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Theatre for Young People

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THE BIG LEAGUE

THE BIG LEAGUE

BY **JAMES DURHAM**

MAINSTAGE JAN. 31-FEB. 24, 2011

STUDY GUIDE

STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN BY **AMY LEE**
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PHOTO FEATURES BENTON KENNEDY



LIVE THEATRE IS AN ACTIVE EXPERIENCE!

GROUND RULES:

As members of the audience, you play an important part in the success of a theatrical performance. Please review the following theatre rules with your students prior to your LKTYP visit.

- Food, drinks, candy and gum are not permitted in the theatre.
- LKTYP is a nut-free zone. Many children have severe life-threatening allergies; NO PEANUTS or NUT products may be brought to our theatre.
- No electronic devices are permitted in the theatre because they affect our sound system. Photography, audio and video recording during a performance is prohibited by the Canadian Theatre Agreement.
- Students are not permitted to leave the theatre unless they are accompanied by an adult.

THEATRE IS A TWO-WAY EXCHANGE:

Actors are thrilled when the audience is engaged and responsive. We want you to laugh, cheer, clap and really enjoy your time at the theatre. However, please be considerate audience members. Talking, whispering and excessive movement during a live performance is distracting for the actors, and disruptive for other audience members.

Enhance your visit by encouraging your students to look at different aspects of the production. Before the show, identify tasks for your class. Have one group of students looking at the set, another listening for the music and sound effects, a third watching the lighting and a fourth, the costumes. Compare notes after the show about what they observed. Your students will be more informed and they'll be surprised by how much they noticed. Ask them to be prepared with one question for the actors after the show. Brainstorm with them about possible topics to get the most out of the experience!

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THE STUDY GUIDE

THEMATIC OVERVIEW

TOMMY: I just wanna have fun and play hockey. My Dad really really wants me to make this team and so do I, but when he's screaming at me all the time like "you can do better than", it doesn't help me, it takes all the fun out of it, and it makes me play badly.

TOMMY: Remember when I was little...we were a team, I just played, and you just watched...it was fun: there was no yelling, no screaming, no cheap shots...

In October 2010, Hockey Calgary made it mandatory for all parents and coaches of children who play hockey to take a "Respect in Sport" course. The program is designed to encourage "positive sport behaviours" in parents and to ensure the safety of children. If parents do not complete the course, their children will not be allowed to go to practice, play in games, or participate in team activities.

The ideas behind this program relate directly to the themes and situations we see in *The Big League*. In the play we witness how **competition** puts a strain on the relationship between Tommy, a minor hockey player, and his father Ian, who wants him to do as well as possible. We see the journey from when Tommy is young and he and Ian have fun playing hockey to when he gets older and Ian starts to push his son to take the game more seriously, which takes some of the fun out of it for Tommy. Tommy also discovers that the **competition** strains his relationship with his friends on and off the ice. He must work hard to figure out how to find the right balance between keeping his father happy and still enjoying his own experience with hockey and with his friends.

In this study guide, students will be asked to consider what **respect** in sport means to them, how to examine their own **values** and how to figure out what fair play is. In practice, they will experience exercises and teamwork building while learning to work with others who may have different ways of solving problems.

The culminating activities in this guide offer students the opportunity to participate in a dynamic debate on an important topic, discovering how to formulate and convey opinions and look at different sides of a problem. Students are also encouraged to evaluate their theatre-going experience using Jon Kaplan's article on page 16 as guide to play reviewing.

This year, LKTYP's season is examining friendship, bullying and the need to belong. *The Big League* is a fun-filled, thought-provoking play that will prompt students to consider these themes in a meaningful way.

STRANDS AND CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: Health and Physical Education: Living Skills, Music



CHARACTER EDUCATION CONNECTIONS: Perseverance, Kindness & Caring, Cooperation



THEMES: Pressure to Win, **Sportsmanship**, Being true to yourself

In addition to DRAMA **A** and LANGUAGE ARTS **L**, *The Big League* directly relates to student development in the areas of:



HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION: Living skills.



