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I Have a Story:

Plays From an Extraordinary Year

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We gratefully dedicate this anthology to Myra and Jane,
who taught us to lead with joy, to be fearless in every endeavor,
and to listen with love.

We honor Abby Bosarge, Charlie Hoover,
Eunice Rodriguez, María de Lourdes Arce, José Leonel Arce,
and all whom we have loved and lost this year.

I Have a Story: Plays From an Extraordinary Year

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Introduction

“Art ... shows exactly how it feels to live in the world right now. That’s why you do it, no matter what’s happening. You do it to understand what being alive is, to envision the world.” —Danger Zeiler and Allison Gregory

What is it like to be alive in the world, *right now*? What does it mean to be a young person living in a moment of historic upheaval? And in such a moment, how can theatre do what it does best: connect people through story to understand the world and create it anew? The plays you are about to read—plays of loneliness and laughter, loss and love, frustration and possibility and hope—are an energizing and revelatory response to *this* moment in time, but also to the larger question of what it means to be a young person. To inherit a world not of your making, but one that will shape your life—and be shaped by you. It is a collection of plays created through listening, through collaboration, through moments of shared laughter and deep sorrow. It is an offering by an extraordinary group of young and adult artists who came together to connect through story and create the world anew.

How did this come about? It took a pandemic ... but more than that, it took a seismic shift in how we communicate in our lives and on our stages ... and in how we used a “pause” to learn to listen just a little bit better. When we think back on our lives, each and every one of us will have a unique story from the pandemic. Young people, in particular, experienced monumental shifts in their lives and in their understanding of the world they will inherit. They also lost time and milestones in time—proms and homecomings, quinceañeras and bat mitzvahs, fifth grade graduations and eighth grade class trips—that can never be recaptured. And yet in the pause of the pandemic, with news stories generated every few seconds, no one seemed to be asking young people for their perspectives. We at Write Now, we who spend our lives writing *for* young audiences, felt a fundamental need to stop and listen *to* them. And so we asked ... who has a story? And thus began a profound journey of listening.

We issued an open call for young people from across the country to send us their tales from the pandemic. We received short essays, letters, poems, drawings and videos. We interviewed dozens of young people who simply wanted to talk. To process. To be heard. A handful of them were theatre folks or writers at heart, but many more were storytellers in a range of media—sketching and songwriting, video game design and Lego architecture, podcasting and journaling. We also sent a call out to TYA playwrights asking “who wants to work with a young person to tell their story for the stage?” And the response from more than thirty playwrights was a joyful and immediate “I’m in!”

The construct was as follows: the young person (now young author) was the holder of the truth of their story; the playwright would work with them to create a monologue or short scene inspired by that truth. Each team chose their own method of collaborating—some crafted stories based entirely on the words of the young author, some co-wrote scenes, and some were led by the playwright who adapted the young author’s story. It is no little irony that one of the biggest nemeses of this collection, Zoom, is also what made this project possible. Creative teams from across the country met online to share stories, to hear monologues read aloud, to comment and give feedback, and above all, to listen. This anthology is a compilation of their work, an offering out to young and adult performers alike of stories *by* young people *for* young people out of a landmark period in our lives.

The creative teams were given free rein to be as realistic or as wildly imaginative as they chose—and you will find a rich and diverse range of perspectives, styles and stories.

When we started this project, we didn’t anticipate meeting nearly so many other-worldly creatures—unicorns and monsters, wizards and apocalyptic horsemen, Olympic-medalist bunnies and mannequin heads on joy rides. Interestingly, many of these delightfully fantastical and devious stories stem from a sense of feeling overwhelmed or trapped ... by anxiety (Phoebe), fear (Braulio), loss (Anka) or peer pressure (Amity) ... and by the need to use creativity to redefine the boxes and screens in which we are trapped (Aditi, Alexis, William and Danger).

There are many reflections about the profound impact of being “socially distanced”—and stop for a moment to unpack what that truly means—on friendships, on learning, on human interactions at every level. We experience the deep frustrations of online learning from Jonah, Samantha and Jaren, as well as coffee-through-the-nose laughter at things that *simply shouldn’t be taught* on Zoom from Kira. We see friendships form online (Amari) and disintegrate online (Nathaniel and Madisyn) and sometimes just turn funny (Augusto). And from JJ we get a glimpse into the myriad of ways in which young people connected online through video games, which have truly become a center of community and creativity for their generation.

As Makenzie reminds us, the pandemic of racism has been raging on for centuries. We hear deeply moving first-hand accounts of racism from Sonii and Isabella. From Makenzie, Sofia and Ella we hear the response from young people and their determination to speak out and to fix what previous generations have so clearly broken.

Discovery of personal strength is a resounding theme throughout our stories. From scaling climbing walls with Salome and surfing the biggest waves with

Hanna, to Alexis embracing her inner quiet and Eden braving teachers and principals to speak on behalf of her class, we see young people finding their courage and their voice. And lest you still be at sea, yourself, Taos and River gift us with survival guides for this pandemic (and the next!).

While survival is at the core of each and every story, we also learn how to say goodbye. From Anaysa and Genevieve, we have moving examples of how to remember and honor those we've lost. And from Abby, we have a profound example of how we might say goodbye ourselves.

We hope that you will enjoy reading these stories, but we hope even more that you will help bring them to the stage. This intended to be a build-you-own adventure in production. There is far too much content for a single evening; pick the scenes that best fit your actors/audience in any combination you choose. Many playwrights have specific casting notes, and we respectfully ask that you honor them. We also have suggested an optional prologue in the production notes, providing an opportunity for your actors to lend their voices/experiences to the production. After all, we all have a story ...

For us, this project has been an incredible gift. It reminded us again and again of the magic in human connections and the power of theatre to connect us—in real time—through the telling of stories. We watched in sheer delight the discoveries of shared humor and shared history, the forming of new friendships and the unearthing of unknown talents, and the many celebrations of landmark moments (new babies, first days of college, new homes, graduations and more) that occurred in an incredibly short time. Most of all, we recognized over and over again the joy and relief and power that comes from fulfillment of that most fundamental of human needs ... the need to be seen.

As we write today, the pandemic is not over. There are chapters yet to be written by the virus, and by our individual and collective responses to it. There are still days, more days than we'd like, when hope feels elusive. But there are also more stories to be told ... of courage, loss, creativity, possibility and love. Always of love. As both Braulio and JJ remind us, one day the pandemic will end. And when it does, may we all be richer for the bonds we've created, the strengths we've discovered and the stories we've shared.

—Jenny Millinger and Julia Hogan Laurenson
September 2021

Jenny and Julia’s COVID Story

Once upon a time, Julia Hogan Laurenson was planning to head to New York City for the perfect summer internship. She could taste the bagels and pizza already! And then COVID hit—and she had to rethink her plans.

Once upon a time, Jenny Millinger was trying to stuff a whole thriving theatre company into a tiny box—and still make it thrive creatively.

Julia was connected with Jenny through that tiny box ... and magic happened. They spent the summer together on Zoom making a play, creating digital content, teaching and doing academic research. They had a marvelous time; however, eventually summer ended, Julia returned to school and life continued. The pandemic continued. And Jenny started wondering, “Who is listening to young people?” and “How can we bring young people’s stories to the stage?”

Suddenly she found herself editing an anthology connecting young people and playwrights. But Jenny was no longer precisely a “young person” (in years if not at heart), and she wanted to make sure that the anthology’s perspective was balanced and that the young people had a mentor/peer throughout the process. So she sent out an SOS to Julia. And Julia said, “Are you kidding me? I’m in!”

And thus the Zooming began again, along with the quick-fire exchanges, laughter and color-coded spreadsheets. It has been a tremendous joy to work on this project together. Jenny has learned so much from Julia—as a dramaturg, an editor and a friend. Julia adds that it absolutely goes both ways!

Ironically, they still have yet to meet in person. But, as they have so beautifully seen throughout this process, collaboration can happen in any space, so long as you enter it with openness, curiosity and trust.

As Jenny said to Julia at the end of her internship, “Until we work together again.”

Acknowledgments

We offer profound thanks to the “older” playwrights who voluntarily signed on to this project without knowing which story they would be assigned. You have been open and thoughtful and inventive and respectful and incredibly generous with your time and talents.

We thank the partner theatres who helped to collect stories and nominate young people for this project: Dallas Children’s Theater, First Stage, Honolulu Theatre for Youth, Imagination Stage, Northwestern University’s Imagine U at the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts, Orlando Repertory Theatre, Seesaw Theatre, Seattle Children’s Theatre and Syracuse Stage. We also thank the many teachers who nominated their students for the project, some of whom had never before attended a play! Write Now is a program of Childsplay, and the entire Childsplay ensemble has supported this project from its inception. We greatly benefited from the editing powers of Kate Justen at Dramatic Publishing. And we are eternally indebted to Linda Habjan at Dramatic Publishing, whose constant support and encouragement turned a spark of an idea into an actual collection of plays.

Most of all, we thank the young authors. You have shown phenomenal courage in telling your stories and trusting us to get them right. Thank you for your honesty, your creativity, your patience, and your willingness to challenge us to do better by you on every level. The world *is* and *will be* a better place because of you.

One Barrel at a Time

By

PHOEBE ANDERSON and TOM ARVETIS

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(ONE BARREL AT A TIME)

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One Barrel at a Time

CHARACTERS

PHOEBE: A 12-year-old girl.

MAX: A horse.

TEACHER'S VOICE

ALEXA'S VOICE

PRODUCTION NOTES: The stage directions call for a specific song by a specific recording artist. Producers must get appropriate permission to use this recording for their production. If acquiring permission is not possible, please substitute with something comparable that you have the necessary rights to use.

(A bedroom with a large window and door. A bed with horse-themed sheets. A desk with a tablet or laptop, a plastic toy horse, a plate of apple slices and a bottle of hand sanitizer. A chair with an equestrian helmet hanging from its ear. A nightstand with a lamp and an Amazon Echo. It is midmorning. The sunlight is bright and inviting.)

PHOEBE sits at the desk on a Zoom call. She wears pajama pants and a T-shirt. She is "at school."

TEACHER'S VOICE *(emanating from the laptop or tablet)*. All right, everyone. It's break time. When we come back, we'll be reading and discussing the D.H. Lawrence poem "The White Horse." In the meantime, put down your device. Go get some water, go to the bathroom and maybe step outside for a breath of fresh air. It's a beautiful day. I'm setting a timer. I'll see you back here in ten minutes.

(PHOEBE gets up from her chair, crosses to the window, opens it and takes a deep breath.)

PHOEBE. Alexa, what's the weather today?

ALEXA'S VOICE. Currently in Phoenix, it's seventy-nine degrees Fahrenheit with clear skies and sunshine. Today you can expect a high of eighty-four degrees and a low of sixty-eight degrees.

(She crosses back to the desk and picks up the toy horse.)

PHOEBE. Too bad I'm stuck inside all day.

(MAX, a horse, saunters up to the open window.)

MAX. Hey, Phoebe!

PHOEBE. Max? What are you doing here?

MAX. Oh, I was in the neigh-borhood! Whatdya say we saddle up?

PHOEBE. I can't right now. School.

MAX. Oh. Right. That's OK. Maybe after.

PHOEBE. I don't think I can.

MAX. But it's Friday! You know what that means ...

PHOEBE. Max—

MAX *(using his hands as a megaphone)*. Barrel races—!

PHOEBE. Max—

MAX. We are gonna finally stick it to that chestnut Holly. She's been talking way too much smack down at the stables. But I've been working on my canter. I think I finally figured out that third turn, and—

PHOEBE. Max!

(MAX stops, confused.)

PHOEBE *(noticeably upset)*. I can't. OK? Not today. Probably not for a while. You should just go.

MAX. But—

PHOEBE. I'm sorry, Max.

(PHOEBE closes the blinds. She crosses to the desk and puts down the toy horse, then crosses to the bed and throws herself down, dejected.)

(After a moment, there is a knock on the door.)

PHOEBE. Who is it?

MAX *(from behind the door, using a different voice)*. Leslie.

PHOEBE *(perplexed)*. Leslie?! Leslie who?

(PHOEBE opens the door and reveals MAX.)

MAX. Leslie the house and go horseback riding!

PHOEBE. Max, what are you doing?

MAX. Just foaling around.

PHOEBE. Stop.

MAX. Sorry. I'll try to rein it in.

PHOEBE. UGH! Enough with the puns.

(PHOEBE crosses back to the bed terribly annoyed.)

MAX. Too much?

PHOEBE. Yes. You're worse than my dad.

MAX. Sorry. I get carried away. Ooh. Uh ... that was not a pun, by the way. That was an idiom. Very different. Although I suppose it could be a pun. If you were the horse and I was you. And we were actually out riding. Then it would be an excellent pun. Wow, I never realized I'm an anxious talker. Can I come in?

PHOEBE. I guess so. Just don't poop on the carpet or my mom will freak.

MAX. Understood.

(MAX delightedly trots into the room and takes it all in.)

PHOEBE. Of course she'll probably freak anyway.

MAX. Wow. Your room is so nice! Love the horse posters. That one looks like my cousin Ginger.

PHOEBE. I'm not supposed to have any friends over right now.

(MAX notices the apple slices.)

MAX. Ooh. And what have we here?

PHOEBE. You can't have that.

MAX. Mm. Smells like honeycrisp. I love honeycrisp.

(PHOEBE grabs the plate of apple slices. MAX takes a step toward PHOEBE who takes a step back. This repeats a couple of times with varied tempo and should be played for laughs.)

MAX *(cont'd)*. Phoebe, this is torture.

PHOEBE. It's my snack, and we shouldn't be sharing.

MAX. That's not like you. Is everything OK?

(PHOEBE, filled with worry, begins pacing about the room.)

PHOEBE. No. I told you. I'm not supposed to have any guests. And I can't share my apple. And I can't go riding because I'm stuck inside. But since you're here and you don't have a mask on, I need to keep at least six feet away.

MAX. Mask?

PHOEBE. Yes. Six feet. That's the rule.

MAX. I don't think they make masks for horses.

The Scariest Movie

By

BRAULIO ARQUILLA and MABELLE REYNOSO

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The Scariest Movie

CHARACTERS

PACO: Soon to be 11 years old.

THE FRIEND: Horror movie character.

THE MONSTER: Horror movie character.

SETTING: Paco's home; Oct. 31, 2020; night.

(There's a couch with a coffee table and a TV. On the coffee table, there's a remote control and a giant bowl of Halloween candy. A teddy bear sits on the couch. We hear a toilet flush. PACO, dressed in his pjs, enters and makes himself comfortable on the couch with his bear. He turns on the TV to a scary movie in progress. We watch the action in the movie, and in real life, unfold. In the movie, THE FRIEND is warily walking around. We cannot see THE MONSTER.)

THE FRIEND. Bethany? Bethany, stop joking.

THE FRIEND.

PACO *(unenthusiastic)*.

This isn't funny anymore. Where
are you?

This isn't funny anymore. Where
are you?

(We hear a scream in the movie. PACO yawns.)

THE MONSTER *(offstage)*. Was that a yawn?

(THE FRIEND sees something terrifying.)

THE FRIEND. Oh no! What is that? ... What are you? ... Please don't hurt me!

(PACO sifts through the candy bowl. He begins removing Reese's peanut butter cups and makes a pile.)

THE FRIEND *(cont'd)*. Please! Don't hurt me!

(Nothing from PACO or THE MONSTER.)

THE FRIEND *(cont'd, clears throat)*. I said "PLEASE DON'T HURT ME."

THE MONSTER *(entering)*. He's not even paying attention.

THE FRIEND. Uh? What?

THE MONSTER. The kid. The kid's not even paying attention. Look at him.

THE FRIEND *(to THE MONSTER)*. Um, I think we need to stick to the script.

THE MONSTER. You making a coffee table art installation?

PACO. Oh. *(Aware of the characters talking to him.)* Are you—is it—are you talking to me?

THE MONSTER. I don't see anyone else in the room.

THE FRIEND. Um, I don't know what I'm supposed to—

THE MONSTER. Hey, kid?

PACO. Wait. You can see me?

THE MONSTER. Yeah, nice pjs. What's your name?

PACO. Um, Paco.

THE MONSTER. Paco?

PACO. Well, Francisco but everyone calls me Paco.

THE MONSTER. Something tells me you're not old enough to watch this movie. So—

PACO. What are you talking about? I've seen this movie a zillion times. My mom and I watch it every Halloween.

THE MONSTER. Sure, Paco. Well since you've seen this movie a zillion times, you know what's coming up. This is a big moment in the movie. *(To THE FRIEND.)* This is your big moment.

THE FRIEND *(to PACO)*. I don't have a big moment. I'm just The Friend.

THE MONSTER *(to THE FRIEND)*. Don't do that. Don't sell yourself short. *(To PACO.)* This guy is one of the hardest working Friends I know. He's the *best* Friend.

THE FRIEND. Thank you. I really appreciate you saying that.

