enough therapists; COVID-19 has everyone overworked and the exclusionary practices of the bottleneck model have made it so there are very few therapists to be found in a pandemic. Lenny Bernstein's article from *The Washington Post* titled "This is why it's so hard to find mental health counseling right now," addresses this predicament. Bernstein asserts that "the federal government's mental health and substance abuse referral line fielded 833,598 calls in 2020, 27 percent more than in 2019 before the pandemic began. In 2021, the number rose again to 1.02 million" (2). Therapists and experts are over capacity and are struggling with burnout themselves, as their backlogs continue to grow each day. Bernstein confirms the extra barriers experienced by intersectional identities when he states, "It is even more difficult to

find specialized care for children or those with lower income. Assistance of any kind is in short supply in rural areas, where all healthcare choices are more limited than they are for residents of cities and suburbia. Those hoping to find a Black or Latino therapist face even more limited options" (1). Clinical psychology is the most common mental healthcare in our country, but the barriers to access exclude the communities of people who may need it the most.

While clinical psychology continues to provide help for those who have access, it is difficult for me to look past the exclusivity and inaccessibility currently plaguing our mental health care system. I'm not saying theatre is a substitute for therapy, but I do think there is something of value in exercising theatre as a holistic practice. Alternate forms of therapy that employ creative practices exist, such as art therapy, drama therapy, and music therapy. These practices can be effective and can offer many of the benefits I am speaking to, but there is often a stigma surrounding these methods because they are new in practice and lack large-scale randomized control trials

(Davis 7). Art therapy is often recommended in addition to a primary form of treatment (Davis 6). When we reimagine what theatre can be, how it can look, and what it does to the community; we start to see how the ethical practices of theatre practitioners can establish theatre as community nourishment. Theatre can be the container for which identity as individuals and as a collective.

Regeneration's mission is to support where it is needed. This curriculum provides young theatre artists with the support they need in order to implement restorative practices into their praxis. By doing this, they offer new perspectives into restorative practices as they move into creating theatre for social change. As they continue to make connections to their communities through art, they will also be able to offer support to social development through the lens of Drama-Based Instruction. In this thesis, I will explore how Regeneration practices influence the work of a performer through my performance of Rona Lisa Peretti in UofL's 2023 production of *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. Using Regeneration

as a lens for approaching performance practices will provide real-life context for the importance of this research.

## CHAPTER 1

### THEATRE AS A LIMINAL SPACE FOR IDENTITY FORMATION, CURATION, AND REHABILITATION

A major component of Regeneration Practices is understanding theatre as a liminal space in which identity formation can occur. Have you ever considered the construction of our identities? In what space can we explore the curiosities of the identity spectrum safely? For me, this space has always been the theatre. There is something fatilouquent about becoming a theatre artist. As I work to obtain my MFA in Performance at the University of Louisville, I continue to investigate the origin of this intangible pull that has held me and my peers despite the oppressive systematic forces infecting the industry. Why do we keep coming back to the theatre? This is the guiding

question I explored when approaching my thesis performance of Rona Lisa Peretti in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, a realtor and former spelling bee champion who returns every year to host the bee in hopes of recreating her life-changing moment for a lucky junior high student. In considering my guiding question, my process has led me to the understanding that theatre serves as a catalyst for ritualistic, cultural, and spiritual identities to be contextualized and expanded. An examination of the intersections between theatre and ritual connected by Schechner in *Performance Theory*, as well as viewing cultural identity through an autoethnographic lens as defined by Holland et al in *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* and additionally in Muñoz's *Disidentification*; justification will be provided for the ritualistic, cultural, and spiritual components of theater serve as a liminal space for identity formation, curation, and rehabilitation.

As a laboratory, the performing arts offer the context in which Carl Jung's individuation can be fully realized in modern Western societies. This can be achieved by the understanding of theatre as a space of liminality in which the crystallization of identity can occur. Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, theorized that to reach enlightenment, one must sacrifice their Ego to "The Self" (529). This sense of enlightenment is characterized by Jung's theory of individuation, "the process by which a person becomes a psychological individual, a separate indivisible unity or whole, recognizing their innermost uniqueness" (529). Attaining agency of The Self is what Jung believed to be the driving force that leads people on the journey toward self-realization or Individuation.

Individuation is the discovery of meaning in life and how one reaches their truest self (vol.17 179). Jung believed individuation relies on the convergence of opposites such as consciousness/unconsciousness, individual/collective, divine/human, and life/death. Jung deemed collective unconsciousness, knowledge, and imagery



shared by all human beings due to ancestral experience, as being the ultimate goal of an individual. Jung believed this to be the act of the unconscious Self-overcoming the Ego (vol.17 153). He describes the process of individuation as something that is never fully completed, though it can create experiences that make the full development of the identity seem attainable.

Jungian influence on the 1970s New Age Religious movement, in combination with adaptations of Eastern spiritual ideals, led to a new Western phenomenon of personal transformation and healing. While my research began with Jung, perspectives on self-actualization have expanded over the years. One of the more dominate perspectives today for how psychologists examine how people reach their full potential is Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which has recently been re-examined by clinical psychologists Steven J Hanley and Steven C Abell who developed an innovative approach to this model that emphasize that relatedness is important for individual growth (37). This suggests that independent growth is

influenced greatly by your relationships and the community around you.

In recent publication of the Annual Psychology Review in 2020, Eveline A. Crone from Department of Developmental Psychology at Leiden University and Andrew J. Fuligni from the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at University of California provides strong context for how societal placement and personal relationships intertwine with identity development. Crone and Fuligni argue that self- and other-oriented thinking are intertwined processes that rely on an overlapping neural network (447). This suggests that identity development is influenced by the role one plays in society as well as the relationships one maintains. This research assures that interpersonal relationships and societal influences play a role in identity formation.

So, how does any of this apply to performance? It is my belief that theatre acts as a liminal space that can be characterized as ritual, cultural, and spiritual; where both the individual and collective can partake in the

process of individuation and, in a larger sense, bring the collective unconscious into consciousness. To support this claim, I examine the theme of crisis. Crisis, as commonly understood, is a time of difficulty, trouble, or danger. It is a crucial time in which change is impending. Schechner defines crisis as, "The sudden and unstinting spending of kinetic energy and the link among performance, hunting, ritual, and play" (105). Schechner roots crisis back to an instinctual, ritual, and evolutionary practice. Species that hunt partake in play as a practice, an on-call crisis-oriented expenditure of kinetic energy (105). An example of this could be an actor performing a scene; the actor is using the performance as a type of play, a rehearsal for real life.

Having discussed how, according to Jung and other theorists, individuation and collective unconsciousness is the ultimate goal of an individual, it is clear that we reflect on the role crisis plays in our lives and performance as defined by Schechner as well as recognizing play as a practice for crisis. Now that we understand

performance as a mode in which play can inform our daily experiences, we are ready to examine the ritual, cultural, and spiritual qualities of theatre that qualifies theatre as a liminal space for identity formation.

Schechner offers a tentative definition of performance as, "ritualized behavior conditioned/permeated by play" (99). Schechner asserts that ritualized behavior is present within an array of human actions, but performance as a compacted area of theatre is a "particularly heated arena of ritual" (99). An example of theatre as ritual is the dynamic between the audience and the performer. Theatre etiquette is ritualized behavior, such as spectators positioning themselves in view of the drama, taking a moment of refreshment during intermission, and applauding the performers during bows. This falls in line with Schechner's assertion that ritual and drama are both, "crisis-oriented and occur within special times/places; they operate according to rules, traditions, and strategies" (109). Schechner urges further that ritual is an event upon which its participants depend, and theater is

an event that depends on its participants (137-138). He maintains that the move from theater to ritual happens when the audience is transformed from a collection of separate individuals into a group or congregation of participants, echoing Jung's theory of collective unconsciousness (157).

Theatre is a space for culture consisting of the cultural identities of the performers, the cultural context of the material, and the cultural environment in which the performance takes place. Cultural identity in performance cannot be ignored due to the associations previously developed by spectators from their lived experiences. Spectators receive narratives from cultural identity. For example, imagine a scene that calls for two female-identifying actresses to get into an altercation: if the actress who dominates the fight is a BIPOC artist, spectators are likely to be influenced by their examination of the social location of a BIPOC woman in America. The narrative would shift if it were two white actresses or even two BIPOC actresses even though the dialogue and action would remain identical.

According to Holland et al, many activities inform our social relations with one another such as, "the dialect we speak, the degree of formality we adopt in our speech, the deeds we do, the places we go, the emotions we express, and the clothes we wear" (127). This sense of relative social position is what Holland refers to as positional identity or, "A person's apprehension of their position in a lived world" (127-128). When an audience views a performance by a BIPOC artist, they are always already ascribed a cultural identity. This is why theatre-makers who subscribe to the idea of colorblind casting, the practice of casting actors in roles despite their race/ethnicity, are perpetuating a practice of cultural erasure. One might argue that not all theatre is meant to direct its viewers in this way, that theatre meant purely to be a form of entertainment still exists. Some may claim that performances rife with large-scale spectacle have no aim to make political statements, but I argue that working to disengage politically and culturally is a statement in and of itself, a deliberate silence that speaks volumes.

Furthermore, theatre is a spiritual space. In my experience, the theatre is a space where people who have been marked as "other" find a sense of safety and belonging. In *Disidentifications* by José Estaban Muñoz, disidentification is a term used to describe the deliberate declarations of self against the majoritarian mindset, against oppressive systems. Muñoz believes that "what is left at the end of the disidentificatory process is a new model of identity and a newly available site of identification" (41). The courage to do this is, in a sense, Jung's enlightenment. It allows individuals to shed the materialism and need for external validation. This speaks to Aristotle's three tiers of happiness as understood by Boal. Boal explains that Aristotle's highest degree of happiness is, "that of a man who acts virtuously and asks for no more. His happiness consists in acting in a virtuous manner, whether others recognize him or not. This is the highest degree of happiness: The Virtuous exercise of the rational soul" (Boal, 14). When an individual is

courageous enough to disidentify, there is wholeness within their character and spirit.

