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## Teen Theatre: Exploring the Role of the Young Adult in Art and Life

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TEEN THEATRE: EXPLORING THE ROLE  
OF THE YOUNG ADULT IN ART AND LIFE

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## I. Introduction

### **Background**

My theatre journey began, I am sure, as many others did. I first got “the bug,” as we say, attending both professional and community performances with my family. At that time, I did not think much about the content of the play. I was of a young age. Enamored by the magic, I drank in the costumes, the sounds, the lights, and the sets. Everything was beautiful to me. After the genesis of my love for theatre, I took advantage of every opportunity to perform on any stage: dance recitals, school circuses, Sunday School choir, and finally school plays. I eventually turned to the technical world as well: the building, painting, gathering, and organizing of that theatre magic. Until my early days of high school, that magic was enough.

I cannot say exactly when this changed. However, as with the novels we read in English class and the type of problems we solved in math, my tastes gradually became more discerning. In high school I began to read and collect short plays for our semi-annual ten-minute play festival, and I found many plays that were simply bad. Simultaneously, our large-scale productions always struck me as distant. From Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* to Stephen Sondheim’s *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, I never truly related to or felt like a part of these worlds, though created by such talented storytellers.

From my experiences since that point – which have included a great deal of both very good and very bad theatre – I have found I was not alone in this sense of loss, this distance that stretched between me and the works of playwrights. As I completed my

junior year in college, I finally had the chance to participate in a class that would help me fill this void.

Simply titled, Theatre for Youth is a course that explores and exposes students to a variety of genres, topics, playwrights, and scripts in the world of youth theatre. Here I read good plays. Here, too, I read bad plays. Despite their quality, however, one thing struck me in all these works: they were for youth. They were not family shows, not adult shows appropriate for young people, but plays with that specific audience in mind. Whether the age range was the very young or the adolescent, these plays identified issues and ideas common in that epoch (the seemingly infinite time) from age five to age eighteen.

What a remarkable discovery this was. It opened a world of possibilities in my future work. Furthermore, it led me to believe that – just as there are truly, genuinely good plays written for adults – there must also be that same level of quality within theatre for youth. Thus began my quest.

### **Creative Challenge**

Throughout the spring semester of 2012, I explored, discussed, and rehearsed two plays for young people that thematically examine the topic of self-identification. For the purpose of this thesis, I defined self-identification as an adolescent's journey of discovery, which involves finding a context for oneself in the community and finding the purpose or potential of an individual. The scripts selected are intended for an audience of 12 to 18 year olds, and my ensemble of actors was comprised from that age group. My goal was to discover how the works a) related or did not relate to the experiences of the actors, b) dramatically explored the purpose or potential of an individual, and c)

helped the actors find a context for art and for themselves in the community. The project culminated in a reflection of my work with the teenagers over the course of the semester, which analyzed the process, the outcomes, and the response by participants and audience members to the work presented.

The purpose of this thesis was to summarize my exploration with a group of teenagers of two scripts and our experiences throughout the process. The scripts chosen fit two qualifications: I considered them to be examples of true quality in playwriting and they addressed adolescent self-identification. In rehearsals the teens and I discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each script we read and chose to perform a staged reading of the one we considered better suited for our ensemble. A discussion of my decision to direct a staged reading rather than a full-fledged production can be found in the Creative Process chapter, subheading Performance and Reflection.

My goal in this project was to compare my reason for choosing scripts against my students' opinions as well as to conduct an open conversation about what this particular group of teenagers looked for in a "good" play: a play that touches them, makes them think, and aids in their self-identification. My focus, therefore, has been trained on the process in which I was involved, rather than the product of our production. This goal of comparison is of vital importance to me because I truly believe in the power of theatre to change lives. The first step toward instigating such a revolution is the selection of the correct script. Based on the developmental stage of adolescents, who are by nature focused on the present as well as their own peer group, adults choosing scripts for adolescents must look to plays that convincingly portray adolescence. Oftentimes, listening to teenagers is the most effective tactic for this process; they value the

responsibility and provide genuine feedback about which plays inspire them. This approach is not now the norm, but I believe it should be.

## II. The Creative Process

### **Preparations**

Between my online research and the reading of scripts available to me in print, I explored countless plays that eventually fell into three categories as related to my definition of self-identification. While there is neither the time nor the space to review individually each of the 50 scripts I considered, I will summarize my findings and highlight a few examples of each category. The first category included plays I discarded simply because, for various reasons, these documents did not appeal to me. Some, such as "Epic Fail," found on the Eldridge Plays and Musicals website or "Conflict" and *Tomorrow's Wishes* on playwright Wade Bradford's website, seemed to address a younger audience and state the central themes more explicitly than is necessary with teenagers. Others, including *Life in the Fat Lane* by Cherie Bennett and Dennis Foon's *Skin*, *Invisible Kids*, and *New Canadian Kid*, address topics very relevant to my audience, but not specifically related to the topic of self-identification. Finally, some scripts did not appeal to me because I was not interested in the story itself. Examples of this include *The Pinballs*, written by Aurand Harris, and Wade Bradford's short plays based on Shakespearean works, including "Macbeth Mix-up" and "Romeo Revised."

Next, I categorized plays that were somehow technically unfit for my project. Toward the beginning of my process, I considered selecting several shorter pieces that address similar themes to perform in pairs or trios. I looked specifically at *10 by 10*, a collection of ten-minute plays, and "Cinema Limbo," a short play by Wade Bradford.

However, I eventually decided that selecting one play to explore as a whole group would serve my needs better, both in terms of lesson planning and content.

Eventually, I found six plays that greatly appealed to me for this project. Specifically, they addressed the two self-identification issues most important to me: finding a context for oneself in the community and the purpose or potential of an individual. My final six included: *Triangle* and *The Lost Ones* by Laurie Brooks, *Liars* by Dennis Foon, *Charlie Foster* by Raymond King Shurtz, *Governing Alice* by C. Denby Swanson, and *Danny, King of the Basement* by David S. Craig.

To narrow my selection, I began to look at other factors that could affect our work with or performance of the piece. I eliminated *Triangle* and *Liars* from the final list due to the difficulties of performing these scripts as staged readings, the most likely format of our performance. These two would be more successful as full productions because of technical requirements. I then divided the last four scripts into two groups based on cast size. *Charlie Foster* and *Governing Alice* require a large cast, while *The Lost Ones* and *Danny, King of the Basement* utilize fewer actors. Below is a brief description of each of the four plays I chose.

*Charlie Foster*: Charlie Foster was a kid no one knew or cared about until he accidentally drowned in the river. Or was it an accident? Ten young people try to comprehend this life and death, questioning their memories and each other's. They use emotional tools within their understanding to process the tragedy—the rules of swimming and improvisation—as they explore this complex and profound experience that has changed each of their lives.



*Governing Alice*: In this modern adaptation of the Greek classic *Antigone*, a rebellious high school student named Alice must respond to the sudden and shattering death of her older brother, the class valedictorian -- who was shot while robbing a convenience store. Up against an unyielding principal and accompanied by a bookish Geek Chorus, Alice must find her own way through personal and classical tragedy. In honoring her brother, she'll probably break some rules. Which is more important?

*The Lost Ones*: In a time of war, two feral children play at what they know. Remembering little of the past, they construct a world of their own from a few memories, a battered copy of Peter Pan and their own determination to survive, until the arrival of the enemy becomes the catalyst for them to look outside. *The Lost Ones* tells the story of two boys who have lost their childhood to war and investigates emotional literacy and the human rights of children.

*Danny, King of the Basement*: In two years Danny and his mom have moved more often than kids lose teeth. When Danny moves into a new basement apartment, the kids he meets seem to have way more problems than just being hungry. But Danny's imaginative play creates a community that allows his friends to cope with their problems and ultimately to help Danny – because his crisis isn't losing a home. It's gaining one...

