

# ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY

## STUDY GUIDE: Students & Educators

World Premiere Musical

## KIMBERLY AKIMBO

Book & lyrics by **David Lindsay-Abaire**

Music by **Jeanine Tesori**

Based on the play by

**David Lindsay-Abaire**

Choreographed by **Danny Mefford**

Directed by **Jessica Stone**

**Mary McCann**

School Executive Director

**Heather Baird**

Director of Education

**Tyler Easter**

Education Manager



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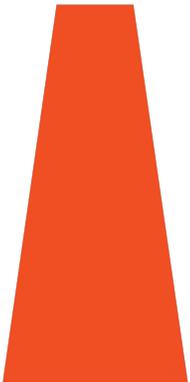
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# SECTION I: THE PLAY

Synopsis

Themes



# SYNOPSIS

Kim is a bright and funny Jersey teen, who happens to look like a 72-year-old lady. And yet her aging disease may be the least of her problems. Forced to maneuver family secrets, borderline personalities, and possible felony charges, Kim is determined to find happiness in a world where not even time is on her side.

# THEMES

Family dynamics/dysfunction

Love

Chronic illness/disability

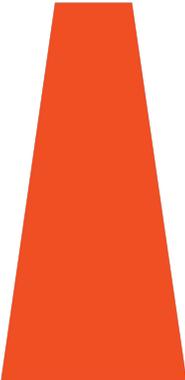
Loss

Dark humor/black comedy

# SECTION II: CREATIVE TEAM

Creative Biographies

Characters/Cast List



# CREATIVE BIOGRAPHIES



**DAVID LINDSAY-ABAIRE** (*book*) is a playwright, screenwriter, lyricist, and librettist. His play *Rabbit Hole* premiered on Broadway at MTC and received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, five Tony nominations, and the Spirit of America Award. His *Good People* was awarded the NY Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play, The Horton Foote Prize, The Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award, and two Tony nominations. David also wrote the book and lyrics for *Shrek the Musical* (Jeanine Tesori, composer), which was nominated for eight Tonys, four Oliviers, a Grammy, and earned him the Kleban Prize as America's most promising musical theatre lyricist. David's other plays include *Ripcord*, *Fuddy Meers*, *Kimberly Akimbo*, *Wonder of the World*, and *A Devil Inside*, among others. David's screen credits include his film adaptations of *Rabbit Hole*, *The Family Fang*, and *Rise of the Guardians*, among others. He is also, along with Tanya Barfield, Co-Director of the Playwriting Program at the Juilliard School.



**JEANINE TESORI** (*music*) is a composer of musical theater, opera, television, and film. She won the Tony Award for Best Score (with bookwriter & lyricist, Lisa Kron) for the musical *Fun Home*. Her other musicals include *Caroline, or Change* (with Tony Kushner), *Shrek the Musical* (with David Lindsay-Abaire), *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (with Dick Scanlan), *Violet* (with Brian Crawley), and *Soft Power* (with David Henry Hwang) which was her second work after *Fun Home* to be a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama. Along with Missy Mazzoli, she is one of the first women to be commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera. Her latest opera *Blue* (libretto by Tazewell Thompson) received the MCANA Award for Best New Opera. In addition to her work as a composer, Tesori is the Founding Artistic Director of New York City Center's *Encores! Off-Center* series, Supervising Vocal Producer of Steven

Spielberg's *West Side Story*, and lecturer in music at Yale University.



**JESSICA STONE** (*director*) worked as an actress on and off-Broadway, in television, and in film for many (many) years before transitioning to directing. That pivot started in 2010 with her all male production of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. She has since been directing at theaters all over the country. Favorites include *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, *Vanity Fair*, *Ripcord*, *Arms in the Man*, and *As You Like It*. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two sons. She's delighted to be here at Atlantic Theater Company with this group of storytellers.