MUSIC

THE COMPANY

THE CAST

Deke/Ron McKleen	Matt Bois
Ian/Don Berry	Mark McGrinder
Tommy	Simon Rainville
Bobby	Tamila Zaslavsky

CREATIVE TEAM

Written by	James Durham
Director	Mary Ellen MacLean
Set/Costume Designer	Jung-Hye Kim
Lighting Designer	Rebecca Picherack
Sound Designer	Lyon Smith
Assistant Director	Stephen Colella
Stage Manager	Andrea Schurman
Assistant Stage Manager	Sarah Bustard

SYNOPSIS

Tommy loves playing hockey with his friends – Roy “Deke” Mahovlich and Roberta “Bobby” Plante – but his Dad pressures him to up his game and moves him to a “better” team. Does friendship get benched when the **competition** heats up between teammates? While his Dad is yelling, Tommy gets conflicting advice from Don Berry and Ron McKleen. LKTYP’s Mainstage is transformed into a hockey arena, complete with actors on rollerblades, in a unique production that cleverly stickhandles Canada’s national pastime.

GLOSSARY

The words in the Glossary appear in pink throughout the study guide.

Values: The worth, usefulness or importance of a thing.

Sportsmanship: Athletes who display fair and generous behaviour in sport.

Peer Pressure: Our friends’ influence on changing our attitudes, **values** or behaviour.

Parental Pressure: Our parents’ influence on changing our attitudes, **values** or behaviour.

Competition: A contest between individuals or groups towards a goal that cannot be shared.

Respect: Positive feelings and actions of high regard towards a person or a thing.

INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT: JAMES DURHAM

What inspired you to write *The Big League*?

I wanted to be the best father that I could be for my son. I wanted him to do his best in whatever activity he chose to do, but more than that I wanted him to enjoy himself.

As a parent, have you ever seen or experienced a relationship similar to Tommy and Dad’s?

I have seen this kind of relationship many times between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, at the rink, at the soccer field, and at the dance studio.

Did you play sports when you were growing up? If so, how do you think it affected the person you are today?

I played soccer, hockey, Tae Kwon do, and I did some swimming. It taught me perseverance, because I was really little and I had to work extra hard at every sport I tried, but I really enjoyed all of it. Much later on in life, when I turned thirty, I became a serious amateur long distance runner. It's the only sport I ever really excelled at; I guess I put all that perseverance to use. Also, perseverance is absolutely essential as a playwright; writing takes time patience and a great deal of focus.

You have written plays for adult audiences as well. How was it different writing a show for young audiences?

I have written for adults, but writing for young audiences is more difficult, you have to distill everything down. The play is just as rich as a play written for an adult audience, but the quality of the writing must be more specific and more focused. Michael Miller who wrote "The Power of Harriet T!" described plays for young audiences this way: "they aren't condensed they are distilled", and so are more potent. It also has to be very entertaining, young audiences are extremely smart, savvy and exposed to all kinds of entertainment, so as a playwright you have to "bring it".

What is your favourite part of *The Big League* and why?

By far my favourite part is when Tommy says "I am a child", because the play starts to turn here. Tommy's dad is so completely unaware of how his actions have discouraged Tommy so much. Tommy bravely faces his dad and tells him how he feels, and his father listens. It's amazing what your child will say to you. I asked my son Ethan when he was learning to play hockey, "Is it all right if I yell encouraging things from the stands?" And he said no. He didn't really tell me why, he couldn't explain it because he was only four going on five at the time, but I realized something: no one at any age wants someone staring over their shoulder while they are trying to learn something.

What is the most important thing that you want people to take away from the show?

Maybe the last thing I wrote in the last question, but also that we really need to listen to each other and try to see how we are behaving. It's amazing; sport taps into our passions, and many activities do the same thing, like theatre. So when I wrote the play I thought I would combine a few of my passions and see what would happen. So be passionate, but don't let your passions carry you away.

PRE-SHOW UNITS

Curriculum Expectations: participating in these activities, students will:

- understand how their choices and behaviours affect themselves and others, and how factors in the world around them affect their own and others' health and well-being.
- demonstrate personal and interpersonal skills and the use of critical and creative thinking processes to assist them in making connections, analysing and solving problems and making decisions.
- demonstrate an understanding of factors that contribute to their personal enjoyment of being active.
- acquire knowledge and skills related to healthy living to help them interact positively with others, build healthy relationships and become effective team members.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS — ALL GRADES

- What is teamwork?
- What is the different between "negative" and "positive" peer pressure?
- How do you determine your own values and live by them?
- How does a team work together when different people on the team have different values?
- What are some of the most important rules in sports?
- Do students prefer to play team or individual sports? Why?
- Was there a time when students have felt compelled to stand up to authority (such as a teacher, parent or coach)? Why? How did it feel?
- Have students ever had to make a decision that they knew was necessary but at the same time was very difficult? Why? Explain the situation to the classmate and report to the class.

