

Destiny Arts Center's

Youth ON THE Move!

A teacher's guidebook
to co-creating original
movement/theater
performances with teens

BY SARAH CROWELL with Maura Wolf, Naomi Katz, and Simón Hanukai

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DESTINY ARTS CENTER

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Youth on the Move: A Teacher's Guidebook to Co-Creating Original Movement/Theater Performances with Teens

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The Guidebook & Videos

A Summary

The Guidebook

We have designed this guidebook to share the process that the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company uses to create movement/theater pieces as a collaboration between high school students and professional artists, in hopes that this process will help to design, expand, transform and/or improve a high school level performance program that you already run or want to create. The guidebook is formatted so that each chapter represents a distinct phase of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company 5-month process of forming a group, creating and producing a show, and debriefing the experience. While we will offer some suggestions about how to do things, the guidebook primarily describes the process through which we created our show for a 5-month period starting in December 2003 and ending in May 2004.

Video: A Place Named Destiny (70 MINUTE DOCUMENTARY)

We highly recommend that you and your students watch this documentary as it gives a personal context in which to understand the various exercises and lessons in this guidebook, and inspires both teacher and student to begin the creative process. It follows the process of creating the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company show, *Soul Dust*, which was performed in the spring of 2001. The film premiered in June 2002 at the Mill Valley Film Festival in the San Francisco Bay Area. Watching it offers insight into the lives of some of the company youth and demonstrates their personal journeys as they work together to create the show. Watching the film makes this curriculum come to life.

Video: Vision to Action (SHORT PROMOTIONAL VIDEO)

This short piece features current Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company members and professional artists and educators talking about how the performing arts are an important instrument for personal transformation and social change. The interviews are combined with exciting footage of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company in rehearsals and performances.



About Destiny Arts Center

Destiny Arts Center exists to end isolation, prejudice and violence in the lives of young people.

Destiny (De-Escalation Skills Training Inspiring Nonviolence in Youth) Arts Center is a unique arts organization devoted to the safety, creativity and empowerment of young people. Through a deep-seated philosophy of nonviolence, Destiny uses martial arts, dance, theater, youth leadership, conflict resolution and self-defense training in after-school, weekend and summer programs, as methods to motivate youth to discover themselves and one another as significant, powerful and peaceful people. Our multicultural community allows youth to come together in an atmosphere of love, inspiration and respect that celebrates and transcends different backgrounds and experiences.

Destiny Arts Center was founded in 1988 as a violence prevention program in a public elementary school that served 30 youth. Today the Center serves over 250 youth per year in onsite and outreach programs, and another 12,000 youth and adults through performances and workshops throughout the Bay Area and nationwide. Over the years, Destiny has become a potent manifestation of both arts education and youth development in a community-based setting.

About the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company

The work of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company (DAYPC) inspired this guidebook. The Company is a multicultural group of teens that have auditioned annually since 1993 to create original performances, in collaboration with professional artists, that combine hip-hop, modern and aerial dance, theater, martial arts, song and rap. The productions are a dynamic, creative forum for young people to express their fears, hopes and strategies for confronting challenging personal and social issues, including racism, sexism, homophobia, violence, poverty, and the environment. The DAYPC gives youth opportunities to bear witness to the crucial power of art and culture as mediums for self-expression, agents of solidarity and means of working toward peace.

Members of the Company live in the context of an urban culture that is focused more and more on wasteful consumption, high-speed digital communication and fast-paced media, and less and less on storytelling, creating art and nurturing connections between people; in a context where young people feel increasingly alienated from each other and the generation that is their mentors; in a context where low-income, low-performance schools are removing the arts from the academic school day in order to improve test scores; in a context where gun violence, the knowledge of environmental destruction, and the direct experience of racism, sexism, homophobia and poverty confront them every day.

As an antidote to the pressures they confront daily, the Company members develop a powerful command over their bodies and their movement technique so that they can express themselves without words. They develop writing and theater skills so that they can express themselves through poetry, storytelling, monologues and scene work. They learn to work together in an environment that values genuine self-expression and true collaboration. They develop strength and flexibility in their bodies and minds so that they can make art that speaks authentically about themselves and their world.



What People are Saying about the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company

“I saw the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company do their thing and they were dazzling!
A combination of wonderful talent, high energy, and social consciousness.”

—**HOWARD ZINN, HISTORIAN, activist and author of A People’s History of the United States**

“The Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company is a politically astute, talented and visionary
group of young people who combine political activism with cutting edge cultural expression.”