**DANNY MEFFORD**'s (*choreographer*) work includes *Fun Home* (Tony Award, Best Musical), *Dear Evan Hansen* (Tony and Olivier Award, Best Musical), *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, and *The Bridges of Madison County*. Off-Broadway and other: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love's Labour's Lost* (Shakespeare in the Park), *Miss You Like Hell* and *February House* (The Public), *Good Person of Szechwan*, an international tour of *The Sound of Music*, *Pump Boys and Dinettes* (Encores! Off-Center), *Melancholy Play*, and *Dance Dance Revolution*. Danny's choreography can be seen on TV in "Dickinson" (Apple+) and "Rise" (NBC). He is a Drama Desk, Astaire, and Lucille Lortel Award nominee. Directing: *The Fitzgeralds of St. Paul*, *Becoming Liv Ullman* (NY Fringe), and *Wasted* (Ars Nova). MFA in Acting: Brown/Trinity Rep.

**CHRIS FENWICK** (*music director*) most recently music directed the Public Theater's production of *Soft Power* (Pulitzer finalist). He music supervised the Broadway revival of *Once On This Island* (Tony Award, Best Revival) and music directed the Broadway revival of *Sunday in the Park With George*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal. He music directed the Public Theater and Broadway productions of *Fun Home* (Tony Award, Best Musical;

Pulitzer finalist); music supervisor of the national tour and London production. He was the founding music director of City Center Encores! Off-Center. Chris music directed the original productions of Michael John LaChiusa's *Giant*, *Los Otros*, *Queen of the Mist*, and *See What I Wanna See*. Music director for Patti LuPone at Carnegie Hall and more. Film: Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story*.

## CHARACTERS/CAST LIST



**STEVEN BOYER**  
Buddy



**VICTORIA CLARK**  
Kimberly



**JUSTIN COOLEY**  
Seth



**OLIVIA ELEASE HARDY**  
Delia



**FERNELL HOGAN II**  
Martin



**MICHAEL ISKANDER**  
Aaron



**ALLI MAUZEY**  
Pattie



**BONNIE MILLIGAN**  
Debra



**NINA WHITE**  
Teresa

## BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT REHEARSAL

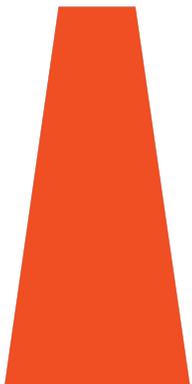


# SECTION III: YOUR STUDENTS AS AUDIENCE

Theater Vocabulary

Vocabulary from *Kimberly Akimbo*

Satire & Black Comedy



# THEATER VOCABULARY

## TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To be able to discuss theater through a common, shared vocabulary.

## STUDENT GOAL

To understand that the most effective way to discuss theater and new ideas is through a shared vocabulary.

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**ACTION:** *The events that move along the story of the play and which influence the characters within the play.*

**CHARACTERS:** *Individuals the audience learns about from their actions and reactions.*

**ENSEMBLE:** *A group of performers working together to create a complete production.*

**DIALOGUE:** *The exchange of speech between two characters which reveals the feelings of the character as well as the story of the play.*

**MONOLOGUE:** *A speech by one actor on stage, which is intended to reveal the inner thoughts of the character the actor plays.*

**CHARACTER ARC:** *The change produced in a character by the events and other characters in the play.*

**MUSICAL THEATER:** *A twentieth century creation where writers and musicians collaborate to create a play which features song, dance and drama.*

**MOOD:** *The overall feeling the play evokes.*

**COSTUME:** *The clothes, boots, etc., worn by the actors based on their character.*

**PROP:** *Objects used by an actor to enhance their character. For example, wine glasses at a bar for drinks.*

**SET:** *The constructed environment of a play within which the action takes place.*

**SOUND:** *Noises and music used in the play.*

# VOCABULARY FROM *KIMBERLY AKIMBO*

## TEACHER OBJECTIVE

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**ANAGRAM:** *A word, phrase, or name formed by rearranging the letters of another, such as cinema, formed from iceman.*

**BEGRUDGE:** *Envy (someone) the possession or enjoyment of (something).*

**GLAUCOMA:** *A condition of increased pressure within the eyeball, causing gradual loss of sight.*

**PROGERIA:** *A rare syndrome in children characterized by physical signs and symptoms suggestive of premature old age.*