PACO. Hold on. You guys are best friends? Like for real? That's cool that you guys get to be in a movie together.

THE FRIEND. Yeah. It is pretty great. I do like hanging out with this guy.

(THE FRIEND puts his arm around THE MONSTER, who is not prepared for this closeness.)

THE MONSTER. Too much.

(THE MONSTER peels THE FRIEND's arm off of him.)

PACO. I haven't been able to hang out with my best friend since forever.

THE FRIEND *(sympathetically)*. He moved away?

PACO. No. He still lives in the same house. I guess I see him on Zoom and when we play online, but it's not the same.

THE FRIEND. I don't get it.

PACO. Tell me about it. Neither do I. We used to go skateboarding at the park. I was just learning how to ollie, and since this whole thing started, my mom took my skateboard away.

THE FRIEND. Why?

PACO. Because she's afraid I'll fall and break something and that'll just lead to going to the hospital and I can't go to the hospital. Obviously.

THE FRIEND. Obviously?

THE MONSTER. Friend, a word?

(THE FRIEND and THE MONSTER sidebar. THE MONSTER whispers something.)

THE FRIEND. Oh? ... Oh! ... Ohhhhh.

(Back to PACO.)

THE FRIEND *(cont'd)*. COVID, huh? I'm sorry you're going through a hard time. Well, hopefully we can take your mind off of it. This is a pretty great scary movie if I do say so myself.

THE MONSTER. Yeah, let's get on with the show. We have a lot more plot points to get through. Paco, a little respect for the performance, huh?

PACO. Yeah, sorry.

THE MONSTER *(to THE FRIEND)*. Can you take it from "Please don't hurt me"?

THE FRIEND. As you wish.

(THE FRIEND and THE MONSTER resume their places. THE MONSTER disappears. THE FRIEND gets in position.)

THE FRIEND *(cont'd)*. Please don't—

PACO. Hold on. Wait up. There's no COVID in your movie, is there?

THE FRIEND. Uh, well, no.

PACO. So you can't get it? You can't spread it?

THE MONSTER. No and no. Can we please get on with it?

PACO *(to THE MONSTER)*. You're not in the sequel, are you?

THE MONSTER. Now what does that have to do with anything?

PACO. I'm just asking.

THE MONSTER. Technically, no. It focuses on my mother's storyline. But I'm definitely in part three!

PACO *(to THE FRIEND)*. And you're definitely not in the sequel.

An All-American Monologue Through Asian Monolids

By

SONII BORA and BARRY KORNHAUSER

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An All-American Monologue Through Asian Monolids

CHARACTERS

PERFORMER: Person of any gender who identifies as Asian.

(Deep audible breath. Then, breaking the fourth wall, directly addressing the audience, and doing so with apparent good cheer.)

PERFORMER. Three ways to make your monolids appear larger, rounder and less ... mono. *(Quickly dropping the cheerful facade, conveying instead an underlying sadness.)* ... Or three ways to prevent an anti-Asian hate crime:

Number one—

Wing your eyeliner. With just one flick of the wrist, you'll go from looking like Ling Ling to Lucy. From Chink to Chuck!

Two—

Wear prescription eyeglasses. Not only will they completely change the appearance of your eyelids, but they will also be great for keeping an eye on attackers from a cautious distance.

Three—

Wear a fun or loud outfit to distract potential attackers from the size and shape of your eyelids. But be warned, don't wear anything too skimpy now. You ever heard the slang term "yellow fever"?

Side note to my non-Asian "allies": Remember that it's OK to stand by Asians even when your roots cling to a different tree. *(While scanning the audience.)* But do you REALLY? 'Cause you see, you love our food and consume our media. But to pronounce our names—it's a bit too tricky."

You know, things were tricky for *us*, too, more than it may seem.

My parents fled to this country in hopes of finding the American dream, but they were left with the nightmare.

And quite frankly it seems as if the system never cared!

Galveston

By

ABBY BOSARGE and TONYA HAYS

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Galveston

CHARACTERS

ABBY: Female or female-identifying actor. Should be portrayed by a youthful actor. Dressed casually and should wear a hat or scarf to cover up their hair.

(Lights up on ABBY seated in a chair. The actor may stand later on as the walk down the torch-lined beach is described..)

ABBY. Since I was a little kid, the beach has always made me feel safe. It is my happy place. A place of peace. When they told me that I was going to die just days before, I thought I would never be able to go to the beach again.

Before I go on, I want people to know that I'm just an ordinary kid. Sure, I've done things and experienced things that could be considered out of the ordinary. And I recognize I've been given enormous responsibilities and burdens, but I'm handling them in the only way I know how: by staying positive, staying grateful and staying hopeful. I still love doing kid things, like going to Disney and hanging out with friends. Cancer hasn't changed any of that.

But now, I was sicker than I'd ever been. I couldn't eat, I couldn't drink, I couldn't speak. Heck, I could barely breathe without hurting. Every one of my doctors told me there was no way I'd make it out of this round of chemo alive. They told me to say my goodbyes, do my prayers and prepare to go any day. Not months. Not weeks. Days. So that's what I planned to do. I had recently lost someone very special to me with no closure ... and it was awful. I wanted to make sure none of my friends had to go through that as well.

So what better place to spend some time with a few special people than my special place, the beach? Cancer would take many things from me but not one last trip to the beach. I invited a few friends, and by few, I mean twenty. COVID-19 limited the number of people I could ask, but I was grateful to get to see anyone at all. The plan was to meet at a little spot on Galveston Beach and, with the help of the Make-a-Wish Foundation, we were able to start the celebration with a drag queen show! How awesome is that? It was one of the things on my bucket list. I thought my friends would enjoy a lighthearted performance. We planned to have a bonfire after and just spend time with each other, Or so I thought ...

Jesse the Great's Guide to Surviving a Depressing Pandemic

By

RIVER BRATTON and BRIAN GUEHRING

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(JESSE THE GREAT'S GUIDE TO SURVIVING
A DEPRESSING PANDEMIC)

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Jesse the Great's Guide to Surviving a Depressing Pandemic

CHARACTERS

The Teens:

JESSE: A brave, honest middle-schooler who has depression (uses they/them pronouns).

TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN: An unlucky middle-schooler who has bad timing, (any gender).

DALLAS and DREW: Some not so supportive “friends” (any gender).

TEEN DO RIGHT: A middle-schooler who does everything right (any gender).

AVERY and ALEX: Very supportive friends (any gender).

SIGNIFICANT OTHER: A heartbreaker (any gender).

The Adults:

MOM: Jesse’s super-supportive and engaged mother (she/her).

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR: Overwhelmed school administrator (any gender).

SETTING: Middle school and Jesse’s house.

TIME: 2020; before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHARACTER NOTES: The following characters may be doubled.

MOM and SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

DREW and SIGNIFICANT OTHER

(JESSE, a super cool middle-schooler, directly addresses the audience from their house.)

JESSE. Hey, ya’ll, my name is Jesse.

(MOM enters with a basket of laundry.)

MOM *(enthusiastically)*. Jesse the Great!

JESSE. Mom, don’t interrupt! I’m talking to the audience.

MOM. Oh, sorry. I didn’t see the audience. *(She waves to the audience.)* The audience just needs to know how you are so incredible and amazing. Jesse the Great!

JESSE (*with lots of eye rolling*). Mom.

MOM. Oh, sorry. Not another word. I'm just going to put away your clean underwear.

JESSE. MOM!

(*MOM gestures a zipping of her mouth as she puts away clothes or picks up the room.*)

JESSE (*cont'd*). As I was saying, I'm Jesse. I'm a middle-schooler. I use they/ them pronouns.

MOM. And we are so proud of them!

JESSE. I just recently came out. Luckily, I have very supportive parents. Unluckily, I have depression.

MOM. Having depression is nothing to be ashamed about. And it doesn't solely define you. You are also an amazingly creative theatre kid and good student and so silly and such a good friend ...

JESSE. MOM!

MOM. Young queer people have a much higher rate of depression than their peers.

(*JESSE shushes their mother.*)

MOM (*cont'd*). Sorry, this is your audience and your story. I'm just so proud of you. Jesse the Great!

(*MOM pantomimes zipping her lips again.*)

JESSE. I have a supportive and overinvolved mother, and I just survived fifteen months of living during the COVID pandemic.

MOM. Did you know that a national poll showed that almost half of all teens have shown signs of a new or worsening mental health condition since the beginning of the pandemic?

JESSE. MOM! Out!

(*JESSE indicates that MOM should leave. MOM tiptoes out of the room.*)

JESSE (*cont'd*). Yes, the pandemic has made mental health challenges even harder. So I am here to share with you my *Guide to Surviving a Depressing Pandemic*.

(*JESSE possibly pulls out a prop book of the guide, or projections of a fun PowerPoint go up.*)

JESSE (*cont'd*). So I'm going to show you what not to do.

(JESSE indicates R as TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN enters looking frazzled.)

JESSE (*cont'd*). And I'm going to show you what you should do.

(JESSE indicates L as TEEN DO RIGHT enters looking supported.)

JESSE (*cont'd*). Lesson number one: Don't come out of the closet right before a pandemic.

(Lights up on R where DREW and DALLAS enter next to TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN.)

TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN. So, friends, I've got something to tell you. I've been struggling with this for a while, and I really need to tell you something.

DALLAS. Of course.

DREW. What's up?

TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN. I'm gender nonbinary, which means that I don't identify as a boy or a girl. I use they/them pronouns.

(Pause. DALLAS and DREW look at each other.)

TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN (*cont'd*). So ... are we still friends? Do you have questions? What are you thinking?

(SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR enters with a mask.)

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR. Sorry. There is a new disease called COVID. Very contagious. School is shutdown. Probably just for a few weeks. I'm sure this will be over soon. But school is now closed.

(SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR rushes DREW and DALLAS off.)

TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN. Wait, what? I have to go weeks without any friends supporting me?

(TERRIBLE TIMING TEEN freezes.)

JESSE. Yeah, that's bad timing. Coming out and then going into shutdown makes you feel so isolated. It's much better for your mental health to come out when you can be surrounded by friends.

(Lights up on L where AVERY and ALEX join TEEN DO RIGHT. All are wearing masks.)

ALEX. I'm so glad school started again.

AVERY. I missed y'all.

Yearbook 2020

By

EDEN BURNETT and MAX BUSH

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(YEARBOOK 2020)

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Yearbook 2020

CHARACTERS

ALLISON: An eighth grader.

TIME: After school, Feb. 27, 2021.

PLACE: Ms. Foster's eighth-grade classroom.

PRODUCTION NOTE: Whenever there is an ellipsis [...], Ms. Foster asks a question or makes a comment, to which Allison responds.

(At opening, ALLISON stands on a bare stage in a pool of light and speaks directly to the audience, as if they are Ms. Foster, her teacher.)

ALLISON. Thank you for seeing me, Ms. Foster. May I take off my mask?

...

(Takes off her mask.)

I will. Twelve feet. Thanks.

(Puts her mask away.)

I've been thinking about this for three weeks—I even wrote down what I wanted to say because I didn't want to say anything weird. But now I don't want to read you what I wrote; I just want to talk to you. Hmm?

...

Yes, about the school canceling the yearbook. My mother—who is tired of me complaining about not having a yearbook—keeps saying to me: “You don't get what you don't ask for.”

...

I know it's not your final decision.

...

I *will* talk to the principal; but I wanted to talk to you first, to see if you would support me, I mean, us. I thought—we thought—that if you supported us, you could come with me when I go to the principal to ask if we can have a yearbook this year.

...

**Four Horsemen and a Funeral
(a eulogy in less than ten minutes)**

By

ANKA CHIORINI and JAMES STILL

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(FOUR HORSEMAN AND A FUNERAL [A EULOGY
IN LESS THAN TEN MINUTES])

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Four Horsemen and a Funeral (a eulogy in less than ten minutes)

CHARACTERS

ANNIE: A teenager.

FOUR HORSEMEN: Four friends of Annie’s who also happen to be theatre nerds.

CASTING NOTE: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which we wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever ways the play is cast, it will tell the story of a teenager and four horsemen and a funeral.

PRODUCTION NOTE: The Four Horsemen are written to be irreverent, silly, playful and fun. The writers have purposefully left room for actor invention in terms of how they might participate in Annie’s stories. Please lean into that spirit.

MUSIC NOTE: The writers suggest songs by the band AJR—but please note: permission to include AJR’s music or any other music not in the public domain needs to be secured in advance of any performance. However, don’t assume AJR wouldn’t give you permission—it never hurts to ask!

(Music plays from a phone: “OK Overture” by AJR or the pandemic-inspired “Bummerland” or maybe the chorus of “100 Bad Days”—something upbeat, catchy, witty ... something that makes you want to dance even if you don’t want to dance. Not a dirge. Tone is everything.

The FOUR HORSEMEN [teenagers] playfully dance onto the scene. Maybe they’re in the audience, maybe they’re onstage, maybe they’re on a video. They are dressed strangely, elaborately, inventively. They are all wearing masks—the pandemic kind.

ANNIE appears.

The FOUR HORSEMEN try to get ANNIE to dance with them, but she waves them away. She’s not feeling it. Yet.

The music snaps off.

The dancing reluctantly stops.

The FOUR HORSEMEN take their seats.)

ANNIE. So ... yeah ... um ... hello. I guess we should do this.

FIRST HORSEMAN. C'mon, Annie!

SECOND HORSEMAN. Woo woo woo woo!

THIRD HORSEMAN. Let her talk.

FOURTH HORSEMAN. Go ahead, Annie!

ANNIE. Right. Thanks. So. I've never done this, anything like this—I've never hosted a—a funeral before. Hosted? That makes it sound like I'm on *Saturday Night Live* or something.

SECOND HORSEMAN. "LIVE FROM NEW YORK! It's Saturday Night!!"

THIRD HORSEMAN. And now here's your host!

FOURTH HORSEMAN. Give it up for ...

ALL FOUR HORSEMEN. ANNIE!

(The FOUR HORSEMEN all applaud and cheer wildly.

ANNIE just looks at the FOUR HORSEMEN.)

ANNIE. I'm not really the hosting type.

FIRST HORSEMAN. Right on. How about "thrown"?—"I've never thrown a funeral before."

SECOND HORSEMAN. I like it.

THIRD HORSEMAN. Take it back a few lines.

ANNIE (*regrouping*). Right. Thanks. So. I've never done this, anything like this—I've never thrown a funeral before ... (*Breaks.*) Hold on. Whoever heard of throwing a funeral?

FIRST HORSEMAN. What's wrong with throwing a funeral?

ANNIE. You throw a party—not a funeral.

SECOND HORSEMAN. I thought this WAS a party.

THIRD HORSEMAN. It's a funeral, man.

FOURTH HORSEMAN. Who died?

SECOND HORSEMAN. I'm so confused.

FIRST HORSEMAN. Shhhh! Pay attention.

ANNIE. Maybe I should just forget the whole thing.

FOURTH HORSEMAN. C'mon, Annie. You just need something to break the ice, like a joke, you know, something like: "So a teenager and Four Horsemen walk into a pandemic—"

ANNIE. It's a funeral not a comedy club.

FOURTH HORSEMAN. Right.

FIRST HORSEMAN. I know, I know! "A funny thing happened on the way to the pandemic ..."

SECOND HORSEMAN. Wait wait! I've got it—this is the one, this is it:

“Hello. My name is Annie, and I am a—

ANNIE. Woah, woah, woah! How about just: “Thanks for coming to the funeral.”

FIRST HORSEMAN. Lame!

SECOND HORSEMAN. I like my idea better.

ANNIE. Whatever! I asked you here today so that we could mourn the loss of my freshman and sophomore years of high school. That's where the funeral part comes in, that's what this funeral is about—that's who died, or that's WHAT died—and that's why we're here ...

FOURTH HORSEMAN. I feel ya.

SECOND HORSEMAN. I don't get it.

THIRD HORSEMAN. It's a metaphor.

SECOND HORSEMAN. I still don't get it.

FIRST HORSEMAN. Let her do her thing.

ANNIE. Welcome to the funeral for my freshman and sophomore years of high school.

(The FOUR HORSEMEN start cheering, etc.)

ANNIE *(cont'd)*. Maybe I should introduce my—cheering section—

(More cheering from the FOUR HORSEMEN.)

ANNIE *(cont'd)*. AKA the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—

(Even more cheering from the FOUR HORSEMEN.)

ANNIE *(cont'd)*. And if you've never heard of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse you can Google it after the funeral.

FIRST HORSEMAN. Basically we're just four dudes who bring danger and dread to the world.

(The FOUR HORSEMEN strike a menacing [and funny] pose as if ready for some kind of battle.)

ANNIE. It was March 2020. The Four Horsemen were on their way—I just didn't know it yet.

(NOTE: The FOUR HORSEMEN might act out this story as it happens: Olympic TP fight, Hazmat Lady, sound effects, etc. Be inventive!)