— **ANGELA DAVIS, author, scholar and activist**

“Destiny is dynamic visual diversity: rhythms, colors, voice, dance, expression, emotion, flight
and all of the characteristics we know as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual identity. How lucky we
all are that an agency and community such as Destiny exists. My hope is that the Destiny
movement will spread across our country.”

— **RANDOLPH CARTER, Director, Office of Diversity & Multicultural Services,
National Association of Independent Schools**

“Destiny Arts youth explore the issues of discrimination (on all levels) and human violence,
with a depth of thought, feelings and vision for the future that is truly inspirational.”

— **NANCY NADEL, Oakland City Councilwoman**

“Thank you Destiny Arts for providing the direction and support for these students to get them
to this level of performance. I know you must be proud of each one of them — I know I am!”

— **SHEILA JORDAN, Alameda County Superintendent of Schools**

“I was amazed at the talent and profound insight of these young people and how well they
articulated issues they care about through dance, music and spoken word. The combination
of politics and funk was both exciting and inspiring!”

— **PETER BRATT, Director/Screenwriter**

“In these times, young people are hungry for the integrity, humanity and spiritual connection that is lacking in the world around them. Destiny Arts creates a strong link for people to remember their connection to their ancestors and recreate a responsible mindful way of being for generations to come. Our future looks hopeful.”

— **LAKOTA HARDEN, Native American dancer and activist**

“Fantastic! With so much negative press around young people these days, it’s so inspiring to see such a motivated and talented group. What’s particularly impressive is that we got to see not only their skills and talents, but we also got a rare insight into what goes on in their hearts and minds. And it’s really encouraging! If only Destiny were a required program in the schools!”

— **JONAS MOK, Executive Director, World PULSE**

“Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company vividly demonstrated hip hop may be the coolest way to bring kids of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds together to advance the values of a multiethnic, multicultural society.”

— **ANN MURPHY, Oakland Tribune**

“No matter what work I choose to do in the future I know for a fact my choice will have been affected by the time I have spent in the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company. DAYPC is a multiracial, economically diverse group of teens who come together to create a show using dance, martial arts and theater. The performance not only tells our stories, but also promotes peace in the community as well as the world at large. Destiny has forced me to evaluate the way I look not only at the world but also at myself and I think I have grown immensely from the experience.”

— **KENDRA STATON, Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company member, 2002–2005**

“We are living at a time where the vision and creativity of young people is essential to the sustainability of our communities. It is these voices that give us hope and that will carry our species forward into a more enlightened age. Destiny provides a rare experience for young people that they will carry forward into the rest of their lives, while being able to touch so many with their great work.”

— **ALLI STARR, DIRECTOR, Co-Founder of Cultural Links, Art & Revolution, and Dancers Without Borders**

“Through this performing arts group I experienced dance, theater, meditations, writing, and martial arts with a positive message, and, most of all, a sense of community that I had never felt before. We addressed issues that many thought we were too young to comprehend. We stunned audiences with our opinions and managed to be heard in a society that doesn’t want to listen. We are impacting the world.”

— **SAM MENDE-WONG, Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company member, 1993–2000**

Acknowledgements

“...We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, bound in a single garment of destiny.”

— MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

I stand in deep gratitude to all of the people who have made this project possible — to the huge, incredibly supportive Destiny Arts Center family, a wild and wonderful intergenerational community of warriors for peace.

You are the writers and editors of this guidebook, who worked overtime to make sure that the heart and soul of the work was not lost on the page.

You are the artists and educators who have had the courage to truly collaborate with young people, to guide them gently and powerfully to their own truths.

You are the youth who have had the courage to get up on stage and speak and move your stories, so that your communities can know who you are and what you care about.

You are the Company alumni who have come back to volunteer year after year in whatever ways are needed. You come with your parents, your friends and your children. You come with your memories, your enthusiasm, and your appreciation for the way that the productions have evolved.

You are the lighting, sound, set and costume designers, the backstage crew, the set builders and painters, the photographers, the American Sign Language interpreters, the graphic designers, the set builders and painters, the publicity managers, the videographers, the ushers, the lobby and house managers. You are the ones who have baked cookies for the bake sales, torn the tickets, passed out the programs and cleaned up when the show was over.

You are the Destiny staff members who have stopped everything to work the long hours it takes to put on the Company productions. You are the Board of Directors who have made sure that the Company continues to be funded year after year.