So why does any of this matter? The majority of academic theatre in this country is dying. Programs are pivoting their focus from what was once teaching the craft, to now training actors to monetize their talents. Privileged programs are exceedingly rare and for many practitioners, COVID-19 was the final nail in the coffin. Earlier I described crisis as a crucial time in which change is impending, and that time is now. I am not offering a foolproof plan on how to solve these issues. What I am proposing is a new perspective, a shift of focus. Like a painting done in pointillism, theatre is more than the initial image you see. When you look closer, theatre reveals an array of opportunities to create community everywhere we go. We can call upon theatre as a weapon in our fight against oppressive systems as well as a space for healing and rehabilitation. It can offer adolescents and young adults a space for identity curation, supplying them



with the agency and bravery to leave our world better than they inherited it.

Understanding the ritualistic, cultural, and spiritual context of theatre, we can identify how theatre acts as a liminal space for identity formation. Theatre can be a dedicated space for ritual, cultural, and spiritual expression. It is a space to congregate and further our understanding of ourselves and each other. Embracing our true identities brings about a euphoric sense of belonging, especially when shared with others. It is vital that our communities have a space where we are free to disidentify from our learned behaviors and given titles and re-identify as our authentic selves. Theatre is a safe arena in which we can fail fantastically so that when we are faced with crisis in the natural world we are prepared to engage critically.

Recognizing theatre as a liminal space for identity formation, curation, and rehabilitation is merely theoretical if it is not exercised. It can never be effectively put into practice to serve our communities if

we, as artists, are not upholding these ideals within the industry. Our industry has a nature of being exclusionary-theatre is only for artists/theatre is only for like-minded individuals/theatre is only for rich people who can afford to do something "fun" for a living/ theatre is only for intellectuals. We have created barriers between the people we need most as supporters and the people who need the support of theatre most. Our issue is internal. Calling back to Schechner's definition of crisis, the time for crucial change is among us and, as artists, we need to realign our priorities as theatre makers and educators toward more equitable and inclusive holistic practices.

## REGENERATION

When we begin to release the notion that theatre is simply entertainment, we allow the theatre to take a different form. We see that theatre is not confined to a physical space that has a prescribed level of engagement with a monetary commitment, but rather a practice that has the potential of existing in any place under any context. Theatre exists wherever people practice it, wherever there are people to view or be viewed. Theatre should serve as a laboratory in which conversations of individual and communal growth can be facilitated and explored, as opposed to escapism. In situating theatre as a critical practice in our communities for social development, we legitimize our craft beyond a singular experience and develop a stronger relationship with our communities where our work is valued and fiscally supported.

I believe arts in action to be an incredible mission for artists, especially in our specific field. I have heard

many first-hand accounts by individuals who share the same resounding response: "Theatre saved me." What I find difficult as a theatre-maker is the complexity of the arts in action mission. How are we expected to use our craft to affect positive change within our communities when, as an industry, we have not dismantled the harmful power dynamics that perpetuate oppressive culture? In order to take part in the betterment of our communities, we must examine how we interact with similar barriers within our industry.

Regeneration is my attempt to create an opportunity for theatre-makers in training to develop a critical lens for the structures of our industry and develop intentionality in the way they interact with the work. Regeneration is a curriculum that is dedicated to creating space for renewal and restoration for theatre-makers in their training, but it is also a practice of using kindness as a radical act. Theatre-makers will understand that developing these different applications to the craft will influence their praxis, their pedagogy, and their agency of self.

Using the interactions I have had with self-care practices, intimacy training, and trauma-informed theatre practices throughout my training, I developed a curriculum that coincides with traditional theatre training programs. To affect change on a global scale, we must first take responsibility, as theatre-makers, for how we participate within the industry. This curriculum aims to implement and prioritize ethical self-care practices that work in tandem with traditional theatre arts training. These practices are instrumental in providing artists agency and self-regulation while moving between imagined worlds and our natural world. Regeneration is a new point of mastery to be achieved alongside the practices of acting, voice work, and movement training.

## CHAPTER 2

### REGENERATION: A BREAKDOWN

In this thesis I develop a curriculum for a series of courses called Regeneration. Regeneration, as stated above, aims to implement, and prioritize ethical self-care practices that work in tandem with traditional theatre arts training at the collegiate level. For the purposes of this thesis, I have developed the curriculum based on the model of a traditional four-year undergraduate program that includes eight units; students will complete two units over the course of one academic year. Regeneration is not limited to undergraduate programs. The 8 units can be modified to fit within different time frames, so as long as the progression of the content remains consistent.

In this thesis, you will find a breakdown of the units and their learning objectives for units 1-7 as well as a

detailed sample syllabus, unit breakdown, and sample final project for Unit 8. My intention with going into a deeper examination of Unit 8 is to express the cumulative result of Regeneration in the theatre-makers' final semester in a pre-professional training program (as I am nearing the end of my program) and how the Regeneration practice has influenced my praxis in my own independent study.

## REGENERATION CURRICULUM

### YEAR I

#### Unit 1: Year 1 Semester 1: Regeneration I: In Practice

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will focus on self-care practices to supplement first-year introductory theatre major courses. Learners will know the importance of developing self-care practices in relation to theatre training. Students will explore techniques and practices such as meditation methods, introductory yoga practices, and personal creative writing projects. Students will study works such as *The Body Is Not an Apology, Second Edition: The Power of Radical Self-Love* by Sonya Renee Taylor, *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Bhante Gunaratana, and *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to...

- Build safe containers for emotional health by developing greater self-awareness and strengthening inner dialogue.
- Create unique individualized self-care practices for class, rehearsals, and personal environments.
- Commit to a thorough exploration of a variety of existing self-care practices within and around our current field.
- Identify commonly used self-care techniques and theatre practitioners in related fields.

Unit 2: Y1S2: Regeneration II: Intimacy Training

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will focus on theatrical intimacy training and trauma-informed theatre practices. Students will explore techniques and practices regarding consent in the rehearsal process, de-rolling or debriefing after scenes with intimacy, and workshops with a resident or local intimacy coordinator. Students will study works such as *Supporting Staged Intimacy: A Practical Guide for*

Theatre Creatives, Managers, and Crew by Alexis Black & Tina M. Newhauser, Staging Sex by Chelsea Pace, and "De-Roling and Debriefing: Essential Aftercare for Educational Theatre" by Kate Busselle.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to...

- Develop a language to amplify intimacy training and trauma-informed theatre practices in and surrounding theatre environments.
- Think critically about the current academic conversations around trauma-based theatre practices.
- Learn the basics of intimacy training and trauma-informed theatre practices and their activation within several roles within the theatre industry.
- Facilitate conversations on how to use theatre to enhance intimacy practices outside of theatre spaces.

YEAR II

Unit 3: Y2S1: Regeneration III: Sociometry

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will explore the study of Sociometry: the study of relationships between social structures. Students will explore the dynamics of interpersonal relationships within a group. Students will study works such as Foundations of Sociometry: An Introduction by J.L. Moreno and Sociometrics: Embodied, Experiential Processes for Healing Trauma and Addiction by Tian Dayton.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to..

- Develop a basic understanding of the psychological foundations of Sociometry.
- Build connections between Sociometry and character development in theatrical storytelling.
- Conduct a deep study of a play and the relationships of the characters with a focus on Sociometry.
- Research, organize, build, and present a creative piece based on Sociometry and social structures.

Unit 4: Y2S2: Regeneration IV: Somatic Reconnection

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will focus on building somatic exercises to rebuild the mind-body connection (MBC). Students will study works such as Feldenkrais for Actors: How to Do Less and Discover More by Victoria Worsley, The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk, and The Lucid Body: A Guide for the Physical Actor by Fay Simpson. Learners will generate a new understanding of the relationship between the self and space.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to..

- Discover and develop a general awareness of the self, rhythm, and space.
- Identify basic anatomy in order to develop a kinesthetic language.
- Create specialized MBC practices for class, rehearsals, and personal environments.
- Facilitate a group exercise for somatic reconnection.

YEAR III

Unit 5: Y3S1: Regeneration V: Devising (Jung/Bradshaw)

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will explore Jung's Shadow work and Bradshaw's Inner Child work to start learning healthy ways to curate meaningful theatre performances. This course will discuss topics that will brush against the surface of childhood experiences. Learners will learn how to face these experiences within theatrical performances in safe and ethical ways. This workshop will be supported by the guidance from mental health professionals and there will be resources available to students who request it. LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to...

- Understand the works of Carl Jung and John Bradshaw
- Develop an awareness of the Shadow and the Inner child.
- Practice giving, receiving, and applying feedback.
- Develop a creative piece exploring the relationship between the Self, the Shadow, and the Inner child.

Unit 6: Y3S2: Regeneration VI: Autoethnography

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will focus on critical ethnography, systematic study of individual cultures, and its relationship to theatrical storytelling, and the importance of sociocultural influence in theatre training. Students will study works such as Critical Ethnography by D. Soyini Madison and Disidentifications by José Esteban Muñoz.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to..

- Explore performance as integral to and constitutive of culture.
- Create embodied critical acts based on observations, stories, and/or scenes of everyday life.
- Collect observations from ethnographic fieldwork.
- Devise and perform an autoethnographic performance that focuses on their praxis.

YEAR IV

Unit 7: Y4S1: Regeneration VII: Transportation to  
Transformation (Boal)

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will explore Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. We will focus on Boal's mission to move audience members from passive spectators but active "spect-actors," to physically take action towards the injustices, staged as oppressive scenarios.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to..

- Attend, analyze, and interpret a range of performances, staged and improvisational, scripted, and unscripted.
- Reconstruct traditional plays using the themes Theatre of the Oppressed to activate passive spectators into "spect-actors."
- Facilitate a class using Boal's pedagogy.
- Have cultivated the values of humanistic inquiry, including skepticism towards received views and openness to new ideas.