ANNIE *(cont'd)*. I'm in a grocery store and the shelves are completely empty except for decorative bottles of olive oil and a half-eaten package of sugar-

Tap Dance

By

SAMANTHA CHUCK and JOHN GLORE

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Tap Dance

CHARACTERS

MOM (w): In her 40s.

EMILY (w): 14 years old.

DAX (m): 12 years old.

SETTING: A suburban kitchen; May 2020.

PRODUCTION NOTE: The final stage direction of the play is intended to describe a feeling more than an actual event. Obviously, most companies won't have the resources to pull off something so elaborate in a literal way. A much simpler approach can be effective, as long as the goal is to create a theatrical, spectacular, joyous moment to conclude the play.

(MOM sits at a table working on a laptop. She's in a Zoom meeting, but she's wearing earbuds, so we only hear her part of the conversation. She kneads bread dough as the meeting progresses, punching it when she gets frustrated.)

MOM. You're on mute. Sally, you're on mute. SALLY, UNMUTE YOURSELF. I wasn't shouting, OK, I guess I was shouting. I was trying to get your attention. No, I'm not mad, I just ... I know. Please repeat what you said, because I'm sure we all—OK, now your camera is off. *(To herself.)* I hate Zoom so much. Sally, your—AND she's dropped out completely. She really needs to upgrade her Wi-Fi.

(EMILY enters. She's having a bad day. She carries an open laptop, which she sets down on a counter. She, too, is wearing earbuds.)

EMILY *(responding to a voice in her earbuds)*. What? Oh, right. Sorry.

(She puts the laptop on the floor, positioning it so its camera captures her from the knees down. After a moment, she begins to tap-dance, facing away from her mother. The floor is ceramic tile, so the tapping is loud.)

MOM. Emily. Emily! *(To her laptop.)* No, it's not a machine gun, it's my daughter. Excuse me for a minute.

(MOM gets up, walks over to EMILY and taps her on the shoulder. EMILY, who didn't hear her approach, jumps out of her skin.)

EMILY. Mom! Don't sneak up on me like that!

MOM. I didn't sneak. It's not my fault you couldn't hear me over all the noise you're making.

EMILY. What do you want, Mom? I'm in the middle of something.

MOM. What are you doing?

EMILY. Tap-dancing?

MOM. I know, but why?

EMILY. It's my Zoom class. I told you about it.

MOM. Right. But do you have to do it here in the kitchen? I'm in a meeting, and I'm making bread.

EMILY *(amused)*. Pff. You? Bread?

MOM. Don't laugh. I'm trying to make the best of being home all the time. Now why are you tap-dancing in the kitchen?

EMILY. Because this is the only floor that's good for tap. The rest of the house is carpet.

MOM. What about the bathroom? No carpet in there.

EMILY. Good idea, Mom. "Hey everyone, how do you like our toilet?"

MOM. Well, this is Italian tile, and it wasn't made for that kind of abuse. You'll crack the porcelain.

EMILY. Mo-om!

MOM. OK, OK. Just. Tap gently.

(MOM looks at EMILY's laptop and starts to giggle.)

EMILY. What's so funny?

MOM. It's a screen full of teenage legs.

EMILY. Yeah, Mom. It's a tap class. The teacher needs to see our feet.

MOM. I just find it a little amusing. Turn the sound on for a sec.

(EMILY exasperatedly complies. We hear a bunch of people tap-dancing, but not together—each is doing his or her own sequence of steps, so it's utter cacophony.)

MOM. OK, you can turn it off. That racket will drive me bonkers in about ten seconds.

(EMILY turns off the sound. MOM goes back to her own laptop. EMILY returns her attention to the class and starts tapping again. She continues to do tap steps through the following.)

MOM (*to her laptop*). Welcome to my house, folks. Pandemic pandemonium, 24-7. It'll get worse before it gets better, so unless we have something else to talk about, let's adjourn. I'll talk to you all next week. Sally! Welcome back! Meeting's over. Upgrade your Wi-Fi.

(DAX enters wearing hockey gear, including inline skates and a goalie's mask. He's walk/rolling awkwardly on the skates. He's on the phone, and he, too, is wearing earbuds.)

DAX. Dude, I know. I'm on my way. I'll be there in like, twenty-seven seconds. Just wait at the corner.

MOM. Dax, I've told you a million times, take your skates off in the house.

(DAX points to his earbuds and shakes his head to indicate he can't hear her. MOM gets up and blocks him from proceeding any farther.)

DAX. Dude, I can't talk, my mom is like, literally hip-checking me in the kitchen right now.

(MOM pulls the earbuds out of his ears.)

DAX (*cont'd, to MOM*). Dude! What?!

MOM. Dude, no skates in the house.

DAX. Oh yeah, I forgot. But I'm almost to the door now, so can't I just leave them on for like three more steps?

(MOM crosses her arms and glares at him.)

DAX (*cont'd*). Lame.

(He sits on the floor and stares at EMILY dancing while he pulls off the skates.)

DAX (*cont'd*). What is *she* doing?

MOM. Zoom tap dance.

DAX. Why does she get to jackhammer the kitchen floor, but I can't even wear my skates inside?

EMILY. Get lost, Dax.

(His skates now off, he stands and goes over to EMILY's laptop. He gets down on the floor and invades her Zoom space.)

EMILY (*cont'd*). Dax!

DAX (*into her laptop camera*). Hi. I'm Dax. I'm the talented one in the family.

EMILY. Mom!

The Great Zoom Battle for 6th Grade

By

JAREN DAVIS and REGINALD ANDRÉ JACKSON

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The Great Zoom Battle for 6th Grade

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

ROMAN SHEPARD: Sixth grader.

THE MASKED ONE: Sixth grader. Face is always hidden.

MAKAELA: Sixth grader.

HUMPHREY: Sixth grader.

BLANK SCREEN #3/SPARKLES: Sixth grader. Hides behind a blank screen.

DISCORD: Sixth grader. Hides behind the image of Discord, a character from *My Little Pony*.

BLANK SCREEN #2/T-REX: Sixth grader. Hides behind a blank screen.

DAD (voice only): Symbolic father to all sixth graders but Roman.

MOM (voice only): Symbolic mother to all sixth graders but Roman.

MOTHER SHEPARD: Mother to Roman.

JAKE: Sixth grader.

MISS COLLINS (voice only): Sixth-grade homeroom teacher.

THE FOREHEAD: Sixth grader. Hides behind the screenshot of a forehead.
Highly nonverbal.

CASTING NOTE: There are 13 speaking roles. With doubling, this play could be performed by 8 actors, less if you choose to employ recorded vocals. The cast size may be easily increased. It is a world you may populate in any way you wish.

PROLOGUE: ~~DOS AND DON'TS OF ONLINE LEARNING~~ ZOOM DOS AND DON'TS

(A middle-school auditorium. Early to late years of the COVID-19 pandemic. An incoming seventh grader delivers a presentation to his school. Enter ROMAN SHEPARD to scant, rapturous, obligatory or nonexistent applause.)

ROMAN. Wow. You came. I guess this is happening.

(ROMAN focuses himself. References his cue cards.)

ROMAN (*cont'd*). Um. Could you lower the screen, please? Someone?

(A screen is lowered or brought out.)

ROMAN (*cont'd*). My name is Roman Shepard. Last year, *my first year here*, I spent not being here. That made me, almost, not want to be here. Then, like everyone else in sixth grade, I got a progress report from you. My mind went, “What if we gave a progress report to the school?” This isn’t so much that, but it is—I guess—a report on how to make better progress.

(ROMAN writes as he speaks. A heading is displayed on a big screen via an overhead projector.)

ROMAN (*cont'd*). Dos and Don’ts of Online Learning.

(On the screen we see, “Dos and Don’ts of Online Learning.” A masked figure suddenly enters. The mask is not worn to prevent contagion. This is a face masking a face. THE MASKED ONE rushes to the projector. He strike a line through “Dos and Don’ts of Online Learning.” It now reads ~~Dos and Don’ts of Online Learning~~. THE MASKED ONE speaks as he writes “Zoom Dos and Don’ts.”)

THE MASKED ONE. Zoom Dos and Don’ts. There, that’s better.

ROMAN. What are you doing? This is my presentation.

THE MASKED ONE. Obviously.

ROMAN. I am presenting now. This now. Right here, now. You can’t—

THE MASKED ONE. Nobody cares what you say. They don’t. Next year’s going to be just like the first. Maybe worse.

ROMAN. Ignore him, please. We can all do better. To start, students, we can be on camera.

THE MASKED ONE. Wait, what? What if I’m having a bad hair day?

ROMAN. You can wear a hat.

THE MASKED ONE. What if I don’t feel like being on camera?

ROMAN. I didn’t always feel like doing my homework, or going to school, but I did it.

THE MASKED ONE. Well, what if I’m camera shy?

ROMAN. You? I don’t ... I guess, if you really are camera shy, that would be a reason. But for the rest of us—

THE MASKED ONE. Who dropped you on your head as a baby? The blank screen is the coolest thing that ever happened in the history of school. Take us to a Zoom room.

(The projector is removed. A number of frames of varying forms and sizes appear in the playing space. Some are filled with the faces of students. Many

are blank. Some bear screenshots. One such shot shows only a forehead. Others bear random images, among them the Death Star. All have names in the lower corner.)

THE MASKED ONE (*cont'd*). Think about it. You wanna wear pjs, you wear pjs. If you want to play a video game, or take a nap, you do it. You can play Fortnite—then take a nap, and nobody will ever know. Not a soul.

(ROMAN rushes to a blank screen.)

ROMAN. Yeah, well look here.

(He rushes to another. This one is occupied by DISCORD, from My Little Pony.)

ROMAN (*cont'd*). See here? What even is it?

(He darts between the blank screens.)

ROMAN (*cont'd*). And here. And there. What are they doing? How do we know they're even in class?

THE MASKED ONE. What do you care, Shepherd Boy? Nobody nominated you Zoom sheriff.

ROMAN. It's not even spelled that ... I'm not letting you distract me.

(ROMAN takes in his audience. He finds his focus.)

ROMAN (*cont'd*). Zoom can help you remember names and faces. So, if you have to be off camera, post a picture of yourself. Nobody wants to be partners with the Death Star. But there it was ... all year long. Always there. Always lurking. And nobody says anything. No one ever says anything about anything.

THE MASKED ONE. You're not paying attention.

ROMAN. Not payin—if anybody is paying attention in class it's—

THE MASKED ONE. Look in the chats.

ROMAN. Chats? What are y—

THE MASKED ONE. Just look in the chats.

(A chat box appears. It is full of entries. More and more are dropped in.)

MAKAELA. You need to start at the beginning.

HUMPHREY. First things first, right.

BLANK SCREEN #3/SPARKLES. I care.

DISCORD. I am Discord. How do you not know Equestria?

MAKAELA. First day of school. We need to start there.

Jonah Pedals Out of the Whale

By

JONAH DEAN and GABRIEL JASON DEAN

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Jonah Pedals Out of the Whale

CHARACTERS

JONAH: 13-year-old boy.

(Lights up on JONAH. He sits on a bench wearing a practice jersey, shorts and a football helmet. His face is totally obscured.

Sounds of a football game surround him.)

JONAH. Benched.

Capital B, capital E, capital N, capital C, capital H, capital E and D.
Underlined. In bold letters.

BENCHED.

Might as well be a prison sentence.

I'm on the A-team, but now I gotta sit here on the sidelines and watch even though I still feel it way down deep in my bones every time a teammate trucks somebody to the floor.

I'm telling you, I could run these plays in my sleep.

Sometimes I do. No joke.

A lot of people say they dream about flying. Not me. My dreams are filled with rocket sweeps, slip screens and wishbones.

Those are football plays in case you don't know.

I didn't get benched 'cause I can't play good. Better believe that.

I got more of this game in me than a dog's got barks.

I'm benched 'cause of grades.

Coach told me *yesterday*, "Jonah, get 'em up or I'm putting you down."

Like I'm a sick old animal or something. Can you believe that?

And *one day*. He gives me *one day*.

How'm I supposed to change a whole gradebook overnight?

Unfair.

Capital U, capital N, capital F, capital A, capital ... capital ... A, capital I, capital R.

Bold. Underline. Exclamation.

UNFAIR!

Before the virus, I was honor roll. And A-team.

Now I'm failing everything. And B-team because of it.

I still gotta practice like I'm A-team though.

But come game time, I just sit here and watch.
When the virus came, I became Jonah in the whale.
You know that story?
It's in the Bible.
I heard it at my church.
Jonah's on a boat in a big storm, and he gets thrown overboard and swallowed up by a whale. And he lives there for three days before the whale spits him out on dry land.
That's me.
And the virus is the whale.
Or the whale is the virus.
Either way, I'm sitting in the deep, dark belly of a whale.
Alone.
Down here at the bottom of the ocean.
Sinking.
And it's been way longer than three days.

(A whistle blows.

Lights shift.

Underwater ocean sounds.

JONAH is still wearing his helmet. His face is lit up as though by a laptop.)

INSANITY.

Capital I, capital N, capital S, capital A, capital T, capital I, capital ...

IN-SAN-IT-Y.

Capital S, capital A, capital N, capital T, capital ...

IN-SAN-IT-Y

Capital I, capital N, capital S, capital A, capital N, capital ... what's next?

IN-SAN-IT-Y.

Capital I! Capital T! Capital Y!

Italicized. Underlined. Bold. Period.

INSANITY.

When this whale swallowed me up and the world went dark and school was on a screen, all my teachers went insane. It's like they forgot how to teach me.

I know it's hard for them too, but all I get are these videos and talking heads.

No time for questions.

No time to repeat things.

No time to write it on the board.

No time.

And yet ... SO. MUCH. TIME.

Nothing feels real anymore.

The teachers don't do my accommodations.

So how'm I supposed to keep being successful?

Dyslexia means ...

Sometimes I need things read aloud.

Sometimes I need to hear the lesson more than once.

Sometimes I need to see it written on the board.

Sometimes I need ... some time.

And even though time is all I got right now, I feel like this whale is diving down faster and faster into the dark, dark ocean and I feel the pressure on his ribs, his insides getting tighter and tighter around me.

And the pressure makes me tired.

And angry.

And it's like I want to break something and scream, but I'm just too tired.

I don't want to do the work anymore. 'Cause, really, what's the point?

'Cause it's just getting darker and tighter inside the belly of this whale, and I don't know if I'll ever see the light of day again.

(A deep rumble.

JONAH straddles the bench.

The rumble gets louder and louder.

JONAH starts to pedal the bench like it's a bicycle.)

Good thing this whale swallowed my bicycle too.

It's the only thing I got down here to help me ease the stress.

I love riding up the hill of this whale's throat.

It's a steep climb and gets my heart thumping and legs burning!

When I was little, Dad taught me to ride my bike and our driveway has this big hill and when I first started I could never make it to the top.

But Dad said, "Jonah, be persistent, and you'll get there!"

And he was right.

I got to the top of that hill!

So I can get to the top of this one too!

I pedal and pedal and imagine it's the Tour de France and I'm leading the pack up the twisty, winding roads in the Alps.

I push past the burn and can feel my legs getting stronger and stronger.

And as I get stronger, I can feel my rage melting away too.

I climb and climb and climb and push push push, smiling almost the whole way to the top ...

I can see the light of day in the distance ...

So close ...

So very, very close!

But then ...

The hill of this whale's throat turns straight up and no matter how hard I try

...

Riding the Waves

By

HANNA DZIADURSKI and LEE CATALUNA

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(RIDING THE WAVES)

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Riding the Waves

CHARACTERS

HANNA: 10-year-old girl, thoughtful and observant.

MARI: 10-year-old girl, energetic and enthusiastic.

(HANNA and MARI are best friends.

They begin their story speaking directly to the audience.)

HANNA. In surfing, there's always another wave coming, another chance, even if you have to wait a long time for it to come.

MARI. My dad taught me to surf.

HANNA. My dad taught me, too.

HANNA & MARI. Dads who surf are the best!

MARI. At the end of third grade when COVID happened, school shut down, and we had distance learning. That meant we were stuck inside! It was horrible! I was in my house, my best friend Hanna was in her house.

HANNA. Indoors, learning math on a little screen.

MARI. Outside, a sunny Hawaii afternoon and the blue ocean just a short drive away. ARGH!

HANNA. Technically we weren't supposed to be talking during Mrs. Kuroda's class. No chatting on Zoom during the lesson, but we did it anyway.

(They are messaging in the chat box online.)

HANNA *(cont'd)*. Hey!

MARI. Hey!

HANNA. Want to do something?

MARI. YES! Anything!

HANNA. What can we do? Everything is shut down because of COVID.

MARI. I know! Even all the beaches on the island are closed.

HANNA. Actually, my dad said the beaches are closed, but the ocean isn't ...

HANNA & MARI. What if we go surfing together?

MARI. YES! BRILLIANT! Let's go as soon as class is over.

HANNA. We can meet at the surf break I was telling you about ... Old Man's!
The one named after a surfer who used to live there and surf every day.