You are the parents and caregivers of the youth, who have supported them through the sometimes-arduous journey of creating the Company performances that, you understand, transform their lives. You have made sure that they are in rehearsals and script-writing sessions. You have driven them from place to place constantly. You have cooked, cleaned, decorated, made costumes and sold tickets. You have come to the shows and cheered for all the youth with the loudest voices.

You are my family, who has wholeheartedly supported me to be an artist through the thick and the thin. You are my partner who has held me and loved me through the bitterness and the sweetness of the creative process. You are all my bright and shining lights.

You are the ones who are named below and the ones who are not. All of you are part of the inescapable network of minds, hearts and bodies who have made the work of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company possible. Thank you with all my heart!

— Sarah Crowell, April 2005

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Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company Co-Artistic Directors 1990–2005:

Kate Hobbs, Naomi Bragin, Simón Hanukai

The Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company members who participated in the creation of the 2003/2004 production, *INSight* and whose words and ideas are part of this curriculum:

Lindsay Ducos, Chandrika Francis, Amalia Mesa-Gustin, Arienna Grody, Rhummanee Hang,

Jamila Jackson, Angelina Johnson-Holman, Zeneta Johnson, Jennifer Lawson, Mariana Martinez, Jaime Phillips, Lisie Rosenberg, Kendra Staton, Dessie Woods.

The Destiny Junior Company members who also participated in the creation of segments of the 2003/2004 production, *INSight*, and whose words appear in the *INSight* script (found in the Appendix):

Abbey Augus, Molly Billick, Miranda Buxton, Navarra Buxton, Katiana Carey-Simms, Giana Cirolia, Lena Greenspan, Kimisia Harper, Rose Huey, Eden Lani-Castro, Zakiya Mowat, Zoe Statman-Weil.

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The All Nation Drummers, George Anzaldo, Caprice Armstrong, Chanel Baty, Gilbert Blacksmith and the Medicine Warrior Dance Troupe, Wilma Bonet, Janine Bruno, Sarah Bush, Rashidi Byrd, Liza Cirolia, Anthony Daniels, Paula Dewart, Naomi Diouf, Doralynn Folsé, Schuyler Fishman, Suzanne Gallo, Paul Ginocchio, Rennie Harris, Roland Jackson, Krissy Keefer, Caroline King, Rami Magrone, Leah Malberg, Jill Parker, Rashad Pridgen, Jay Pugao, Soyinka Rahim, Jen Resnick, Sonya Richardson, Amelia Rudolph, Kyla Searle, Alice Taylor, Evelyn Thomas, Kimm E. Ward, Cory Wechsler.

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Jeffrey Adams, Jenny Bachofner, Edythe Boone, Annemarie Brown, Susan Carpendale, LaShanté Churchwell, Laura Cirolia, Keila Claussen, Cristi Delgado, Ezra Eismont, Doralynn Folsé, Ryan Fioroni, Schuyler Fishman, Benjamin Frost, Holly Gibson, Paul Ginocchio, Felicia Gustin, Amanda Green, Elaine Hamblin, Ellen Hamilton, Sherry Hicks, Stephanie Johnson, Hannah Kanzell, Evelyn Kawahara, Andy Keefer, Kendra Keller, Cici Kinsman, Richard Kittle, Ron Kittle, Ari Lathuras, Lara Lawrence, Janine Macbeth, Catrina Marchetti, Anita Martinez, Peter Mayfield, Tanja Odzak, Guillermo Prado, Marcia Quinones, Reba Rose, John Santos, Kyla Searle, Ann Smith, Yoly Stroeve, Deb E. Taylor, Jules Tortolani, Michael Velez, Dana Watson, Sarah White.

Introduction

The Power of Performance

BY SARAH CROWELL

I cannot remember a time when I didn't want to dance, sing and tell stories. In all of the home movies from my childhood I am spinning, kicking, belting out a tune, and smiling ear to ear as I put on a show. I can see myself getting the neighborhood kids together to create choreography with them. I am teaching the moves to the music, handing out the costumes and making sure everyone comes to rehearsals on time. I am setting up chairs and getting the parents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents to sit in the audience and pay attention. I am cueing up the music and inspiring my performers to do their best. I am twirling in my favorite tutu and bowing to the applause.

I feel like a big kid now. The stakes are higher, the audiences are bigger, the tickets are more expensive, but otherwise my life is the same. I bring young people together to create a show that means something to them. I build an environment that is safe, encouraging and disciplined. I make sure that the production aspects of the show are smooth and professional so that the performers' talent and skill can shine. I invite their families and communities to witness what we have created together.