**TOURETTE SYNDROME:** *A disorder that involves repetitive movements or unwanted sounds (tics) that can't be easily controlled. For instance, you might repeatedly blink your eyes, shrug your shoulders or blurt out unusual sounds or offensive words.*

# SATIRE & BLACK COMEDY

From Britannica:

Black humor: In literature, drama, and film, grotesque or morbid humor used to express the absurdity, insensitivity, paradox, and cruelty of the modern world. Ordinary characters or situations are usually exaggerated far beyond the limits of normal satire or irony. Black humor uses devices often associated with tragedy and is sometimes equated with tragic farce. For example, Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove*; or, *How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1963) is a terrifying comic treatment of the circumstances surrounding the dropping of an atom bomb, while Jules Feiffer's comedy *Little Murders* (1965) is a delineation of the horrors of modern urban life, focusing particularly on random assassinations. The novels of such writers as Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Joseph Heller, and Philip Roth contain elements of black humor.

*Kimberly Akimbo* is described as a “shrewd satire,” and a black comedy. Satire, as defined by Oxford dictionary, is “the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices...” In the case of this play, the titular Kimberly is suffering from a rare, fictional disease (similar to progeria, a real world genetic disorder) that causes her body to age four times faster than average, with a life expectancy of sixteen. In spite of this bleak outlook, and in the face of a seriously dysfunctional family unit, Kimberly (and the musical) approach the disease and the circumstances of the characters' lives with a sharp wit. The play uses humor to tell what could otherwise be a tragic story.

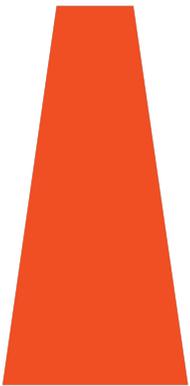
There are many theories about why black comedy, sometimes called black humor, or “gallows humor” works—Why people find it funny, why it used, and to what effect. Sigmund Freud, the famed neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis suggested that people use comedy as a coping mechanism for considerable stress. He theorized that this type of humor is an outlet for people to express aggressive impulses.

In Antonin Obrldik's “Gallows Humor- A Sociological Phenomenon,” Obrldik claims that this type of humor serves a social purpose, increasing morale among the oppressed. He suggests that this type of humor chips away at the forces it is directed against.

In *Kimberly Akimbo*, there are many oppressive forces at play: Family dysfunction, alcoholism, chronic illness, and criminality. In the musical, notice how humor opens new pathways to understanding these characters, how it might increase morale amongst the characters and the audience, and in what ways it might begin to dismantle the fear associated with the negative forces at play.

# SECTION IV: YOUR STUDENTS AS ACTORS

Reading a Scene for Understanding  
The Atlantic Technique Exercise  
Scene Analysis Worksheet



# READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

## TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To introduce the Practical Aesthetics “tools” for breaking down a scene. To understand the character and the story of the scene by relating the character’s actions to the student’s own life.

## STUDENT GOAL

To understand that an important part of creating a simple, honest character involves knowing what that character wants.

## MATERIALS

Pens, pencils, copies of the following scene from the play, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

# THE ATLANTIC TECHNIQUE EXERCISE

## STEP ONE

Divide the students in pairs. Ask the students to select which character they want to portray.

## STEP TWO

Allow the students time to read the scene silently to themselves.

## STEP THREE

Ask the students to read the Introduction to the Practical Aesthetic Introduction sheet and have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet .

***NOTE:** The four questions and the students’ answers to them form the basis for the Practical Aesthetics scene analysis; and enables the actor to create a simple, honest character. They’re simply being honest to their own experiences!*

## STEP FOUR

After the students have completed the question worksheet, ask each actor to read the scene in front of the classroom for an audience. Students should incorporate the ideas from the worksheet as they read the scene.

# SCENE FROM *KIMBERLY AKIMBO*

**BUDDY**

Hey, Kimmy! How crazy is this?! April, and it's like a Christmas card out here! You wanna make a snow angel?

**KIMBERLY**

I'd love to, but my ass is frozen to the bench.

