

Leah Wright Mueller

128 ROCK HILL ROAD, CENTRE HALL, PA 16828 • 814-404-0966 • leahwmueller@gmail.com

Middle School Theatre Education Philosophy

My goal as a theatre educator is to intellectually stimulate and culturally engage students through the creation, rehearsal, study, production, and critique of theatre. Theatre education is an excellent medium to foster public speaking skills, teamwork, responsibility, and the art of story telling. By developing a trusting classroom environment with clear ground rules for respect and constant class discussion between teacher and student, I hope to engender a space where students are free to voice opinions, perform, and create.

There is a baseline curriculum that I believe to be critical to a theatre education including a brief history of theatre, script study, and actor training, and cultivating the skills needed to critically write and discuss performances. Starting with this skeletal curriculum, I build coursework, projects, and special studies around student interest. I believe that when students are given the opportunity to help shape the structure of their learning, they develop ownership and responsibility for their own education. An example of student led learning is a final play-writing project. By studying a diverse range of theatrical writing styles through prompts, improvisation (devising) and adaptation of well know stories, students will eventually write their own piece of theatre and perform it. Through this performance students discover and investigate the many roles of theatre professionals including, but not limited to acting, directing, and producing. Students are also encouraged to explore technical aspects of theatre such as set design, lighting, and sound. I also use this final performance as a platform to integrate technology, such as projections, music, and sound effects, into the curriculum. As a culmination of their course work, students watch recordings of their performances and are assigned to write self and peer reviews about the process and the final product.

My responsibilities as a teacher are to present clear guidelines and expectations for student learning, maintain a safe space to create, manage class time, provide prompt feedback, and pursue professional development. All of this can be achieved by my preparedness for class and an agreement between teacher and students that our classroom will be a positive environment. I will outline assessment criteria explicitly. Assessment will be conducted through written exams, short writing prompts recorded in student journals, and class participation. These modes of assessment allow for differentiation and a range of ways to engage with the course effectively. In my classroom the student's responsibilities include coming to class prepared, having completed any assigned tasks or readings. When assignments are complete students exhibit higher achievement and greater rates of learning. The students must also agree to respect and support each other so that everyone will feel free to speak their minds and take creative risks. This environment will be constructed through community building and focusing exercises that are used with theatre companies before rehearsals. When the teacher and students have fulfilled all responsibilities, the classroom can flourish as a forum to explore theatre and analyze and produce works of art.

Theatre education is a great contributor to creating well-rounded, confident, and active members of society. The study of theatre can open endless possibilities for cross-curricular learning, exploration of social justice issues, and generally 'connecting the dots' for students between people and places and the common stories that we all share. Arthur Miller said "the theatre is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental. It's so much like life." Theatre is a rehearsal of, gateway to, and exploration of life that will enrich students in a profound way.