Unit 8: Y4S2: Regeneration VIII: Community-Based Theatre

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This unit will serve as a culmination of the previous units, focusing on how to implement these tools throughout the industry and the community spaces we inhabit as artists. Students will study works such as Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond by Nellie McCaslin and Improvisation for the Theatre Third Edition by Viola Spolin.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to..

- Create a personal Regeneration practice that is specific to a show within the academic season.
- Develop a pedagogical focus for Regeneration praxis.
- Advocate for safe and ethical theatre training in all spaces
- Facilitate Regeneration praxis in professional settings both in and out of the industry.



CHAPTER 3  
UNIT 8 SYLLABUS

REGENERATION VIII: COMMUNITY-BASED THEATRE

Professor Sarah Elston (She/Her)

Office Hours: By appointment—virtually and in-person. All meetings should be scheduled with 48-hour notice.

Contact: [scelst01@louisville.edu](mailto:scelst01@louisville.edu)

Course Description

This unit will serve as a culmination of the previous Regeneration units, focusing on how to implement these tools throughout the industry and the community spaces we inhabit as artists. Students will independently be able to use their learning to create safe and ethical boundaries for fieldwork as artist educators, facilitate self-regulatory practices for a diverse group of students, and

comprehend the key issues, methodologies, and paradigms of traditional theatre arts pedagogy. Students will be able to create embodied critical acts based on observations, stories, and/or scenes of everyday life.

### Course Objectives

- Create a personal Regeneration practice that is specific to a devised piece of performance.
- Develop a pedagogical focus for Regeneration praxis.
- Advocate for safe and ethical theatre training in all spaces.
- Facilitate Regeneration praxis in professional settings both in and out of the industry.

### Course Texts

- ❖ A Course Packet will be provided by the instructor.

The packet will include excerpts from..

- *Performance Theory* by Richard Schechner
- *Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal

- *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* by D. Soyini Madison
- *Disidentifications* by José Estaban Muñoz
- *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* by Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, Carole Cain

### Course Assignments + Assessment

#### Attendance + Participation

This course requires preparation, presence, and active participation. Your contribution to class discussions is vital to your/our artistic and professional growth. Please show up to each class with designated assignments and reading complete (see course calendar).

#### Reading Responses

Students will respond to the assigned reading through a Blackboard discussion board. You must reflect on the

assigned reading by naming two things you resonated with and two questions you have about the reading.

### Micro-Teach

Each student will teach one class this semester that focuses on a portion of the course texts. The micro-teach will include I) a visual presentation summarizing the reading; II) a session/lesson plan that activates the reading, and source material.

### Performances

Each student will devise and perform a short performance that will be influenced by their relationship with Regeneration practices.

### Resource Guide

Students will develop a Resource Guide to be turned in with their Final Project for a show in the season that is geared towards providing students and facilitators

with more avenues to activate critical retrieval of performance.

### Final Project

Students will develop a repertoire that will include different exercises from previous Regeneration courses organized for a series of varying circumstances. The final project includes a lesson plan that the student will facilitate in class.

### Assignment Breakdown

A. Journal Entries	50
B. Micro-Teach	100
C. Performances	100
D. Resource Guide	100
E. Final Project	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>

## Assessment

This course will be an “ungraded” learning environment.

The intention here is to focus our attention on curiosity, discovery, and growth and away from the fear of learning that comes from traditional academic power structures. When you eventually leave the university, grades will cease to have meaning. Your knowledge and skills will take center stage. The decision to go grade-free is based on the following facts:

- Grades take student focus away from more useful feedback.
- A dependency on grades discourages risk-taking, experimentation, and constructive failure.
- Grading creates a transactional system.
- Grades reinforce hierarchies over relationships and ensembles.

I will provide feedback on your work, but all feedback will come in the form of questions, comments, and opportunities to refine a creative process, not points or letters. You will also be learning and developing the skill of self-assessment, reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers, a skill that is vital to performers. You will still be assigned a grade at the end of the course, but you will determine that grade in conference with me.

Part of my role in this environment will be administrative. I will help to keep track of the work you do and how you participate in class. All assignments are designed to provide learning opportunities, so it's important that you do them.

Regeneration Course Schedule

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>TUESDAY</b>	<b>THURSDAY</b>
W1	Introduction & Syllabus	Ensemble Building
W2	Regeneration 1: Recap	Regeneration 1: Recap
W3	Regeneration 1: Practice	Regeneration 1: Practice
W4	Regeneration 2: Recap	Regeneration 2: Recap
W5	Regeneration 2: Practice	Regeneration 2: Practice
W6	Regeneration 3: Recap	Regeneration 3: Practice
W7	Regeneration 4: Recap	Regeneration 4: Recap
W8	Regeneration 4: Practice	Regeneration 4: Practice
W9	Regeneration 5: Recap	Regeneration 6: Recap
W10	Regeneration 5&6: Practice	Regeneration 5&6: Practice
W11	Regeneration 5&6: Practice	Regeneration 5&6: Practice



W12	Regeneration 5&6: Performance	Regeneration 5&6: Performance
W13	Regeneration 7: Recap	Regeneration 7: Practice
W14	Final Development	Final Development
W15	Final Development	Final Development

#### Academic + Classroom Misconduct

Students are expected to always conduct themselves appropriately. No one will be discriminated against or disrespected on the basis of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, veteran status, ancestry, national or ethnic origin, or other characteristics or classification(s).

#### Technology

Various course announcements and materials will be sent via email and/or made available on Blackboard. It will be assumed that students have ready web access and will check

email regularly. Please advise your instructor if you anticipate any difficulties.

#### Disability Resource Center

The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate and complete the requirements for this class, contact the Disability Resource Center (Stevenson Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

#### Title IX/Clergy Act Notification

Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain confidential support from the PEACC Program (852-2663), Counseling Center (852-6585), and Campus Health Services (852-6479).

To report sexual misconduct or sex discrimination, contact the Dean of Students (852-5787) or the University of Louisville Police (851-6111).

Disclosure to University faculty or instructors of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) is not confidential under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer. For more information, see the Sexual Misconduct Resource Guide at

<https://louisville.edu/dos/students/studentpoliciesandprocedures/student-sexual-misconduct-policy>

### Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the right to make changes in the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to

compensate for canceled classes due to illness or inclement weather, or for similar reasons. Any changes to the syllabus announced by the instructor to the class are the student's responsibility.

## Health and Wellbeing

### Counseling and Mental Health

Each UofL student is allotted 10 free sessions each semester. The first visit is an intake session where they gather info. on how to address your mental health needs, but subsequent sessions are with a counselor. Here's a link for more info. and to sign-up:

<https://louisville.edu/counseling>

### **Intimacy Pillars**

<https://www.teamidi.org/gallery/the%20pillars.pdf>

### Free Mindfulness & Meditation Apps

- Yoga Jubilee - a collective of yoga instructors who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color

providing yoga programming for BIPOC communities and their allies. <https://www.yogajubilee.com>

- Meditative Story- is a podcast—real-life stories are told by different folks with breaks of led mindfulness prompts that relate back to the story. Look it up on your favorite podcast site.
- Insight Timer- literally has a timer for meditation that you can set with or without ambient music. Then there are also a bunch of different guided meditations—including a separate sleep section. You can find it in apps on your phone or tablet.

## SAMPLE FINAL: RESOURCE GUIDE

In this section, I provide a sample final for the final unit, Regeneration VIII: Community-Based Theatre. This sample final is a resource guide for young audience members that have attended a performance of the University of Louisville Theatre Department's production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

Students taking Regeneration VIII will have to create a similar a resource guide and develop a facilitation using Drama-Based Instruction on Regeneration practices. Resource Guides and facilitations must use a main stage production as a lens in which to explore Regeneration practices. The resource guide and facilitations will be presented in class as a final project, but the objective is to prepare artists with the skillset to bring show-specific Regeneration practices into community spaces. The target audience may shift respectively to age-appropriate content. For the purposes of this sample final, I have created a Resource Guide

for learners in early adolescence. The guide has activities for instructors to facilitate with the group as a well as individual activities. This age group took the focus as I considered the ages of the characters in *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* and the target age of the audience. Resource Guides created for shows with more mature content will be designed to meet the appropriate age requirements. See Appendix for the full Sample Final: Resource Guide

## REGENERATION: UNIT 8 BREAKDOWN

In this section, I offer a breakdown of goals and activities for Regeneration VIII: Community-Based Theatre. Included is a brief outline that documents the learning plan for this unit as well as a concise list of sample activities. Students will refamiliarize themselves with key elements of previous Regeneration units, then develop a pedagogical approach to each unit. By the end of this unit, students will have the skillset to facilitate Regeneration practices in community-based theatre setting.



Name of Unit: Regeneration VIII: Community-Based Theatre

Unit Number: 8

Created by: Sarah Chen Elston

### **Stage 1 -Desired Results**

#### **Prior Knowledge**

There is a prerequisite for this course. Students must have completed Regeneration Units 1-7. This course will synthesize major components of Units 1-7, such as...

- Meditation methods
- Creative writing projects
- Consent in the rehearsal process
- De-roling/debriefing after scenes with intimacy
- Sociometry
- Mind-body connection (MBC)
- Devised Theatre techniques.
- Forum Theatre

Students will revisit these practices through the lens of a practitioner. Utilizing drama-based instruction techniques, students will develop pedagogical approaches to teaching Regeneration practices.

## **Stage 2- Learning Outcomes**

### **Transfer**

Students will independently be able to use their learning to...

- Create safe and ethical boundaries for fieldwork as artist educators.
- Facilitate self-regulatory practices for a diverse group of students.
- Comprehend the key issues, methodologies, and paradigms of traditional theatre arts pedagogy.
- Create embodied critical acts based on observations, stories, and/or scenes of everyday life.

## **Making Meaning**

### Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that....