As a child, performance was a natural and joyful expression of my love of life. As a teenager, dance and performance were my means for survival. By then I was living with my single mother who was struggling to make ends meet. Life was tough. I did well in school, but I just couldn't figure out the high school social scene. During those years, I spent hours playing solitaire in my room by myself or writing angst-filled poetry while sitting on the roof of my house. I wasn't into boys. I wasn't into partying. My clothes weren't cute enough to make me popular on the weekends. But, no matter how bad things got, I had dance.

In dance class I felt free. I fit in. I had goals that I knew I could meet. I could work on touching my toes, getting into the splits and hitting that double pirouette, even if I couldn't deal with the way the girls in school talked about me behind my back. In dance class I felt beautiful, disciplined and had a purpose in life. Even if I wasn't the best in my class, I still loved to be pushed to master a new move. Every bead of sweat that rolled down my body released me from another day of high school torture. And then there was performing. The costumes, make-up and rehearsals on stage were like heaven to me. The smell of the moldy dressing rooms and rubber dance flooring were like Thanksgiving dinner feast smells. When the lights hit and the music was playing, I was on air. I was on stage and could disappear from the harshness of my reality. I could be totally myself without having to be in my life. And people would applaud and tell me that I was okay just the way I was.

At the same time that I was discovering my dancer self, I was learning about the world around me. I was fascinated and intimidated by history and politics. I was infuriated by the injustices that I began to understand, and moved by the stories of people struggling to make the world a better place for everyone.

My family was always fighting for social justice. My mother worked with women's groups to fight against sexism and racism. My father was involved with the peace movement, dealing with issues from environmental justice and nuclear disarmament to global monetary policy. I was passionate about the same issues, but I didn't know how to mix the seemingly self-centered world of the performing arts with this growing fervor to be an agent of social change. I felt split between my obsession with my body and getting it to look and move the way I wanted it to, and the global struggle for peace and justice.

In my adult life I was able to bring those two parts of myself together. At 25 I moved from the East Coast to the Bay Area and began to work with Dance Brigade, formerly the Wallflower Order Dance Collective, a feminist dance/theater company that does work with a social/political message. The work was exhilarating. Finally I was able to blend my passion for justice with my passion for dance and performance. Through Dance Brigade I worked collaboratively on choreography and theatrical pieces that told stories about issues that were important to me.

We created shows like *Pandora's Box*, which was an exploration of women's history and the rise of patriarchal society, and *Good-bye Columbus*, which told the stories of America's colonized people. Dance Brigade also created and produced a Bay Area holiday favorite, *The Revolutionary Nutcracker Sweetie*, which was a political spoof on the Nutcracker Suite and used a community cast of about 70 dancers, musicians, acrobats and aerial dancers. The show had a dance piece that was dedicated to the freedom of South Africa, a piece about the extinction of different animal species, and a Sugar Plum Fairy who touted the values of Mao Tse Tung's *Little Red Book*. These experiences laid the foundation for my dance and theater work with young people.

I have no doubt that the work I do now with youth is a tribute to my struggling, open-hearted, shut down, glorious, miserable, passionate adolescent self, who wanted to be loved and understood for who she was, and who desperately wanted to make a difference in the world. I want to share the power of discipline, the art of dance, and the feelings of exhilaration and empowerment I experienced when I was on stage. I also want to give young people an outlet for their passion for social justice — an outlet that was not offered to me as a teen, but that would have made a great difference in the way that I viewed myself as an artist. I want to transmit to them the knowledge that performing arts can be a powerful instrument for social change as well as personal transformation.

There are so many teens that need an outlet for self-expression and a community that recognizes their value. They need a place to shine. There are so many young people who need to know they can have impact on a world that often seems like it's spinning out of control. I know that having a strong sense of self-esteem and feeling we can have an impact on the world in a meaningful way are directly connected. That's why I'm so excited about sharing the work of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company.

Through the process of co-creating and producing movement/theater pieces about their own lives, young people increase their self-esteem, their self-acceptance and their courage to tell their truths. Through the process of developing their own script they also clarify their values, and develop their critical thinking and performance skills.