In addition to scripts, I referenced bibliotherapy texts in my work during the rehearsal process. Bibliotherapy is the use of literature to draw connections to one's own life. In particular, I was drawn to Liz Burns' description of bibliotherapy in the introduction to her *Literature and Therapy: A Systemic Review*: "The kind of fusion which takes place between the life situation and the literary one releases creative energy, whilst the form of the text gives structure and meaning to the process" (xxi). This in particular intrigued

me because it speaks not only of the content of the literature, but of the form as well. It implies that novels, poetry, and drama affect the readers (or performers) differently and therefore, form is equally important. This information was particularly influential to me in my process because of the careful consideration I took in choosing my course of study as well as the form of my thesis.

### **Recruitment**

The next step in my process was to recruit teenagers who would be interested in working on the project with me. I began by drafting a letter to potential participants, explaining the project, the requirements from them, and the time commitment needed. With the letter, I also included a registration form so that I could collect the necessary contact and scheduling information. These documents may be viewed in Appendix A.

My thesis advisor Gretta Berghammer then recommended teenagers with whom she had worked in the past through Sturgis Youth Theatre. We sent the letter and registration form via email to those students whom she identified as potentially interested and involved in talented and gifted programs at their schools. While the latter was not a requirement on my part for my students, we felt selecting students who already possessed some degree of emotional maturity and the ability to articulate their responses would be beneficial in this process, as it relied so heavily upon personal reflection.

Once we had 11 confirmed students (with the possibility of three more), it became clear that our decision would be made between the scripts with a larger cast – *Charlie Foster* by Raymond King Shurtz and *Governing Alice* by C. Denby Swanson. At this time, I ordered copies of each script using funding I had been granted from Sturgis

Youth Theatre and through the Department of Theatre's Experiential Learning Fund. As I received the scripts, I began to look at specific elements of the scripts such as estimated performance length, casting requirements, and staging possibilities.

### **Rehearsal and Reflection**

My lesson planning, the next step in the process, was very general at first. Although I could plan what types of activities would benefit our rehearsals, many of the specifics depended entirely upon what happened in the prior lesson. In particular, much of our work depended on what was decided in the first few lessons as we read both plays, discussed them in detail, and chose which one the students would like to perform. After the first lesson, when I had gotten a sense of what the ensemble thought of each script, I began to formulate my impressions of each cast member's strengths in performance and I predicted (although incorrectly) which script they would vote to perform. All this was in preparation for auditions, which we could not postpone any longer than the second rehearsal we had together.

After the first two rehearsals, we fell into a more steady routine of welcome and warm-up activities, rehearsing, and cool-down and reflection time at the end. The only adjustments needed to my lesson planning during this period of rehearsals typically came when I discovered a particular activity or way of doing something that needed to be amended for the next rehearsal.

Rehearsals were held for two hours on Sunday afternoons in the Communication Arts Center, room 108. For the most part, we conducted our time together as a rehearsal rather than a formal lesson. This requires different preparation than a typical lesson, but I intentionally chose to plan our time together as lessons. This approach

reinforced my goals for the unit. Additionally, my lesson plans served as a guide for my personal reflections. Appendix B includes both intended lesson plans and actual lesson plans where a variance occurred. I planned this process in advance with the knowledge that what a teacher or director wants to happen and what actually happens can differ greatly. I hoped, through this process, to encourage myself to seize teaching moments as they arose and to reflect upon my ability to remain flexible during the process. Specific information about my reflection process is included in the next section.

Another part of my process, especially in our first two rehearsals, involved gauging the responses of the teenagers as they read the scripts. I gathered these responses through formal and informal conversations as well as written reflections. After the initial reading of both scripts, we had an open discussion about responses to the plays. Students were then asked to answer in writing three questions for each script and indicate the characters for which they would like to audition. These questionnaires and a summary of comments made during our open discussion are included in Appendix C. Each actor has been assigned a number, which will remain consistent whenever used. Additionally, students were asked to reflect on the day of the performance, offering comments about the rehearsal process as a whole, as well as the performance itself. A copy of these questions, as well as audience responses to the script can be found in Appendix D.

After the actors voted almost unanimously to perform *Charlie Foster*, I proceeded to apply for performance rights through its publisher, Dramatic Publishing. When I received approval, I paid the royalty fee using funding provided to me by the Nadyne Harris Scholarship for Honors Research through the Honors Program.

## Performance and Reflection

In order to spread the word about our performance, I prepared an invitation for students to take home to parents and encouraged them to invite friends and other relatives to watch as well. The invitation is included in this document as Appendix E. Additionally, I created an event on Facebook so that I and my students were able to spread the word online as well.

The culmination of my creative process for this project arrived Sunday, March 5 at 4:00 PM: our performance. This was our chance to share with family members and other supporters our staged reading of *Charlie Foster*. A staged reading differs from a fully staged play in several ways. Rather than memorizing their lines, actors keep their scripts with them onstage as they perform. Oftentimes an actor in this situation does not need to rely on the script in every scene but instead uses it as a point of reference or reminder in those instances where he or she is not completely memorized. Little blocking is employed and it often only serves the purpose of directing the audience's attention to particular characters or part of the playing space. Additionally, few technical elements are involved in a staged reading. The set usually consists of chairs for performers who are not in the current scene. Lights and sound are not incorporated at all, and minimal costuming is required. As in our performance, actors will often find items of clothing in their own wardrobe to suggest a character without wearing a full costume.

After our performance, I spoke very briefly about my thesis to bring all audience members up to speed on our project before inviting them to ask questions of me and the cast members. This talk back forum after a performance is typical both of theatre for

youth performances and creative thesis projects. It allows the audience to explore further the performance piece itself as well as the project behind it. My process after the performance included organizing and compiling the input of the various participants in the project as well as my own reflection to put together a comprehensive documentation and reflection of the benefits of this project. The final product of my thesis is seen in this document.

### III. Process Critique

Because of my process-based approach, I wanted to track what I learned about working with teenagers as well as their responses to our work. I gathered this information through personal reflections after each rehearsal and after our performance, student reflections throughout the process and after the performance, and audience feedback during our talk back session. In order to critique my work this semester, I will refer to the responses described above and add commentary in order to share my analysis of the work and the challenges we encountered both during and after the process.

#### **Beginning the Work**

When I began recruitment, I was concerned that not enough students would be interested in or available for the project. However, I ended up working with 13 students, the perfect number for both large cast scripts. Unlike *Charlie Foster*, *Governing Alice* is written for a few large roles, a few supporting roles, and several chorus members. I hoped the uneven distribution of lines would not bother my students. However, they discussed for a long time their preference for *Charlie Foster* because of the even character distribution and the ability to play characters near their own age and

experiences. While this is true of most of the cast of *Governing Alice*, it was clear from their character and script preferences that the adult characters in that script were not as appealing to the actors as the teenage characters in both scripts. I had chosen these plays with more consideration of content than casting. While I am aware that the types of roles available are just as important to students as any other element in the play, for this project I was more interested in how they responded to the content. I am glad, however, that they were able to distinguish between which play they preferred and which play would be better for our ensemble.

Through their reflections, it also became clear to me that the students were drawn to exactly the same elements of this script as I was with one glaring exception: the Geek Chorus. I thought that the Geek Chorus (a simultaneous tribute to and parody of an ancient Greek Chorus) was charming and innovative. It brings another salient characteristic of a Greek tragedy into *Governing Alice* while providing the audience with transitions and points for reflection. My students, however, had a much more negative reaction to the Geek Chorus. Descriptions of it included weird, awkward, and obnoxious.

