



a theatre of education.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SELF-EMPOWERMENT THEATRE

PART 1

Start With Why

05 the why

PART 2

The Elements of Self-Empowerment Theatre

17 ensemble-driven

20 devised

21 empowered

22 story-focused

23 kinesthetic

PART 3

Resources

17 source list

20 further reading

Our mission is to create theatrical opportunities that instill confidence, creativity, and discipline in youth.

Our vision is to empower youth for life.

start with why

THE CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND OF SELF-EMPOWERMENT THEATRE.

part 1

What follows is an explanation of the need for Self-Empowerment Theatre, and a description of its educational advantages. Please refer to the Source List in Part III for full citations.

the why.

We are at a crossroads when it comes to arts education. Arts programs continue to disappear quietly from our schools, though the arts, specifically dramatic arts, have been shown to increase students' performance and motivation (Ruppert). At the same time, drop-out rates and student violence continue to grow at worryingly high levels, and student anxiety is increasingly pervasive and debilitating (Flannery).

Numerous studies over the past fifteen years have shown the benefits of arts programs, and specifically theatre programs, in primary and secondary schools across the country (Ruppert, Rushlow, and "The Effects of Theatre Education"). Students who participate in theatre, in addition to **scoring higher on standardized tests**, are **more engaged** in their other courses, **more disciplined** in their school attendance, and **more confident** than their peers who aren't involved in the arts. Further, the widespread benefits of youth involvement in the arts are even more pronounced for students in low-income areas, students deemed at risk of dropping out, and students with disabilities.

A 2005 Harris Poll showed that **93% of Americans believe that the arts, including theatre, are vital to a well-rounded education** (Ruppert). However, shifting priorities and budget cuts continue to infringe upon the actual implementation of quality arts programs, especially in low-income areas and small schools.

In the face of such conflicting evidence and motivations, Young Actors Theatre proposes a new theatre program for the twenty-first century. We are the makers of Self-Empowerment Theatre, and our mission is to **create theatrical opportunities that instill confidence, creativity, and discipline in youth**. We have been developing Self-Empowerment Theatre since 2005, and since then have grown from serving 60 students to serving 10,000 annually, with an 89% return enrollment rate. We are poised to expand our programming and our geographical scope, and to provide more students with a transformative theatre education.

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Self-Empowerment Theatre is a new kind of theatre for youth.

Instead of reproducing a classic play, each Self-Empowerment Theatre play is based on **original content devised by the student ensemble**. We choose topics that are relevant and meaningful to our students, like bullying, violence, health, and technology. **Every student is on stage from start to finish**, rather than keeping most of the students backstage most of the time.

While traditional theatre education techniques remain valuable, our arts programs require a new angle to keep students and teachers engaged. **Self-Empowerment Theatre is not the theatre of yesterday, but a theatre disruptor**. It combines all art forms, and relates creative thinking to other areas of study. At its core, theatre is and always has been transformative both for its audiences and its participants. It teaches lessons and effects change. Self-Empowerment Theatre **has enabled countless participants to gain a larger vision of themselves and of the world that surrounds them**. A broadened perspective is more necessary now than ever.

By using the Self-Empowerment Theatre method of drama education, the confidence needed to be on stage becomes the **confidence to dream big**. The creativity needed to envision a character becomes the **creativity to inspire innovation**. The discipline needed to learn a role becomes the **discipline to build self-reliance**. These three pillars—confidence, creativity, and discipline—are the foundations of Self-Empowerment Theatre.

Every child wants to experience greatness.

Human-to-human interaction is lacking in today's society. Self-Empowerment Theatre is a place where students come together to face each other honestly: it is where they come to develop conflict resolution skills and to alleviate anxiety, stress, and fear. It teaches students that **roadblocks are inevitable on the path to greatness**. By following the hero's journey of trials and failures on the road to success, students internalize that success isn't easy, nor should it be. Our students, like our heroes, can overcome impossible odds to find success. Self-Empowerment Theatre transforms students, empowering them to embrace **challenges** as they shape and change the world before them. Empowered students have the tools to take responsibility for who they are, and who they will become.

Our goal is to harness the widespread benefits of traditional arts courses, while using a problem-solving approach to theatre to instill additional learning and innovation skills. As technological innovation continues to increase the complexity of our work environments and daily life, the ability to solve problems creatively will only become more necessary (Samuel). Self-Empowerment Theatre uniquely cultivates the skills set forth by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills: **creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration** (www.p21.org). These are skills our students can apply endlessly, and we encourage them to do so in their science and math classes as well as in the other liberal arts.