PRE-SHOW — GRADES 2-5

ACTIVITY 1.1: MOUSE, TIGER, ELEPHANT

Note: For this exercise, there should be enough room for the students to run around.



Directions:

- This exercise is like a life-size version of “Rock, Paper, Scissors.”
- Decide as a class the action and sound of a Mouse, a Tiger, and an Elephant, that everyone will practice together.
- Explain that the Elephant stomps the Tiger, the Tiger eats the Mouse, and the Mouse scares the Elephant.
- Divide the class into two teams. Decide on a home base for each team.
- Each team must form a huddle and decide on one animal that they will all be together.
- After the teams have decided, they will face off in the centre of the room and on the count of three, they will become their animal.
- The team who wins, must try to tag the people on the other team before they reach their home base.
- If someone gets tagged, they must join the other team.
- The game continues until everyone is on one team, or until they have had enough.
- Have the students discuss their reflections on the exercise.
- Was it easy for the whole team to choose one animal?
- Did a clear leader emerge on the team?
- How did it feel to leave your original team?
- Did it feel like everyone was playing fairly?

ACTIVITY 1.2: HUMAN SCULPTING

Directions:

- Ask students to think about what happens to their minds and bodies when they have fun.
- Have the students find a partner and choose one person to be A and the other to be B.
- A will begin “sculpting” B’s body to show what “having fun” looks like. For facial expressions, A can have B mirror his/her expressions.
- When they have finished their sculptures, all of the A’s can walk around the room and look at all of the sculptures and discuss the different interpretations of having fun.
- Ask A and B to switch so that B is sculpting A and repeat the previous activities.
- Now ask the students to think about what happens to their minds and bodies when they are feeling pressure.
- Have B return to his/her “having fun” sculpture and then ask the A’s to alter the sculpture to show what “feeling pressure” looks like.
- When they are finished, ask the A’s to walk around and look at the different sculptures and discuss what they see.
- Ask A and B to switch and repeat the exercise.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY: REFLECTIONS ON PRESSURE

Directions:

- Ask the students to write a journal entry about a time when something that was fun turned into something that made them feel pressure.
- Students may choose whether or not they would like to share their experiences and reflections.

PRE-SHOW — GRADES 6-8

ACTIVITY 1.1: HUMAN KNOT

Directions:

- Have the students stand in a circle and then walk towards each other, making the circle smaller.
- Ask each student to find two different students’ hands to hold on to (they should not hold the hand of the person standing next to them).
- The students will find themselves in a “human knot” which they must try to untangle, all working together.
- Once they have untangled themselves, have them repeat the exercise.

Further Extension:

Have one person outside the circle telling people how to untangle themselves.

- How easy or difficult was it to untangle the knot?
- Did everyone feel that their opinion was being valued?
- Did everyone work together as a team?
- How did it feel to have one person directing the group?

Note: You may divide the class so that each circle has no more than 12 students.

ACTIVITY 1.2: PRIORITY OF VALUES

Directions:

- Ask students to number the following in the order of importance to them:

Winning a game	_____
Physical well being	_____
Being a good friend	_____
Having fun	_____
Trying your best	_____
Doing well in school	_____
Pleasing your parents	_____

CULMINATING ACTIVITY: CODE OF VALUES

Directions:

- Lead the students in a discussion of what **values** are important to them as a class. After determining the **values** that are prominent for the group, lead them in creating a “Code of **Values**” for the class and post it in the classroom.

POST-SHOW UNITS

Curriculum Expectations: By participating in these activities, students will:

- use elements of design in art work to communicate ideas, messages and understandings.
- generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience.
- make judgements and draw conclusions about the ideas and information in text.
- demonstrate an understanding of appropriate speaking behaviour.
- demonstrate an understanding of appropriate listening behaviour by adapting active listening strategies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS — ALL GRADES

- What purpose do you think Don and Ron, the commentators, served for Tommy?
- In hockey is it more important to have fun or to win?
- What is the difference between a “Cheap Shot” and a “Fair Hit”?
- If you are talented at something, does that mean you should make that thing your career?
- How do you talk to a parent about something they are doing that makes you uncomfortable? How can you tell them while still making sure that they know you **respect** them?
- If something is not illegal, how much should you use it (in regards to dirty play)?
- Why is Tommy conflicted?
- What does Tommy learn by the end of the play?
- At the end of the play are Tommy’s problems resolved? Why or why not?