Ultimately, my focus on self-identification in the scripts I chose clouded my understanding of other factors in choosing a script. My students, however, did not have the same handicap; they were able to discover that, although the heart of *Governing Alice* rang true for them, the script itself was not suitable for our group. However, I was pleased to note that, all other factors being equal, neither story stuck out as clearly superior to this group. This indicated to me that I had the correct criteria in mind when I selected these scripts.

During a discussion about the scripts at our February 5 rehearsal, Actor 10 commented that *Charlie Foster* was not children's theatre. This intrigued me because, as a Theatre for Youth major, I tend to group theatre for young adults with theatre for preadolescent youth. Even as I intentionally chose scripts that I thought reflected the maturity level of teenagers specifically, I never considered them to be in a separate genre. I think Actor 10 made an important distinction, however. Like adolescence itself, drama created for teenagers is in a category of its own – neither children's theatre nor adult theatre. This, perhaps, is why the term theatre for youth is now in wider use than simply children's theatre.

That same day, Actor 11 brought up a point I also considered in choosing scripts. Part of what I believe makes youth theatre inauthentic is the reliance upon stereotypes to represent characters. Whether this stems from a desire to represent the world in more simple terms or a lack of confidence in the abilities of young actors, I think this practice must be avoided at all costs. Instead, teaching artists must strive to assist their students in exploring the multi-faceted nature of people and the world around them.

After casting, Actor 5 expressed her disappointment about playing Charlie, a relatively small part. I appreciated her honesty in this situation, but it is the sort of thing I hate to hear as a director. As the process continued, however, I believe she did well in the role she received, and we were able to find appropriate moments to incorporate her into the whole piece, rather than just Charlie's monologue in the last few pages of the script. In the end it became more of a creative challenge for us, for which I am grateful.



## Performance and Talk Back

I had hoped we could just have a very quick run-through of the script before our performance, but that afternoon I was given an unpleasant piece of information: Actor 2 was sick, and she would not be performing. Having a sick actor was a challenge I had considered, but one for which I had not really prepared. I was truly relieved, therefore, when my students found a solution. Two actors shared the lines for the missing character. I have always considered the actors to be in a unique position to contribute to the solution of such problems because – sometimes unlike a director – actors spend so much time with a script; not only their lines or contribution to a script, but also with the relationships between their character and others onstage. This is why the solution given to me by the actors worked at least almost as smoothly as the solutions I could have contributed.

While the performance went off without a hitch, my students and I felt we did not have quite enough time in our process to feel totally prepared for our performance. Very early in the planning process, I had toyed with the idea of rehearsing more than one day a week, but chose not to, for fear that it would limit the number of students involved. In the end, the project was a great success. Timing, however, is always an issue in these projects.

In her final reflection, Actor 6 confessed that she was not confident in our decision to perform *Charlie Foster*. I never got that impression from any of the actors during the process; and while she does not explain why she felt this way, I cannot recall a moment where she seemed to lack confidence in our work. I think this presents a challenge for me to strive to do everything I can, even more than I did for this process,

to help excite, motivate, and encourage my students. I admit to feeling stretched for time during our process, but I never doubted we would achieve less than our goals. This comment from Actor 6 tells me that I need to be more conscious of expressing that pride and assurance with my actors.

### **Celebrations**

The talk back session was definitely a moment of celebration for me. In many ways, it validated the groundwork I had laid, and it gave the students a special and unique opportunity to share their insight, as well as their interest in more serious works of theatre than they typically encounter. Through this project I hope to impress upon other directors the importance of giving teenagers an opportunity to explore more sensitive issues, like the ones addressed in *Charlie Foster* and *Governing Alice*. Therefore, I enjoyed our success in showing our audience of parents, future educators, and theatre artists the importance of this genre of youth theatre.

Audience members who elected to view the performance in fulfillment of an assignment for the course Drama in Inclusive Classrooms were asked to answer reflection questions following the performance. One shared her feelings about the performance, which indicated to me that she felt strongly affected by our work. I appreciated that this audience member also mentioned the power of story. It reinforced for me the uniqueness of theatre in its ability to share one incident – a microcosm of life – in which can be found truth for countless people in countless situations. While I knew the actors did not always match exactly the personalities of their characters, I had hoped they would find some way to relate to those characters and to others in the

performance so that they might be able to learn a bit about themselves from our work on this play.

#### IV. Proposal

I had hoped, at one time, that this thesis could be used as a “go to” list of scripts that would and would not work, whether for my own purpose or for the purposes of other theatre artists. I know now that this was an unrealistic goal. It will always take time to find the correct script for the correct group of students.

However, I believe that in this case, we did find the perfect script for this ensemble. We found a script that meant something to the group and that could bring them together to form a bond. This script became something they were motivated to perform and to perform well, and that is what they did. In order to do real justice to our field, I believe teaching artists – and, in this case, I include all adults who engage youth in theatre as teaching artists – must strive every time to find that script that means something on a much deeper level than just the work itself.

While this thesis does not give the easy answers to the questions of being a teaching artist and finding the perfect script, I hope my readers can take away from my project the key ingredients for success, the ones I learned myself.

1. Listen to your students. They know better than you what they want, what works for them and what does not. While you may have more experience, youth – especially teenagers – are full of delightful inspiration.
2. Take risks. *Charlie Foster* and *Governing Alice* both addressed topics that were somewhat taboo as subject matter for my high school theatre experiences. I was fortunate to have the leniency of operating under Sturgis

Youth Theatre for this project, but I believe I would have wanted the chance to perform or even read these plays in high school. From the feedback I received, my ensemble for this project agreed.

## V. Closure

From my review of dramatic pieces available for teenage performers, I got the impression that playwrights often underestimate the abilities and desires of this audience. While some of the scripts I read in my research addressed pertinent issues for this age group – peer pressures, eating disorders, relationships, achievements, goals, dreams – the approach often lacks the genuine color and flavor of life that teenagers appreciate. Similarly, while actors appreciate performing ‘adult’ works (typically canonized plays from such playwrights as Shakespeare, Wilder, and Moliere), the characters often lack qualities with which a current teenager can identify. Age alone can be a barrier in these cases. A teenager plays a middle-aged character much less convincingly than a teenage character.

My recommendation, therefore, to parents and professionals, to teaching artists and theatre directors, to classroom teachers and speech coaches is as follows: find scripts that really matter to your teenagers. Listen to what they have to say and to what interests or motivates them. Understand that it takes time. I know it takes time. Time is the last thing we have, but teenagers are waiting for a challenge. They are waiting to step up and show the world what they can do. As agents of theatre, teaching artists are in a perfect position to give them their chance.

This project simultaneously challenged me and affirmed my beliefs. It gave me a

snapshot of my work at this point in my career, as well as an accurate account of areas in which I might improve. As with every production or theatrical endeavor, this project was a learning experience. While in some ways I always mourn the end of a production (especially one in which I invested so much of myself), there is still some comfort in the ripple effect. This show has expanded me as well as, I hope, my students and our audience. I hope they can carry the message with them, as I will with me. It will affect the way I interact with others. My world view has been colored by this work, and I think my students would say the same.

As I conclude this project, I see again the inherent humanity expressed in theatre. It truly gives humans a context for themselves in the world. I believe this can be especially true in young adults. While striving for self-identification and to find that place for themselves, adolescents who turn to theatre can find a guide there, a way to find a better understanding of one story, one situation, that can transform their world.

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APPENDIX A  
INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Hello,

My name is Jessica Vaught. I am a senior Drama and Theatre for Youth major at UNI, and I have been working closely with Gretta Berghammer for the past few years. For my senior thesis I have chosen to explore the world of theatre for young adults ages 12-18. During our rehearsal time, we will read two scripts, choose our preferred piece, and put together a staged reading to be performed at the end of our final class time.