MARI. My dad is working, but I'll nag him to take me.

HANNA. I don't really need to ask my dad. He always says yes to surfing.

MARI. But Hanna ... what about ... ?

HANNA (*to the audience*). Mari and I had never gone surfing together. We usually do other things when we're together at school or after school. Besides, I hadn't been in the ocean in a while. I had a bad thing happen when a big wave caught me and tumbled me around under the water. My father had to pull me out. I got scared.

MARI (*their chat continues*). Hanna ... what if the waves are big?

HANNA. I'd rather face big waves than stay in the house one more minute.

MARI. Yeah?

HANNA. YEAH!

HANNA & MARI. This is going to be great!

HANNA (*to the audience*). As soon as class finished, I changed into my swimsuit and packed everything we needed. My dad put the boards in the car, and we headed to Waikiki. Once we got there, we put on sunscreen, grabbed our boards and went down to the beach.

Ehhhhh, where's Mari?

MARI. Dad, hurry up!

HANNA. I kept an eye out as we got into the water. Old Man's is kind of a long paddle out, which can be tiring, but my excitement was like rocket fuel. I got to the break faster than my dad, which is VERY impressive. Out on the water, you could totally forget about COVID. It felt like normal. I looked around the group of surfers, but I didn't see Mari.

MARI. Dad, please hurry up. Please!

HANNA. I saw a guy who looked like Mari's dad in the water. Hi! Wait, no, oops, that's not him.

Where is she?

I tried to focus on catching a nice wave, but the conditions that day ended up being so bad. There were no waves whatsoever.

And where was Mari?

MARI. Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad!

HANNA. The sun was getting lower on the horizon. We were running out of time.

MARI. Daaaaaaaaaaaaaad!

HANNA. It was no use. She wasn't coming. My dad said it was time to go home.

MARI. My dad finally finished his work, and we raced down to the beach. I grabbed my board and got in the water. I paddled out and looked for my best friend in the lineup of surfers.

HANNA. Just as we were leaving, I spotted Mari's mom and her brother.

Hi! Is Mari here?

Her mom pointed her out in the water. (*Waving to MARI far away.*) Mari!

Whoosh!

By

ADITI GANESH and SUZAN ZEDER

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(WHOOSH!)

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Whoosh!

CHARACTERS

TERRA: 11 years old and wise beyond her years.

GOOGLE EARTH: Projections OR an actor speaking the bold italic stage directions that match this font.

ALCHEMIST OF EVERYTHING: A disembodied voice, until the end.

SIRI: Annoying recorded voice and a ball of red, blue and green light.

ALEXA: Annoying recorded voice and a ring of blue and green revolving light.

WIKIPEDIA: Projected text or a live actor reading the text aloud.

2 FRIENDS: *Projected text messages.*

SOUND PERSON: *Recorded sound or a performer creating sound effects and images live.*

ANACONDA SNAKE: Projected image or a live actor with a yellow tennis ball in their mouth.

UNICORN: Projected image or a live actor with a beautiful horn.

FLAT-TAILED HORNED LIZARD: Projected image or a live actor with spikes.

PRODUCTION NOTE: This play has been written to be performed in a number of ways. Although it is the preference of the authors to use multiple forms of technology (projections, animation, sound, lights, special effects, etc.), it can also be done with no technology at all, by actors on stools on a bare stage who perform the stage directions and descriptions of images as narrative.

OR as a hybrid with some technology and some onstage actors.

OR as a radio play live or recorded.

OR as a play to be read and enacted only in the theatre of your mind.

The only limitation is your imagination.

(An empty stage with a HUGE screen on the rear wall.

Projection of a closed laptop computer.

The computer opens. On the screen is a projected image of GOOGLE EARTH. The earth spins 'round and 'round.

TERRA enters also spinning as if she is being flung about in space.)

TERRA. WHOOOOOSH! Whoooooah, whooooooah, whoooooooah ...

(Finally, the image swoops in. A promontory with white glistening snow, crystalline blue sky.)

TERRA. WHERE AM I ?

ALCHEMIST *(disembodied voice)*. You are here.

(SOUND PERSON creates a winter storm.)

TERRA. Who are you?

ALCHEMIST. The Alchemist ... of Everything.

TERRA. What is going on?

ALCHEMIST. You started it, you and your friends!

TERRA. At the beginning of COVID, we all had plans. I was supposed to go to Canada, another friend was going to visit her grandparents, and another was going to India, and we all REALLY wanted to go, but we couldn't because of this pandemic that makes us all stay inside all the time.

ALCHEMIST. So, what did you do then ?

TERRA. If we couldn't really go places, why didn't we all get online at the same time and do Google Earth—that way we could go anywhere on the planet. So, I planned a trip to Yellowstone Park for us to see Old Faithful, and just as it started to shoot the geyser, it froze midair and I was whooshed here.

ALCHEMIST. You were chosen.

(SOUND PERSON intensifies the winter blast.)

TERRA. I don't think I'm at Yellowstone anymore, and where are my friends?

(Sound of a text and messages appear on the screen.)

FRIEND 1 (text message). WHAT HAPPENED TO OLD FAITHFUL? IT JUST STOPPED!

FRIEND 2 (text message). WE CAN'T GET OUT OF GOOGLE!

FRIEND 1 & 2 (text message). HELP!!!!!!

ALCHEMIST. They are on pause until you figure out how to save the planet!

TERRA.Me?

ALCHEMIST. You must travel to the ends of the earth and back again. You must find three very important ingredients to save the earth and bring them to the exact spot where the top of the earth meets the edge of the sky. And you must be quick about it. The pressure of the pause is liable to trigger a super eruption!

TERRA. What are the ingredients?

ALCHEMIST. You must find the last Banana Squash, the Donut of Dubai and the Sacred Ice Pop!

TERRA. Why me?

ALCHEMIST. Because it's YOUR story!

(Another blast of winter storm. ALCHEMIST disappears.)

TERRA. Wait!! How am I supposed to save the planet?

(SIRI appears as swirling red, blue and green colored ball.)

SIRI. "There are many ways to save the planet including conserving water, reducing use of fossil fuels, embracing green energy and planting more endangered plants and trees."

TERRA. Who are you?

SIRI. I'm Siri, your virtual assistant.

TERRA. What is a Banana Squash?

SIRI. I found this on the web.

WIKIPEDIA. Origins of the Banana Squash can be traced back to ancient sites in Peru and were traded across the Americas. The Banana Squash was introduced to markets in 1893.

TERRA. But this is the last one on earth.

SIRI. Then you better go find it!

TERRA. Maybe there's still one left in the Amazon!

(GOOGLE EARTH whooshes out as the planet spins and a little red marker appears: AMAZON RAINFOREST. GOOGLE EARTH zooms down into a sea of green treetops.)

TERRA *(cont'd)*. Street view!

(Whoosh down into the trees: trunks, branches and vines whip by. An enormous ANACONDA SNAKE appears with the last Banana Squash [a yellow tennis ball] in its mouth.)

TERRA *(cont'd)*. What in the world is that?

WIKIPEDIA. Anaconda: Although the name applies to a group of snakes, it is often used to refer only to one species in particular, the common, or green, anaconda, which is the largest snake in the world by weight and the second longest.

The Right Kind of Noise

By

SOFIA GOMEZ and RAMON ESQUIVEL

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(THE RIGHT KIND OF NOISE)

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The Right Kind of Noise

CHARACTERS

ISABEL: 15 years old, finishing middle school and starting high school.

ENRIQUE: 11 years old, finishing elementary school and starting middle school.

MOM: 30s or 40s, a Spanish translator at the hospital.

DAD: 30s or 40s, a professional animator.

SETTING: A home in Portland, Ore., in 2020, during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

(ISABEL tries to record a podcast.)

ISABEL. Hello everyone! Welcome to the first episode of my podcast, *The Isabel Show!* I am Isabel, the host. In this first episode, I want to talk about something very important: my birthday next month! My family's throwing a big party for me, called a *quinceañera*. If you don't know, a *quinceañera* is like a "sweet sixteen" celebration for people of Latino or Hispanic descent, except we do it when a girl turns fifteen years old. *Quince años*.

(ISABEL's brother, ENRIQUE, enters.)

ENRIQUE. Izzy! Mom says we gotta go now.

ISABEL. 'Rique, I was practicing! I'm supposed to record it after school today.

ENRIQUE. Lock your door next time. Tell us over the family text. Just don't yell at me.

(ENRIQUE exits. MOM enters, dressed for work.)

MOM. *Vamonos*. Got a full day of clients at the hospital. *¿Has comiste?* Dad made burritos.

(MOM exits. ISABEL joins DAD in the kitchen.)

ISABEL. Mom said you made breakfast burritos?

DAD. In the microwave. Store-bought ones so they taste like paper. Gotta go, *mijita!*

(DAD exits. ISABEL is about to toss the microwaved burrito when ENRIQUE enters.)

ENRIQUE. Don't trash it! Give it to me. They're good with lots of hot sauce.

(ENRIQUE exits as he pours hot sauce on the burrito. ISABEL grabs Takis from a cabinet.)

ISABEL. Oh, well. Guess I'll just eat Takis for breakfast again.

(A month later, ISABEL records from her room.)

ISABEL. Hello, everyone. Welcome to the second episode of my podcast. *The Isabel Show*. I am Isabel, the host. As you all know, the world has completely changed in the last month. Today is my fifteenth birthday, and everything has shut down. And I mean everything. So in this episode, I want to talk about what struggles I've had to face, and how I have lost so much, and how everything has gone wrong for me. Remember how I told you about my *quinceañera* that was supposed to happen this month? Guess what: canceled! It was gonna be the best party of the century. In my culture, it's a huge deal, and I have to miss out on it because of COVID. I was gonna wear this massive dress that's like a gazillion dollars. Get all these presents. We were gonna play music, and I was gonna dance around with all my friends. Best of all, I was gonna eat all the candy and cake anyone could ever imagine. But of course, COVID had to ruin it all. Something people don't understand is that we kids have had this the hardest. It's been a roller coaster for us, having to deal with so many cancelations just isn't fair. That's all for this episode. Happy birthday to me.

(A week later, ISABEL, ENRIQUE and DAD are gathered in the kitchen.)

DAD. This has been kind of fun, huh? All of us working from home these last couple of weeks?

ENRIQUE. Yeah. Fun. Lots of that fun stuff.

DAD. How are you liking virtual school? Do you have much homework?

ENRIQUE. So much. Even classes that don't give homework are giving homework. Like gym class.

ISABEL. I have homework for study hall! And don't even get me started on Zoom classes.

ENRIQUE. Zoom class is pretty cool, actually. I don't have to wear pants.

ISABEL. You need to wear pants, dude. Even for Zoom class. At least summer break is soon.

(During the following, MOM enters. Her personal protective equipment [PPE] covers her body.)

MOM removes her PPE and places the pieces in a bag. She keeps her mask on for the rest of the play.

DAD. I had an hour commute before, but now I have none. And I get to be home with you two.

ISABEL. When's Mom supposed to get home? I need her to help me with a project.

DAD. I'm sure they're slammed at the hospital.

(The kids see MOM.)

ENRIQUE. She's home!

ISABEL. Mom! Can you help me with my project?

(They run to her, but MOM holds up a hand to stop them. She scrubs her skin thoroughly.)

DAD. *Vengas a comer, mi amor.*

(DAD prepares a plate and leaves it on the table. MOM sits down. The others keep some distance.)

MOM. *Gracias a Dios.*

ENRIQUE. Do you need anything, Mom?

MOM. Throw my scrubs in the washer, *mijo*.

(ENRIQUE exits to put MOM's clothes in the washer.)

ISABEL. Mom, we have to interview someone about the pandemic messing up their jobs and stuff.

MOM. *Un momentito, mija.*

(During the following, MOM dozes off.)

DAD. Mom's exhausted. Why not interview me? My job is awesome.

ISABEL. You make animated movies. That's cool and all, but not really "essential." You know?

DAD. *Andale pues.* Art isn't essential? I feel like I'm talking to my dad.

(ENRIQUE re-enters, sees dozing MOM.)

ENRIQUE. Shhhhhh.

Dear Future 7-Year-Olds Who Will Be Surviving a Pandemic

By

TAOS GOODWIN and IDRIS GOODWIN

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(DEAR FUTURE 7-YEAR-OLDS WHO WILL
BE SURVIVING A PANDEMIC)

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Dear Future 7-Year-Olds Who Will Be Surviving a Pandemic

CHARACTERS

THE KID: A young person roughly 10 years old or younger.

PRODUCTION NOTE: The formatting of this play was inspired by Mad Libs. Producers have two options for performance: one is to perform it as written by Taos and Idris. The second is to solicit audience input for the “blanks,” perform the version that the audience creates, and then also perform Taos’ version as a compare/contrast.

(THE KID addresses the audience.)

THE KID. Before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the last big pandemic was 100 years ago.

So I bet you’re hearing or reading this in 2120!

You probably have way more technology and medicines, and less politics than we have now, so you may not even need this, but in case you have become a post-apocalyptic wasteland that’s back to burning fossil fuel and scavenging for root vegetables and water, maybe this will be very helpful. Or maybe you’re just like we are now and nothing has changed.

Who knows. But look here’s some things that might help you.

You’ll be seeing a lot of the large people. Parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents. They will be looking at the screen. A lot. Their laptops, smartphones, iPads and getting news every few seconds about things like

Sickness

(noun)

Or things like

death

(noun)

They will get a little restless sometimes.

They will need to leave the room sometimes and come back.

But don’t worry. They’re looking out for you and thinking about you constantly.

You'll need to get used to wearing a mask

At the School
(place)

At the arcade
(place)

At the grocery store
(place)

And of course at the Library
(place)

The rules are pretty straightforward:

1. Wear a mask.
2. Wash your hands.

What's more confusing than the rules is going to online school. I didn't think it was so bad, but my large people had a hard time with it.

The worst thing about online school is:

I don't get to see my friend in person
(what's the worst thing about online school?)

The best thing about online school is:

I get to chew gum
(what's the best thing about online school?)

You may go back in person, masked hopefully, and it'll be great to see your friends again.

But it's not so bad being home a lot more because you'll have a new little brother to get to know. He's great.

He likes to Play with his toys
(verb, something fun & specific)

And run around the sprinkles in the back yard
(verb, something fun & specific)

And it's not always great.

Sometimes he knocks down my blocks
(verb, something naughty)

and Throw things and yell Ba-da
(verb, something naughty)

And for some silly reason the door on your room doesn't latch so he can sneak in and

Destroy toy soldiers
(verb, something naughty)

But it's all good. Because he's your brother, and it's up to you to teach him to

Play toy cars
(verb, something fun)

And Play ball
(verb, something cool)

And Learn his ABC's
(verb, something useful)

Also your large people will need a lot of help too.
Every single day.

They need you to take out the trash
(verb, a chore)

And Watch my brother
(verb, something responsible)

Try to make them laugh.

I find that Advanced jokes
(verb, something funny)

work(s) most of the time.

Even though getting together with cousins and uncles and aunts and grandparents from out of town can be tough, you'll still celebrate. And you'll manage to still have fun.

You'll have a couple birthdays and get presents like

Magnatiles and clay
(great presents you received)

Make sure you have a strong Wi-Fi connection so you can watch shows and movies like

top chef
(a show or movie)

Or Tom and Jerry
(a show or movie)

ChicaWow **(In Her Own Words)**

By

ANAYSA GRADILLO-HOOVER and JOSÉ CRUZ GONZÁLEZ

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ChicaWow

(In Her Own Words)

CHARACTERS

ANAYSA: A 16-year-old of mixed heritage with an infectious smile, braids, a small necklace with her name on it, braces and red acrylic nails.

DEDICATION

Special thanks to Dorina, Christina, Jesse, Emma and to my eight siblings.
For Charlie Hoover and Eunice Rodriguez.

(ANAYSA, a 16-year-old, speaks directly to the audience.)

ANAYSA. I was really iffy about this,
I'm a shy person, and I don't really talk—
Um, well, my family back story—
It's a lot.
'Cause there's a lot of us—
So, it started off with me,
The first girl.
My *nana* decided to, like, take care of me.
'Cause I was the only girl.
My mom and the men she had messed with,
They got into drugs.
So, we're in the system of CPS, Child Protective Services, for a while.
They were going to split us apart.
Me and my siblings.
My *nana* and *tata* adopted all five of us.
I'm *huerita* out of all my family.
I'm the whitest one.
When everyone sees me, "You're a white girl, huh?"
It's like, not a white girl, but I'm a white girl.
I'm sixteen.
I'm basically the mom of everything.

Like, I have to keep everybody in line.
And they're like, "You're not the mom! You're the big sister!"
And I'm just like, "Uhhh."
And then I hate when they're like,
"OK, Mom!"
I'm like, "Don't start!"
I'm a little kid, but I have the mentality of what grown-ups go through.