- Ethical self-care practices are idiosyncratic and intentional.
- Humans receive more information and make more meaningful connections when they feel safe and protected.
- Theatre serves as a tool for developing ethical self-care practices.
- Adversity isn't an obstacle that we need to get around in order to resume living our life. It's part of our life.

### Essential Questions

Students will keep considering...

- Ways to reframe the placement of self-care practices in the industry.
- How to combine Regeneration with theatre-making
- Ways to promote and prioritize self-care practices.
- Ways to invite audience members into the Regenerative process.

## **Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills**

Students will know..

- How to critically examine pre-existing methodologies
- How to apply strategies developed in Regeneration I-VII for specific professional settings
- How to use theatre as a container for Regeneration practices
- How to develop practices for actors and non-actors

Students will be able to...

- Create a personal Regeneration practice that is specific to a mainstage production.
- Develop a pedagogical focus for Regeneration praxis.
- Advocate for safe and ethical theatre training in all spaces

Facilitate Regeneration praxis in professional settings both in and out of the industry.

**Stage 3 -Learning Plan**

**Week One:**

Introductions & Syllabus:

- Check in
- Name game
- Course introduction
- Syllabus review
- Q&A

Ensemble Building:

- Check-in
- Community agreements
- Improv games
- Personality Matrix
- Peer Interview

**Week Two:**

Regeneration 1: Recap

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Discussion
- Activity Outline
- Closeout

**Week Three:**

Regeneration 1: Practice

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Activities
- Closeout

**Week Four**

Regeneration 2: Recap

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Discussion
- Activity Outline
- Closeout

**Week Five**

Regeneration 2: Practice

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Activities
- Closeout

**Week Six**

Regeneration 3: Recap

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Discussion
- Activity Outline
- Closeout

Regeneration 3: Practice

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Activities
- Closeout

**Week Seven**

Regeneration 4: Recap

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Discussion
- Activity Outline
- Closeout

**Week Eight**

Regeneration 4: Practice

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Activities
- Closeout

**Week Nine**

Regeneration 5&6: Recap

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Discussion
- Activity Outline
- Closeout

**Week Ten**

Regeneration 5&6: Practice

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Activities
- Closeout

**Week Eleven**Regeneration 5&6: Practice

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Activities
- Closeout

**Week Twelve**Performances:

-Each student will devise and perform a short performance that will be influenced by their relationship with Regeneration practices.

**Week Thirteen**Regeneration 7: Recap

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Discussion
- Activity Outline
- Closeout

Regeneration 7: Practice

- Check In
- Constructive Rest
- Activities
- Closeout

**Week Fourteen**Final Development

--Students will develop a Resource Guide for a show in the season that is geared towards providing students and facilitators with more avenues to activate critical retrieval of performance. Students will also develop a physical repertoire that will include different exercises from previous Regeneration courses organized for a series of varying circumstances. The final project includes a lesson plan that the student will facilitate in class.



**Week Fifteen**Final Development

--Students will develop a Resource Guide for a show in the season that is geared towards providing students and facilitators with more avenues to activate critical retrieval of performance. Students will also develop a physical repertoire that will include different exercises from previous Regeneration courses organized for a series of varying circumstances. The final project includes a lesson plan that the student will facilitate in class.

## SAMPLE ACTIVITY LIST

Below are a few examples of activities that can be utilized as framework for exploring Regeneration practices. Students will curate a learning plan with activities from the Drama-Based Instruction Teaching Strategies online database from the University of Texas at Austin (Dawson). Lesson plans should include warm-ups, ensemble building activities, critical thinking activities, and different forms of reflection or processing.

### Check-In

At the beginning of class, the facilitator invites learners to participate in a brief moment of intention setting. The facilitator may ask learners to take a moment and reflect on their emotional/physical state before beginning the work. Facilitators may offer a prompt for learners to answer, allowing a moment of acceptance and camaraderie amongst the group.

## Constellations

The facilitator invites learners to physically demonstrate connections amongst the group following prompts. The facilitator will provide a prompt (EX. Someone in class that has made you smile) and learners will ask consent to place their hand on the shoulder of the person they choose. Learners will pause after each prompt to observe the physical constellation they created. This activity helps to develop consent practices and a sense of identity and belonging within a group.

Source: *Playing Boal: Theater, Therapy, Activism* ed. by Mady Shutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz

## Iceberg of Identity

This activity asks learners to explore the construction of identity, how identity markers influence our self-image, and the role of privilege in certain identity markers. Learners will write down various forms of identity from two categories; Identity Communities (EX.

religion, race/ethnicity, hobby/vocation), Identity Markers (ascribed by society- EX. liberal, cis-gendered, bisexual). Learners will select 5 identifiers and place them on a large illustration of an iceberg based on whether the identifier is visible (placed above the water) or invisible (placed below water level). The facilitator will lead a discussion with the learners based on the results.

Source: Bridget Lee, AmeriCorps Training

#### Watercolor Conversations

This activity involves watercolor materials for learners to share expression through illustration rather than words. Learners are paired up and tasked to create an illustration together. The facilitator should remind learners that conversations include taking turns, observing, relating, and collaboration. This allows learners to build community and develop collaborative practices.

Source: Beth Link

### Voices In The Head

The facilitator will invite volunteers to create a frozen image or tableau. The learners observing will be asked to voice the inner thoughts of the characters in the frozen image. The facilitator will provide side-coaching and guided directions for the volunteers. This activity provides learners with a deeper understanding of character motive through subtext.

Source: Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode; Augusto Boal

## CHAPTER 4

### REGENERATION PRACTICE AT PLAY: REFLECTION

I spent much of my early theatre training feeling like I was working from a place of deficit. I grew up in a small rural town in Pennsylvania where there was extraordinarily little exposure to the theatre arts. My passion for the discipline is rooted in the holistic benefits I experienced as a young artist looking to make sense of my large capacity for emotions. I sought out most of my initial understanding of the discipline through popular texts and, with little training, gained acceptance to an arts conservatory. During this time, I quickly learned that my peers had extensive knowledge of the craft and a large resume to prove it. Though, what was especially intriguing to me was their inability to self-regulate within their practice. My peers, while captivating on stage, lacked a

foundational understanding of self-care and collaboration. Instead, of developing healthy ways to process the intimate nature of the work, my peers and I were pressured to perform through toxic positivity. Toxic positivity maintains that no matter what, one should remain positive, but this ignores a wide range of emotions that are critical in self-regulation. There is much hurt that can result from toxic positivity, and it was clear to me that my peers, while good intentioned, were unable to process effectively under toxic positivity. It was this point that my curiosity for Regeneration practices began.

Regeneration is not about being positive or eradicating negative emotions. Regeneration is meant to support you when need it the most. Regeneration practices are less rooted in positivity and more rooted in hope. Hope is needed most when you are dealing with negative emotions from performance. I moved on from this conservatory training to a much smaller program that allowed me the flexibility to explore these practices and formulate an artistic pursuit that I have been able to foster in my

master's training. I began my research for developing a self-restorative process for more emotionally challenging roles. In 2020, I was in rehearsal for *Hamlet* as my senior capstone performance at Guilford College. When preparing for the titular role, I knew I would need to prepare for the intensity of the process. While I was able to approach the work with clarity and intentionality, the development of my research was missing a foundational understanding of how -self is in relation to the -whole.

Regeneration practices are a necessity when working with emotionally challenging roles. In 2021 the University of Louisville produced a devised piece named #HASHTAG: When Social Justice and Social Media Collide. This piece took a satirical approach to creating conversation on how we participate in social justice in person and online. This production was a direct response to the murder of Breonna Taylor and the resurgence of the Black Live Matter Movement, which made the process both cathartic and emotionally delicate. The necessity for Regeneration practices is greatest when actors are asked to portray



these emotions night after night. But then, there is also necessity for this work in lighter roles as well. This thesis, as well as my thesis performance in the production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, has served as my testing ground for newly developed practices that focused on the individual as well as the larger group.

In the Spring of 2023, I performed in the role of Rona Lisa Peretti in the University of Louisville Theatre Arts Department's production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. I entered the rehearsal process curious about how Regeneration practices would influence my experience as a performer. Using the Regeneration courses as a focus, I decided to curate a personal regenerative practice for this production as well as develop a resource guide using the final project model for Regeneration VIII: Community-Based Theatre.

My personal regenerative practice consisted of pre/pro/post rehearsal self-care practices such as creative writing prompts inspired by *The Artist's Way*, de-roling or intentional practice to separate character from self after

performance, guided meditation, and some sort of physical practice such as yoga, basic barre, or tai chi. My practices were never set in stone and were determined by what emotional, physical, and mental support I needed for each rehearsal. Each practice began individually but was paired with cast-wide intimacy practices. These intimacy practices included consent, checking-in, and synchronized group breathing.

I found that the practices that benefitted me during this process was a combination of creative writing pre-rehearsal, our synchronized group breathing as we began rehearsal, and guided meditation post-rehearsal. The creative writing allowed me to bring awareness to how I was applying my training to my performance as well as set goals and intentions for how my experience in the production spoke to my overall artistic mission. Our synchronized group breathing allowed me to connect energetically with each member of the production without physical touch, resulting in an awareness of self in relation to the larger group. Lastly, I found that guided meditation was necessary

to prevent post-performance judgement and critique. The outcome of bringing these practices into the space as a performer led to a heightened sense of ownership over the craft, an enriching perspective on trauma-informed practices within technical theatre circles, and new questions about intimacy training in educational environments.

My process began with understanding the physical and emotional demands of my character Rona Lisa Peretti. Understanding this allowed me to make informed decisions regarding how I approach my Regeneration practice. Rona Lisa Peretti is a former spelling bee champion who has returned as a host of the bee for much of her adult life (Finn and Sheinkin 7). She finds fulfillment in orchestrating the annual event where she can affirm and uplift children during a crucial point in their most formative years (Finn and Sheinkin VI). During the development of my character, I saw the intersection between my character and myself. Rona's given circumstances began to reflect my experience as a theatre educator, as my

passion lies in trying to facilitate a space where everybody and every identity can feel seen, heard, and respected.