I will be completing this "special project" under the guidance of Gretta and support of the Sturgis Youth Theatre. **You are receiving this email because Gretta thought you would be a GREAT participant!**

Our schedule **is** as follows:

January 29 – 2:30-5:00

(30 minute orientation and welcome meeting at 2:30; rehearsal at 3:00.

Parents welcome!)

February 5 – 3:00-5:00

February 12 – 3:00-5:00

February 19 – 3:00-5:00

February 26 – 3:00-5:00

March 4 – 3:00-5:00

(Performance during the final portion of our rehearsal March 4)

**While you could miss ONE rehearsal in February, you must be able to attend all of the others. Everyone has to be available for the first and last sessions.**

Below is a description of the scripts we will consider for our work. The selection will be narrowed down to two of the four, based on the size of our group.

Because of the nature of this project, there will be **NO CHARGE** for participation. We would, however, like a commitment by Monday, January 16. Attached is a registration form, to be returned to Gretta Berghammer by January 16.

I look forward to working with you on this project. If you have any questions for me, please don't hesitate to ask. You may reach me by email at [jjvaught@uni.edu](mailto:jjvaught@uni.edu) or call my cell phone: (515)975-4690.

Thank you very much,  
Jessica Vaught

Small group (4-5 actors):

- *Danny, King of the Basement* by David S. Craig: In two years Danny and his mom have moved more often than kids lose teeth. When Danny moves into a new basement apartment, the kids he meets seem to have way more problems than just being hungry. But Danny's imaginative play creates a community that

allows his friends to cope with their problems and ultimately to help Danny – because his crisis isn't losing a home. It's gaining one...

- *The Lost Ones* by Laurie Brooks: In a time of war, two feral children play at what they know. Remembering little of the past, they construct a world of their own from a few memories, a battered copy of Peter Pan and their own determination to survive, until the arrival of the enemy becomes the catalyst for them to look outside. *The Lost Ones* tells the story of two boys who have lost their childhood to war and investigates emotional literacy and the human rights of children.

#### Large group (8-15 actors)

- *Charlie Foster* by Raymond King Shurtz: Charlie Foster was a kid no one knew or cared about until he accidentally drowned in the river. Or was it an accident? Ten young people try to comprehend this life and death, questioning their memories and each other's. They use emotional tools within their understanding to process the tragedy—the rules of swimming and improvisation—as they explore this complex and profound experience that has changed each of their lives.
- *Governing Alice* by C. Denby Swanson: In this modern adaptation of the Greek classic *Antigone*, a rebellious high school student named Alice must respond to the sudden and shattering death of her older brother, the class valedictorian -- who was shot while robbing a convenience store. Up against an unyielding principal and accompanied by a bookish Geek Chorus, Alice must find her own way through personal and classical tragedy. In honoring her brother, she'll probably break some rules. Which is more important?

## Registration Form

Student Name:

Parent/Guardian Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Phone:

E-mail:

Age:

Grade Level:

I would like to participate in the staged reading led by Jessica Vaught. I am available for 5-6 of the 6 rehearsal dates. (Please check the dates you are available.)

- Sunday, January 29, 2:30-5:00 PM (2:30-3:00 will be a welcome and orientation meeting for parents and actors)
- Sunday, February 5, 3:00-5:00 PM
- Sunday, February 12, 3:00-5:00 PM
- Sunday, February 19, 3:00-5:00 PM
- Sunday, February 26, 3:00-5:00 PM
- Sunday, March 4, 3:00-5:00 PM (Our performance will take place during the last half of this rehearsal. Specific time TBA.)

Check here if you have changed your address or contact information since the last time you enrolled your child(ren).

Check here if it is your first time enrolling your child in a SYT program

Check here if you would like to receive SYT information via email, and include your current email address here: \_\_\_\_\_

Send registration to:

Gretta Berghammer, Artistic Director

Sturgis Youth Theatre

University of Northern Iowa

Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0371

Gretta.berghammer@uni.edu

APPENDIX B  
LESSON PLANS

- Teacher-leader: Jessica Vaught
- Audience: Grades 9-12 (proficient)
- Environment: After school enrichment
- Unit Statement: At the end of this unit, students will have had the experience to read, reflect upon, respond to, and rehearse a script. They will be proficient at the drama skills of analyzing a script, reflecting upon their work and the work of others, and evaluating the script as well as performance choices. The work they create will demonstrate they can apply these skills to a script and a performance for an audience.
- Goals and Learner Outcomes for Unit: Interpret: Analyze, Reflect, Evaluate; Create: Communicate; and Perform/Present: Practice and Share

### Lesson 1

- Lesson Statement: At the end of this lesson, students will have had the experience to read and reflect upon at least one script. They will demonstrate these skills by participating in read-throughs and participating in discussion.
- Goals and Learner Outcomes: This lesson will focus on Interpret: Analyze and Reflect.
- Student Skills: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to share their response to the themes of the script. Emphasis will be placed on how or if they personally identify with the script.
- Teacher-Leader Skills: This is a topic I've been interested in exploring for a long time. I look forward to a somewhat 'pressure-free' environment to discuss and explore these scripts and the themes they represent.
- Primary Teaching Strategy: This lesson will incorporate activity and discussion.
- Introduction/Warm-up:
  - Getting to know each other: My name is Jessica and the first time I remember performing was my first dance recital when I was three. (Repeat around the circle)
  - Garbage can: Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work.
  - Where's the Celery: Players stand in a circle. First each player introduces him or herself while passing the ball to another player in the circle. After that pattern is established, introduce another pattern beginning with another player. Add the two patterns together, and continue to layer additional patterns.
  - Duration: 15 minutes
- Hook:
  - Discuss: Antigone; summary if students need it
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Activity: Read and Discuss *Governing Alice* (Popcorn – one line at a time)
  - Discussion Questions (in partners or threes; record answers):
    - What is your initial response to the script?
    - It's said that art reflects life. Do you see life in these plays?
    - Do you identify with this script in any way? Why or why not?
  - Share highlights with group
  - Duration: 40-45 minutes



- Break
  - Duration: 10 minutes
- Activity: Read and Discuss *Charlie Foster* (Popcorn – one line at a time)
  - Review of role play scene
  - Discussion Questions (in partners or threes; record answers):
    - What is your initial response to the script?
    - It's said that art reflects life. Do you see life in these plays?
    - Do you identify with this script in any way? Why or why not?
  - Share highlights with group
  - Duration: 45 minutes
- Wind Down:
  - Finish audition form before leaving
  - Duration: 5 minutes

## Lesson 2

- Lesson Statement: At the end of this lesson, students will confidently communicate characters from our scripts. They will demonstrate these skills by auditioning for at least one role.
- Goals and Learner Outcomes: This lesson will focus on Create: Communicate and Perform/Present: Practice
- Student Skills: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to communicate character through voice and movement so they may successfully audition for a role.
- Teacher-Leader Skills: Leading auditions is always a risk for me. I struggle with the idea of making someone unhappy, but it is a challenge that gets easier each time I run auditions.
- Primary Teaching Strategy: This lesson will incorporate both activity and discussion.
- Introduction:
  - My name is... and I know for a fact that you are...
  - Garbage can: Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Warm-Up/Hook/Review:
  - HA - Stand in a circle. One person begins by clapping hands together and pointing at a person across the circle, saying, "Ha!" That person then raises his hands, pointing at the sky, while the two neighboring players clasp hands and point at the middle person - all saying, "Ha!" The middle person then sends the "Ha" to a player across the circle and so on. If a person makes a mistake, they may be eliminated. Draw - last two students turn around, take three steps. Leader says, "Draw," and first to "Ha" the other wins.
  - What's Next? 3-4 students stand in a line. The audience asks, "What's next?" The first student gives an answer of what happens at the beginning of the work. The audience then asks, "How?" The player responds, "Like

this," and pantomimes the answer. Continue to the last person, who must explain how it ends. (Twice for Governing Alice, twice for Charlie Foster.)