My *tata's* cancer came back.
He went to his doctor and they told him he had COVID.
My *tata* went into the hospital fine.
My *nana* was pissed.
She was like, "You guys sent my husband in there. You guys couldn't even figure out what was wrong with him and said it was COVID."
I didn't want my *tata* to die in the hospital alone.
He was able to die here at home.

Personally, it's hard for me because I was my *tata's* baby girl.
He would call me, "*ChicaWow*."
I called him "Dad."
He always did things for me.
Went out of his way with everything.
I had to start doing them myself.
Buy my makeup and my nails.
Like I do my makeup for me, you know?
It gives me a little more confidence about myself.
It makes me feel like, "OK, girl!"
And then my nails, they're acrylic.
Um. It helps me like with my anxiety 'cause—
It helps me not bite my nails.

We got my grandpa's ashes.
So, like he's there in the living room.
'Cause my *tata* and my *nana* had the same bedroom, but they never liked seeing the same things.
So, my *tata* would just go out in the living room and just chill watching his own TV.
We have him on this desk in the corner with pictures of him and things he liked.
I'm excited to go back to my teacher's class, but I'm not excited to go back to school.
One of my best friends died.
Eunice was her name.
We've been friends since daycare.
She was seventeen.

A Good Day for Jordan

By

MAKENZIE GREER and GLORIA BOND CLUNIE

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A Good Day for Jordan

CHARACTERS

MAKENZIE GREER: A talented lawyer and crusader for justice. Ideally cast as a Black woman.

SETTING: A police station in a large metropolitan city. A hallway and Chief Steve Anderson's office. Morning. A weekday. The future.

(MAKENZIE GREER waits in the hallway outside of Chief Anderson's office.)

GREER. Chief Anderson?

(Catching up with Chief Anderson as he tries to escape into his office.)

Chief Anderson? Amid the protests and the calls for you to resign—you've become a hard man to catch. Makenzie Greer. I represent the Calloway family. Yes, the Calloway family. I know you're busy—and avoiding me. But today can be the worst day of your life—or one of the best. Why don't we step inside your office? Yes?

(They enter the office. The office is suggested by a chair and a desk or table. GREER sets her briefcase on the desk. She gestures for the chief not to speak.)

Before you say anything, anything at all—I need you to hear me out. And this will take a minute, so please, sit.

You need to know—*this* is one of the *worst* days in Mrs. Calloway's life. Last week, she sent her boy to the corner store for milk and eggs—and a bullet in the chest means he will never come home again. A bullet from one of your officers means he will never again taste her amazing blueberry pancakes.

Again, another Black man—a Black boy—murdered. Mrs. Calloway's son was *only sixteen*. So many gone now, we struggle to count the names. Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling ...

Jordan Edwards?

(Shows the chief a photo of Jordan, either an actual photo or one from a tablet.)

Do you remember him? He was after Philando Castile, and Michael Brown, and a few years before George Floyd.

(Holds hand up as if to stop the chief.)

Wait! Just listen. You see—I remember Jordan well.

We were both members at True Believers of Christ Community Church. We're like family there. Been going since I was born, and one day, Jordan showed up with the Hagerty's. I was maybe eleven, and he was about thirteen?

Said, "I'm Jordan Edwards"—and smiled. Smiled and nodded. Sweet. Super shy. But when he smiled—if the room was down, Jordan picked it up with that smile. Everybody called him Smiley.

Was like a big brother to me. Always involved in some church activity—bible study, youth revivals, back-to-school bashes—the Ice Carnival. And junior choir! *He could sing!*

And loved football. A running back at Mesquite High. A freshman star! Everybody knew that next year, he'd be varsity.

(Sets photo gently on the table/desk.)

Weird how I found out he was gone. Woke up one Sunday and I'd missed a whole bunch of FaceTimes from Willie. At church, us kids knew something was wrong. Somebody had died. Folks said it wasn't *our* Jordan. Then they said it was, that he got hit by a car. Then Willie called. He had been at this party ...

Jordan was a such good kid. Had cleaned his room ... done his chores. His dad said, "Great!" Go! But be back by midnight!" Party was only three miles away.

Somebody called the cops. Complained about noise and underage drinking. While the cops were in the house, there were gunshots outside. Shots that turned out to be blocks away.

Jordan and his brothers, Kevon and Vidal, were already leaving when Officer Oliver raced out of the house. Already in Vidal's car. A black Chevy Impala. Jordan in the front seat. The car pulled away. Oliver raised his rifle. A bullet tore through Jordan. Blood, so much blood.

Later, they searched that house. And there was no evidence of drugs or drinking. Just kids being kids. Oliver said Vidal had tried to run his partner down with his car, but the body cam video proved it was a lie.

The day Jordan was killed—my world stopped. Fifteen and dead. For a long time, I was in a fog. Didn't know what was going on. Just knew somebody wasn't there anymore.

Jordan, lying in the casket—red polo shirt, khakis—but he wasn't there. News folks and cameras crawling all over, at the funeral, at the trial—but his smile wasn't there to light up the room. Just tried to hold on. Saw a therapist for a while.

And I could have stopped. Lost all motivation. But that year, I learned how to fight. We organized. Got *Justice for Jordan*. And Roy Oliver got fifteen years for murder! One of the first times a Dallas cop, a white cop—went to jail for the dirt he did.

Big Changes

By

KIRA HOPGOOD and ERIC COBLE

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Big Changes

CHARACTERS

NAOMI

RAPHAEL

NAOMI'S TEXT

RAPHAEL'S TEXT

SETTING: Two rooms in two houses (could be a dining room, bedroom, living room, kitchen—anywhere remote learning can happen).

(Two pre-teen students, NAOMI and RAPHAEL, sit in separate rooms in separate houses, in front of their open laptops wearing headphones or earbuds, waiting for class to start.

Throughout the scene, they will be constantly texting each other on their phones. While the characters are physically reactive, they rarely speak out loud.

Behind them, however, stand two actors representing NAOMI'S TEXT and RAPHAEL'S TEXT, who will speak the texts sent between the two friends.)

NAOMI'S TEXT *(as she texts on her phone)*. We're all gonna die.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT *(as he texts on his phone)*. You can't die of embarrassment.

NAOMI'S TEXT. Watch me.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. At least I *can* watch you. Half the class has their cameras off.

NAOMI'S TEXT. Can you blame them?

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Better to have your camera on, you get better grades. But you haven't had Mr. Walden before—

NAOMI'S TEXT. I had him for gym.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. That's where he belongs. But when he's online you just gotta remember one thing:

No Eye Contact.

NAOMI'S TEXT. What?

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Mr. Walden's cool if you just let him talk, but Do Not Engage.

NAOMI'S TEXT. Do Not Engage.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. 'Cause he's like a wild dog: you make eye contact, he'll know you know he exists and then he's ON you with a question—

NAOMI'S TEXT. Do Not Engage—

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. And in this case it's gonna be a question about the human reproductive system.

NAOMI'S TEXT. And *then* I'll die of embarrassment.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. I wish more kids had their cameras on. I'd love to see Jacob's face when Mr. W spills the beans on where babies come from.

NAOMI'S TEXT. He probably has no idea.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Jacob's gotta be the one last week, when Mr. Walden asked us to send in our questions about “the big changes” conversation, who wrote, all caps, “ARE WE GONNA TALK ABOUT SEX?!”

NAOMI'S TEXT. My dad signed the forms. He said if this was in person they'd divide us up into a girls' group and a boys' group—

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. But this way we can text together the whole way through.

NAOMI'S TEXT. You're my only—oop, Mr. Walden's back on.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Here we go.

NAOMI'S TEXT. You scared?

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Why should I be scared? I know all this, this is just review for me—

NAOMI'S TEXT. Me too, for sure.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. I just hope everyone else is—

(Sound of a car crash!

They jump!)

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. What was *that!*?

NAOMI'S TEXT. Is Mr. Walden driving??

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. What, no, he's in his home office, look, or laundry room or wherever that is—

(Sound of car engines roaring, brakes squealing—)

NAOMI'S TEXT. Is this part of the talk?

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. I thought this was Sex Ed, not Driver's Ed—

NAOMI'S TEXT. It's Brock McCoy.

(NAOMI types furiously on her laptop.)

NAOMI'S TEXT (*cont'd*). Brock, mute! You forgot to mute!

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Brock is driving?

NAOMI'S TEXT. Brock is watching *Fast & Furious*. Again.

(Car sounds cut out suddenly.)

NAOMI'S TEXT. I wonder if he does that every class, or just with gym teachers ...

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. At least you can tell it's him. Who's the kid named "Wolverine's Mom"?

NAOMI'S TEXT. That's gotta be Allison Musgrave. Yesterday her screen name was "Ding Dong The Pizza's Here."

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. I wish I could change my name—

NAOMI'S TEXT. Last week in math, Allison was changing her name like literally every two minutes, from "Big Mac" to "Big Mac With Cheese" to "Big Mac With Cheese And Ketchup" to "Big Mac With Cheese And Ketchup And Mice" to "Big Mac With Cheese And Ketchup And Mice And A Bellybutton," and Mrs. Tabor literally screamed at her, "ALLISON STOP NAMING YOURSELF!!"

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. My mom says I have to be me every day just like in real school.

(NAOMI scans her laptop.)

NAOMI'S TEXT. And Roxanne's on camera. Of course. You can tell it's her 'cause she's a cartoon potato.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. I wish I could change my face online—

NAOMI'S TEXT. Yesterday she was a possessed cat.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. My mom says I have to have my own face to show respect.

NAOMI'S TEXT. Honestly, Roxanne probably needs to hear this talk more than anyone else.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. She probably thinks "big changes" means becoming a dog in sunglasses.

NAOMI'S TEXT. LOL. We should probably be listening to Mr. Walden too.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Honestly, I have no idea what "big changes" he's talked about so far—

NAOMI'S TEXT. I'm just glad my parents already explained it all to me.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Me too.

NAOMI'S TEXT. This is gonna be, like, a waste of a week.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. Almost makes me miss math.

NAOMI'S TEXT. I just hope I stay awake.

RAPHAEL'S TEXT. "Yeah, we get it."

NAOMI'S TEXT. I know, right?

Out of the Box

By

AMARI HOWARD and CALEEN SINNETTE JENNINGS

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Out of the Box

CHARACTERS

ELLIOT (m): Black teen.

RENEE (w): White teen.

GRACIELA (w): Latina teen.

MRS./MR. HENDERSON (a): Voice-over only. Change pronouns as needed.

SETTING: This play is to be performed onstage, but it is a representation of being on Zoom. This can be done simply by using three chairs facing outward, or by placing the actors inside three large cardboard boxes (the kind that large appliances come in) with windows cut out. However it's done, the "Zoom screens" should be labeled with the following names: "Graciela," "Elliot," "Michelle Dobson, Ph.D." There should be an additional chair/box that is in the background. It is labeled, "Mrs. Henderson"

(Lights up. All the students are muted to start. RENEE is "on screen" although her "screen" is labeled with someone else's name. ELLIOT stares ahead. GRACIELA gestures to someone unseen over her shoulder, then turns to stare straight ahead. Silence. MRS. HENDERSON, the unseen teacher, speaks in voice-over.)

MRS. HENDERSON (V.O.). Hi everyone. Welcome to session number one. You've pledged to make this a safe and confidential space. I'll be present, but I won't participate. This is *for you, about you, and up to you*. Please begin.

(MRS. HENDERSON mutes herself. Awkward silence)

GRACIELA. I'm Graciela, Mrs. Henderson's third-period English.

ELLIOT. Elliot, fifth period.

(Silence. ELLIOT and GRACIELA wait for RENEE to answer.)

GRACIELA. Hey!

(RENEE looks up.)

GRACIELA (*cont'd*). We're saying our names.

(RENEE points to the bottom right of her frame where the name should be.)

ELLIOT. Your screen says “Michelle Dobson, Ph.D.”

RENEE *(annoyed)*. It’s my mother’s computer.

GRACIELA. I can show you how to put your name up.

RENEE *(angry)*. I ALREADY KNOW HOW! She won’t let me touch her settings.

ELLIOT. Don’t you have a computer?

RENEE. Don’t you mind your business?

(GRACIELA shouts and gestures at someone unseen over her shoulder.)

GRACIELA. I’m on Zoom. It’s for school! SHUT UP!

(She rolls her eyes, then speaks to ELLIOT and RENEE.)

GRACIELA *(cont’d)*. So what’s your name?

RENEE. Renee. How long is this supposed to take?!

ELLIOT. Mrs. Henderson says anywhere from ten to thirty minutes per session.

We get to decide how long we need.

RENEE. Let’s get it over with!!! What are we doing?

GRACIELA. We’re supposed to help each other by talking through our problems.

RENEE. I DON’T HAVE ANY PROBLEMS!

(Silence. All three stare straight ahead. Blackout. Pause. Lights up.)

MRS. HENDERSON *(V.O.)*. Welcome to session number two. I want everyone to try harder than you did last time. Take a deep breath. You can do this.

(MRS. HENDERSON mutes herself. Silence. ELLIOT and GRACIELA stare straight ahead. RENEE looks down at her cellphone, which she holds below “the screen.”)

GRACIELA. You timing this on the phone in your lap?

RENEE *(hurriedly puts her phone away)*. I don’t have a phone in my lap.

ELLIOT. You know Mrs. Henderson can see us, right? She’s muted and her camera’s off, but she can see us.

GRACIELA. We’re supposed to talk about our problems with our peers.

RENEE. TELL STRANGERS MY PROBLEMS WHILE THE PANDEMIC SHOVES US ALL DOWN THE TOILET! *(Sarcastically.)* AWESOME!

ELLIOT. Could you stop shouting?

(ELLIOT and GRACIELA stare straight ahead. RENEE looks down at her phone. Silence. Blackout. Pause. Lights up. GRACIELA is gesturing

animatedly but silently to someone over her shoulder. MRS. HENDERSON waits until she stops.)

MRS. HENDERSON (*V.O.*). This is session number three. I'd like you to get past your frustrations today. Get to know each other. Of course, you have the option to quit. If you do, you'll each face your own consequences. So, it's your decision.

(MRS. HENDERSON mutes herself. Silence. RENEE speaks to someone over her shoulder.)

RENEE. ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT! STOP NAGGING! AND STOP EAVESDROPPING ON MY ZOOM!

(Silence. GRACIELA tries to offset the awkwardness.)

GRACIELA (*to ELLIOT*). What's your favorite color?

ELLIOT (*pause*). I guess blue. I like the ocean.

(ELLIOT looks to RENEE, who stares straight ahead and doesn't answer.)

ELLIOT (*cont'd, to GRACIELA*). What's your favorite food?

RENEE. What are you doing?!

GRACIELA. We have to start somewhere, Renee. What's your favorite food?

RENEE (*sullenly*). Pizza.

(Silence.)

ELLIOT. Thin crust or deep dish?

(RENEE slams her fist into her hand and shouts.)

RENEE. IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD, PEOPLE! "THIN CRUST OR DEEP DISH?" SERIOUSLY?

ELLIOT. Can you dial it back, Renee? We're trying to ...

RENEE. "Help each other." You keep saying that as if it's possible.

GRACIELA. Look, my mother will kill me if I flunk English. If I do these sessions, Mrs. Henderson will let me make up the assignments I owe.

RENEE. How many?

GRACIELA. Twenty-three.

ELLIOT. Wow!

GRACIELA. You try to write with a new puppy whining, your aunt nagging you to babysit your screaming three-year-old niece, your grandmother blasting the TV, and your cousins playing Fortnite: Battle Royale right underneath the desk. My house is so full I can't even turn around.

W.W.H.G.D?

By

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W.W.H.G.D?

CHARACTERS

ELLA: 11 years old.

(ELLA is riding in a round, fairy-tale-like carriage. She is wearing what appears to be a purple princess dress.)

ELLA. I couldn't have a birthday party like I normally do, so I asked my parents if we could go on this carriage ride instead. We're riding around downtown St. Louis. I decided at the last minute to wear the princess dress. It felt like the thing to do. I didn't know the carriage was going to look like a fairy-tale carriage. And it's purple just like the dress! The dress and the carriage go perfect together. It's like I planned it, but I didn't! It just happened—like magic.

(She waves to someone unseen.)

People smile and wave at us. Like we really are royalty.

(She waves at more people unseen.)

If I had my iPad with me, or my notebook and my pencils, I could draw some of these people. I like to draw, especially faces. And the weird thing is I feel like I know the people whose faces I draw—I know this little person that I created in thirty seconds. Sometimes I go back and work on the drawings a little more—adding shading and stuff. I like being creative.

(She waves again.)

My mom and I marched down this same street last summer. It was a protest march for George Floyd. It was so hot that day! And we were all wearing masks because of the pandemic. There were thousands of people there. Some people were handing out water so we all wouldn't pass out or something. It was really long, but I wanted to be there. I was really upset when George Floyd was murdered. It's so not right. The way the policeman held him on the ground, he couldn't breathe. He died. Black people are treated like this a lot. It's not right. It's got to change. Everyone deserves justice.