POST-SHOW UNIT — GRADES 2-5

ACTIVITY: CREATE YOUR OWN HOCKEY TEAM

Directions:

- Tell the students that they each have the opportunity to create their own hockey team.
- Have them choose a name for their team.
Using the picture provided on page 8, have students design a jersey for their team, which should include their team logo.
- Have students create a set of **values** for their team.
- Ask each student to present their team to the class.

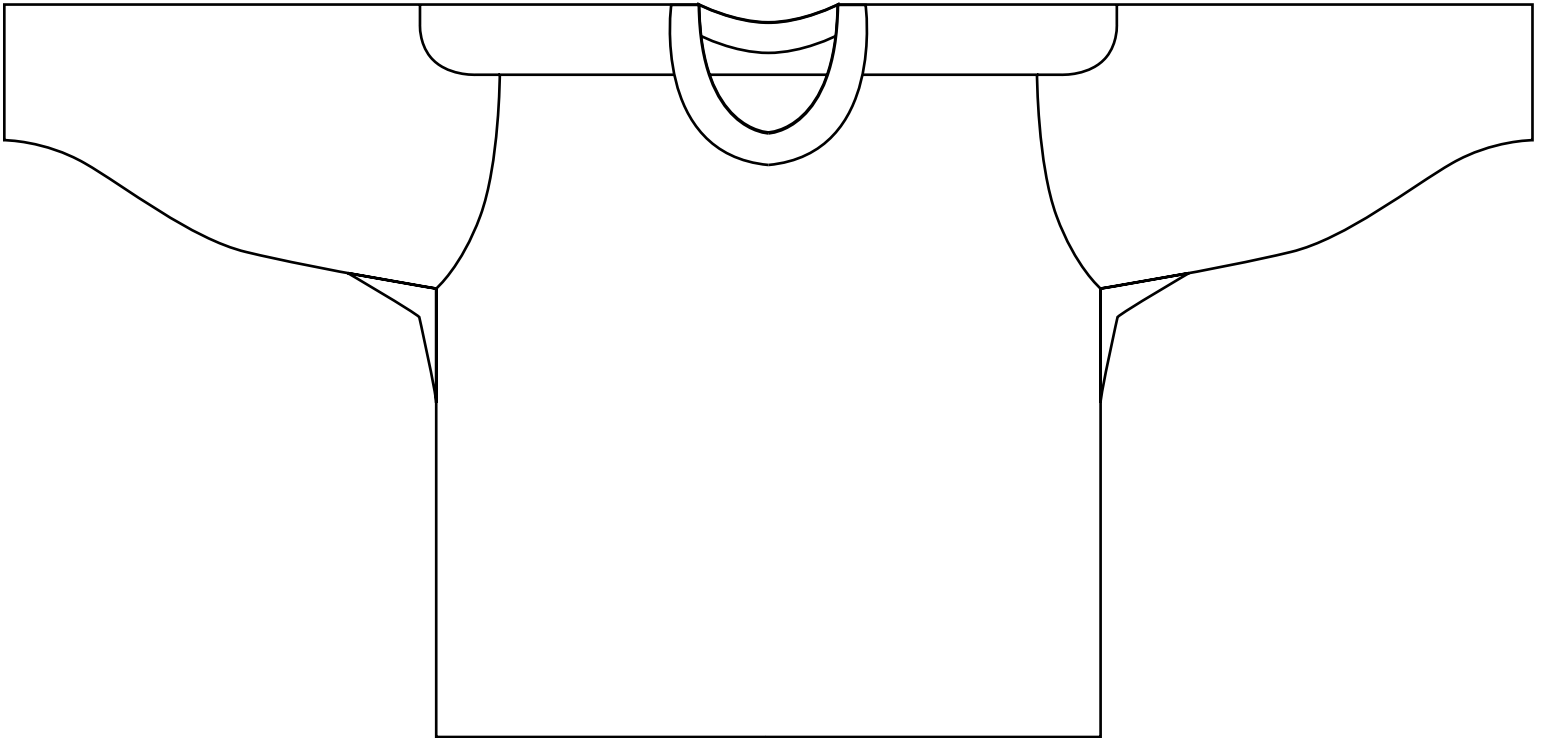
CULMINATING ACTIVITY: CREATIVE WRITING

In *The Big League*, Tommy, Deke, and Bobby sing about their passion: Hockey.

