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Why Children's Theater Matters *The Impact of the Arts on Young People*

(Omaha, NE) On the surface, children's theater seems simple: a few over-the-top characters, some brightly-colored costumes, a simple plot borrowed from a children's book and maybe a catchy song or two. It's an hour spent together as family, then it is back to the "real world," as the on-stage images fade into a distant memory.

In reality, studies have found that children's theater has a powerful impact on children and their development. Studies show that engaging in imaginative activities like theater fosters increased intelligence. Seeing the world through a new perspective helps young minds imagine new worlds, new possibilities, and new ideas. Children who attend live theater have shown greater tolerance of different people and ideas, as well as increased empathy for others. They show a better understanding of reading materials. they view social studies concepts in a new light as history comes alive in front of their eyes. Teachers have even found that by incorporating drama activities in the classroom, their students' math scores have increased. There is no doubt that theater not only entertains, but also enhances children's lives in many ways.

Here are a few excerpts that illustrate the power of children's theater:

From Education.com:

"Study after study has shown that the arts are more than fluff. Longitudinal data of 25,000 students involved in the arts, conducted at UCLA's Graduate School of Education by Dr. James Catterall, shows that consistent participation greatly improves academic performance and significantly bumps up standardized test scores. Students who make time for the arts are also more involved in community service, and less likely to drop out of school. And we're not just talking about upper middle class kids. These facts remain, regardless of a child's socio-economic background.

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“Theater also connects to the importance of reading. A play has the ability to jump a story off the page and bring it to life. This can be a revelation to regular bookworms, but also a real boon to reluctant readers. “Part of it is that what’s happening on stage is very similar, in a way, to the play acting and role playing all children do. It’s live, and good plays are just a little bit ‘incomplete’, if you will—they need the audience to complete them, and they change slightly with the audience. Films, of course, are static,” says Kim Peter Kovac, President of Theatre For Young Audiences/USA (TYA/USA), a national organization for professional children’s theaters.

“While plays work to jumpstart the imagination, they also lengthen the attention span. At first, Hartzell says, sitting still in a darkened room may not feel natural for children. But that’s precisely why it’s important. Because TV is such a popular form of entertainment, she says, kids aren’t used to focusing for an hour or an hour and a half. “Kids today see a new image every 3-4 seconds. They’re used to constant change. And they don’t listen as well,” she says.”

(http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Why_Childrens_Theater_Matters/)

From The Huffington Post:

“Bill English of San Francisco’s SF Playhouse says, theater is like a gym for empathy. It’s where we can go to build up the muscles of compassion, to practice listening and understanding and engaging with people that are not just like ourselves. We practice sitting down, paying attention and learning from other people’s actions. We practice caring.

“Kids need this kind of practice even more than adults do. This is going to be their planet and they’ve got more time to apply that empathy and make a difference. Buddhist roshi Joan Halifax challenges us to actively and specifically teach children (and vote for presidents with) empathy. Why not take your child to the theater to do just that.”

(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lauren-gunderson/world-theater-for-children-and-young-people-day_b_1343408.html)

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From Medical Daily:

“Researchers measured to see if live theater made students more tolerable of different people and ideas, as well as better able to read another person’s emotions (empathy). Of course, researchers conceded students from a drama or advanced English course may have gone into the experiment already being familiar with plot and characters; same for those who have read or seen a movie version of *Hamlet* or *A Christmas Carol* before.

“Even so, “it is very clear that reading or watching movies of *Hamlet* and *A Christmas Carol* cannot account for the increase in knowledge students experienced by winning the lottery to see the plays,” researchers explained. “Even when we control for watching the movie or reading the material for school, the estimated effect of winning the lottery to see the plays remains basically unchanged, producing an effect size of 58 percent of a standard deviation for the treatment group on knowledge of the plot and vocabulary of the plays.”

“Live theater, it seems, matters as much as math and reading skills.”

(<http://www.medicaldaily.com/live-theater-better-student-vocabulary-tolerance-and-emotions-be-or-not-be-smarter-307407>)

From SocialStudies.com:

“Creative dramatics, a highly effective method for integrating arts education into core curriculum, produces a positive and lasting impact on student learning, in terms of creative and critical thinking, language development, listening, comprehension, retention, cooperation, and empathy and awareness of others.¹ Creative dramatics not only has the power to bring curriculum to life, but also to stimulate active involvement in the development of conceptual understandings.