The comparison of my character and Rona's character led me to further examine the interconnectedness of my spirit and the spirit of the character. This experience, as defined by Otakar Zich, can be understood as the theory of the actor's signifying process (McAuley, 94). Zich, a Czech composer, and aesthetician believed there is the actor who is physically present in the space and there is the character that the actor presents who comes into existence in the minds of the spectators through the actors' performance. Between the two is the stage figure—the physical manifestation of the character or persona constructed by the actor and the other artists involved in that production (McAuley, 94). When tasked with developing the character of Rona, I was forced to reflect on the development of my own character. This positioning allowed me to find presence in a liminal space of the ongoing development of my own identity.

As I developed the character of Rona Lisa Peretti, I also developed her perspective—I began to see the world around me through the lens of the character. This perspective shift allowed me to view my own circumstances in a different light. Could this be what theatre opens its participants to?

At first glance, Rona Lisa Peretti is reminiscent of the ominous adult voice in Charlie Brown films. The character doubles as the sports announcer type—where she introduces each character with colored commentary—and the authority figure—often deciding the fate of the young spellers (Finn and Sheinkin VI). I have seen depictions of the character played in a passive nature. The character can easily be classified as a secondary character used to provide exposition and sustain the forward motion of the plot, but I see this type of portrayal as a missed opportunity. The guiding question I had approaching the character was about her ritualistic practice of hosting the spelling bee. Why does she continue to return year after year?

In my character research, I determined that Rona returns each year in hopes of replicating her success for the children in the spelling bee. She has become a top realtor in her county and the moment in her life that served as the catalyst for her success was when she won the 3rd Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (Finn and Sheinkin 8). Rather than a passive announcer and mark of authority, Rona is a maestro in this orchestral production. She has the ability to freeze the action in time to speak directly to the audience and express her favorite moments of the bee (Finn and Sheinkin 10, 39, 69). In this way, she is like Boal's "Joker" as she bends and pivots for students throughout the bee in hopes of serving the greatest good for all spellers (Boal 27-37). She finds pride in facilitating an opportunity for children to achieve greatness. Rona's intentions become blurred when she starts to realize that her actions are not benefitting all the children. She even provides a seemingly personal statement as a sentence, "She thought she was walking into the dawn, but it turned out—it was the crepuscle" (Finn and Sheinkin

68). She realizes that her perspective is flawed in the sense that success for one speller inevitably means failure for another (Finn and Sheinkin 69). She begins to see that the best way she can promote success for students is not to force them to replicate the steps she took towards success, but to replicate the state of being she was in when she achieved success—thus supporting the students, no matter the outcome, in the way they need to be supported so they can reach success.

This idea of setting a path of success for our future generations is an admirable goal. Where it becomes shortsighted is when we do not leave room for agency. I see this same pattern in academic theatre environments. So much of our training as performers is decided for us based on methodologies that have been in place for decades; mostly decided by white straight men. These perspectives no longer serve the artists that make up our industry. I am passionate about Regeneration because it is not a prescribed study. The work is individualized and based on how the individual fits within the context of the whole.

Regenerations practices were helpful in reminding me to bring intentional awareness to the way I collaborate with other performers. As well as an actor, I served as cast deputy which is a cast-appointed spokesperson who speaks on behalf of the cast to the directors. This is the production's attempt at further dismantling the power dynamics between stage managers, directors, and producers and giving everyone the ability to participate in production-wide decisions. I also served as a student liaison to our intimacy coordinator when she was unable to attend rehearsals. Though I am not certified as an intimacy coordinator, I have been exposed to intimacy coordination in much of my MFA training. I have completed intimacy workshops led by our in-house intimacy coordinator for several UofL productions as well as interacted with these practices in the classroom as a student and a teacher. The most consistent intimacy practice we held was the practice of checking in. This is a practice that we developed as a company where we shared our level of comfort regarding consent for physical touch, held space for each person to



share a word that embodied their emotional state, and synchronized group breathing that served to build synchronicity within the cast. One of my greatest contributions as a student liaison was opening our intimacy practices with our technical students.

As we neared technical rehearsals, I had a feeling the intimacy practices we implemented into our rehearsals would soon fade away. This was difficult for me to accept, as I believed the addition of people in the space required even more prioritization of intimacy work. Suddenly, a very intimate process is set on display in front of technicians and stagehands who, by the nature of their work, are not participating in the full rehearsal process. It seemed important to me that the people who will be dressing us from head to toe, lighting our bodies, and amplifying our voices deserve Regeneration too. I proposed we develop a new practice of checking in that included the cast, crew, and technicians. Whoever was available and willing would participate in a routine check-in that was developed by the group that involved boundaries of consent, acknowledgment

of current emotions, and a somatic practice of group synchronicity. Due to a sizeable amount of pre-show duties, this check-in began to dwindle in size as the show run began but the intent was valuable in this experience. There was a stronger unity between cast and crew that I had not experienced in my MFA training. Talks of implementing intimacy practices in technical theatre training have started from this production and I remain curious and invested in these conversations.

In constituting Regeneration practices as a focus in this production, so many new avenues of theatre-making became available. I began to feel a similar pride in finding new ways to approach the work as I did at the height of Pandemia theatre. Seasoned performers, such as Meisner-trained Tonya Pinkins, recently criticized intimacy practices in a talkback I attended for the 2022 revival of *A Raisin in the Sun* for taking out the instinctual nature of acting—referring to it as limiting and riddled with obstacles for the actor. I find the prioritization of intimacy has opened so many more opportunities for me to

explore character development in meaningful and authentic ways.

One of the demands of the character Rona is to improvise with audience volunteers. Entering the process with a focus on intimacy inspired me to punch up rather than punch down. This means that I chose to improvise with the goal of uplifting the audience volunteers rather than mocking them. With improvised theatre, it is often easier to make comments based on appearances and first impressions, my goal was to find humor in the universal experiences we have in our society without putting down the experiences of others. The structure that was created by intimacy coordination as well as my independent focus on Regeneration practices brought about a sense of safety. Knowing that the container for our work had been constructed by the whole, I felt more confident to follow my instinctual nature and explore the world of the play in a more meaningful way.

Included in this process was the creation of a resource guide for young audience members to interact with

Regeneration practices. While a personal regenerative practice greatly influenced my approach as an actor, the resource guide required a shift in focus. While the personal regenerative practice elevated my experience as an actor, I felt as if there were foundational holes in my practice. There are still areas of my research that I lack the expertise, such as certified intimacy training, a deeper understanding of sociology, and drama therapy. Part of my intention with these courses is that there are opportunities created for intimacy directors and coordinators, drama therapists, and psychologists to hold space in higher education. While good intentioned, I believe my lack of confidence held me back in implementing it into my process for this production and the resource guide. I am looking forward on continuing my research and further legitimizing this curriculum.

This production has rewarded me with many new discoveries as well as many new curiosities. I remain curious about the dichotomy of intimacy practices vs. efficiency in production. While I see the benefits of

holding space and making time for intimacy practices, when is radical inclusion prohibiting production from progressing? What is the protocol when radical inclusion is taken advantage of and risks the efficiency of the production, and all involved?

I am also curious about our loyalty, as theatre-makers, to honor the script—especially when dealing with content that is offensive and/or oppressive and is not crucial to the story we are trying to tell. In our production, we altered the pledge of allegiance and created a spelling bee pledge, we provided context for the appropriateness of an ex-convict serving as a comfort counselor for a children's spelling bee, as well as removed possible spelling bee words that had outdated and offensive definitions. These decisions were made at the discretion of the directors and intimacy coordinator to best serve the story we were trying to tell in the most inclusive and enjoyable manner. I feel like this loyalty between actor and text is shifting in American theatre as we see performances of plays that add dialogue or blocking to

place the importance of the play in context with the current world around us. Who are we loyal to? The exact text? The performability of the text? The intent of the playwright? Or the collaborative efforts of all artists involved in the production of a theatre piece?

I maintain that the Regeneration practices allowed me to see myself within the process and how building space for myself allowed others to do the same. The caliber of work was elevated, and miscommunications were rare. These practices allowed me to be more invested in the people I was collaborating with and gave us the freedom to be courageous in the face of failure. Regeneration practices helped me develop an intentional awareness for me to receive success. Because I allow myself to be present, I am more capable of recognizing and replicating the state of being I feel most successful.

## CONCLUSION

### NAYSAYERS, SAY WHAT?

At different moments in my training, I have experienced the holistic benefits of theatre creation. In these moments, mentors have cautioned that "Theatre is therapeutic, not therapy." These mentors and practitioners alike will claim that theatre practices often touch upon intimate concepts regarding identity and lived experiences, but that using theatre as a form of therapy, a method in which you can heal your traumas, is unethical practice as they are not mental health professionals. I believe these practitioners are well-intentioned in their pursuit to maintain ethical and safe practices by compartmentalizing lived experience and the experiences performed onstage—no matter how similar they are in circumstance.

As a practitioner myself, I am in no way qualified to facilitate healing in this fashion. As much as I would like to offer this support, it is way out of the bounds of my training as a theatre artist. Practitioners who claim that "Theatre is therapeutic, not therapy" are in favor of healing through theatre, as long as you have primary care with a licensed professional.

And yet, there are practitioners who will abuse the intimate nature of theatre to emotionally manipulate and harm others in the industry, such as the Exit63 Theatre's 2019 production of *Horse Girls* when a director's abuse led to the silencing of the cast and the cancellation of the production. The intimate nature of theatre can be healing and destructive. How can we ensure that the intimate nature of theatre is used for healing instead of hurting?



## THE SKINNY

Most actors at the beginning of their training are expanding their perspectives and learning to think critically about communication. They are developing an awareness that leaves the classroom with them as they live their personal lives. It is unethical to train actors to perform traumas that potentially mirror their own lived experiences without the tools to process them. This is particularly true for some forms of theatre for social justice. Actors are asked to perform traumas they have potentially experienced and then placed with the burden of responsibility to seek the proper mental healthcare they may need as a result. I do not claim theatre to be therapy, but I do believe the intimate nature of our work requires more intentionality surrounding mental health. That's my hope in developing Regeneration.