My teacher, Miss Ames, talks to us about all the stuff going on—COVID, the election, climate change, George Floyd. And she lets us talk about it, too. And she listens to what we have to say. School is on Zoom, so when we

Isabella

By

ISABELLA MARIE LUCAS and SILVIA GONZALEZ S.

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Isabella

CHARACTERS

ISABELLA: Youth.

ISABELLA. At the speed of light
I was affected by a wave of outrage
A wave that pulled me under
A single discomfoting stare
It penetrated me like a dagger
Which stayed on like a sting

A sting that will forever harm me
At indiscriminate moments
Which instead should be flooded
With happy memories

A distressful, lingering anguish
That will forever haunt me
Drag me down
Cause shame
Shame for being
Who I am

Now, an ever-present anxiety
Challenging my identity
Making me question myself
And my culture
Teaching me
To distrust

While I was happy with my family
Enjoying lunch together
A first time after restrictions lessened
From the horrible spread of COVID-19

Eating fries and having a shake
Like a normal kid

Then that judgmental look in my direction
From two bored, middle-aged women
Whispering, staring, and insulting
My family's culture

This was not an incident
To compliment shiny brown hair or eyes
But designed to humiliate me
Degrade me
Punish
Who I am

Their faces forever chasing my identity
Their venom guiltling me
For what
I cannot change

I fled the restaurant
Feeling discouraged and scared
My life
Changed forever
The torture of racism
Now in my consciousness

I cried
From the discovery
Of how people can cause
Harm on purpose

My family
Noticing my distress
Tried to comfort me
Cover me with love
Remove the venom
Of deep pain
A deep pain that they sadly
Already know

They have always tried to shelter me
From all signs of racism
A racism they hoped
I would never have to experience
Unfortunately, I did

Stay Peculiar

By

MADISYN MARCHETTI and ANNE NEGRI

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(STAY PECULIAR)

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Stay Peculiar

CHARACTERS

MOLLY: Bright, enthusiastic fan; seeks an online connection in isolation.

FRANKIE: Charismatic, uncompromising fan; seeks control and power online.

CASTING NOTES: Although originally written with MOLLY as female and FRANKIE as male, gender is fluid and casting should be as well. Feel free NOT to adhere to cisgender norms in finding the right people to perform this play.

(MOLLY is sitting in her room. Her room is bright; the curtains of her windows are open. The lights are on and her bedroom door is open to a well-lit hallway.

She sits in front of a piano/keyboard. She is looking at lyrics in her notebook and trying to plunk out a simple melody on the keys.)

MOLLY (*sings*). *It had just begun*

Same style, shy smiles

Across the lunchroom

It was all brand new

Little jokes, locker notes

In late February

And then it happened ...

COVID crushed my crush, and now we're all stuck at home alone

COVID crushed my crush, livin' life in the friend zone

COVID crushed by crush, oh well, at least I've got my phone

(MOLLY writes in her notebook.)

MOLLY (*cont'd*). Needs work.

(MOLLY prepares to record herself making a video on a computer or phone.)

MOLLY (*cont'd, mutters and sings to herself*). *At least I've got my phone.*

(She starts recording.)

MOLLY. Hello, *Peculiar Occurrences* fans ... it's Molly. I know we are all feeling scared right now. I hope everyone is staying safe. One positive, we have time to binge seasons one and two of our favorite show, *Peculiar Occurrences*. And big news ... drumroll please ... the producers just announced that season three will be released earlier than expected! So get ready to find out what happens. More memes, pics, and reaction videos coming soon. Stay Peculiar, Molly!

(MOLLY stops the video.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. And post.

(MOLLY prepares to watch her show when she gets a sound notification on her phone.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. That was fast! *(Looks at her phone.)* Frankie. Frankie? Must be a new follower.

(FRANKIE appears from the digital void.)

FRANKIE. OMG! I love *P.O.* HEART EMOJI.

MOLLY. LAUGHING FACE EMOJI. Only true fans call it *P.O.*!

FRANKIE. I've been watching *Peculiar Occurrences* since before everyone was watching it.

MOLLY. Me too! I actually started this fan page back in 2016.

FRANKIE. SHOCKED FACE EMOJI! Wow, you've had your fan page longer than I've had mine. I started mine in 2018.

MOLLY *(to self)*. Oooh ... Frankie has a fan page too.

(MOLLY quickly searches up FRANKIE's fan page.)

MOLLY *(cont'd, to FRANKIE)*. ADRIANA PEQUEÑA! I love her! She seriously has the most amazing vocal range of any singer out there right now.

FRANKIE. Yes, yes, yes! Because she's a pop singer, people always try to belittle her talent.

MOLLY. And Adriana writes all of her own music.

FRANKIE. Yes, she does. You get it.

MOLLY. I totally do! I actually write songs too.

FRANKIE. That's so cool! I've always wanted to write songs. I think we're gonna have to be new BFFs.

MOLLY. I think so too.

FRANKIE. I'm literally online all the time.

MOLLY. Me too.

FRANKIE. Especially when I'm at my dad's house. He doesn't care what I do. HIGH FIVE EMOJI!

MOLLY. It's good to find new friends now that we're all stuck inside for who knows how long.

FRANKIE. Yeah, COVID sucks.

MOLLY. Surprise selfie! *(Takes a pic, sends.)*

FRANKIE. Wait?! You're not a bot? ROBOT EMOJI Me either. *(Takes a pic, sends.)*

MOLLY. We're both real!

FRANKIE. See you tomorrow?

MOLLY. Absolutely, BFF!

(MOLLY closes her bedroom door to the hallway. She goes through the motions of time/days passing [pajama bottoms/Zoom classes/snacks in bed].

We hear MOLLY's phone notification going off. MOLLY and FRANKIE pantomime sending each other messages, pics, videos.)

FRANKIE. Hey, Moll!

MOLLY. ONE EYEBROW UP EMOJI. By now, you know I prefer Molly.

FRANKIE. I know, but Moll is such a great nickname.

MOLLY. Fine. Can I call you Frank then?

FRANKIE. I prefer Frankie.

MOLLY. Then I think we should call ourselves by our preferred names.
SMILEY FACE EMOJI

(Beat.)

FRANKIE. So, did you make a video of your song yet?

MOLLY. Yes, I made it ... but I'm scared to share it.

FRANKIE. With me? HALO FACE EMOJI.

MOLLY. Not just with you. With anyone. I've literally never sung in front of anyone or shared any of my lyrics. Never, ever.

FRANKIE. I understand. I've had some bad experiences sharing online too. People can be so fake. But you're one of the most real, genuine people I've met.

MOLLY. Aw, thanks. BLUSHING FACE EMOJI. Honestly, your friendship has really gotten me through these past few weeks. My IRL friends all disappeared.

FRANKIE. I'll give you honest feedback, and I won't show anyone else.

MOLLY. You promise?

FRANKIE. I promise. *(Beat.)* Also, here is a video of me lip syncing to one of Adriana's songs. *(Lip syncs.)* I appreciate you, but I've moved on
Can't believe I'm actually giving you a song
It was fun while it lasted

Picture Me Better

By

ALEXIS MUTURI and SHAY YOUNGBLOOD

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Picture Me Better

CHARACTERS

AUGUST: A 16-year-old brown girl.

(Music up, like a rolling radio dial of various styles of music until an ambient beat plays under the monologue. AUGUST, wearing headphones, dances onto the stage as if no one is watching. She faces the audience as she speaks, pulls out a phone and aims it at the audience as if reading from a text.)

AUGUST. Shy Girl. That’s what people call me. Shy Girl, like I’m some kind of underachieving superhero. When my friends, parents and teachers describe me, they use words like “quiet” and “reserved.” People are always trying to box me into a role that doesn’t fit. The opposite of me is my cousin Kiki. She smiles all the time and she can’t seem to stop talking, even in her sleep.

Just because I don’t like to talk, doesn’t mean I don’t think about things, deep things, important things. I think about impossible questions like: What makes you, you, and what makes me ... well, me?

When the pandemic happened, last year, I was in eighth grade. I had piano lessons, chorus and modern dance. It was dark by the time I got home after school. Then every activity stopped. No more piano. No more chorus. No more modern dance. Suddenly I had a lot of time to think about great big questions like: Is there a heaven? Why does racism exist? Will I ever fall in love?

Pre-COVID, I really didn’t like school. I felt disconnected from the other students. I didn’t have a name for what it felt like, not to fit in. It was a relief to take a break from the students AND the teachers. When classes went online it was like my own little miracle. I loved it! Finally I could learn at my own pace, and I wasn’t forced to interact with other students in group projects or pretend to have team spirit participating in sports.

Going to parties was super stressful. There would always be strangers, friends of my cousins or co-workers of my parents. My mother will inevitably say: “Go make friends. You can’t be like this forever.” “No way!” I think to myself before hiding in a corner with my phone. My father says, “Nonsense. You are not shy! You are my child. You are confident and you have high self-esteem. Now go, make friends like your mother says.” My father believes in the power of positive thinking.

The Caged Bird

By

WILLIAM PAGE-DALE and JOHN DILWORTH NEWMAN

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The Caged Bird

CHARACTERS

PERFORMER: An elementary student.

(The PERFORMER stares at their pet bird in a cage [actual or imagined]. They look out at the audience.)

PERFORMER. I'm a bird trapped in a cage. That's how I feel during the pandemic. I can't go to school, can't jump with my friends on my trampoline. Can't really do anything outside my home.

I'm online for school a couple of hours in the afternoon. My teachers give us work to do online, but I get all my work done for the week on Monday morning. So what do I do for the rest of the week?

Sometimes I look at our pet parakeet. I'm sure he gets bored reading the newspaper at the bottom of his cage. Sometimes I think I should give him my phone so he could play video games.

I played video games before COVID, but not like I do now. My favorite game platform is Roblox. Millions of kids use it, and a lot more have since the lockdown. You can play games that other kids make or you can create your own that they can play. It's almost like playing with other people in the same room with you. I can't change much about my pandemic world, but I can create my own world from scratch.

You have to have a thick skin to get through the pandemic. In Roblox, you can buy a different skin. I bought a penguin skin that I wear in my games. I had to get used to my flippers and my beak, but if I can get used to wearing a mask, I can get used to wearing a penguin. I wish I could wear my penguin skin on Google Meet and freak out my class and my teacher.

My mom lets me have a lot more screen time now, and my grandpa gives me an allowance so I can buy Roblox game passes and get avatar items that that other kids have built.

My dad sometimes plays Roblox with me, but I think he likes real games better. He loves to play disc golf. It's a lot like a video game, but you play it

Pandemic Kickball

By

AUGOSTO RIOS and ALVARO SAAR RIOS

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(PANDEMIC KICKBALL)

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Pandemic Kickball

CHARACTERS

AUGOSTO: Fifth grader.

MOM

REY: Fifth grader.

KIDS #1-5

TIME: 2020-21 school year.

PLACE: Home and elementary school playground.

CASTING NOTE: AUGOSTO and REY may be played by any gender but character names must remain the same.

(As the play begins, we hear “I’m so done with this game.”

Moments later, AUGOSTO, a fifth grader, appears wearing a backpack and a facemask.

He removes the mask, tosses it away and laughs.)

AUGOSTO. Mom! I’m home.

(MOM appears.)

MOM. First day back at school! How was it?

AUGOSTO. It was good.

MOM. Were all your friends there?

AUGOSTO. No. Some are still virtual.

MOM. So, it was just good?

AUGOSTO. We did get to play kickball today.

MOM. You love kickball.

AUGOSTO. We still had to wear masks, though.

MOM. Still had fun?

(As AUGOSTO nods, a laugh escapes.)

MOM *(cont’d)*. What’s so funny?

(Another laugh.)

MOM *(cont'd)*. Are you going to tell me?

(Another laugh but this one is big.

Moments later, KIDS #1-5 appear. All are wearing masks covering their nose and mouth.)

KID #2. OK. Let's get this one out.

KID #1. Get ready to get struck out!

KID #5. Not gonna happen.

(KID #1 rolls the "ball," and KID #5 kicks it hard.)

KID #4. Oh, no. Not again.

KID #3. Home ruuuuuuuun!

(As some KIDS moan and complain, KID #5 walks the bases.)

KID #2. That was the sixth home run in this inning!

KID #3. Look. Gracie kicked it so far she's not even running.

AUGOSTO. My team was losing bad. Really, really bad. After that home run, everyone was yelling for a new pitcher.

KID #2. New pitcher!

(More shouts of "new pitcher" are heard.)

KID #1. You want a new pitcher?

(A few say, "Yeah.")

KID #1 *(cont'd)*. OK. Bye!

(KID #1 exits.)

KID #3 *(to KID #1)*. Don't leave.

(Beat.)

KID #3 *(cont'd)*. OK. Now, we really need a new pitcher.

AUGOSTO. I'll pitch!

MOM. You got to pitch?

(AUGOSTO nods.)

MOM (*cont'd*). High five.

AUGOSTO. Mom, I'm not done with my story.

MOM. Sorry.

AUGOSTO. So, I'm the new pitcher and guess who is up to kick? My friend Rey.

KID #2. C'mon, 'Gosto. You can do this. Strike 'em out!

(AUGOSTO pitches to REY. REY runs to the ball and kicks and misses. A few cheers are heard.)

KID #4. Strike!

KID #2. Good job, 'Gosto. Do it again!

(AUGOSTO pitches to REY. REY runs to the ball and kicks it hard. We hear a few say "Oh no.")

KID #4 keeps an eye on the ball in the air.)

KID #4. I got it! I got it!

(KID #4 catches ball and teammates celebrate.)

KID #3. You're outta there.

(REY groans.)

REY. I'm so done with this game!

(REY takes off mask.)

KID #5. Rey. We're not supposed to take our masks off.

(REY throws his mask on the ground. Stomps on it.)

REY. I'm so done with this game!

(REY flaps his arms like a bird and makes strange noises. Then, he runs around while still flapping his arms and making strange noises.)

Beat as the other KIDS watch and laugh. Then, REY runs off.)

MOM. Does Rey always do things like that?

(AUGOSTO shakes head.)

MOM (*cont'd*). I wonder why he did that.

AUGOSTO. I don't know. But it was funny. Really, really, really funny.

You're the Reason
(a.k.a. The Fortnite Interruption/A COVID Conversation)

By
JOSÉ JOAQUÍN SALAZAR and JOSÉ CASAS

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(YOU'RE THE REASON)

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You're the Reason

(a.k.a. The Fortnite Interruption/A COVID Conversation)

CHARACTERS

JJ: A young, energetic boy who loves video games, skateboarding and his family and friends. He is 13 years old, on the verge of beginning high school, and is the nephew of CC.

CC: An adult who is a playwright and college professor. He loves everything pop culture and the '80s. He also loves his family and friends. He is also the uncle of JJ and MONDO.

MONDO: A senior in high school. He is a goofball addicted to gaming. He is also a bad loser and winner. He is a cousin to JJ and a nephew to CC.

TIME: The time of COVID-19.

PLACE: A living room inside a home where a Fortnite battle is taking place.

PRODUCTION NOTES: At certain points of the play, JJ is playing the online video game Fortnite. As the game action takes place, it is underscored by the actual sounds of the game being played. However, if any producing theatres/schools have the resources, it would be great to be able to show actual video of the game being played live.

This play is based on an actual moment between the playwright and his nephews who identify as Chicano/Mexican American. When possible, it would be great to honor that in casting, but not required. If cast members are of a different ethnicity, please replace the word "Tio" with "Uncle (fill in a name)."

(A young boy named JJ is engaged in a back-and-forth online game of Fortnite against his cousin, MONDO, whom we see on another part of the stage, which is representative of a different space. JJ is playing with his Iron Man skin while MONDO is playing with his Sash Sergeant skin. Both combatants are furiously pounding on the buttons of their controllers as they yell into their headsets. Tensions are high and trash talking is abundant and the action should border on fun chaos. Next to JJ is his uncle CC. He is interested in seeing the action but also frustrated because he is trying to interview his nephew for a play. He awaits a break in the action, holding onto a handheld voice recorder.)

CC. Come on, J. We need to start this.

JJ. I know, *Tio*. I know. Just let me finish him off!

CC. Tell your friend you're busy.

JJ. It's Mondo.

CC (*annoyed*). Oh, Lord. Really!? Why am I not surprised!

(We hear a screech from the headphones.)

MONDO. Hey, *Tio*!

CC. Hey, nephew! (*To JJ.*) Can you please end this?

JJ. Yessir.

(The action between the cousins becomes more intense and, thus, so does the trash talking.)

JJ. YOU'RE SUCH A CAMPER!!!

MONDO. YOU'RE A HACKER!!!

JJ. THIS IS JUST LIKE YOU IN CALL OF DUTY ... UGH ... YOU HAVE THE MAP AWARENESS OF CHRISTOPHER FREAKING C. COLUMBUS!!!