Directions:

- Divide the class into groups of four.
- Ask them to find something in common that they are all passionate about.
- Have them collaboratively write a poem about their passion.
- If they want to, students can add a tune to make it a song.
- Have each group present their song or poem to the class.

CREATE YOUR OWN HOCKEY TEAM TEMPLATE



POST-SHOW UNIT — GRADES 6-8

ACTIVITY: PARENTAL PRESSURE

Tommy: As I got older my Dad wanted me to be the best player that I could be, and so did I, we were like a team.

We played hockey together all the time. Hockey was all fun. But as I got older my Dad started to change: he got way more serious about the game.

Directions:

- Have the students think about **parental pressure**.
- Using the template on page 9, ask students to write down the answers to the following questions in the appropriate column: What can be positive about it? What can be negative about it?
- Ask the students to discuss the positive aspects and negative aspects of **parental pressure**.

PARENTAL PRESSURE	
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE

CULMINATING ACTIVITY: THE BIG DEBATE

Have students read the article on page 10 about Calgary's "Respect in Sport" requirement and organize a classroom debate.

Directions:

- Have students research elements of debating.
- Next have them create a one-sentence motion in order to debate the following points:
 - a. It should be mandatory for Parents and Coaches to complete a "Respect in Sport" course
 - b. Parents and Coaches should not have to take a "Respect in Sport" course in order for their kids/team to play hockey (either one of the points could form the motion.)
- Divide students into two groups.
- One group will argue in favour of the motion and the other group will argue against the motion.
- Invite another class to the debate to act as a group of jurors.

Extension:

Apply this debating model to other subject areas. A debate is a great way to get students involved and engage their critical thinking and verbal skills.

HOCKEY PARENTS FACE RESPECT COURSE DEADLINE

CBC NEWS OCTOBER 15, 2010

Calgary minor hockey coaches might be the ones in the penalty box, if parents fail to complete an online course by midnight Friday.

Respect in Sport is designed to encourage “positive sport behaviours” in parents and to ensure the safety of children, according to its website. No certificate of completion means no practice, no games and no team activities for the hockey player.

But it’s not just the player who will suffer if he or she skates without parental certification – coaches who play kids who haven’t been cleared will face automatic suspension.

Claude Vilgrain, a former NHL player who now coaches an AAA midget girls team, is in a conundrum. As of Thursday afternoon, three of his top players hadn’t been cleared to play in the team’s first game of the season on Saturday.

“In a sense [a suspension would be] fair, because it’s my team. I manage a team and everyone is expected to do it,” said Vilgrain.

Perry Cavanagh, president of Hockey Calgary, said it’s unfortunate if some coaches are caught in the middle of a parent’s refusal to take the course, but the rules will be strictly enforced on players.

“Their eligibility is revoked until their parents provide a certification number,” Cavanagh said.

He said he believes Calgary to be the first minor hockey system in North America to make a **Respect** in Sport course mandatory for parents.

Cavanagh said that as of Thursday, about 80 per cent of Hockey Calgary’s registered players had **Respect** in Sport-certified parents.

Hockey Calgary oversees 15,000 young hockey players in Calgary. Last year, the organization offered the course on a voluntary basis.

REVIEWING A PLAY

JON KAPLAN’S INTRODUCTION TO STUDENT REVIEWERS

Theatre is, for me, an art form that tells me something about myself or gets me thinking about the world in which I live.

Whether going to the theatre as a reviewer or simply an audience member, I think that watching a play is an emotional experience and not just an intellectual one. I always let a show wash over me, letting it touch my feelings, and only later, after the show, do I try to analyze those feelings.

That’s when I start to think about some of the basic questions you ask when you’re writing a review – what did I see (story, characters, themes); how did I respond to what I saw; what parts of the production (script, performances, direction, design and possibly other elements) made me feel and think what I did; why was I supposed to respond in that fashion?

When you go to the theatre to review, take a few notes during a show if you feel comfortable doing so, but don’t spend your time writing the review during the show; you’ll miss what’s happening onstage.

Writing a review doesn’t mean providing a plot summary. That’s only part of the job; you have to discuss your reaction to what you saw and try to explore some of the reasons for that reaction.

I don’t believe that there’s any such thing as a totally objective piece of criticism. We are all individuals, bringing our own backgrounds, experiences and beliefs to a production. In some fashion, every one of us sitting in the theatre is a critic, no matter whether we’re writing a review or not; we all react to and form judgments about what we see on the stage.

