

Arts Alive! Believes Theater Makes Kids ‘Better People’

We have worked with shy kids and jock kids and music geeks and math nerds and bullies and princesses and over-achievers and kids with special needs and...the list goes on and on. And we know that theater has the power to go beyond the stereotypes we are given to reach people at an authentic human level and help us ask ourselves, "How can I become a better person?"

Kids who are involved in theater are going through the process of answering this question for themselves. In the ARTS ALIVE! programming, our goal is to make this process conscious through our methodology of teaching and reinforcing social/emotional skills through the collaborative creation and performance of musical theatre plays. Did you know that just by taking part in theatre, kids are actually becoming better people? No matter who your kid is or what their interests are, there are 5 key reasons why being involved with theater makes your kid a ‘better person’:

1. They are Discovering their Real Talents

Theater is a multidisciplinary art form. Successful theater productions at every level from Broadway to after school drama club to your backyard are dependent on a group of diverse people with diverse talents coming together towards one common goal. Theater needs performers and directors and writers and designers and musicians. Theater needs people who are strong leaders and marketers and managers and financial decision makers. There is a place for everyone in the theater and being involved can help your kid discover just where they fit into the big picture (both onstage, and off!).

2. They are learning Collaborative Problem Solving

When you have all of these diverse folks coming together towards one common goal, there will inevitably be hundreds, even thousands of "good ideas." And all of these ideas have to somehow create 1 play that the audience will understand and enjoy. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, there are 5 core areas of competency in social/emotional learning; self-awareness; self management; social awareness; relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Theater offers the ideal playground for children and youth to practice and strengthen these competencies. Being involved in a theatrical production means:

- Constantly negotiating how and when to contribute or not contribute your ideas to the group
- Bouncing back when you don't get the part you want or your idea does not make it into the play
- Handling your emotions when you have received some tough feedback or you are tired and frustrated during a long rehearsal or you are nervous about opening night or one of your parents can't make it to the play
- Handling disagreements when someone thinks the play should go in one direction and you think it should go in another direction
- Overcoming the inevitable mistakes that are made -- lines are forgotten, cues are missed, sets fall down, costume pieces don't hold up -- deciding they are not the end of the world and figuring out how to learn from these mistakes

3. They are learning to Respect Differences

Theater can bring you all around the world and back again. Stories can take us anywhere we want to go without ever leaving the stage. On a theatrical expedition, we are required to enact and embody characters, ideas, and situations that are outside of our own experiences, our own comfort zones. When your kid takes on the stories and ideas of others, she is in the process of understanding life outside of themselves, their families, their towns. In learning how to appreciate and respect people who are different from them, kids are preparing to better navigate all areas of their life, work and play.

4. They are learning to Succeed Academically

A wide range of research has shown that involvement in theater strengthens students reading and writing skills. According to Americans for the Arts [<http://www.americansforthearts.org>], who has compiled a summary of some of the key findings, "Learning and participation in music, dance, *theater*, and the visual arts are vital to the development of our children and our communities." Through dramatic play, very young children are learning the building blocks of language development necessary to make them stronger oral and written communicators. School age children engaged in theater are learning to comprehend, recall, and restate what they are reading; how to ask critical questions for clarification and deeper comprehension; memorization and problem solving skills; elements of story for creative and non-fiction writing; and speaking in front of others. One study even shows that, as high school students read and analyze difficult dramatic texts such as Shakespeare, they are improving their ability to analyze all types of difficult materials including math and science texts. Through their involvement in theater, not only are your kids learning interesting facts, they are really *learning how to learn*.

5. They are Making Great Friends

The friends your child will make in the theater are some of the best friends they will ever have. We all know that the folks who are closest to us are the ones who have seen us at our best and our worst and have stuck by us after it's all said and done. Being involved with theater will give your kids a chance to "go through it" with a group of people; tackling a difficult project and coming out the other side so proud of what they have achieved together. It is similar to winning the championship game or traveling in a foreign land. The work is challenging but so rewarding. It teaches you more about yourself and the other people who are on the journey with you. It teaches you how to support each other on and off the stage.

At ARTS ALIVE! it is never about whether or not a child will "make it" as an actor. It's about giving them the chance to be part of something bigger. Through participation we see kids every year becoming more confident in abilities, stronger in social, emotional, and academic skills, and just overall better people/friends. The confidence gained in theatre enables children to make better choices. Thus, our connection with the BAY Team - we feel that involvement in the ARTS are a strong component of PREVENTION.

Dena Davis, Artistic Director of *ARTS ALIVE!*