Regeneration practices have enhanced my training greatly. I have found ways to commit more intentionally

within a production. Through intention setting and self-care practices, I opened new creative avenues and opportunities that gave me the responsibility to uphold intimacy guidelines and agency to speak on behalf of the cast. I found the University of Louisville's production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* to be spiritually fulfilling thanks to Regeneration practices. I found the process to be exciting and joyful. The collaborative environment we built allowed us to return to the vulnerability and innocence of children—every rehearsal felt like a game of make-believe. As a group, we discovered intimate connections to the text that made us laugh and cry and meditate. I left the process with a sense of closure and strong command of self—which has only been the case in one other production I participated in, thanks to my very first mentor whose praxis inspired my Regeneration focus.

## FINAL STATEMENTS OF MEANING

Theatre, as a discipline, is far more than artistic pursuit. Theatre is a catalyst for global change—and not in the sense that theatre simply inspires or influences, but that it serves as an instrument for a transformative experience. The ritualized practice of theatre we share as a human race is so profound and is rooted in oneness in diversity, in the universality of the human condition. Theatre has influenced my life greatly in many different capacities, as a performing artist, as a teacher, and as a practitioner. As an artist, I believe theatre to be a vital component of my abilities as a leader, a follower, a friend, a partner, and a daughter. As a teacher, I have been able to use theatrical conventions and drama-based instruction to facilitate positive change for the people and communities I care deeply for. But—as a practitioner, I am beyond burnout.

The theatre industry, like nearly all other major art forms, has been commodified to the point that the dichotomy of storytellers and listeners has shifted to performers and sponsors. Art for commerce has prioritized the distinct and profound method of communication experienced through storytelling as a service for which money can be exchanged, demoting the holistic benefits from authentic and meaningful forms of theatre to a lucky coincidence. This capitalistic focus has created an oppressive structure within the industry that results in sacrifices made by theatre-makers who are overworked, underpaid, and in a constant internal battle between their creative passions and the reality of their practices. The artist and the industry are in a codependent relationship where each party relies solely upon the other to function resulting in a destructive cycle of abuse. Theatre artists cannot create meaningful content as a vessel for dismantling oppressive structures until we dismantle the oppressive structures within our industry and methodologies.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Theatre education is critical in the construction of the theatre industry. This is where I believe the largest and most effective change can happen. When we challenge the methodologies that have been passed down to us in our training, we can generate updated and more fitting practices that serve the larger mission of using theatre as a tool for social change. Reprioritizing theatre as a tool for social change allows the artist and the industry to work in a symbiotic relationship, allowing meaningful and transformative art to be made and situating the craft as a vital component of social development.

Theatre for social justice has long been practiced, but what continues to prevent this work from becoming the foremost mission of this craft is the execution. Traditional theatre training has not always provided safe or inclusive practices, leaving practitioners with the responsibility to address complicated social constructions

without the resources to support their work. Regeneration practices are meant to provide theatre-makers with the support they need to ethically and safely work within this proximity as well as develop a pedagogy for facilitating this space for others.

This is only the beginning of practices such as these. I believe this discipline is at the cusp of a renaissance period as worldwide exposure through the internet has given theatre-makers the platform to share both passions and pains in their praxis. I plan to continue to develop these practices as well as a concise practice that can be adopted by professional theatre training programs globally. In an attempt to deconstruct the institutional exclusivity of knowledge and culture, I hope to construct workshops and events open to anyone who is looking to bring intentionality to their creative practices. Furthermore, I plan to develop variations of Regeneration suited to artists of all kinds, educators, and audiences. I remain curious about cross-pollination between occupations and Regeneration practice and how they will influence each

other. I am also tasked with developing an administrative perspective regarding these practices and finding practical ways to implement this work as seamlessly as possible.

In the next few years I plan to take the time to dedicate more research and development to the preliminary units of Regeneration and how the flight plan is structured. Once each unit is fully realized, I would like to begin offering each unit as a two-week long workshop. I would like to offer Regeneration as a free summer evening program to young adults in the early years of their theatre training. This will serve as trial runs for the Regeneration curriculum. I hope to publish the curriculum once the research is complete. From there, I would like to bring this curriculum to different pre-professional theatre training programs as well as offer the Regeneration program to workforces such as education, healthcare, and business operations. I believe this work can be transformative across many professions.

I identify as a Hope Punk artist. I use my craft to weaponize kindness and hope in the face of probable demise.

Theatre education allows me to explore work that speaks to my artistry and how I choose to contribute to the world at large. I believe theatre is a discipline that has the potential to promote social justice and enhance social development and community enrichment, but I don't believe it can achieve this without providing theatre-makers the sufficient self-care practices to approach this work ethically.

The intentionality that Regeneration practices bring results in a deeper connection to the craft, the community, and the self. When we can translate these practices into our personal lives, I believe there is the possibility for an elevated experience of life. Theatre, as a discipline, acts as a catalyst for ritualistic, cultural, and spiritual identities to be contextualized and expanded. It serves as a safe container in which we can explore the nuances of identity and partake in identity genesis. Instead of identifying by one's actions or reactions, theatre can be a space to restructure the performance of personhood.



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## APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Sample Final: Resource Guide.

Below is the full Sample Final: Resource Guide. This guide for the Spring 2023 UofL Theatre Arts Department's production of *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. See text for more information.

# THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE

## Resource Guide

There are almost 20,000 species of bee on the planet

The National Spelling Bee began in 1925. The winning word that year was "gladiolus." (It's a type of flower.)

Bees are essential for pollinating our flowers, fruits and vegetables on Earth

The Scripps National Spelling Bee is the most popular spelling bee event in the whole world.

The "BEE" in spelling bee is Bee is derived from the Old English *bēn* meaning "a prayer, a favor."

### BEE FACTS

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- Stage Frightly vs. BIG MIGHTY
- How to Be A Good Winner
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- Mindfulness Maze



# **TEACHER RESOURCES**



## THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE



An eclectic group of six students vies for the spelling championship of a lifetime. While candidly disclosing hilarious and touching stories from their home lives, the tweens spell their way through a series of (potentially made-up) words, hoping never to hear the soul-crushing, pout-inducing, life un-affirming "ding" of the bell that signals a spelling mistake. Six spellers enter; one speller leaves a champion! At least the losers get a juice box.



# THE SPELLERS



**William Barfée**



**Logainne Shwartzandgrubenierre**



**Leaf Coneybear**



**Marcy Park**



**CHIP TOBENTINO**



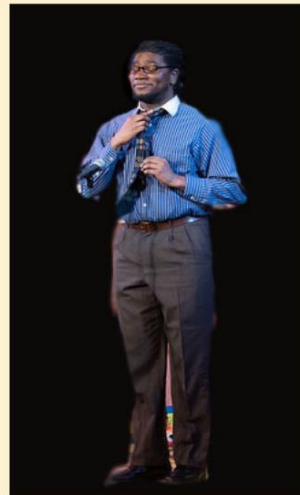
**Olive Ostrovsky**



# THE ADULTS



**MITCH MAHONEY**



**Vice Principal Douglas  
Panch**



*Rona Lisa Peretti*






## Show Vocabulary

- Syzygy- When the Earth aligns with the moon and the sun.
- Strabismus- The inability of one eye to obtain binocular vision with the other because of an imbalance of the muscles of the eyeball
- Capybara -A tailless, largely aquatic South American rodent often exceeding four feet in length
- Boanthropy- The delusion that one has become an ox
- Lugubrious- extremely sad and droopy
- Phylactery- Either of two small square leather boxes containing religious texts traditionally worn on the left arm and head by Jewish men during morning weekday prayer
- Cystitis- An inflammation of the urinary bladder
- Acouchi- A South American rodent of the genus Myoprocta, resembling an agouti
- Hasenpfeffer- A highly seasoned rabbit stew, often served with sour cream
- Qaimaqam- A lieutenant or deputy in the Ottoman Empire.
- Tittup- Lively movement or behavior- to move restlessly
- Sluice- An artificial passage for water with a valve or gate for stopping and regulating the flow
- Chimerical- Unreal, imaginary, visionary. Wildly fanciful. Highly unrealistic.
- Crepuscule- Twilight
- Weltanschauung- One's personal perspective, your philosophy, the way you look at the world



## **Throw Your Own Spelling Bee!**



Below are two study lists for 5th & 7th grades. Challenge your students by throwing your own Spelling Bee!





## Scripps National Spelling Bee

### Two Bee Study Words for Fifth Grade 2020-2021

The 2020-2021 School Spelling Bee Study List is broken down into three levels of difficulty: One Bee, Two Bee and Three Bee. Two Bee words include words appropriate for fourth, fifth and sixth grades.

The list below includes 50 challenging fifth grade words. If you learn the spellings and meanings of these words, you will be well prepared for your fifth grade classroom bee. To prepare for a school spelling bee, ask your teacher for the full 450-word School Spelling Bee Study List, which includes these words, the remainder of the Two Bee words, and the One Bee and Three Bee words.

whimper  
mobility  
bough  
flurry  
drowsy  
instrument  
activists  
nutrients  
lair  
cruel  
splutter  
gesture  
imposing  
agreement  
chef  
mislead  
retreat

bracelet  
eddy  
listlessly  
glisten  
scoff  
blissfully  
commute  
scarcely  
hybrid  
schedule  
convince  
formation  
complicated  
dappled  
crease  
subtitles  
implore

inwardly  
fanged  
cautioned  
accuse  
opposite  
coarse  
cocoa  
stretcher  
mustard  
goblins  
grateful  
previous  
unnoticed  
rustle  
whales  
fragment



Download the Word Club app for spelling games and audio pronunciations.



