



ACT's Young Playwrights Program *empowering students to create plays*

Overview – What is the *Young Playwrights Program*?

ACT's **Young Playwrights Program (YPP)** offers Puget Sound area middle and high school students an engaging, challenging language arts/theatre curriculum based on the art of playwriting. ACT believes in the power of playwriting to transform students' lives. ACT also believes in generating and nurturing new plays and playwrights. ACT's YPP sends professional teaching artists into schools for twenty sessions in ten weeks each fall to teach the basics of playwriting.

All students are taught from the same rigorous and innovative curriculum, comprised of four units: Discovering Plays; Exploring Plays; Writing a Play; and Revising & Finalizing a Play. In these units, students learn vital concepts and skills associated with the performing arts and language arts, such as: dramatic structure, character creation, dialogue, action, subtext, point of view, understanding and developing dramatic conflict, writing a scene, generating ideas through improvisation, the importance of rewrites, and writing for an audience. Each student completes at least a first draft of a ten to thirty minute original play by the end of the session. Student work is evaluated by ACT teaching artists using rubrics based on national and state learning standards.

Toward the end of the YPP's ten-week term, a panel of teaching artists and ACT artistic staff select eight outstanding student plays from the program for inclusion in a festival of new work at ACT Theatre, the **Young Playwrights Festival (YPF)**. The winning plays are announced in mid December at a big party at ACT called **The YPP Celebration**, to which all YPP students, their families, and participating schools are invited. At the ACT celebration professional actors are hired to perform scenes from student plays, a nationally recognized artist is engaged to speak to the students, and partner theater companies choose plays to stage during the spring alongside the ACT festival.

Benefits and considerations for students

- **Relevant, useful writing skills** – The YPP teaches students to express themselves through writing and tell a dramatic story with a beginning, middle and end. Students keep journals to work independently and everyone creates an original script.
- **Student agency and self-confidence** – ACT's YPP endows students with tools for self-expression in a safe environment. The YPP places great importance on accommodating students from diverse backgrounds, communities, and levels of ability, and on bringing students together to share and appreciate each other's work.
- **Reading fluency and public speaking** – YPP students read their work and the work of their classmates out loud in every session. Becoming a confident speaker and a fluent reader is a major part of the YPP curriculum.
- **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** – Theatre brings out talents that aren't often discovered in a typical classroom. The YPP incorporates theatre games with writing exercises breaking students away from a sedentary routine. This allows students with different learning styles to explore writing on their feet and on the page.

Benefits and Considerations for schools and teachers

- **Collaborative planning** – ACT works closely with each school partner. We tailor our curriculum to meet the needs of students in independent, public and alternative schools, as well as students with special needs and students considered "at-risk". The YPP curriculum can be

integrated into existing English or Drama curriculum. (For example, Teaching artists can use current reading assignments as inspiration for writing exercises.)

- **Standards-based curriculum design** – Our lesson plans are available to classroom teachers. Objectives are tied to applicable Common Core Writing Standards and National Arts Standards, and based on our fourteen-year track record in public, independent, and parochial school settings.
- **Student evaluation** - Classroom teachers work with the YPP teaching artist to assess student work during the YPP. The YPP teaching artists do not assign grades to individual students. They do provide feedback to students and communicate with the classroom teacher weekly about individual student progress.

Benefits and Considerations for Seattle Public Schools

- **Respect for students' past experiences** – Cultural competency and reflective practice are cornerstones of ACT's instruction.
- **Program evaluation** –ACT surveys students before and directly after the YPP to measure the success of the program from the students' perspective. We use this data to ensure that the YPP curriculum continues to challenge, inspire, and make a difference in students' lives. We also share this data with schools, funders and the ACT community.

YPP Background

ACT has been finding, creating and sharing contemporary theatre with audiences since 1965. From six schools and sixty-five students served in 2002, the inaugural year of the program, the YPP has more than doubled in size. **The 2015 YPP reached over 200 students at nine classrooms in the Puget Sound Area and one afterschool program, here at ACT.**

The Young Playwrights Program prepares the teaching artists in August & early September each year. The curriculum preparation sessions are used to develop a consistent approach to YPP curriculum content, instruction, and assessment.

Our teaching artists are produced, often published, working playwrights, bringing a wealth of experience to each classroom. Teaching Artists have included ACT's former Literary Manager and Education Director Anita Montgomery, playwright and Cornish College of the Arts Faculty member Elizabeth Heffron, playwright and professional actor Todd Jefferson Moore, and award-winning local playwrights Kelleen Conway Blanchard, Marcy Rodenborn, and Wayne Rawley, among others.

Funding

ACT receives generous funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as several foundations and individuals that help to cover some of the cost of the YPP. Rates for the program in schools begin at \$3000. Scholarships are available.

For additional information:
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