As the director of youth-authored performance work, my job is to teach the necessary dance and theater skills so that my students have access to the art forms in meaningful ways. As we co-create the scripts, my job is to ask a lot of questions, listen carefully for the answers, both hidden and

explicit, and then to carefully craft a show out of the words, stories and experiences of the youth. My job is to steer the process when it gets stuck. Often teenagers get lost in their own personal stories and forget that there is a whole context to their experiences. They both influence and are influenced by this context. I can guide them to see their connection to the world around them. Once the youth become passionate about an issue they can get stuck being angry about it. However, their anger can be positive if it does not remain stagnant. My job is to guide the anger into strategies for action. I am not just a director; I'm a coach, showing the youth ways out of places that may keep them hopeless, angry and alone.

There are a hundred stories I could tell about young people's transformations through the performing arts style that I have developed in collaboration with many professional artists since 1993. I tell many of them in this guidebook as I unfold the process of creating the performance piece. I share stories about young women who feel torrents of self-hatred about their bodies, discuss these feelings through dance and theater, and find peace in knowing that their stories touched the lives of many young women just like them. I share stories of young black men who talk about what it's like to feel that people are afraid of them as they walk in the world and how they long to be free from other people's fear. You've perhaps witnessed a student stand in front of his peers and tell them a truth that he is afraid to tell. By finding the courage to tell it anyway, the student has been changed forever.

In addition to all of the emotional and intellectual benefits of performance, this work also strengthens the physical performance capabilities of young people. By setting the bar high and supporting them to reach it, young people can strengthen and stretch and learn to move together as never before. This process opens a new door — if they are given the opportunity to perform with their minds, bodies and spirits fully engaged, anything is possible.





How to Use this Guidebook

This guidebook includes:

- A phase-by-phase, session-by-session account of how we created *INsight*, the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company show that premiered in the spring of 2004.
- Measurable Outcomes for each phase of creation and suggestions on how to determine whether you are meeting these goals.
- Reflections called Journal Notes from the teachers and observers about things that happened during the process of creating the show, and why they happened in this way. These notes include stories about the process of creating performance pieces of this nature over a 12-year period, with particular emphasis on the stories from the process in Spring 2004.
- An Appendix that consists of audition materials, sample documents that we give to students and their parents/guardians, a list of the California Performing Arts Content Standards that relate to the curriculum, the script of the DAYPC show from 2004 called *INsight*, detailed descriptions of group bonding games, meditations, and dance, choreography and theater exercises, and sample evaluation and publicity materials.

Use this guidebook...

- as a step-by-step guide to creating a show that integrates movement and theater.
- as a template for creating work collaboratively with youth.
- to give greater depth of understanding to a collaborative process that you have already developed.
- to develop a performing arts program with a focus on autobiographical material.
- for the games, exercises and meditations in the Appendix.
- for the journal notes that give useful tips about running a youth company in which youth write their own work.

The Phases

The process of creating an original movement/theater show, in the style of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company, usually consumes five to six months from start to finish.

There are six distinct phases of development for the group that are included in the curriculum. The first four phases happen before a full piece is created:

1. Setting a Tone: Promoting and Holding Auditions (1 session)

This chapter gives detail about recruiting, auditioning and selecting a performance group.

2. Building Trust: Group Bonding (10 sessions)

This chapter gives a session-by-session account of building an inspired, committed group.

3. Getting Creative: Generating Written Material and Choreography for the Show (13 sessions)

This chapter gives a session-by-session account of the process of creating movement and written material that will be used to shape the performance piece.

4. Putting the Pieces Together: Finalizing the Script and Choreography (15 sessions)

This chapter gives an overview of the process of pulling together and editing the written material and choreography from the previous phase and creating a cohesive show. In this section, the sessions are grouped together rather than laid out one by one, since most of this phase involves rehearsals that are generally repetitive.

After the piece is created the final two phases of the process occur:

5. Putting on the Show: Production and Performance

This chapter gives an overview of all aspects of putting together the production once the show has been created. This phase is not broken down into sessions because it is a guide to producing a show with attention to professional detail, including lighting, sound, costumes, etc.

6. Debriefing the Whole Process: Reflecting and Affirming (1-4 sessions)

This chapter gives examples of our self-reflection about the process of creating and performing the show, once it is over. In this phase the group also deepens their appreciation for another and the process.

The Sessions

The Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company sessions are divided up into rehearsal and script-writing sessions. All company members also take at least three one and a half-hour movement classes per week as a requirement for participation in the group, which must include two hip-hop classes a week and at least one other class in either modern dance or martial arts. These classes happen at different times from the rehearsal and script-writing sessions.

This curriculum gives an outline of each rehearsal and script-writing session, directing you to the Appendix for detailed instructions of most of the exercises and meditations included in the session. There are some exercises that are detailed within the session outline. These are used only once or twice during the 5-month creative process. The exercises that appear in the Appendix are repeated often and can be replaced with similar exercises from the same category.