- Duration: 15 minutes
- Activities:
  - Discussion of Governing Alice – discuss plot, any more questions or comments?
  - Discussion of Charlie Foster – discuss plot, any more questions or comments?
  - Vote – would we like to vote anonymously?
  - Staged Reading talk – what it is, how it differs, etc.
  - Duration: 30 minutes
- Break
  - Duration: 10 minutes
- Key Activity:
  - Auditions: each student will be given a chance to audition for the parts in which he or she is interested. To audition, each actor will be part of a small scene for each character they would like to audition for
  - Duration: 40 minutes
- Wind Down:
  - Stage Directions Game: Using a ball or other object, have each person in turn call someone else by name, give them a stage direction, and ask them a question (of the get to know you variety).
  - Places, Please! A leader ("The Director") gives instructions to a group of "actors and technicians" in a theatre. These verbal instructions correspond with specific actions and responses. The director may call the following: Stage Left, Stage Right, Down Stage, Up Stage, Hoist the Fly (players run stage right or stage left, get in groups of three, and pull the fly. If the leader chooses, they may yell have to yell, "heads!"), etc.
    - We will focus on Stage Directions alone
  - Duration: 20 minutes

## Lesson 2 Actual

- Lesson Statement: At the end of this lesson, students will confidently communicate characters from our scripts. They will demonstrate these skills by auditioning for at least one role.
- Goals and Learner Outcomes: This lesson will focus on Create: Communicate and Perform/Present: Practice
- Student Skills: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to communicate character through voice and movement so they may successfully audition for a role.
- Teacher-Leader Skills: Leading auditions is always a risk for me. I struggle with the idea of making someone unhappy, but it is a challenge that gets easier each time I run auditions.
- Primary Teaching Strategy: This lesson will incorporate both activity and discussion.
- Introduction:
  - My name is... and I know for a fact that you are...

- Garbage can: Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
- Duration: 5 minutes
- Warm-Up/Hook/Review:
  - Take a Hike: Everyone takes off their shoes and leaves them at their place in the circle. Someone (who's shoes are not in the circle) stands in the middle and says, "take a hike if..." then fill in something that is true of that person. If it is true for someone else in the circle, that person has to try to find a new spot in the circle. The person without a spot is the next in the middle.
  - What's Next? 3-4 students stand in a line. The audience asks, "What's next?" The first student gives an answer of what happens at the beginning of the work. The audience then asks, "How?" The player responds, "Like this," and pantomimes the answer. Continue to the last person, who must explain how it ends. (Twice for Governing Alice, twice for Charlie Foster.)
  - Duration: 15 minutes
- Activities:
  - Discussion of Governing Alice – discuss plot, any more questions or comments?
  - Discussion of Charlie Foster – discuss plot, any more questions or comments?
  - Vote
  - Duration: 30 minutes
- Break
  - Duration: 10 minutes
- Key Activity:
  - Auditions: each student will be given a chance to audition for the parts in which he or she is interested. To audition, each actor will be part of a small scene for each character they would like to audition for
  - Duration: 60 minutes
- Wind Down:
  - Thank you, final questions, etc.
  - Duration: 5 minutes

### Lesson 3

- Lesson Statement: At the end of this lesson, students learn staged reading rehearsal skills. They will demonstrate these skills by exploring character during a rehearsal.
- Goals and Learner Outcomes: This lesson will focus on Perform/Present: Practice and Imagine: Explore
- Student Skills: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to apply their knowledge of staged readings and character exploration in rehearsal.
- Teacher-Leader Skills: Directing a staged reading is a new concept to me, and I look forward to exploring the genre along with my students
- Primary Teaching Strategy: This lesson will incorporate mostly activity with some discussion.

- Introduction:
  - Garbage can: Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Warm-Up/Hook:
  - Stage Directions Game: Using a ball or other object, have each person in turn call someone else by name, give them a stage direction, and ask them a question (of the get to know you variety).
  - Casting Notes – Juliet 2 and Jodie 2 should think of character names.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Activities:
  - HA - Stand in a circle. One person begins by clasping hands together and pointing at a person across the circle, saying, "Ha!" That person then raises his hands, pointing at the sky, while the two neighboring players clasp hands and point at the middle person - all saying, "Ha!" The middle person then sends the "Ha" to a player across the circle and so on. If a person makes a mistake, they may be eliminated. Draw - last two students turn around, take three steps. Leader says, "Draw," and first to "Ha" the other wins.
  - Staged reading vs. full production: a staged reading is not memorized. Blocking is minimal, and there are no technical elements (sets, costumes, lighting, etc.). It is not the same as choral reading or readers' theatre because it lacks the choral elements (speaking in unison to emphasize certain words or phrases, etc.)
  - Duration: 15 minutes
- Key Activity
  - Read script with assigned roles. Begin to incorporate and explore certain character choices. Actors will be given questions and suggestions to guide their individual exploration. Questions may include character motivation, experiences with which the actors can relate, etc.
  - Duration: 40 minutes
- Break
  - Duration: 10 minutes
- Key Activity:
  - Begin rehearsing staged reading. Particular time will be spent gaining an understanding of the script, action, and language.
  - Duration: 40 minutes
- Wind Down:
  - Share your favorite part of the script with the group.
  - Duration: 5 minutes

### Lesson 3 Actual

- Lesson Statement: At the end of this lesson, students learn staged reading rehearsal skills. They will demonstrate these skills by exploring character during a rehearsal.

- Goals and Learner Outcomes: This lesson will focus on Perform/Present: Practice and Imagine: Explore
- Student Skills: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to apply their knowledge of staged readings and character exploration in rehearsal.
- Teacher-Leader Skills: Directing a staged reading is a new concept to me, and I look forward to exploring the genre along with my students
- Primary Teaching Strategy: This lesson will incorporate mostly activity with some discussion.
- Introduction:
  - Garbage can: Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Warm-Up/Hook:
  - Stage Directions Game: Using a ball or other object, have each person in turn call someone else by name, give them a stage direction, and ask them a question (of the get to know you variety).
  - Casting Notes – Juliet 2 and Jodie 2 should think of character names.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Activities:
  - Staged reading vs. full production: a staged reading is not memorized. Blocking is minimal, and there are no technical elements (sets, costumes, lighting, etc.). It is not the same as choral reading or readers' theatre because it lacks the choral elements (speaking in unison to emphasize certain words or phrases, etc.)
  - Duration: 15 minutes
- Key Activity
  - Read script with assigned roles. Begin to incorporate and explore certain character choices. Actors will be given questions and suggestions to guide their individual exploration. Questions may include character motivation, experiences with which the actors can relate, etc.
  - Duration: 40 minutes
- Break
  - Duration: 10 minutes
- Key Activity:
  - Begin rehearsing staged reading. Particular time will be spent gaining an understanding of the script, action, and language.
  - Duration: 40 minutes
- Wind Down:
  - Share your favorite part of the script with the group.
  - Duration: 5 minutes

#### Lesson 4

- Lesson Statement: Students will explore ways to physicalize characters during the reading. They will demonstrate this by following blocking in the manner of their characters and interacting with other characters.