MONDO. IT'S OK THAT YOU ARE TRASH. THAT'S WHY IT'S CALLED GARBAGE!

(The battle is getting more heated with a conclusion nearing.)

JJ. YOU'RE SUCH A BUSTER!!! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO PLAY THE GAME!!!

MONDO. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING!!!

(By their reactions, it is apparent that JJ is close to ending MONDO's game. MONDO shrieks out in frustration. CC is enjoying this action, amused by the silliness between the cousins.)

JJ. YOU'RE THE REASON THEY PUT INSTRUCTIONS ON SHAMPOO BOTTLES!!!!!!!

(MONDO's last skin dies. He goes crazy, jumping up and down. It's like his world has ended. CC and JJ begin to laugh their butts off!)

MONDO. OH MY GOD!!! (*Throwing his headset off.*) I HATE THIS GAME!! WHY ME!?

CC (*to JJ*). What the heck is wrong with your cousin?

JJ (*laughing hysterically*). He's raging. (*To MONDO.*) TIME TO EMOTE YOU, CUZ!

(MONDO screeches as JJ begins to emote his skin. We see JJ's skin begin the emote dance with his Iron Man skin to the "Never Gonna Give You Up" emote sung by Rick Astley. It is a hilarious sight. The more CC and JJ laugh, the more MONDO gets angry. After a few moments, MONDO storms off the set.)

CC *(calling out to MONDO, still laughing)*. LATER, MONDO!!!

MONDO *(offstage, loud dejection)*. LATER, TIO!!!

(JJ continues to laugh and, after a few moments, he calms down, ending a fun moment, much to the chagrin of MONDO.)

CC. I have to admit. That was pretty funny. Do all you Fortnite fools act like this?

JJ. What can I say? We're passionate about our games. We feel the need to hype each other up.

CC. You like this game, don't you?

JJ *(nodding)* Yeah ... it's the best.

(Extended beat.)

CC. Switching the subject.

JJ. Subject switched.

(Extended beat.)

CC *(tenderly respectful)*. You and your friends talk about COVID?

JJ. No ... not really.

CC. Play Fortnite instead?

(JJ nods. Beat. He takes off his headset and puts down his game controller.)

CC *(cont'd)*. More than before?

(JJ nods.)

CC *(cont'd)*. Must've been tough. *(Beat.)* I mean, it was tough on everyone.

You know ... finding ways to pass the time.

JJ. You need to learn how to play, Tio.

CC. You think so?

(JJ nods.)

Extended beat.)

JJ. I knew I liked Fortnite from the first time I played it. I was anxious and excited to get onto it and play with my friends and hang out. Playing Fortnite became one of the few things that truly made me happy.

Closure

By

GENEVIEVE SCHROEDER-ARCE and ROXANNE SCHROEDER-ARCE

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(CLOSURE)

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Closure

CHARACTERS

ACTOR: A 15-year-old Latina/Indigenous female, but could be played by anyone who relates to the monologue. Alternatively, several actors could deliver lines of the monologue as a chorus of sorts or divide them among actors, as the themes in the play may resonate with many people.

(ACTOR stands behind a kitchen counter, rolling out dough for a pie, and is reminded of a previous Thanksgiving day. ACTOR reflects to the audience or a friend who hasn't seemed to learn the COVID lesson about not taking anything for granted.)

ACTOR. When we first arrived in Laredo for Thanksgiving last year, I couldn't have imagined how the day would end up. It started so beautifully. A warm but bearable day. We parked inside the gate at Grandma and Grandpa's house on the dusty ground near the orange tree with all the other cars I recognized. Knowing I'd see my family that day felt so good. My mom and I had made four pies that sat on the floor and the back seat next to me. Our Laredo family is huge. My dad is one of ten kids, five boys, five girls. That's a lot of *tíos* and *tías*. And they all have a lot of kids, so that's a lot of *primos* and *primas*—four pies worth! We live three hours away so I hadn't seen any of them in a really long time—and some of their faces seemed to be disappearing from my memory, being masked every time I saw them. We were trying to be conscious of using hand sanitizer and distancing outside, but even so, I remember feeling anxious and worried, even with my family. My grandma was really sick and had been told that she had six months to live. She was choosing to live her last months at home, she said, because she was sick of being in the hospital—alone. She made that choice. For herself, and for us. And we were all getting used to it, and getting to slowly say our goodbyes. But, there was COVID, so only a few of us at a time could go into her small room to see her sitting up in her at-home hospital bed. That Thanksgiving Day, we put on our masks to go in to see her for a moment, and her eyes told us she was happy. Happy to have us all there. Well, all except for Grandpa. He was in the hospital, getting a quick but necessary procedure done. As the food was put on the tables outside and people started eating together, and my *tíos*, *tías*, *primos* and *primas* took off their masks to eat, it felt like it was all sort of back to normal—laughing, picking on each other, same turkey, same mashed potatoes, same green bean casserole as the year before and the year before that, just like normal. And then, the phone rang, and my *Tía* Margie

Climbing the COVID Wall

By

SALOME STEIN KOKIN and SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER

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(CLIMBING THE COVID WALL)

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Climbing the COVID Wall

CHARACTERS

ELI (w): 12-13 (pronounced EH-lee).

MIRIAM (w): ELI's older sister, 15-16.

MOM (w): Their mother. Also plays TEACHER.

DAD (m): Their father.

TIME: March 2020 to July 2021.

PLACE: Various locations at ELI's home, camp and synagogue are indicated on a bare stage by each actor moving one of three lightweight chairs and making simple costume or prop changes—hoodie up or down, scarf on or off, etc. Straddling a chair plus mimed gestures can indicate a keyboard on a desk or a shared dinner table. And so on.

CASTING NOTE: For this script, characters are designated male and female, but they may be played by actors of any gender in any combination. Names and pronouns may be changed appropriately.

(ELI is UC, seated. Others are upstage to her right and left, also seated. Music plays. ELI rises, carries her chair downstage and stands behind it. Music fades.)

ELI. "My COVID Year." Like ... yeah. For the rest of my life, whenever I think back on it, I will remember the climbing wall at Camp Alonim.

(Beat.)

ELI *(cont'd)*. Actually there are several climbing walls at Camp Alonim, but the most difficult one is fifty feet high. Straight up. Impossible. For me, anyway. Hopeless.

(Beat.)

ELI *(cont'd)*. Or so I thought ...

(She smiles, as if keeping a happy secret, then moves chair back and to one side, R of C.)

ELI (*cont'd*). My name is Eli Abrams. I'm in seventh grade now, but I was in sixth grade when COVID began. March 2020. At first it was OK. Online school wasn't so bad. Actually, it was less stressful. At first.

(Music plays. She sits straddling the chair so that its back becomes her "desk." She raises her hands and mimes using her computer. MIRIAM moves her chair forward, on a line with ELI's, and does the same. Both face C, toward MOM as TEACHER, who moves her chair forward to center and stands behind it. MUSIC fades.)

TEACHER. Class, I know how hard this is for you. It's hard for me, too. So, let's relax the rules a bit. If you want to mute yourself, mute yourself. If you need to turn off your video, turn off your video ...

(ELI and MIRIAM simultaneously mime muting themselves and turning off their video, then cross their arms on the backs of their chairs and lay their heads down, eyes closed. TEACHER continues, unaware, and speaking from somewhere between determination and panic.)

TEACHER (*cont'd*). We're just going to have to take it one step at a time, OK? We're going to have to be patient with one another, all right? We will get through this. We will get through this ... together.

(Music plays. She smiles, too broadly, returns her chair upstage, and sits. MIRIAM also moves her chair upstage and sits as music fades under ELI's dialogue.)

ELI (*stands, facing the audience*). And then it got worse. Every day was the same. Nowhere to go. Nothing to do but online school and homework. I slept in. I stayed in my pjs. I sometimes forgot to brush my teeth. It was so hard to concentrate. On anything. It was all a confusing blur. Like ... yeah. Time went by so slowly. And people were scared. I was scared. How long will this go on? Will it ever end? Is this it for us? What if I get sick and infect my family and everyone dies?

(She spins to face the others. DAD and MOM quickly stand up.)

ELI (*cont'd*). Mom! Dad? Can we get a dog?

MOM. A dog?

ELI. Please?

(ELI, MOM and DAD bring their chairs to C and straddle them, as if sitting around their dining table.)

DAD. Now?

MOM. A dog? In the middle of COVID?

ELI. Yes! Now! COVID is exactly why we need a dog. Everyone's adopting dogs to bring a little joy into their houses.

MOM. Everyone?

ELI. Nearly everyone! I've been checking the shelter website every day. I see a dog I love and the next time I look, it's gone. We need to hurry.

DAD. We do not need to hurry. It's a big decision.

MOM. Your father and I will think about it.

ELI (*as MOM and DAD rise and move their chairs upstage*). But ... we need a dog NOW!

DAD. We'll think about it.

(DAD and MOM sit upstage, as before.)

ELI (*to audience*). They thought about it so long, it never happened.

(Music plays. ELI moves her chair so that it's the door to MIRIAM's room. MIRIAM moves her chair so that it's her bed. She's watching an anime feature on her iPad and enjoying it immensely. There's a big difference between her attitude toward the screen and toward ELI. Music fades under dialogue.)

ELI. Miriam? Can I come in?

MIRIAM. No.

ELI. Please?

MIRIAM. NO!

ELI. But there's nothing to do. I'm so bored.

MIRIAM. Not my problem.

ELI. Aren't you bored, too? We don't even have school anymore! And there's no camp this summer. There's just COVID, COVID, COVID. Don't you want to play a game or something?

MIRIAM. *NO!*

ELI (*wailing*). AHHHHH!

(Beat.)

ELI (*cont'd*). Can't I just come in for a little while?

MIRIAM. Leave me alone.

ELI. I won't touch anything ...

MIRIAM. Stay out of my room!

ELI. You can come into my room ...

MIRIAM. Why would I want to do that?

Falcon's Fury

By

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Falcon's Fury

CHARACTERS

HARPER: 13-year-old girl.

SETTING: A table, a chair and a shelf with mannequin heads.

(Lights up on HARPER, who sits at a desk, painting the head of a mannequin. There is a shelf of six or seven mannequin heads behind her.)

HARPER. I'm weird, that's what everyone thinks, and it's what I think, too. Maybe I'm weird because I have red hair. Maybe red hair causes weirdness. More likely, it's my mind that makes me weird: what I like, what I think is funny.

For example, I have this collection of mannequin heads. Sometimes I put one of them in a hoodie and walk down the street carrying a head on my shoulder. One time a guy said to his girlfriend, "That girl is weird." His girlfriend said, "I think she could be dangerous." I pretended I didn't hear them. I just kept walking, with a head on my shoulder.

So anyway, it was July 18, 2020. My thirteenth birthday. That day was probably the most exciting day of the whole year, maybe even my whole life! The theme parks in Florida had just opened back up after COVID, including my favorite, Busch Gardens! That park's got everything going for it except this one awful ride called Falcon's Fury.

For my birthday, I took all six of my friends there. We had the time of our lives! We did every ride in the whole park: SheiKra, Cheetah Hunt, Montu. Cobra's Curse, Scorpion and Sand Serpent, all of them, excluding Falcon's Fury.

Because even if you gave me one million dollars to ride it, I still would not ride Falcon's Fury. That thing is brutal! It's a 335-foot tower. They strap you in a chair, pull you to the top, then tip you over, so you're facing straight down. And they hold you there for a whole minute. A whole minute. I mean, who does that? It's torture.

Then they let you go. And you fall like a rock. Or more likely an egg. Nope, nothing could get me to ride it. And everyone knows it.

Out of the Ordinary

By

ALEXIS WILEY and JONATHAN GRAHAM

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(OUT OF THE ORDINARY)

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Out of the Ordinary

CHARACTERS

GIRL: An elementary school kid.

SETTING: A bare stage representing the girl's house, and her imagination, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Lights up on an empty space. A GIRL comes on, carrying a full canvas bag. She finds her light and speaks to us.)

GIRL. Once there was an ordinary Girl, living an ordinary life. She had ordinary parents—except when they were a little weird—and an ordinary older brother, who doesn't play with her as much as he used to ... but she was nine and he was twelve ... so that's pretty ordinary, too.

She lived in an ordinary house. Ordinary for her was Arizona, which means cactus and a pool outside, and eighty-four degrees—inside.

This Girl went to school, played with friends, went to fun places with her family, and had a dog.

(A burst of loud barking interrupts the flow.)

Sorry about that. She does that a lot. Which is pretty ordinary, too.

So there she was, living an ordinary life, when all of sudden, she found herself in the box.

(She sets down the bag at C. From it she takes a rope and uses it to meticulously mark a perfect square on the floor. When she is done, her back is to us. She digs through her bag. When she turns to face us again, she is wearing a cloth mask.)

All of a sudden, the ordinary felt very different.

(She pulls a tape measure from the bag and carefully measures each side of the box.)

When other people were around, the box was six feet on every side. Grown-ups explained that it was a precaution, just for a few weeks. But before too long, it felt like the box might be there forever, and the Girl got used to life inside it.

(She steps inside the box, takes off her mask and puts hand sanitizer on her hands. She tries to do various things inside the box like dancing, skipping or even turning a cartwheel. She is clearly frustrated by the constraints of space.)

It wasn't great living in a box, but like everybody else, the Girl dealt with it. Eventually, she even got used to going to school inside the box.

(From the bag, she pulls out a cardboard rectangular frame that she holds in front of her face: a Zoom frame. Pause, she is still as if buffering, then returns the frame to the bag.)

Inside the box, she first got used to the things she couldn't do—like go to restaurants, hang out with a big group of friends, or give hugs. But eventually, she learned to enjoy the things that she could do inside the box.

(She pulls a stately stuffed BEAR from the bag. Then she pulls out a very energetic and athletic stuffed BUNNY. The GIRL tosses BUNNY up in the air and catches her a few times. BEAR watches this thoughtfully. Now GIRL tosses BUNNY, and she lands just outside the box. He gives GIRL a look.)

Sorry!

(BEAR stretches his arms out of the box and pulls BUNNY back in.)

(As BEAR, in a voice deeper than her normal voice.) Hello and welcome to the Stuffy International Network and our live broadcast of the Bunny Gymnastics World Championships! Our first contestant will be attempting something truly incredible. She will complete a complicated and awe-inspiring gymnastics routine within the confines of a six-foot by six-foot square! Can she complete a maneuver that no stuffed animal has ever performed in competition? Let's watch!

(GIRL tosses BUNNY way high in the air and catches her.)

(As BEAR.) Oh, my goodness! The quadruple double pike reverse axle with a twist! And she stuck the landing!

(Now she has BEAR interview BUNNY.)

(As BEAR.) Congratulations on an amazing performance!

(As BUNNY in a high, enthusiastic voice.) Oh, thank you so much!

(As BEAR.) How does it feel to be the greatest bunny of all time?

(As BUNNY.) Oh well, even though I've earned one hundred and thirty-seven gold medals, every one feels very, very special.

First Nether

By

NATHANIEL WILEY and ERIC PFEFFINGER

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(FIRST NETHER)

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First Nether

CHARACTERS

DREW: Not yet a teenager.

RILEY: Same.

TIME: 2020, and a little bit before, and a little bit after.

PLACE: The United States.

CASTING NOTE: DREW and RILEY each can be played by performers of any racial or ethnic background and any gender identity.

(Outdoors. Pre-2020. DREW and RILEY talking. The conversation is constant, overlapping, bouncing off each other, riffing, leisurely, energetic. The talk is accompanied by—and somehow powered by—each participant's almost perpetual motion through the space: wandering, climbing, jumping, sprawling, investigating, experimenting. Both their words and their bodies occupy the whole space and colonize every surface within it.)

RILEY. I was gathering wood for a shelter—

DREW. Creative?

RILEY. Survival.

DREW. Well sure 'cause mobs.

RILEY. Yeah but I hate staying inside and hiding.

DREW. I mean or you can go outside, get killed by creepers. Not much of a choice.

RILEY. You can fight.

DREW. Not all night you can't. Why not cobblestone?

RILEY. Didn't feel like mining.

DREW. I would've done cobblestone.

RILEY. Shelter's pretty cool, though, has a redstone lighting system.

DREW. Cool—look, caterpillar.

RILEY. I don't trust caterpillars—have you gone back to the nether?

DREW. Yeah I needed glowstone for my lamps.

RILEY. Ghosts?

DREW. Of course.

RILEY. Ghosts.

DREW. Cool thing though is when they shoot fireballs you can deflect with like a sword or a bow.

RILEY. Cooler than skeletons.

DREW. No one gets excited about fighting skeletons.

RILEY. No one's ever, "Cool, skeletons."

DREW. Literally never.

RILEY. How many Nether biomes have you seen?

DREW. All of 'em.

RILEY. Which is the coolest?

DREW. I really like Warped Forest.

RILEY. Yeah.

DREW. They give cool wood.

RILEY. Yeah.