**BUDDY**

*(chuckles)*

No joke, it's like ten degrees out here. You didn't wanna wait inside?

**KIMBERLY**

They closed at eight.

**BUDDY**

The rink closed? What time is it?

**KIMBERLY**

Ten thirty.

**BUDDY**

Already? No, that can't be right.

*(taps his watch)*

**KIMBERLY**

Where were you?

**BUDDY**

It's a good story actually. I was talking to this guy, and he bet me twenty bucks that I couldn't fit a whole mango in my mouth. And you've seen me do that, so you know he lost. Except he didn't have the twenty bucks, so he gave me this instead. *(pulls a Game Boy from his coat)* It's a Game Boy! Cool, right? I think it was his kid's but...a bet's a bet.

**KIMBERLY**

You said you'd pick me up at eight.

**BUDDY**

I know, but...I got a Game Boy, Kim.

**KIMBERLY**

You suck.

**BUDDY**

Alright, enough, let's go.

# THE ATLANTIC TECHNIQUE INTRODUCTION

## ANALYSIS

Script analysis is the process of breaking down a beat within a scene. We ask four questions in order to do this.

1. What is the character literally doing?
2. What does the character want?
3. What is the essential ACTION?
4. What is that action like to me? It is AS-IF...

**LITERAL:** In this step, the actor determines what the character he or she is playing is literally doing according to the text.

**PURPOSE:** An actor has to travel far—think of this preparation as the road map.

**WANT:** In this step, the actor identifies the goal of the character in the scene, specifically what the character wants from the other character/s in the scene. The given circumstances of the story inform the WANT.

**PURPOSE:** To focus the actor on the characters' interaction.

**ACTION:** Playing an ACTION is the physical pursuit of a goal. Defining the ACTION of the scene allows the actor to determine what result or CAP he or she is looking for from the other actor/s in the scene.

## EXAMPLES:

- *Put someone in their place / Beg someone for forgiveness / Get a favor*
- *Get someone to let me off the hook / Force someone to face the facts*
- *Inspire someone to greatness / Get someone to see the light*

**PURPOSE:** Using an action gives the actor a task and a specific point of view. The Atlantic Theater Company teaches that the Action creates character.

**AS-IF:** In this step, the actor personalizes the action by finding a real-life situation in which they would behave according to the action they have chosen for the scene.

**EXAMPLE:** *Get a favor. It's AS-IF I forgot to do my science homework and I'm asking my teacher for an extra day to hand it in.*

**PURPOSE:** To gain personal insight and urgency to the scene or beat.

**TACTICS & TOOLS:** Different ways an actor goes about getting his action.

**EXAMPLE:** *Plead, flirt, demand, inspire, challenge, level, threaten.*

**LIVING IN THE MOMENT:** Reacting impulsively to what the other actor in the scene is doing, from the point of view of the chosen action.

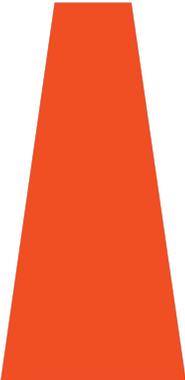
# SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

	If you're playing BUDDY	If you're playing KIMBERLY
WHAT IS MY CHARACTER LITERALLY DOING?	Buddy is literally talking to Kimberly about where he was before picking her up on this cold day in April.	Kimberly is literally talking to Buddy about how she has been waiting for him to pick her up from the rink.
WHAT DOES MY CHARACTER WANT?	Buddy wants Kimberly to celebrate his brilliant idea to make a snow angel on this freakishly cold day in April.	Kimberly wants Buddy to sincerely apologize for not showing up for her on time.
WHAT IS THE ACTION I'M GOING TO PLAY?	To get someone to join my party.	To get someone to come through for me.
THE AS-IF...	It is as if I'm asking my sister to agree to come with me to a concert that I know she'll have a great time at.	It's as if I'm asking a friend to make a promise to show up for an opening night performance that means a lot me.