- Goals and Learner Outcomes: This lesson will focus on Perform/Present: Practice, and Imagine: Explore
- Student Skills: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to explore character through voice and movement. Emphasis will be placed on creating character through improvisation and experimentation.
- Teacher-Leader Skills: I love getting a chance to refine work through rehearsal and to see how characters develop.
- Primary Teaching Strategy: This lesson will incorporate mostly activity with limited discussion.
- Introduction:
  - HA - Stand in a circle. One person begins by clasping hands together and pointing at a person across the circle, saying, "Ha!" That person then raises his hands, pointing at the sky, while the two neighboring players clasp hands and point at the middle person - all saying, "Ha!" The middle person then sends the "Ha" to a player across the circle and so on. If a person makes a mistake, they may be eliminated. Draw - last two students turn around, take three steps. Leader says, "Draw," and first to "Ha" the other wins.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Warm-Up/Hook:
  - Garbage can: Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Activities:
  - Sharing of news article: <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/teens-drown-wading-louisianas-red-river/story?id=11312631&page=2#.Tz3DEJiHjao>
  - Discussion of events, what that experience would be like.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Key Activity:
  - Rehearsal of script, focusing primarily on the limited blocking involved in the script, but also continuing to reinforce character choices.
  - Individual work on vocalization will be incorporated as needed.
  - Duration: 100 minutes; 10 minute break at 4:00
- Wind Down:
  - The Gum Game: One character enters the scene. Without saying anything, he or she sits on a park bench, chewing a piece of gum. At some point, the character decides he or she does not want the gum, sticks it on the bench, and leaves. The next character enters, interacts with the gum somehow, and exits, leaving the gum behind. The game continues.
  - Duration: 5 minutes

## Lesson 5

- Lesson Statement: At the end of this lesson, students will have the experience to perform a character through voice and movement. They will demonstrate these skills by applying them to our rehearsal of the script.

- **Goals and Learner Outcomes:** This lesson will focus on Create: Communicate, Perform/Present: Practice
- **Student Skills:** At the end of the lesson, students will be able to share their character dramatically with other members of the class through their vocalizations and movement.
- **Teacher-Leader Skills:** I am eager to see our work during rehearsals begin to come together to form a cohesive presentation.
- **Primary Teaching Strategy:** This lesson will incorporate mostly activity with limited discussion
- **Introduction:**
  - **Garbage can:** Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
  - **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Warm-Up/Hook:**
  - HA
  - **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Key Activity:**
  - Rehearsal focusing on voice, characterization, expression, etc. Final blocking choices will be made, followed by a run-through
  - **Duration:** 105 minutes
  - **Break:** 10 minutes about halfway through
- **Wind Down:**
  - Say good-bye to the class as your character.
  - **Duration:** 5 minutes

#### Lesson 5 Actual

- **Lesson Statement:** At the end of this lesson, students will have the experience to perform a character through voice and movement. They will demonstrate these skills by applying them to our rehearsal of the script.
- **Goals and Learner Outcomes:** This lesson will focus on Create: Communicate, Perform/Present: Practice
- **Student Skills:** At the end of the lesson, students will be able to share their character dramatically with other members of the class through their vocalizations and movement.
- **Teacher-Leader Skills:** I am eager to see our work during rehearsals begin to come together to form a cohesive presentation.
- **Primary Teaching Strategy:** This lesson will incorporate mostly activity with limited discussion
- **Introduction:**
  - HA
  - **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Warm-Up/Hook:**
  - **Garbage can:** Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
  - **Duration:** 5 minutes

- Key Activity:
  - Rehearsal focusing on voice, characterization, expression, etc. Final blocking choices will be made, followed by a run-through
  - Duration: 105 minutes
  - Break: 10 minutes about halfway through
- Wind Down:
  - Say good-bye to the class as your character.
  - Duration: 5 minutes

## Lesson 6

- Lesson Statement: At the end of this lesson, students will have successfully portrayed character through voice and movement. They will demonstrate these skills through a performance for an audience.
- Goals and Learner Outcomes: This lesson will focus on Perform/Present: Practice and Share.
- Student Skills: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to present a character to an audience in a completed stage reading.
- Teacher-Leader Skills: I love seeing my students perform. The pride is palpable and well deserved.
- Primary Teaching Strategy: This lesson will incorporate mostly activity with limited discussion
- Introduction:
  - Final Announcements
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Warm-Up/Hook:
  - Garbage can: Each member of the group will get a chance to 'throw away' something that has been bothering them so focus can shift to our work together.
  - Duration: 5 minutes
- Activities:
  - Review script: no more changes will be made; this is simply a final run-through
  - Final Reflections: students will give comments and thoughts about the overall experience in written form.
  - Duration: 55 minutes
- Key Activity:
  - Perform for an audience!
  - Talk back: audience will have a chance to ask questions of cast and director
  - Duration: 50 minutes
- Wind Down:
  - Bows, thank yous, adoration
  - Duration: 5 minutes



APPENDIX C  
REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRES

## Governing Alice:

In this modern adaptation of the Greek classic *Antigone*, a rebellious high school student named Alice must respond to the sudden and shattering death of her older brother, the class valedictorian -- who was shot while robbing a convenience store. Up against an unyielding principal and accompanied by a bookish Geek Chorus, Alice must find her own way through personal and classical tragedy. In honoring her brother, she'll probably break some rules. Which is more important?

Characters (Circle and number your top three character choices):

Alice

Izzy

Ethan

Principal

English Teacher

Convenience Store Owner

Geek Leader: Must be willing to sing/rap

Geek Chorus: Must be willing to sing/rap

Note by Actor 2 on character ranking – Alice rocks like me

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your initial response to the script? Do you like it? Why or why not?

Actor 10 – I like the script, but not the Geek Chorus

Actor 13 – I like it, it's short and pretty straight forward.

Actor 12 – Yeah, I like it but I do not like the Geek Chorus very much. I like how Ethan surprised everybody by robbing. I really like Alice's character because she's really outgoing

Actor 3 – I love the art of this play... the whole collaboration of this is really creative and could be hung on a wall in a museum; I love the contemporary take on the classical greek period. THERE'S ART In SMALL THINGS.

Actor 6 – it's different, edgy. Single word back and forth. Has monologues. Geek leader is funny. I like it because of those things.

Actor 4 – Different, edgy. They have single word back and forth than a big monolog. I like it

Actor 11 – Alice is outspoken and strong. I like this play because of her deep character traits and because it's "real."

Actor 7 – I like it, because it is dark and insperational [sic] in a sense, and also realistic

Actor 9 – yes show how her life was affected [?]

Actor 8 – I do like it because it shows different periods of her life

Actor 5 – I do because Alice has a good perspective on how people should be remembered

Actor 1 – Yes. The story it tells is indentifiable with. All the characters have their own agenda and story. It is excellent story

Actor 2 – Alice is awesome, yes, because Alice has my attitude

From Discussion – Short, small cast, straight forward; Different periods of her life; unsure ending; art – collaboration/creative – collage; Wizards of Waverly place (Alex, Justin, Max); like play – dark , realistic, troubled; different – no happy ending; through provoking; contemporary take of classical; Ethan dies offstage; Geek Chorus – random people; 2 sides to same soul; good/evil in all no one knows everything

2. It's said that art reflects life. Do you see life in these plays? Do the situations seem real and genuine to you?

Actor 10 – yes

Actor 13 – yes. Because they seem like a regular graduation

Actor 12 – Yes, the mural/shrine reflects life. The situation was real and genuine and surprising

Actor 3 – what I like about this play is that it sort of metaphorically represents life. I don't think that people would react exactly like in the play, but it could happen

Actor 6 – doesn't soften anything up at all. Keeps it real. The situation seems real to me.

Actor 4 – not soft, all hard and sharp. They don't soften any blows

Actor 11 – yes, these plays seem real. They seem like something that could happen

Actor 7 – yes

Actor 9 – yes

Actor 8 – It did seem real. Just by reading it you can see it in your head

Actor 5 – Yes, because bad things happen to good people

Actor 1 – Yes, this could definitely happen at any time, to anyone. The situation itself isn't the most tragic part. The tragedy was that they failed to see both sides, past the tragedy.

Actor 2 – Yes, yes

3. Do you identify with the script in any way? Can you relate to characters, situations, or emotions even in a general way?