As the process of creation unfolds, especially during phases 2 and 3, the material gleaned from rehearsal sessions is used in script-writing sessions, and the script-writing sessions define how the rehearsal sessions are planned. In this way there is a dynamic relationship between the two processes.

Rehearsal sessions

Rehearsal sessions happen twice a week. Each session is 2-3 hours long and includes the entire group working in a space that is appropriate for moving around freely. Attendance at these sessions is mandatory.

During this time youth are doing group bonding exercises, playing theater games, having group discussions, writing material that will be used by the script-writing group to create the script, making up dances and dance/theater pieces, refining performance technique, and rehearsing for performances.

Script-writing sessions

Script-writing sessions happen once a week, usually on Saturdays. Each session is 3-4 hours long and ideally happens in a space that is different from the regular rehearsal space. The group sits in chairs around a table in a smaller, cozier setting, and they may have snacks together. Script-writing sessions include a small subset of the larger group, approximately 4-7 participants, who volunteer to give extra time to the script-writing and editing process.

During this time the group is doing group bonding exercises, developing writing and storytelling techniques through simple written and verbal games and exercises, discussing themes and theatrical mechanisms for the show, looking through and editing material that was created in the rehearsal sessions, and putting together a show that has a beginning, middle and end that is cohesive. The script-writing process at Destiny Arts Center is focused on developing interesting and authentic autobiographical material and combining that with fictional characters and scenes. The process also trains the students to become editors. It is not really about teaching specific writing techniques.

The Flow of Each Session

Each rehearsal and script-writing session is split up into the following sections. Where the curriculum lists specific theater exercises, group bonding exercises, dance and choreography exercises, and meditations, you may choose to substitute other exercises from that category in their place. The Appendix includes many more exercises than are listed in each session.

Opening

This is a short, powerful activity to bring students into the space to get them focused. Usually, it includes a meditation of between 30 seconds and 2 minutes, and an overview of the day.

Warm-ups

Warm-ups can include group bonding games or short simple theater, dance or choreography exercises. The main purpose of the warm-up is to create the optimal environment in which to do the focus activity or activities to follow. For example, if the focus activity requires high energy, the warm-up is high energy. If the focus activity requires more reflective energy, the warm-up focuses on grounding the group. If the focus activity is in partners, the warm-up activity can be in partners.

Focus Activities

This is the core part of the rehearsal and can include a combination of long meditations, group brainstorm, involved theater, dance and choreography exercises, rehearsal of previously created choreography, etc.

Debrief

A debrief is a series of questions the instructor asks the students at the end of a focus activity or the end of a rehearsal or script-writing session. The questions are meant to prompt thoughtful answers while allowing the students time to reflect on their experiences. It's an opportunity to do a deeper investigation as a group into what is happening, or what just happened, and how to find meaning in it. You may need to ask a number of questions to get the group to answer. Be patient. Keep asking. Also be open to sitting in silence sometimes to give the students time to think about their answers. Some days the focus activity, especially when it involves guided meditations followed by writing, will take the students so deep that they may have a hard time sharing right away.

Possible debrief question:

- **What just happened?**
- **How did you feel doing what we just did?**
- **Does anyone disagree with what just happened?**
- **On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable were you with what we just did? Why?**

Often, to go deeper with a debrief, you need to ask probing questions that get students to justify or describe their response in greater detail. For example, a student might witness a theatre piece by another student and say that they found it “weak.” You want to know more, “What about it did you find weak? Was there any strength to it? Could you imagine something else that might have happened to strengthen it?” This is an opportunity to expand students’ critical thinking, processing and reflective capacities.

Closing

A simple closing is introduced that will happen at every rehearsal session. The one we use is that the group gets into a circle and puts their fists into the center. The leader says “1...2...3...” and the group says “hey!” in a loud, enthusiastic voice as they raise their fists into the air. This officially ends each session. You may choose whatever closing ritual you like to mark the end of each session. The key is to do the same thing every time. Youth get attached to the ritual and it makes them feel that they are complete.

There are times when the closing includes another element before the ritual ending. We often “give props” before we do our regular “1... 2... 3... hey” thing. “Giving props” is a colloquialism for telling people what you appreciate about them. We include a number of different ways that we do this in the session outlines and journal notes.

The closing for a script-writing session can either be the same or different from the closing for the rehearsal sessions.