When I go to a production, I always keep in mind that the people involved in putting it on have worked long and hard – weeks, months, sometimes years – getting it onto the stage. Even if I have problems with the result, it’s important to **respect** the efforts that went into the show.

Jon Kaplan is senior theatre writer at NOW Magazine, where he’s worked for the past 30 years.

READING LIST PROVIDED BY THE TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY



The Big League

THEMES:

Pressure to Win, **Sportsmanship**, Being true to yourself.

BOOKS:

Boost by Kathy Mackel Dial Books, 2008 (for grades 6-9)

A Different Game by Sylvia Olsen Orca , 2010

The Extreme Team: Roller Hockey Rumble by Stephanie Peters Little Brown and Company, 2004

Nothing but Net by Paul Mantell Little Brown and Company, 2003

Interference by Lorna Schultz Nicholson J. Lorimer, 2004

SOURCES

Fitzgerald, Heather, Howell, Tom, and Robert Pontisso, eds. Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd Edition. Toronto:

Oxford University Press, 2006.

CBC news. "Hockey Parents Face Respect Course Deadline." CBC News . 15 Oct 2010. CBC News. 3 Dec

2010. < [http://www.cbc.ca/canada/calgary/story/2010/10/15/calgary-minor-hockey-parents-respect-](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/calgary/story/2010/10/15/calgary-minor-hockey-parents-respect-course.html#ixzzl6tc3Jriz)

[course.html#ixzzl6tc3Jriz](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/calgary/story/2010/10/15/calgary-minor-hockey-parents-respect-course.html#ixzzl6tc3Jriz) >.

Arts Impact: Making a difference in the lives of students

LKTYP is proud to have **Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life** as lead sponsors for its Arts Impact programme, which provides opportunities for schools in low-income areas of Toronto to participate in quality arts education. Arts Impact's goal is to deepen students' understanding of theatre, allowing them to be inspired by the material presented on stage and to think in ways that challenge their own perceptions.



Connections: Addressing the pattern of poverty

There is empirical evidence that children who live in poverty are at greater risk of dropping out of school. Studies have also proven that exposure to the arts improves scholastic ability and attendance. Thanks to the generosity of **CIBC Children's Foundation**, LKTYP can offer special subsidized tickets to qualifying schools.



CIBC Children's Foundation



Allen MacInnis
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

LORRAINE KIMSA THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

(formerly Young Peoples Theatre) is the largest Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) company in Canada and a significant institution in the Canadian professional theatre community. Over our 45-year history we have produced many of the most important works that now form the canon of plays for young audiences in this country. At the heart of founder Susan Rubes'

idea for Young Peoples Theatre (YPT) was a belief that children deserve a theatre of their own – with resources and standards no lesser than those for adults. She believed – as we do today – that young people deserve good theatre because theatre is good for young people.

Through the communal experience of the theatre we create for them, children can receive indications of what is important, funny, trivial; positive, negative, wrong, right, rightish, wrongish; frightening, reassuring, empowering, unavoidable; familiar, new, eternal ... We strongly believe that even through the most playful of plays, we are speaking powerfully to children about the community and the world in which they live.

Therefore, at the centre of the artistic policy of LKTYP is a desire to have a positive and lasting impact on the emotional, social, and intellectual development of young people. We want children

to be imprinted with experiences that will increase their access to the world, in order for them to grow into the unique and wonderful people they were born to be. To do this, our programming is drawn from the world classics of children's stories, from contemporary works, from the new plays we develop, and from productions showcasing the most innovative and accomplished theatre for young audiences by other Canadian and international theatre companies.

At LKTYP, because we are serious about child development through theatre art, children can experience our work as either audience members or theatre creators. We extend the learning opportunities of our professional productions through our substantial Education & Participation Department. The Department's services for teachers and students helps connect curriculum objectives and learning outcomes to the content of our professional productions; its Community Participation projects link our theatre skill with the educational aspirations of partners who are dedicated to the growth of young people; our interest-based Drama School offers young people the chance to engage deeply in the excitement of theatre art; and our Community Volunteer programme offers everyone who wants it, the opportunity to participate in the mission of LKTYP.

LKTYP is not only a professional theatre for young audiences but a vital community-based centre of arts education.

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ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO



The Ontario Arts Council and the Ontario Trillium Foundation are agencies of the Government of Ontario.