Actor 10 – The characters remind me of Wizards of Waverly place only no one dies

Actor 13 – nope.

Actor 12 – yes, because my brother is smart and my sister and I are both really outgoing but her more than I AND my nickname is Izzy and she makes me do things.

Actor 3 – I think that I most relate to a combination of both sisters... I don't know who I precisely relate to

Actor 6 – I relate somewhat to Izzy because I want to be smart and be like my older brother. I would have also asked who was going to get me my homework. 😊

Actor 4 – English teacher, someone who is trying to make someone see something the [sic] don't want to or refuse to see. Alice. Same.

Actor 11 – I can relate to Alice in her strong opinions, but not her actions

Actor 7 – I can identify with the script, but I don't relate

Actor 9 – yes

Actor 8 – no

Actor 5 – The English teacher tried to see others points of view, and always tries to understand Alice: He got in arguments trying to defend her even though everyone thought she was a bad person

Actor 1 – Yes. I'm top of my class, like Ethan is, and each character is vastly deep even the static ones. Good story

Actor 2 – I am a lot like Alice, I know how Alice feels when she thinks of her brother

Director observations – Great responses; generally they agree with my thoughts – mixed responses to Geek Chorus

An open conversation about *Governing Alice*, February 5, 2012

Actor 8 – Geek chorus confusing; liked plot

Actor 9 – fine, but like other better

Actor 7 – good story, but not interesting

Actor 11 – like and don't like Alice – way she handles things, how she develops – not very deep

Actor 2 – boring – Alice awesome

Actor 12 – okay, but confusing; shorter (which is not a good thing); less variety than CF

Actor 10 – no; Geek chorus awkward; so weird

Actor 13 – short, easy to understand, basic; Geek Chorus obnoxious

Actor 6 – like better; deep stuff, but doesn't make giggly, like CF (CF too mature?)

Actor 4 – Alice's part too big – not other parts; like plot; interesting; not good casting opportunities

Actor 1 – like Alice better – diverse characters – Geek Chorus (GC) holds story together

[At this point, I explained the role of a Greek Chorus]

Actor 5 – not a lot of parts you like/that interest her; Alice is a tease (to Geek Leader)

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Actor 11 – interesting way to show different opinions; kind of random; just reading makes it hard to understand Geek Chorus – like the idea

Actor 10 – GC awkward; subplot of the Geek Chorus Leader's crush on Alice

unnecessary - takes away momentum – distracts from plot

Actor 6 – GC narrators – bring in old Greek

Actor 4 – idea of Greek Chorus – show original story – take up too much of cast; like being “tree #1”

Actor 13 – weird that it's geek – strange, random, annoying

Actor 2 – random in a good way

Actor 8 – agrees about casting; not good opportunities for everyone

Actor 12 – characters; most people want larger roles; Ethan at end random

Actor 10 – no individuality in characters

**Charlie Foster:**

Charlie Foster was a kid no one knew or cared about until he accidentally drowned in the river. Or was it an accident? Ten young people try to comprehend this life and death, questioning their memories and each other's. They use emotional tools within their understanding to process the tragedy—the rules of swimming and improvisation—as they explore this complex and profound experience that has changed each of their lives.

Characters (Circle and number your top three character choices):

Julie

Jodie

Jeff

Kyle

Trisha

Nancy

Debbie

Stephanie

Jana

Melissa

Charlie

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your initial response to the script? Do you like it? Why or why not?

Actor 10 – I like how it is simple and clean cut

Actor 13 – Yeah, it's alright, kinda confusing though

Actor 12 – I really like it because it's a realistic play and the story is really deep and has lots of meaning (? Meaning, perhaps)

Actor 3 – I really like the blunt-ness about life. It gives good ways to think about life.

Actor 6 – Intense and very thought-provoking. I like it because of the improv and all the different characters' reactions

Actor 4 – That was really intense! So many different reaction levels [sic].

Actor 11 – I really like this play and the (albeit confusing) way it was presented.

Actor 7 – I liked it, because its [sic] an interesting mix reality and improv

Actor 9 – I liked it

Actor 8 – Its <sup>sic</sup> good sorta confusing

Actor 5 – Yes because even though no one knew Charlie they still try and say sorry by making a play about how they make amends and tell his story

Actor 2 – It is a sad comedy but an amazing play. Yes. I connected to it. I got in depth with the CD? (Cast, possibly)

Actor 1 - yes

From Discussion – Emotional – connect to; confusing – different – good presentation; reality and improv; production of something; realistic – relate to characters; goes too far (positive); real life – bad choices; mashed together – different scenarios – role play; people onstage know what's happening, not audience (reverse dramatic irony); could happen easily; bluntness; confused at first – intense – comes together at end

2. It's said that art reflects life. Do you see life in these plays? Do the situations seem real and genuine to you?

Actor 10 – yes

Actor 13 – Kind of yes

Actor 12 – Yes, I see life the situation seems like some don't want Mike to get blamed and nobody cares for Charlie which seems like a real-life situation

Actor 3 – I could see people chatting like that



Actor 6 – Yes it seems real. Nothing special about the death, it was a freak drunk accident

Actor 4 – Very real, nothing special about the accident, a freak drunk accident I felt like it could happen to me

Actor 11 – These seem less real than the other, but I like it better. The situations feel real though. I like how each person reveals a little about everyone else's character

Actor 7 – Yes, and most of the situations seem real

Actor 9 – yes

Actor 8 – yes it does

Actor 5 – Yes lots of high school kids are outcasts lots of kids die every day and no one knows them

Actor 2 – yes, yes.

Actor 1 – yes, yes

3. Do you identify with the script in any way? Can you relate to characters, situations, or emotions even in a general way?

Actor 10 – There [sic] theater nerds = relatable

Actor 13 – nope...

Actor 12 – Yeah, Debbie and Trish are like frenemies I can relate to that

Actor 3 – I think that I can relate to Stephanie, trying to be nice to people, but also Kyle, trying to be realistic

Actor 6 – Stephanie because she was nice to him and that probably would be me

Actor 4 – not really, sort of Stephanie because she felt for Charlie

Actor 11 – I don't identify a lot with this play's situations specifically [sic], but I do identify with the feelings

Actor 7 – I can identify [sic] with the story, but I don't relate

Actor 9 – Yes Debbie

Actor 8 – no

Actor 5 – I can relate to Charlie how he felt when he was accepted with Mike and all the guys, how he felt to come out of his shell.

Actor 2 – I can relate to all of them in all ways

Actor 1 – yes

From Discussion – relate to Stephanie – being nice; Kyle realistic

My observations – they seem more comfortable with the subject matter of Governing Alice

An open conversation about *Charlie Foster* – February 5, 2012

Actor 5 – like character of Charlie – doesn't do anything, everyone's mean to him – I would eat lunch with him

Actor 1 – CF better for group, prefer other; more diverse characters

Actor 4 – more character variety; hard to keep straight; improv somewhat confusing

Actor 1 – all high school students – no teachers, etc

Actor 6 – likes it; confused at first – more individual characters; can make them your own; drug mentions – GA better for young audiences; CF more for older kids/adults

Actor 13 – reality, not fiction; dislike length, confusing

Actor 10 – likes it more; individual characters – freedom, equal parts – simple; real life issues, not children's theatre (not adult), more meaningful

Actor 12 – like better; more real; identify characters with people they know; society forgets people to a breaking point – consequences; no one wants to be partners with this person; no one wants to play CF; Kyle protective of Mike; variety, audience will relate

Actor 2 – like more – actual kids' lives; how they act/what they do; diverse roles – CF finally noticed in death; Ethan (in *Governing Alice*) already noticed

Actor 11 – real solid lines for all, not filler; no one really stereotyped – blend of opinions – all say them. People's reaction to events – telling of events – what they feel, arguing it

Actor 7 – prefer – dark, realistic. "teams"/allegiances; improv not everything true, not everything false – interesting combination

Actor 9 – better – realistic where Alice is not

Actor 8 – better – real life situations, not that realistic, cool – like lines

## APPENDIX D

### FINAL AND PERFORMANCE REFLECTIONS

## Written Responses after Performance – March 5, 2012

1. Describe your experience in this project so far (thoughts you have about the play, the process, the cast, me, etc). How has this experience been positive or beneficial to you? Were there any negative aspects to the experience? What was negative about it? What changes would you have made? What things would you have kept?

