

KATHRYN JOHNSON

Playwriting/Theatre Workshops

MEET THE ARTIST:

Kathryn Johnson is an actress, playwright, director and arts educator. Professional theatre credits include acting, directing and teaching for South Coast Repertory Theatre; founding and administering The Pasadena Playhouse Young Actors School; acting at numerous venues throughout the southern California area, including the Odyssey Theatre and Grove Shakespeare Festival; writing and directing original children's musicals for Hollywood/Los Feliz Jewish Community Center and others; and working as an arts consultant, mentor artist and curriculum writer for the education arm of the Music Center of Los Angeles County and for Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts. She has taught theatre and playwriting classes in throughout southern California; she served as Program Director for Playwrights Project from 1988 until 2006, and most recently was one of 20 artists working with the Los Angeles Music Center investigating new ways to integrate arts training into the classroom. She earned a B.A. from University of California, Santa Barbara, and pursued graduate studies in directing and children's theatre at California State University at Fullerton.



Photo: Craig Schwartz



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ABOUT THE WORKSHOPS:

Kathryn uses playwriting and improvisation to help students of all ages realize how powerful their writing can be. Ms. Johnson uses a mix of writing and theatrical exercises to inspire active learning as students improvise dialogue and characters and write scenes or short plays based on their own discoveries. Designed to improve overall literacy and communication skills, workshops also provide students with opportunities for collaboration, critical analysis and revision. Schools may schedule workshops in which students write original plays, sharpen their verbal abilities and presentation skills, or explore elements of drama through playwriting or creative dramatics. Programs for Grades 3-12 help students develop their writing voices, revision and editing skills, written and oral language skills, collaborative skills and appreciation for live theatre. Residencies may culminate in a performance of student writing by participants or readings with professional actors.

Younger students learn to express their ideas and feelings and connect to the world and experiences that surround them while they explore basic elements of literature and playwriting through improvisation and grade appropriate writing. Using imagination and "play," the sessions teach essential dramatic elements such as sequencing, character development and dialogue as well as help students develop a positive self concept, problem-solving skills, creativity and social awareness. Sessions can be used to extend learning within specific classroom units, and may culminate in a "sharing" of favorite class activities with an audience.

BEFORE THE WORKSHOP:

- Lead a class discussion about how theatre differs from other forms of storytelling, including television and movies. How is a play different from reading a book?
- Ask students if they have seen a live performance of a play. Discuss the different plays they have seen, what they liked about the performances, and what they might have done differently if THEY were in charge of the performance.
- Discuss how many different ways we can communicate in person, and play with them a little! Use your faces to show how you are feeling; use your hands to say “goodbye; hello; I don’t know; Don’t do that!”
- Wear comfortable clothes and nametags on the first day. And be prepared to have fun.

AFTER THE WORKSHOP:

Playwriting Workshops

- Publish and bind student plays and present a copy of the classes collected works to the school library.
- Present staged readings of student work to other classes.
- Write character monologues based on historical characters.

Theatre Workshops

- Ask students to create new characters and introduce them to other “new characters” at a make believe tea party. Have at least two conversations as your “new” person.
- Lead your class on an in-class “field trip” as you pretend to guide them through long, soft grass, over jiggly jello, across the moon’s surface, and over a giant pepperoni pizza.
- Use vocabulary words as movement cues. Ask students to physicalize adjectives, pretend to be a specific noun and move like a verb.