Our current students and their parents notice the difference of Self-Empowerment Theatre. Over the past thirteen years, the total number of students participating in our programs has increased yearly at an average of 43%. Our post-program follow-up surveys support our belief that our style of theatre is worth doing for its own sake, and also for the energy it fosters in other areas of life and study. Surveys reveal that confidence and acting technique are the categories in which students and their parents see the most improvement, and **they consistently notice an increase in discipline and focus, creativity and the expression of ideas, overall attitude, and academic performance.** The high expectations set by the program, the public speaking experience, and the increased confidence are the elements most highly valued year after year by parents, and are some of the most transferable benefits.

The Constitution of the National Art Education Association eloquently expresses one of our tenets: "In a highly technological society such as ours, **the visual arts serve as a humanizing force, giving dignity and a sense of worth to the individual.**" We believe in the power of the dramatic arts to enrich and empower our students' experiences as youth and throughout their lives, and we invite you to share in the glories of the work and its payoffs.

the elements of self-empowerment theatre

THE ELEMENTS THAT DEFINE A SELF-EMPOWERMENT PLAY AND WHY THEY WORK.

part 2

In the following section, we explain the necessary elements of a Self-Empowerment play. All are crucial to the educational experience we provide.

the elements | ensemble-driven

SELF-EMPOWERMENT THEATRE IS DRIVEN BY THE ENSEMBLE.

In professional theatre, most plays consist of 95% of the actors waiting backstage 95% of the time. Our educational goals require a different model.

In Self-Empowerment Theatre, every actor is on stage from start to finish, and group lines are delivered throughout. This offers students maximum stage time, helping them stay engaged throughout the entire process, and ensuring that every individual has a memorable experience.

Being on stage through the entirety of the performance helps students truly experience the whole play, rather than only engaging in brief onstage segments. Secondly, it ensures that students have adequate time onstage to truly showcase the confidence, creativity, and discipline they have been developing in the classroom.

Students will most likely be working in groups for the rest of their lives. Getting projects done in the workforce requires that groups of people know how to interact with one another. Emergency service workers are members of an organized ensemble, as are the government, corporations, small businesses, athletics and on. Teams are everywhere. Storytelling well as a group is applicable everywhere.

the elements | devised

SELF-EMPOWERMENT THEATRE RELIES ON DEvised MOMENTS.

Every student has creative ideas about the world, and Self-Empowerment Theatre gives them a platform to voice their ideas. Every Self-Empowerment piece has places for devised moments: moments where the students themselves create the show.

In its purest form, devised theatre does not start with a script; it starts with the ensemble. The students work hand-in-hand with the director to develop an original script, incorporating their own thoughts, ideas, and opinions. In Self-Empowerment Theatre, we incorporate devised moments into our scripts to give students more ownership, more investment, and more empowerment.

The ensemble chooses places in each show where the mask is taken off and the actors tell real-life stories to the audience pertaining to the piece's subject matter. They show how the subject has affected them personally. They use this as a time to discuss how they see the subject matter in their own community.

As the continuous development of new technologies changes the business landscape, the world is calling for innovators. It has been argued that the creative class will be the next leaders of our world. Every business exists to solve a problem, and the problems we face are growing exponentially. When the student is part of a group that builds a story, they start to think like an innovator does, seeing the possibilities in everything around them. The world can be a very exciting place for those who believe that the world is a canvas and the human being the painter.

the elements | empowered

SELF-EMPOWERMENT THEATRE MAXIMIZES EMPOWERED LANGUAGE.

Throughout each Self-Empowerment Theatre play, the ensemble voices relevant quotations from history's greatest minds that underscore the message of the piece. Introducing quotations is a way to create bookmarks between chapters of a play, and is a powerful way for students to delve into the subject matter.

Students work hard with their director to find historical or present-day figures whose journeys and words empower the audience. The task of finding relevant quotations deepens the students' relationship with the subject matter, and often exposes them to new attitudes and themes. Smaller groups within the ensemble focus on a specific message of empowerment that underlies the story at large, and build scenes where characters are shaped by memorable moments of empowerment.

the elements | story-focused

SELF-EMPOWERMENT THEATRE IS FOCUSED ON STORY

Stories are our best teachers. They teach us how to live. They help us navigate the world—to know where we're coming from and where we're headed. They tell us where to place our trust and why. Stories allow us to feel and see issues, as well as factually understand them, imprinting them in our minds in a way that sticks.

Our brains are hardwired to seek out a coherent narrative structure in the stories we experience. The structure helps us understand the relationship between a character's actions and their consequences. This is where learning occurs. In recognizing the effects of our actions within the story, we connect those with our own experiences in the world.