# SECTION V | YOUR STUDENTS AS ARTISTS

Post Theater Creative Response Activity  
Common Core & DOE Theater Blueprint



# POST THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITY

## Developing a Personal Creative Response

### TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To develop critical thinking skills through examining a recurring idea in *Kimberly Akimbo* and relating that to an individual creative response.

### STUDENT GOAL

To examine a storytelling method from *Kimberly Akimbo* and to relate their own experience to the truths and messages of the play, resulting in their own creative response.

Several of the characters in *Kimberly Akimbo* are in the process of recording video messages they intend to share one day with Kimberly's new baby sister. The characters grapple with what parts of their legacy and what wisdom they've acquired that they'd like to share. Kimberly shares the wonders of the world she's experiencing, while her mother, Pattie, mostly recounts the perceived tragedies of her life. Pattie is a hypochondriac who believes she will soon die—Kimberly, because of her illness, very likely will pass away before her new sister is old enough to get to know her. The two characters intend to leave a very different type of legacy for the new baby to inherit.

### MATERIALS

Pencils, pens, writing paper OR word processing software.

### STEP ONE

Discuss the impact that the circumstances beyond the characters' control plays on the characters in *Kimberly Akimbo* and how this impacts the legacy they intend to leave behind.

### STEP TWO

In this activity, imagine you are recording a final video message to someone who you might never get the chance to know before they receive it. What do you want to share with

them? Is it a story about your past? A positive experience from the present? Or something else? What legacy do you want to leave behind?

### **STEP THREE**

Ask the students to share their writings, perhaps allowing discussion of why this particular moment, experience, or story was chosen.

# COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

## ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices. For example: Theater conveys the meaning behind an individual's struggle to have his or her life or life choices validated by family, friends, community, and the broader world.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Do the direction and staging reinforce the theme of "family dysfunction" which is prevalent in *Kimberly Akimbo*?

Do you accept the concept put forward in this production of *Kimberly Akimbo* that dark humor can minimize the negative impact of an oppressive circumstance?

## STRAND BENCHMARKS

### THEATER MAKING: ACTING

Benchmark: Students increase their ability as imaginative actors while continuing to participate as collaborative ensemble members. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on and think critically about their own work.

### THEATER MAKING: PLAYWRITING/PLAY MAKING

Benchmark: Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.

### DEVELOPING THEATER LITERACY

Benchmark: Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.

### MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THEATER

Benchmark: Students demonstrate a capacity for deep personal connection to theater and a realization of the meaning and messages of theater.

### WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Benchmark: Students invigorate and broaden their understanding of theater through collaborative partnerships with theater professionals.