## Scripps National Spelling Bee

### Study Words for Seventh Graders

#### 2017-2018

atoll	paralysis	reservoir	monomania	incarcerated
miracle	chimpanzee	truculently	taxidermy	appendectomy
callous	peroxide	generalissimo	piteously	subterranean
grandiose	amputation	vociferous	strenuous	financiers
dexterity	conspiracy	merengue	intimation	treacherous
barrette	sinewy	claustrophobic	conundrum	orthopedic* or orthopaedic
cordial	flabbergasted	Methuselah	atrocities	sphinx
alacrity	boisterously	entrepreneurs	voluminous	lama
marmalade	linoleum	monsieur	propaganda	celerity
orchids	tapirs	pièce de résistance	conspicuous	acacias
despondency	repugnance	proviso	premonition	Seminole
composure	impeccable	dragoons	memorandum	hallucinations
jauntily	contagious	gargoyle	pastrami	endeavor* or endeavour
Hispaniola	stevedores	anecdote	germinate	labyrinthine
quantum	commendable	brigands	parenthetical	excruciating
calamine	incessant	mandible	crematoria	lichenous
exasperation	ricochet	crampon	massacres	chandeliers
sophomore	tribulations	Sherpa	petulance	uncoquettish
reprobate	azalea	malign	facilitate	tempestuous
annoyance	fluorescent	boroughs	extenuation	Pyrenees

This list includes 50 challenging seventh grade words and, to extend learning, 50 challenging eighth grade words. If you learn the spellings and meanings of these 100 words, you will be well prepared for a seventh grade classroom bee. If you would like to be well prepared for a school spelling bee, ask your teacher for the 450-word School Spelling Bee Study List.

\*preferred U.S. spelling



Join word club on  
spellingbee.com for online  
quizzes and audio pronunciations.



**STUDENT  
RESOURCES**

## Leaf Coneybear's Word Scramble

Leaf is the only speller who didn't win his district bee. He struggles with spelling- can you unscramble the following words?

YCABPAAR

OCAUHC

LNHCAHCLII

ITOGUA

NPEIVLU

---

---

---

---

---

\*\*ANSWER KEY IN THE BACK OF PACKET

**WHAT DO THESE WORDS HAVE IN COMMON?  
Circle the correct answer**

All  
Reptiles

All  
Rodents

All  
Birds

All  
Fish

## How do you value YOU?

You are more than your achievements-- what are some things you love about yourself?

Draw how others see you

Draw how you see you

## Word Search

T T N C R C O R Y Z A P F T A M M C  
I W K P K L N V U L P I N E I R J H  
L F F P E R E G R I N E U Y C A C I  
A Z P L C R E P U S C U L E C Z J M  
P Q U H L P F K C S I L S P I L E E  
I Z K R K X H A S T R O B L E M E R  
A A B Q N R O O I B O S G B G U K I  
V R C H R O M A T O P H O R E B Q C  
U Z O O N O S I S B M W E E V I L A  
G P A L A V E R X O I M H O L R B L  
H A L L U X U S L U I C E Y W M V W  
G Q T N C F A B A C E A E N R R G L

Find the following words in the puzzle.  
Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

ASTROBLEME  
CHIMERICAL  
CHROMATOPHORE  
CORYZA  
CREPUSCULE  
FABACEAE

HALLUX  
ILSPILE  
PALAVER  
PEREGRINE  
ROOIBOS  
SLUICE

TILAPIA  
VUG  
VULPINE  
WEEVIL  
ZONOSIS



## Stage Frigthy vs. **BIG MIGHTY**

Do you ever get stage fright? Here are some tricks that will make you feel **BIG** and **MIGHTY!**

### BOX BREATHING TECHNIQUE

How to calm the mind with the breath

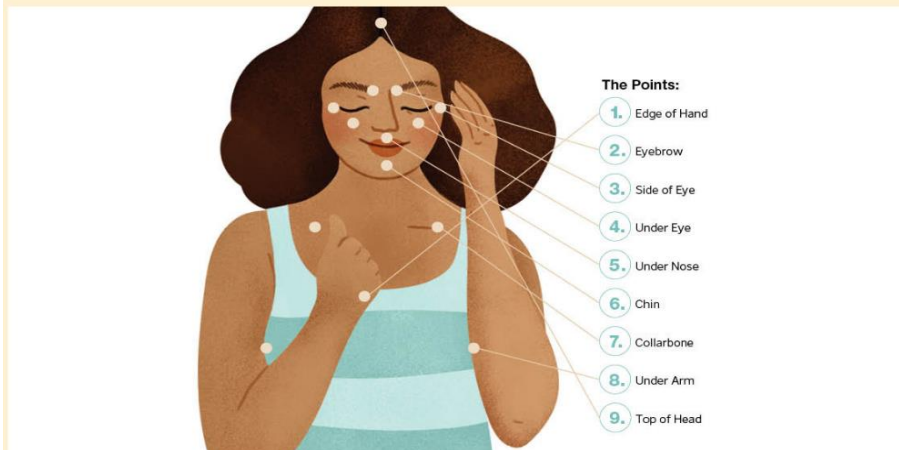


## Stage Frighty vs. BIG MIGHTY

### Tapping in

#### Directions

- A. With four fingers, tap the soft outer edge of your other hand (point 1)
- B. Move through the next points, continuing with the eyebrow point closest to the bridge of your nose (2). Tap each point five to seven times.
- C. Work your way around your face by tapping the side of your eye on your temple (3), directly underneath your eye (4), under your nose (5), and on your chin directly under your lower lip (6). Make sure to take deep breaths as you tap. You may focus on the points on one or both sides of the body.
- D. Continue by tapping on your collarbone (7), under your arm approximately 4 inches beneath your armpit (8), and finally, on the crown of your head (9).
- E. After completing the sequence two to three times, reevaluate the intensity of your emotion. Repeat the entire sequence until you feel a sense of calm.



## **Stage Frighty vs. BIG MIGHTY**

Read the following mantras out loud every morning/night to strengthen your relationship with YOU !

**I AM CAPABLE!**

**MISTAKES ARE  
HOW I LEARN!**

**THIS IS TOUGH,  
BUT SO AM I!**

**ATTITUDE IS  
EVERYTHING!**

**I CONTROL  
MY CHOICES!**

**LEARNING IS MESSY!**

## How to Be A Good Winner

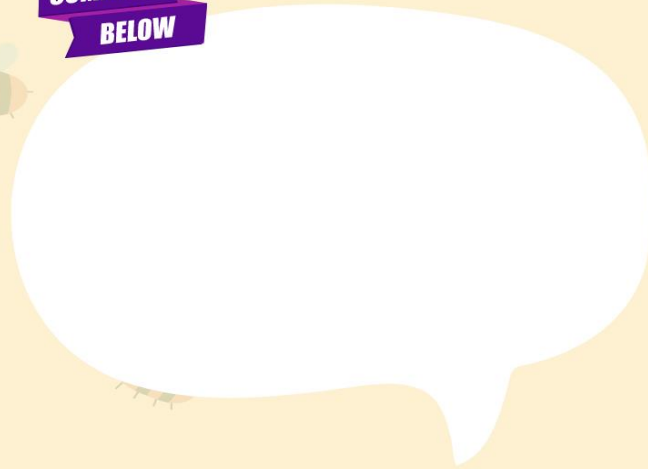
**Celebrate your success  
not someone's failure**

**Thank those who helped  
you succeed**

**Allow others to feel  
their feelings**

Have you ever won something? How did it make you feel?

**COMMENT  
BELOW**



## How to Be A Good Loser



**Celebrate what went well**

**Allow yourself to be present with what comes up**

**Share gratitude with those who supported you**

Have you ever lost something? How did it make you feel?

**COMMENT  
BELOW**

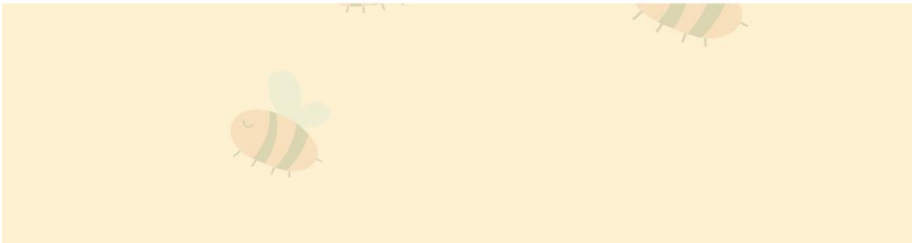
A large white speech bubble shape with a tail pointing towards the bottom right, intended for a comment. It is surrounded by several small, stylized bee illustrations.

## **Mindfulness Maze**

Sometimes it can be hard to focus on the here and now. Use this labyrinth to recalibrate. Use your finger or a pencil to trace your way through the maze. While moving through the maze, just focus on getting to the center and breathing.



# Mindfulness Maze





## Mindfulness Maze







## Leaf Coneybear's Word Scramble

YCABPAAR  
OCAUHIC  
LNHCAHCLII  
ITOGUA  
NPEIVLU

CAPYBARA  
ACOUCHI  
CHINCHILLA  
AGOUTI  
VULPINE

**WHAT DO THESE WORDS HAVE IN COMMON?**  
**Circle the correct answer**

All  
Reptiles

All  
Birds

All  
Rodents

All  
Fish

SOLUTION

**Word Search**

T	.	.	.	.	C	O	R	Y	Z	A	.	.	.	.	.	C	
I	.	.	.	.	.	V	U	L	P	I	N	E	.	.	.	H	
L	.	.	P	E	R	E	G	R	I	N	E	.	.	.	.	I	
A	.	.	.	C	R	E	P	U	S	C	U	L	E	.	.	M	
P	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	L	S	P	I	L	E	E	
I	.	.	.	.	.	A	S	T	R	O	B	L	E	M	E	R	
A	.	.	.	.	R	O	O	I	B	O	S	.	.	.	.	I	
V	.	C	H	R	O	M	A	T	O	P	H	O	R	E	.	C	
U	Z	O	O	N	O	S	I	S	.	.	W	E	E	V	I	L	A
G	P	A	L	A	V	E	R	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	L
H	A	L	L	U	X	.	S	L	U	I	C	E	.	.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.	.	F	A	B	A	C	E	A	E	.	.	.	.	.