In Self-Empowerment Theatre, we ensure the clarity of our storytelling and understanding by teaching our students the DNA (the building blocks) and Bones (the structure) of every story we tell. By engaging students in this way, with compelling stories that deal with socially relevant issues, we give students the tools to examine and build their own stories. We leave students empowered to better move through the world. In this way, our students learn that changing the world can be as simple as telling a new story.

the elements | story

EXHIBIT A

THE DNA: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE PLAY.

The DNA of the play is a series of statements that articulate the basic story, how it functions, and why. Different kinds of stories affect audiences in different ways and warrant different storytelling techniques. Understanding the play's DNA helps students better recognize the purpose and intent behind the story.

This Play is About _____.

Every Self-Empowerment Theatre piece has an issue or theme that it wrestles with and can be expressed in a short phrase.

This Play is a _____.

Defining the genre of the play allows us to better understand how the play operates and moves.

The Protagonist Is _____.

Whose story is this? Whom do we follow?

The Dramatic Question is: _____?

What is the protagonist trying to accomplish? This is the main action for the audience to follow.

The Spine of the play is _____.

Every character in the play relates to the protagonist in a specific way. How does each character move through the play to support the central drama, just as the spine supports the head?

The Audience should Feel _____.

What effect should the play have on the audience? How should they feel as they are taken through the story, so they walk away with the play's message?

The Cry of the Play is _____.

Every play is screaming something through the flames. The play has an opinion about the issues it deals with. What is this play saying to the world?

the elements | story

EXHIBIT B

THE BONES: THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY.

The Bones of the play are a roadmap of the key plot points of the story, illustrating how the protagonist moves through them from beginning to end. Knowing the Bones of the story enables students to understand which events are most important to the narrative and why.

Status Quo - What is the state of the world leading into the story?

Inciting Incident - What happens to the protagonist that sets them off to achieve their goal?

Rising Action - In general, how does the protagonist initially attempt to achieve their goal?

Turning Point - What happens to the protagonist that changes how they proceed?

Falling Action - How does the protagonist attempt to achieve their goal following the turning point?

Oh Yeah! - What does the protagonist do that ensures there can be no other solution than the climax?

Climax - The definitive answer to the dramatic question. Did the protagonist succeed?

the elements | kinesthetic

SELF-EMPOWERMENT THEATRE IS KINESTHETIC.

Self-Empowerment Theatre is a physical theatre. Our performances are filled with movement sequences. These movement sequences are not dances, but rather moments of choreographed actions that intensify the emotions of a character or reprise an earlier scene. They act alongside collective speech moments, adding to the effect of unison in the ensemble.

We teach students that their bodies communicate just as much as, if not more than their words.

resources

GIVING CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

part 3

We aim to learn from as many sources as possible, and here you'll find both the specific sources we've referenced above, and a list of the books we rely on most heavily for our methods and conceptual background.

source list:

Samuel, Alexandra. "How You Can Raise Robot-Proof Children." *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 26 Apr. 2018, www.wsj.com/articles/how-you-can-raise-robot-proof-children-1524756310.

"The Effects of Theatre Education." *Benefits of Theatre Ed*, www.aate.com/benefits-of-theatre-ed.

Eisner, Elliot W. *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing*. Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1985.

Flannery, Mary Ellen. "The Epidemic of Anxiety Among Today's Students." *NEA Today*, 5 Apr. 2018, neatoday.org/2018/03/28/the-epidemic-of-student-anxiety/.

Ruppert, Sandra S. "Critical Evidence: How The Arts Benefit Student Achievement." *NASAA*, 2006. nasaa-arts.org/critical-evidence/.

Rushlow, Bonnie B. "Why Middle School Art Matters." *Middle Matters*, vol. 16, no. 2, Nov. 2007, doi: https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/resources/2/Middle_Matters/2007/MM2007v16n2a2.pdf.

further reading:

We encourage ourselves, our colleagues, and our students to read all the time, and specifically to read the materials that are relevant to our goals and methodologies. Each of the following books will leave the reader enthused, renewed, and uniquely positioned to enact Self-Empowerment Theatre.

Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Pluto Press, 1993.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Pantheon Books, 1949.

Catmull, Edwin, and Amy Wallace. *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration*. Bantam Press, 2014.

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961.

Graham, Scott, and Steven Hoggett. *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*. Routledge, 2009.

Grotowski, Jerzy, et al. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015.

Harari, Yuval Noah. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Vintage, 2017.

Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind*. Vintage, 2011.

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

Kleon, Austin. *Steal Like an Artist: 10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative*. Workman Publishing, 2012.

Pink, Daniel H. *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. Riverhead, 2006.

Pinker, Steven. *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. Viking, 2018.

Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Penguin, 2011.



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social

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