

BLOG, FEATURED

WAM at Southern Berkshire Regional School District

July 19, 2021



This Summer, thanks to the generous support of Berkshire United Way and in collaboration with our friends from Flying Cloud Institute, WAM Team Members and Teaching Artists *Tatiana (Tati) Godfrey* and *Cate Alston* led a three day creative drama workshop with eleven 3-5 grade students from Southern Berkshire Regional School District. After a disrupted school year, many of these students have fallen behind academically and socially. WAM used creative drama games and techniques to practice collaboration with the students who devised their own scenes for performance. What follows is a window into that experience:

Day 1: The Learning Curve

Tati:

Our goals for the workshop was threefold: 1) Learn and practice how to work as a team, 2) learn and play new games, 3) have fun. Creative Drama games are safe, structured ways to practice what is often referred to as "soft skills," in the business world. Active listening, sharing space, making eye contact, etc. On the whole, the games we played on this first day were successful: I pointed out some examples of behaviors that facilitated team work, we were having fun learning and playing games. Goals met!!!

"I was impressed with the boundlessness of the group's imagination and if some of them saw boundaries for their creativity, they influenced each other to think outside the box!"

- CATE ALSTON

There was one possible exception to our success, the game "How Long Do You Think a Minute Is?" This game turned out to be what is colloquially known as "a hot mess." Like the title implies, in this game each player tries to guess how long a minute is by standing in front of the group and just feeling out the end of a minute, at which point they'd yell "time," and I'd stop the stopwatch. The first student who went was only up for seven seconds, which isn't uncommon in the playing of this game. The second student called time at 52 seconds and held the closest record throughout most of the game. There were other students, however, who held space for up to 13 minutes of us all waiting for them to call "time."

I was of two thoughts on the matter: I didn't want to be a hypocrite and end a student's turn when they were actually following the rules of the game and I had to model the active listening and giving of attention that I expected from the students. Given these thoughts, I sat patiently while two separate students took up almost 30 minutes of our learning time.

Tatiana Godfrey, Para Shannon, and Flying Cloud students playing "How Long Do You Think a Minute Is?"

Cate:

Now you may be wondering "How can anyone stand up there for 13 minutes?" "Wouldn't you know that a minute is up?" "How could you let someone go on for that long?" Many of the other students began wondering (and verbalizing) these same things as time ticked on. I even found myself at one point getting nervous and antsy, though once I settled I was sure to inquire whether she felt supported by us and her classmates. Her stoicism indicated to me that she didn't care about the distractions, she was a girl on a mission. The commitment we made to this young girl to see her sense of timing through and this young girl unapologetically taking up space, has impacted me. At one point she even held her pointer finger to her lips, indicating everyone to be quiet as she took the time she needed.

We are so conditioned to shrink ourselves in order to make space for those that society has deemed deserving of that space. What I've realized through this exercise, is that it's important to share space with each other and allow others to step into the spotlight when your time is done AND there is enough space for every human being to take the time we believe we deserve, whether it be seven seconds or thirteen minutes.

"...the scenes were evidence of learning how to work with another person in a productive, creative way."

-TATIANA GODFREY

Day 2: Finding our Footing

Cate:

On the second day of camp, we wanted to reinforce the goals for the week so we began with a few games that helped balance fun and focus but the game that would help us transition into improvised scene work was called "Where Have My Fingers Been?" This is a game with a fun song and the group caught on quickly. ([song linked here](#))

Once you reach the end of the song the person to your right gives you a location and you embark on a three line scene enacted by your two pointer fingers. Some locations that stood out to me were: "The Arctic", "San Diego", and "Inside of a Trash Can" all wonderful places for fingers to be. This got the creative juices flowing so that the group could begin working on their scenes. We split them into groups of four, gave each of them a location, and they were off! Without much structure these students created full, amusing stories.

The first scene was located at an amusement park and told the story of a mother, her two children, an amusement park worker, and some hijinks that ensued. The gut wrenching conflict of this scene was that the mother lost one of her children after coming back from purchasing two caramel apples. The child ran away because her older sister told her that she was a nuisance after begging to go on the ferris wheel. There was a riveting minute of them all chasing each other and thankfully, this scene ended happily as the amusement park worker found the child and the family was reunited. The second scene told the story of a grandmother, her son, and her grandchildren, and their day camping in a cave. They used resources around them such as sticks and rocks to create a "fire", also had a riveting minute of chasing each other around, and ate candy and pie for dinner, which sounds like a camping trip I wouldn't mind being on!

I was impressed with the boundlessness of the group's imagination and if some of them saw boundaries for their creativity, they influenced each other to think outside the box!

"These children used their imagination, the belief that anything is possible, to create worlds that pulled me in."

-CATE ALSTON

Day 3: Lessons Learned

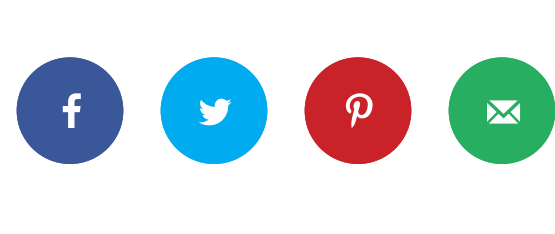
Tati:

This is one of my favorite times with students because I get to witness the pay off of the week's work. Students actively practiced the team building skills we had worked on all week by creating brand new scenes in pairs, which they then performed for the first and second graders to enthusiastic response. The first scene was a wholesome story of a family trip to the beach where the plot centered around a lost penny. Then, a scene about a disobedient daughter who intentionally ruins her mother's carrot soup. One of the most raucous scenes was about a brother and sister who are assigned to detention and then sneak away from their principal and teacher. The students in this scene played both the brother and sister and the principal and teacher. This was followed by another school scene with a child who liked to make explosions. The final scene was more experimental, and while I don't know that I could tell you what it was about, there were definitely a lot of entertaining movements and sounds. Most importantly, each student embodied the goals we'd set for the week; the scenes were evidence of learning how to work with another person in a productive, creative way.

Cate:

As an artist who is at the start of her career, it was inspiring seeing these children so uninhibited. In my personal work as an actor, the challenge that I've been facing is finding the sense of play that is so needed to enjoy the work that I'm doing. Somewhere in the years of training and preparing for a "serious acting career", I abandoned all the things that made me a unique artist because I thought the industry wanted to see a specific version of me. I lost the core of what made me fall in love with theatre in the first place – uninhibited fun. Here were these kids being creative without concerns of "good" or "bad", they were fully being themselves. There were those who were willing to try every idea, those who were unafraid of conflict and sat in discomfort, and those who guided everyone's creativity into a wonderful presentation. These children used their imagination, the belief that anything is possible, to create worlds that pulled me in. Isn't that all we're trying to do? Pull others into a world that we've imagined and ask them to enjoy themselves on the ride? I thought if I was a near-perfect actor (whatever that means), I would be celebrated and here were these kids – imperfectly celebrating each other and themselves.

Tatiana Godfrey, Cate Alston, Para Shannon, and SBRS students preparing to play a game.



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