Word directions and start points are formatted: (Direction, X, Y)

- |                       |                   |                  |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| ASTROBLEME (E,8,6)    | HALLUX (E,1,11)   | TILAPIA (S,1,1)  |
| CHIMERICAL (S,18,1)   | ILSPILE (E,11,5)  | VUG (S,1,8)      |
| CHROMATOPHORE (E,3,8) | PALAUVER (E,2,10) | VULPINE (E,8,2)  |
| CORYZA (E,6,1)        | PEREGRINE (E,4,3) | WEEVIL (E,12,9)  |
| CREPUSCULE (E,5,4)    | ROOIBOS (E,6,7)   | ZOONOSIS (E,2,9) |
| FABACEAE (E,6,12)     | SLUICE (E,8,11)   |                  |

## CURRICULUM VITA

Name: Sarah Chen Elston

Phone: 814.248.2624

Email: [selston5@gmail.com](mailto:selston5@gmail.com)

D.O.B.: Williamsport, PA - September 29, 1997

### EDUCATION

Master of Fine Arts: Performance Arts 2020-2023

University of Louisville. Louisville, KY

Bachelor of Arts: Theatre Studies 2018-2020

Guilford College. Greensboro, NC

Performance Track

Minor: Business Administration

\*Attended Point Park University: Conservatory of Performing Arts from 2016-2018. Transferred out.

### Artistic Statement

I am a hope punk performance artist who creates work that asks the big questions and activates kindness as a radical act. Originally from Pittsburgh, PA; she holds a BA in Theatre Arts from Guilford College and is currently working to obtain her MFA in Performance from the University of Louisville. It is her life mission to immerse creative practices into everyday life as much as possible and to show others the value of weaponizing optimism.

### Awards & Nominations

2023 The A&S Graduate Student Excellence in Teaching Award Nomination, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

2020 Donald Deagon Achievement Award Recipient, Guilford College Theatre Studies, Greensboro, NC

2016-2017 Artistic Achievement Scholarship Recipient, Point Park University: Conservatory of Performing Arts, Pittsburgh, PA

## Teaching Experience

TA 224 Intro to Acting as Communication: Instructor of Record- Spring 2022 & Fall 2022- University of Louisville

This course is an introduction to theatre, performance, and acting as communication. Students will develop performance skills as well as effective approaches to speaking publicly. Students will enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving skills while exploring their relationship to self, a partner, and an audience. Students will explore performance and communication through ensemble building, active listening, acting exercise, and creative material development.

TA 224 Intro to Acting as Communication: Graduate Teaching Assistant- Spring 2021- University of Louisville

This class provides students with an opportunity to experience how an actor (onstage or on film) communicates with an audience as well as with fellow actors, and to

explore how such means of communication might be successfully employed in non-theatre contexts (aka, "real life").

THEA 228 Acting II: Creating the World: Teaching

Assistant- Spring 2020- Guilford College

Explores the work of the actor in reorganizing the self into another human being existing in the circumstances and world of the play. Includes work on sense memory and sensory endowment to bring moment-to-moment physical life to an environment; the discovery and development of immediate and historic given circumstances from textual clues.

Summer Teaching Work

Triad Stage: Summer Performance Academy: Assistant Teaching

Artist 2018-2019- Greensboro, NC

Summer programs are process-based and interactive, so students get a chance to explore theater, hone their

artistic skills, meet new friends, and have a great time. Summer programs are available for students from grade levels 4-8. Programs offer small class sizes that allow for individualized instruction, professional teaching artists who work in both theater and education, support for students with various levels of experience, innovative activities for students to master creativity, collaboration, and communication in a virtual learning environment, and curriculum that allows students to develop performance skills while simultaneously building confidence, public speaking, leadership, and collaboration.

National Student Leadership Conference on Theatre

2014 NSLC Alum

2017 NSLC Assistant Teaching Artist- New York City, NY

From their home base of New York, students experience the life of a theater professional. They go backstage and see the inner workings of Broadway, participate in master classes and discussions with top New York artists, and



spend evenings in the audience of Broadway shows. Students will design, rehearse, and produce their own shows. Throughout the process, they receive feedback from professional actors, directors, playwrights, and stage managers who have years of experience working on Broadway. NSLC's college-level lecture series provides a foundation of knowledge on theater performance and production.

Johnstown Kids Onstage

Teaching Artist 2013-2015

Johnstown Kids Onstage worked with two age groups, 5-10 and 11-15, to produce theatre for Johnstown youth. Johnstown Kids Onstage produced 4 seasons.

Johnstown, PA

Community Service

Kentucky Shakespeare's Community Creates- Louisville, KY

Teaching Artist

The Community Creates Program is an expansion of Kentucky Shakespeare's pre-show program, in which community performance groups are showcased prior to the professional mainstage production. With support from the National Endowment for the Arts, Community Creates partnered with four different community groups around Louisville with the goal of devising a theatre piece inspired by *The Tempest*. The 12-week rehearsal process resulted in a performance prior to a mainstage show at Kentucky Shakespeare.

#### Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is rooted in the belief that the best teacher one could have is themselves. I view my role as a lighthouse. I am not a GPS telling you exactly where to go and exactly how to get there, but rather a guiding light that is reliable and always present.

As a teacher, I work to facilitate a safe space for meaningful learning to occur. I aim to provide my students with practice for real-world engagement. It is important to me that my students develop agency over their own learning.

As theatre artists, they are going to encounter many different methods in their training and will need to be able to discern what information is valuable to them and what is not. I hope that after leaving my class, they will feel they have taken responsibility and ownership over their learning.

I have faced many obstacles as an instructor in the past, such as giving precedence to the product over the process and making too many assumptions about the priorities of my students. These experiences have taught me that facilitating a safe space for learning shifts and changes as the group I am working with changes. The most successful experiences I have had with teaching are when I take each class session one at a time. While planning and forethought are important to my practice, I refuse to prioritize a schedule over the needs of the class. I find that this approach allows students freedom from the sort of structure they are used to encountering in an academic setting and provides them with a sense of ownership over their

education. I have noticed that most of my students are capable of staying on task without me policing their learning.

I want to empower my students to fail at full speed and to continue to ask questions throughout their training. Our craft works outside of the binary, choices are not simply right or wrong, and often our perceived failures will lead to great discoveries. I encourage my students to continue to ask questions and view their work through an exploratory lens.

It is important to me that the material is accessible to all learners. Interactive lectures and group work will be the focus of in-person class time while work outside of the classroom will be more theory-based through engaging with written work from important members of the theatre community and learning how to respond to these ideas through reading responses. I believe group work is a crucial component of classwork and theatre. My students

will gain experience collaborating with others in group exercises, scene work, and group discussions. If theatre were a private practice then it would be playing make-believe. The energy brought to the theatre by artists and creatives is what anchors theatre in the present moment. My goal is to empower my students in whatever capacity works best for them and shine a light on their blind spots, not determine their worth based on how they receive information.

I am a strong believer in Karmic balance. I believe that it is my mission to put good out into the world every day and teaching is one of many ways for me to accomplish this. I believe when you teach out of love and respect for your students that they will radiate that love and respect out into the world. Maybe not always, but that is beyond my control. All I can control is my perseverance to continue to try every day.

Directing Credits

Louisville Fringe Festival- Louisville, KY 2022

The Forest and the Flames by David Clark

UofL Spring Shorts Festival- University of Louisville, KY  
2022

Buy a New Tent by Rachel Meadors

Morning After by Beau Howard

Don't Do Drugs, Kids by Tajleed Hardy

Choreo. Violin Lessons by Flora Schildknecht

Point Park University's Half-Acts- Point Park University,  
PA 2017

Code Brown by Kevin Gilmond

Point Park University's 24-Hour Play Festival- Point Park  
University, PA 2017

Cave The Boy by Rome Vergerio

## Acting Resume

- The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee
  - Rona Lisa Peretti
  - University of Louisville, KY
- Blood at the Root
  - Asha
  - University of Louisville, KY
- Twelfth Night
  - Viola
  - University of Louisville, KY
- #Hashtag
  - Ensemble
  - University of Louisville, KY
- The Birds
  - Julia
  - University of Louisville, KY
- He Said and She Said
  - Diana Chesbrough
  - Triad Stage, NC
- Hamlet 2020

- Hamlet
  - Guilford College, NC
- John
  - Jenny Chung
  - Guilford College, NC
- Working: The Musical
  - Candy Cottingham/Delores Dante
  - Guilford College, NC
- Everything You Touch
  - Esme
  - Guilford College, NC
- The Madwoman of Chaillot
  - Flower Girl/Mme Constance
  - Guilford College, NC
- The Good Person of Szechuan
  - Wang the Waterseller
  - Point Park University, PA
- Twelve Angry Men
  - 9th Juror
  - Point Park University, PA



- Lucky Stiff
  - Ensemble
  - Stone Bridge Players, PA
- Seussical the Musical
  - Gertrude McFuzz
  - Westmont, PA
- Look Homeward, Angel
  - Eliza Gant
  - Westmont, PA

Repertory Theatre

UofL Repertory Company 2022/2023- University of Louisville,  
KY

Trickster Tales by Andrew Harris-Ensemble

UofL Repertory Company 2021/2022- University of Louisville,  
KY

Code Switch devised by the company-Stage Manager/Ensemble

Film

Double-Crossed- Point Park University Film, PA

Caleb Gretsky Short

References

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University of Louisville, KY

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Triad Stage, NC

(336) 274-0067 ext. 215

[sarah@triadstage.org](mailto:sarah@triadstage.org)

Beth Ritson-Lavender

Professor for Theatre Studies

336-316-2341

[ritsonlavenderea@guilford.edu](mailto:ritsonlavenderea@guilford.edu)