Actor 6 – Hey Jessica! So for my feelings about the process are that I really enjoyed working with you and everyone else. I had a lot of fun and learned a lot about stage readings that I didn't really know before. I wasn't at first sure that this selection of Charlie Foster would really work, but I now think that it does. I really liked getting to be able to become my character and working with everyone else even when we didn't focus that well. I felt that this was a good experience and I am glad that I got to be a part of it. Thanks!

Actor 11 – This was wonderful! I loved seeing my friends and meeting new people. I learned a lot about acting. I don't think there were any negative aspects. The only thing I would have changed was that I would have had more meetings per week.

Actor 13 – I really liked how things were laid back and I liked how kind the director was and how she helped us and was patient.

Unknown A – It was a good experience overall, the director and cast were nice and the process was fun, also the play was good and also fun

Unknown B – It was fun. Make it start later

2. Describe how you anticipate the performance will go. Are you more nervous or excited? Do you feel prepared? What makes you feel prepared or unprepared?

Actor 11 – I'm excited about the performance. I think/hope it will go well, and I feel really prepared, because we acted through the play so many times.

Actor 13 – I think it will go well and I'm excited and prepared because of all the practice.

Unknown A – I feel nervous, but excited, I also felt prepared, mostly because I have a script in my hand the whole play

Unknown B – No. yes. Idk

3. Please Include any final thought you have about our work together.

Actor 11 – I'm glad I had the opportunity to do this! 😊

Actor 13 – I liked it. 😊

Unknown 2 – It was good.

Audience Reflections, March 5, 2012

1. What was your initial response to the play? Did you like it? Why or why not?

Audience 1 – I was shocked at how mature the content was. Once I learned the ages of the students, I saw it was reasonable. I liked the play because it dealt with real life issues.

Audience 2 – My initial response to the play was confusion at the fact of using their scripts in front of everyone. At the beginning I was unsure, but as the story went on, I really enjoyed the production.

Audience 3 – My initial response to the play was these kids were very enthusiastic towards the play and were participating in the play because they enjoyed acting. I liked the play because it taught everyone life lessons. The life lesson I believe it taught was everyone is someone and has something to offer

Audience 4 – At first I was really confused and couldn't follow but soon enough the talent took over and I was intrigued and couldn't [sic] wait to hear the rest of the story to see where it would go.

Audience 5 – I thought it was very interesting and really mature for the group that was doing it. I was able to relate to the play which heightened my interest.

Audience 6 – My initial response to the play was that I loved it even more off paper. I had read the script before but had never seen a staged reading or performance of it, so I had no idea what to expect. I really enjoyed the experience. It was very honest and young and in your face. The dialogue reminds me of highschool (not sure if this is a pro or con) but it was very genuine text. I believed the story the actors were sharing with me as an audience member.

Audience 7 – My initial response to the play was that I was really surprised on how mature the piece was for that age group. As I thought about, it is something that almost every teenager goes through. It made me think back to my high school days and never realized how mean people actually were to each other and all of the back stabbing that went on. I actually liked the play and it also made me think about the classmate I lost at the end of my freshman year of high school.

2. How is theatre an effective point of entry to discuss the themes of the play

(bullying, friendships, adolescence, peer pressure (drug/alcohol use), etc.)?

Why? AND/OR Would another point of entry be more effective? If so, what point of entry and in what way would it be more effective?

Audience 1 – I think theater is an effective point of entry because kids are acting out the roles. Students won't feel as threatened because they aren't sharing their stories; they're sharing someone else's story.

Audience 2 – I like the point of entry with theatre, and the effect it had on the audience regarding all of those things. It was really nice to see as a third party what can go on, and unfortunately, what it can potentially lead to. I think it is a great hands-on way for students to learn great values.

Audience 3 – I think kids playing out the parts and being on different sides of these issues, puts these kids in different shoes. Being in different shoes makes kids understand these teenage issues better and gives these kids a greater ability to empathize with other teens. I can't really think of a more effective point of entry into these issues, maybe there is a more effective point of entry, I don't know.

Audience 4 – Theatre is an effective point of entry is the actors are involved and



talented which these kids defiantly [sic] are. Theatre involves a variety of opportunities to portray many themes and lessons. It's also open for interpretation which is effective.

Audience 5 – Theater is an interactive way for students to learn about the different topics by seeing it through another character. I think this along with education on the topics are very good points of entry.

Audience 6 – Theatre is, above all, (in my opinion) one of the best points of entry for social issues. We see these issues of bullying, peer pressure, etc... in our every day lives and oftentimes we turn a blind eye because we don't have an outlet for such a situation. Using theatre as a means of trying to get a grasp on these issues is incredible effective because it makes the audience stare the issue straight in the eye. It makes audience members and actors alike rethink and analyze their experiences with the issues. It could make a change for the better in their future lives.

Audience 7 – Theater was an effective for bullying. The attitudes that the actors and actresses gave off reminding me of emotional bullying that goes on in every high school. Drug/alcohol use and peer pressure was also a big one. In high school that is a big problem and some people just aren't able to say no. Seeing this performance would be good for eighth graders before they are about to enter high school.

3. Please include any other comments you may have about your experience - comments on performances, content, visual aspects, talk back, etc.

Audience 1 – I thought it was done very well! Great job!

Audience 3 – The girl in the right corner who memorized her lines was a remarkable actor. she should really consider a career in acting.

I thought the play was very successful. the audience was laughing and kept engaged. [sic]. After the play, the audience asked a variety of questions, so that tells me it was successful. The students seemed to enjoy themselves, that in itself makes this play successful [sic].

Audience 4 – The visual aspect worked because it put the focus on the speech and story.

Audience 5 – I thought the content was very mature so I was kind of shocked to see the young students talking about the subjects, but the students were very mature answering questions about the play and seemed to really understand the content

Audience 6 – I love the blocking set up. It never got too clogged up in one area of another. You worked very well in the smaller space you had. Also, I know it was unintentional but giving the actor playing Charlie a different block to sit on would be a great visual aid. :)

Actor 7 – This performance really brought back a lot of good and bad memories from high school and I wish I would've know the things I know now before entering high school and this performance can really help teenagers going through that transition.

APPENDIX E  
INVITATION TO FAMILIES

Parents, Friends, Families, and Guests:

We happily invite you to join us for the presentation of our staged reading on **Sunday, March 4, 2012 at 4:00 PM**. We have been reading, discussing, and rehearsing the script *Charlie Foster* by Raymond King Shurtz since the end of January, and we can't wait to share with your our work. The staged reading will last approximately 40 minutes, and there will be a brief talk back session after the performance, where audience members can ask questions of the ensemble and director.

We hope you will join us, but we also want to take a moment to help you understand the nature of the script. *Charlie Foster* explores the events surrounding the accidental death of a high school student. In addition to the emotional content of the script, mention is also made of drugs and alcohol. No representation of these substances will be present in our production. As stated on the publisher's website ([http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/p2369/Charlie-Foster/product\\_info.html](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/p2369/Charlie-Foster/product_info.html)), this script is intended for audiences in middle school and older. Please consider this as you plan for your attendance.

We again thank you for your support, and we can't wait to see you on March 4!

Sturgis Youth Theatre Teen Project Members