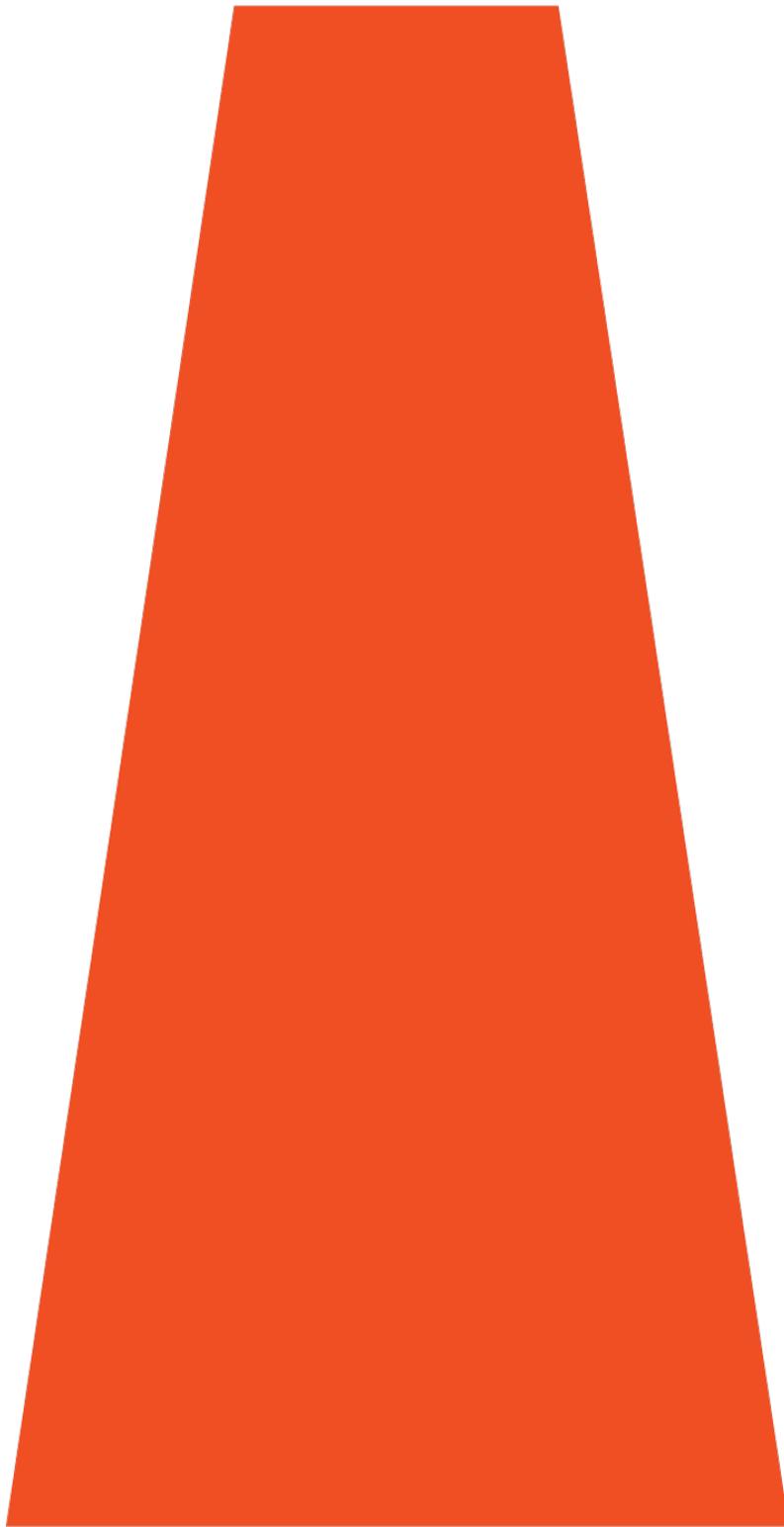
# SECTION VI | THE ATLANTIC LEGACY

## Atlantic Theater Company & Atlantic Acting School

At Atlantic, our aim is singular—to empower simple and honest storytelling that fosters greater understanding of our shared world. We are a family of artists dedicated to exploring essential truths onstage, be it a show at Atlantic Theater Company or a class at Atlantic Acting School. As a producer, presenter, and educator of theater, we are driven by the belief that theater can challenge and transform our ways of thinking and urge us to reflect on our role in society. From our Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning productions to our community-based education programs, we are committed to uncovering and celebrating the stories of our varied human existence.

Founded as an ensemble of impassioned artists in 1985, Atlantic Theater Company has grown into a powerhouse Off-Broadway company. We challenge, inspire, and awaken audiences with truthful storytelling presented across our two venues, the Linda Gross Theater and the intimate Stage 2 black box. As a producer of compelling new works, we are committed to championing the stories from new and established artists alike, amplifying the voices of emerging playwrights through our deeply collaborative programs and initiatives.

At Atlantic Acting School, we equip our students with the physical, emotional, and tactical tools of acting to discover their truths, and prepare them for success beyond our doors. From our full-time and evening conservatories to our NYU Tisch studio, and our after-school and summer programs for kids and teens, our immersive, learn-by-doing approach is central to an Atlantic Acting education. We have mentored and trained outstanding artists for more than 30 years. No matter their age or background, our students learn to break through their creative comfort zones in service to bringing essential human stories to life.



**LINDA GROSS THEATER** | 336 W 20th St. New York, NY, 10011 | **ATLANTIC STAGE 2** | 330 W 16th St. New York, NY, 10011 | **OFFICES/SCHOOL** | 76 Ninth Ave., New York, NY 10011 | **ATLANTICTHEATER.ORG**