“By bringing the methods of drama in to their lessons, teachers can turn their classrooms into exploratory arenas of learning for themselves and their students. Integrating the arts nurtures global intelligence, speaks to emotional literacy,

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fosters innovative thought processes, and cultivates habits of lifelong learning. In my own teaching, I find that the more drama activities I am able to use, the more students understand the concepts we are working on and the more cognitively and emotionally engaged they are. Using creative drama is practical and engaging, and it brings the social studies curriculum to life in very meaningful ways.”

(<http://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/yl/2503/250309.pdf>)

From The Washington Post:

“Instead of art as a stand-alone subject, teachers are using dance, drama and the visual arts to teach a variety of academic subjects in a more engaging way.... Educators and artists who are proponents of the method say it reaches students who might not otherwise absorb traditional classroom methods.

“Some children can struggle with math because it’s abstract. Children can get emotionally invested in acting out a story, though, that involves counting. And they are exceptionally good with imagination, far better than...adult acting students.”

(https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/teachers-are-using-theater-and-dance-to-teach-math--and-its-working/2016/02/22/61f8dc0c-d68b-11e5-b195-2e29a4e13425_story.html)

From the National Arts Council:

“Students who have arts-rich experiences in school do better across-the-board academically, and they also become more active and engaged citizens, voting, volunteering, and generally participating at higher rates than their peers.

“Socially and economically disadvantaged children and teenagers who have high levels of arts engagement or arts learning show more positive outcomes in a variety of areas than their low-arts-engaged peers. In middle school, high school, and beyond, they tend to do better on a host of academic and civic behavioral measures than do at-risk youth who lack deep arts backgrounds. To varying degrees, those

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outcomes extend to school grades, test scores, honors society membership, high school graduation, college enrollment and achievement, volunteering, and engagement in school or local politics.

“At-risk teenagers or young adults with a history of intensive arts experiences show achievement levels closer to, and in some cases exceeding, the levels shown by the general population studied. These findings suggest that in-school or extracurricular programs offering deep arts involvement may help to narrow the gap in achievement levels among youth...”

(<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf>)

From AmericansForTheArts.org:

“Data from The College Board show that in 2014, students who took four years of arts and music classes while in high school scored an average of 96 points higher on their SATs than students who took only one-half year or less.

“The College Board...recommends that education stakeholders consider arts requirements for high school curricula, high school graduation requirements, and college and university admission requirements in the arts.

“Students with four years of art and music classes averaged 523 on the Writing portion of the test - 57 points higher than students with one-half year or less of arts and music classes, who averaged 466 points.”

(http://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2015/by_program/reports_and_data/research_studies_and_publications/SAT_Scores_2014_Arts%20Ed.pdf)

From National Assembly of State Arts Agencies:

“In a well-documented national study using a federal database of over 25,000 middle and high school students, researchers from the University of California at Los Angeles found students with high arts involvement performed better on

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standardized achievement tests than students with low arts involvement. Moreover, the high arts-involved students also watched fewer hours of TV, participated in more community service and reported less boredom in school.

(<http://www.nasaa-arts.org/Publications/critical-evidence.pdf>)

About The Rose

The Rose Theater is one of the largest and most accomplished children's theaters in the nation, with a reputation for enriching the lives of children and families through top-quality professional productions and arts education. In 2016, *American Theatre* magazine named The Rose one of the 20 top children's theaters in the United States. The Rose is committed to making the arts accessible to all children, providing opportunities for thousands of children throughout the community to attend shows and participate in classes each year. Over the course of a year, approximately 70,000 people attend the public performances held at the theater, and nearly 30,000 students attend field trip shows annually. The theater strives to introduce young people to a mix of both traditional favorites and ground-breaking original productions. A number of plays and musicals have made their world premiere on The Rose stage, including *Pete the Cat: The Musical*, *Sherlock Holmes & the First Baker Street Irregular*, *Zen Ties*, *Buffalo Bill's Cowboy Band*, and *The Grocer's Goblin & The Little Mermaid*. We take pride knowing that The Rose is the place where children of all ages experience theater for the first time, and we are dedicated to helping them appreciate theater for a lifetime.

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