DREW. Thing is, you feel like you know the whole world, you've seen everything it has to throw at you, and then the first time you discover the Nether, you come back and everything's a little different. You can't go back to being the person who didn't know about the Nether.

(And it's 2020. They're separated by a barrier. The barrier just comes on in, smooth and unyielding. Each character stares into/talks into a Zoom-style online video frame. This could manifest onstage in any number of ways but the characters are never not oriented around their Zoom frame, and they're never not separated one way or another.)

Silence.

Finally:)

DREW. So what—

(Beat.)

So what did—

(Beat.)

You go first.

(Beat.)

You go first.

(Finally, finally:)

RILEY. I was—

(Beat.)

I was just—

(Beat.)

You go first.

(Beat.)

You go first.

DREW. So ... *(Pause.)* What'd you do today?

RILEY *(pause)*. Stuff ... *(Pause.)* You?

(Silence. Compared to previously, they're artificially still, pinned to their spots like preserved butterflies.)

DREW. Stuff.

RILEY *(pause)*. Cool.

DREW. Is there a delay? On our connection? Is there a delay?

RILEY *(pause)*. No.

(Silence.)

DREW. Have you been playing Among Us?

(Silence.)

DREW *(cont'd)*. I said have you been pl—

RILEY. Some. Among Us gets old 'cause eventually it's always just crew members who started out fine suddenly being suspicious about other people and then you get to the chat and everyone's just looking at each other going "Sus." "Sus." "Sus."

(DREW starts moving around again, a circumscribed version of their earlier wanderings.)

DREW. Thing I was thinking, I was thinking what if they combined Minecraft and Among Us, it would be interesting because in Among Us it's always the same rooms but in Minecraft—

RILEY. I can't hear you, come back, I can't hear.

(DREW returns.)

DREW. Sorry.

RILEY *(pause)*. You were saying something about—

DREW. Nothin', never mind—what's that noise? What's that sound? What is that—?

RILEY. Oh my brother's playing a video game in the room here. Over there. You can't see him.

DREW. Cool, what game?

RILEY. Um.

(Silence.)

RILEY *(cont'd)*. Can't tell, not sure.

DREW. Oh. *(Pause.)* Sounds fun though.

RILEY. Yeah. Yeah it does. Sound fun.

What in This World

By

DANGER ZEILER and ALLISON GREGORY

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(WHAT IN THIS WORLD)

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What in This World

CHARACTERS

LUCY DANGER: 7-year-old girl. An artist.

NEWSCASTER/UNICORN

DAD

MOM

SISTER 1

SISTER 2

TIME: A recent day in an amorphous period during a time when no one can go anywhere.

PLACE: The condo where the family lives very crunched together.

CASTING NOTE: MOM and DAD can double as SISTER 1 and SISTER 2.

(LUCY DANGER confides to the audience.)

DANGER. It started on a Tuesday. I think it was a Tuesday. I'm pretty sure that was the day. I don't really know days anymore, it's all running together and feeling the same. The newscaster on TV was talking about infections and hospitalizations and "growing concern." Whatever that is.

NEWSCASTER. There's growing concern over the alarming speed of spread, and the *danger* of overcrowding in hospitals.

DANGER. On Wednesday my mom said I couldn't go to school. *(To MOM.)* Why?

MOM. We don't want to put you or your teacher or your classmates in any *danger*.

DANGER. If I'm not at school and I can't see my friends, what am I going to do?

MOM. You're an artist. Be creative.

DANGER *(to the audience)*. Sometimes I don't have the right words. Art is easier for me than talking. I can draw what I mean, or write stories and make books, or make things out of pipe cleaners and yarn and clay. Dad even showed me how to use a glue gun. When I'm doing my art, I don't feel alone. I don't feel confused. I feel like me.

MOM. Can you do your art somewhere else, Lucy? I need this space.

DANGER. On Thursday I changed my name. *(Announcing.)* Everyone, I'm going by my middle name now. "Danger." Because it's perilous and risky to be

an artist. Also because it sounds more exciting than “Lucy.” Did everyone hear me? *(To the audience.)* On Friday, my dad got a call from his job. They said they didn’t want him to come anymore because they were closing down. After that he was in a blue mood. Dark blue. Indigo. *(To DAD.)* One time you said it was good luck if you see a unicorn. Remember, Dad?

DAD *(distracted)*. Hm?

DANGER *(handing him her drawing)*. I drew a unicorn for you.

DAD. It’s a very good unicorn, Lucy.

DANGER. “Danger.”

DAD. But I don’t think art is going to fix things.

DANGER *(to the audience)*. What if he’s right?

MOM. It’s a difficult time, honey. We won’t be able to buy your art supplies. We just can’t afford it.

DANGER *(holding up two crayons to the audience)*. I’m down to “Vivid Violet” and “Extreme Green.” Here’s something terrible. If school and art and my friends and going to work and going *anywhere* can go away, what if *everything* goes away? What if everything in the *world* disappears?

(DANGER begins to draw rapidly as SISTER 1 and SISTER 2 enter, head-to-head whispering.)

DANGER *(cont’d)*. Those are my sisters. They’re always talking in secrets.

(One of her crayons breaks.)

DANGER *(cont’d)*. Oh no. I’m down to one crayon.

SISTER 1. Ssh, ssh—*Danger* in the room.

SISTER 2. Danger! Danger!

(SISTER 1 and SISTER 2 giggle.)

DANGER. That’s not very nice.

SISTER 2. Who said we have to be nice?

SISTER 1. Who are you talking to?

SISTER 2. Lunacy is talking to herself again.

DANGER. Don’t call me that. My name is *Danger*—and I am an artist.

SISTER 1. What does that even mean?

SISTER 2. Yeah what does that even mean?

DANGER. It means I, *Danger*, am going to recreate the world.

(SISTER 1 and SISTER 2 look at each other.)

SISTER 1. With a crayon? Whatev.

SISTER 2. Sure you are, Lunacy.

(SISTER 1 and SISTER 2 laugh and run off.)

DANGER. How do I do it? Where does a world begin? What is in a world? One thing I know for sure is *not* in this world: earthquakes or tornadoes. And no homework. Or zombies, no zombies. What is in the world? And how do I make it with one crayon?

(A UNICORN enters with rolled-up blueprints and a pencil behind their ear. They might be wearing a sporty beret or a baseball cap, to which a magical horn is attached. Also they may have a British accent. Or any accent. I don't know.)

UNICORN. OK, let's get to work.

DANGER. How did you get here—?

UNICORN. How do you think I got here? You made me.

DANGER. But you're a unicorn.

UNICORN. Give me a break. Does being a unicorn mean I don't know how to do things? I don't just stand around a day being a unicorn. Do you stand around all day just being a kid? No, you do stuff. I can do anything a horse can do. Now, let's create a design plan.

DANGER. What is a design plan?

UNICORN. For the world you envision. *(Rolls out the blueprints.)* The first thing to consider is scope.

DANGER. I don't understand what you mean.

UNICORN. Range, span, *size*. You want to design a space where you can live, eat, go to school, work, play, et cetera. How large is this world going to be?

DANGER. It's going to be huge.

UNICORN. Like, two stories? Three stories?

DANGER. Bigger than a house. Bigger than a city. Bigger than a country.

UNICORN. What's your concept? You need a concept to turn ideas into buildings.

(DANGER draws on the blueprints in a big sweeping gesture with her single crayon.)

DANGER. It's going to be a world where you can go anywhere. You can just walk outside and not worry about anything and not be afraid.

UNICORN. We need to talk structure. What is the world made of?

DANGER. In Minecraft everything is made from squares.

UNICORN. Squares—? Sounds edgy.

DANGER. In Lego everything is made of—

Production Notes

In the creation of this anthology, we have always considered how the plays would function together in performance. As mentioned in the introduction, we imagine that directors, educators or producers will select multiple plays from the anthology to be performed collectively. To make such a performance feel cohesive, a prologue might be helpful!

In the spirit of collaboration and listening to young voices, we offer several suggestions of how directors and educators could create their own prologue drawing on the experiences of young people. During the process of story collection, young author Nathaniel Wiley shared a beautiful poem, “My COVID Experience,” with us detailing the emotional turbulence he faced during the pandemic and simultaneously the new perspective he gained. Below are samples from Nathaniel’s poem for you to be inspired by or use.

Sample stanzas:

During COVID, I felt sad
But that sadness gave me the opportunity to look on the bright side.
To see the goodness.

During COVID, I was bored
But that boredom made me find new things to try.

Sample ending:

During COVID, I felt sad, angry, lonely, bored and worried.
But those emotions make me who I am.
They made me see the good.

In honor of Nate’s striking words, we invite you to use his stanza structure of “During COVID, I ... , But that ... ” and sample ending structure to create your prologue. We imagine this creation process could take place in a few ways:

Option 1: In the Rehearsal Room

Talk with your actors about their own experiences of the pandemic. Invite them to brainstorm and write their own stanza. Select several to build into a performance piece.

Option 2: From Social Media and Surveys

In your marketing for the production or a larger social media campaign, invite your audiences to submit their own stanzas through a form, comment or even DM. Select your favorites to build into a performance piece.

Option 3: As a Pre-Show Activity

Either through a written lobby activity or more informal conversations with the performers, invite audience members to speak about their pandemic experiences and compile or extrapolate stanzas to create a unique prologue each night. This suggestion, of course, requires greater skill and quicker thinking from your performers.

We also invite you to create your own prologue that honors young voices in your community.

If you decide to use the samples from Nathaniel’s poem as part of your public story gathering, please include his name, Nathaniel Wiley, and the poem’s title, “My COVID Experience” in the programs.

Author Biographies

Phoebe Anderson is an eighth grader from Phoenix. She is a first-place medalist for barrel racing, the general manager of the Micro-Economy at her middle school, and CPR certified. She is super athletic and enjoys rock climbing, running, riding horses and training for ninja warrior. In her free time she loves to write, foster animals, read, listen to music and hang out with her friends.

Tom Arvetis is an award-winning playwright, director and producer specializing in theatre for tweens and teens. His plays include *I Dream in Blues*, *Walk Two Moons* (published by Dramatic Publishing; 2014 AATE Distinguished Play Award winner), *Spark* (published by Dramatic Publishing) and *Sight Unseen*. In 2013, Arvetis received the Orlin Corey Award for Artistic Excellence from AATE; in 2009, he received an Ann Shaw International TYA Fellowship from TYA/USA; and in 2007 he was a member of AATE's first Theatre Leadership Institute. Arvetis owes everything to his wife, Dana, and their four amazing children: Lyra, Simone, Vivian and Max.

Braulio Arquilla is a sixth grader from San Diego. He plays tennis, video games and paintball. A history buff, he loves to read and write about World War II. His first play, *Quarantine Birthday*, was performed by Playwrights Project as a Zoom reading at the start of the pandemic.

Mabelle Reynoso's plays have been performed in traditional and nontraditional theatre spaces including classrooms, community centers and correctional facilities. Reynoso is co-host of the podcast Hey Playwright and leads TuYo Theatre's Pa' Letras, a new play development workshop for emerging Latinx playwrights. She was a 2021 ReImagine: New Plays in TYA grantee for her play *¡Lotería: Game On!* Reynoso was proudly born in Tijuana, Mexico. For more information, visit: www.mabellereynoso.com.

Sonii Bora is a queer, neurodiverse, BIPOC, first-generation American spoken-word poet. He is currently a junior at J. P. McCaskey High School in Lancaster, Pa. He hopes to study political science and sociology in college and aspires to take his gift in poetry into his future career as a performer/author. Bora has performed his work numerous times in his community's various arts centers, and he hopes to become an inspiration to other young artists who struggle with their own interpersonal and/or social battles.

Barry Kornhauser's plays have been produced worldwide. Honors include AATE's Charlotte Chorpenning Cup, the Children's Theatre Foundation of America's Corey Medallion Award, Helen Hayes Award, Ivey Playwriting Prize, Bonderman Playwriting Prize, three AATE Distinguished Play Awards and multiple NEA grants. His youth theatre program for courageous teens (including Sonii Bora) was commended at the White House as a model arts-education initiative. Kornhauser was named "Artist of the Year" at the 2017 Pennsylvania Governor's Awards, and he has the "Family of the Year" *every* year. Now among these honors, he can count the opportunity of having worked on this project with the talented Sonii Bora!

Abby Bosarge is from Pass Christian, Miss., and is a recent graduate of Pass Christian High School and was honored to be the homecoming queen. She loves to bake and spend time with her family and friends, and she is especially fond of dogs.

Tonya Hays has an MFA in theatre in playwriting for young audiences. She has been recognized for her work in the field by SETC. Hays was the director of the WINGS program at Lynn Meadows Discovery Center. Under her leadership, WINGS received the Mississippi Governor's Award and was recognized by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. Hays' work has been presented throughout the world. She has taken productions to the Kennedy Center, The Oregon Shakespeare Festival and The Edinburgh Fringe Festival. She is the assistant professor of theatre performance at Mississippi State University.

River Bratton is a seventh grader from Dallas. They are a vocalist and student at a talented and gifted magnet school. They are passionate about LGBTQIA+ issues and education. They have two rescue dogs who they shower with love and attention.

Brian Guehring is the award-winning playwright in residence of the Omaha Theatre Company for Young People. He is also the co-founder and co-director of the teen theatre troupe Pride Players, which uses improvisation to explore issues facing gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight-allied teens. He was honored by the Children's Theatre Foundation with the Orlin Corey Medallion Award in 2017. Guehring has several awesome plays published by Dramatic Publishing.

Eden Burnett is a ninth grader from Phoenix. Her essay *Why the 8th Graders Should Get a Yearbook* was made into a play this year. She likes drawing and playing games.

Max Bush is a freelance playwright and director whose plays are widely produced on professional, educational and amateur stages across the country. He has won many awards for his work including AATE's Distinguished Play Award, the Charlotte Chorpenning Cup, IUPUI National Playwriting Competition and Individual Artist Grants from Michigan Council for the Arts. He has been commissioned by theatres all over the country. Published plays include: *Ghost of the River House*; *Ezigbo, The Spirit Child*; *The Boy Who Left Home to Find Out About the Shivers*; *Kara in Black*; *An Identified Enemy*; *Puss in Boots*; *Rapunzel*; *Treasure Island*; *The Emerald Circle*; *Sarah* and *The Three Musketeers*, among others.

Anka Chiorini is a high-school junior from Syracuse, New York. Her writing can be seen in her school's satirical newspaper, *Yampage*, of which she is the editor, and in many needlessly complicated emails.

James Still's award-winning plays have been produced throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa, China and Japan. He is a four-time Pulitzer nominee, five-time Emmy nominee, playwright in residence at Indiana Repertory Theatre, and artistic affiliate with American Blues in Chicago. Many of his plays are published by Dramatic Publishing. He lives in Los Angeles.

Samantha Chuck is a freshman at Perry High School and is from Chandler, Ariz. She is an actor, having played leading roles in school plays, a company dancer and a retired gymnast. She also has interests in video games, drawing and painting.

John Glore is an award-winning playwright whose work for young audiences includes *Wind of a Thousand Tales*, *Folktales Too*, *Rhubarb Jam*, *The Day After Evermore* and adaptations of Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, Laura Amy Schlitz's *The Night Fairy*, Kate DiCamillo's *Flora & Ulysses* and Abby Hanlon's *Dory Fantasmagory*. His plays have been produced at South Coast Repertory, Arena Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, The Children's Theatre Company, the Coterie and many others nationwide. For more information, visit: www.johnglorewrites.com.

Jaren Davis, 12-year-old inhabitant of Evanston, Ill., enjoys activities such as theatre, reading, writing, travel and cleaning. In addition to this, Davis plays the clarinet. He enjoys being with friends and enjoys school more than most. Davis has performed in community youth theatre and is looking forward to directing a theatrical performance with his family in the near future.

Reginald André Jackson is a playwright and actor whose works include stage adaptations of Christopher Paul Curtis' *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* and *Bud, Not Buddy*. Other pieces adapted for the stage include Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*, two of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* and a collection of true-life accounts by victims, refugees, activists, reporters and aid workers concerning the horrible crisis in and around Darfur, entitled *Darfur Stories*. Jackson has considerable experience working in arts and education and frequently tours with Freehold Theatre's Engaged Theatre Program, which takes Shakespeare to Washington state correctional facilities, hospitals, homeless populations and other communities that lack access to the arts.

Jonah Dean is an eighth grader from San Antonio. He plays football and violin and LOVES to ride his bike. He volunteers in many capacities, but his favorite opportunities included assistant coaching a soccer team for 3 year olds and working with the exhibits team at the DoSeum, San Antonio's children's museum.

Gabriel Jason Dean's plays have been seen or developed throughout the U.S. at theatres such as New York Theatre Workshop, Manhattan Theatre Club, McCarter Theatre, The Flea, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Kennedy Center and American Theatre Company. His play for children, *The Transition of Doodle Pequeño*, received the AATE Distinguished Play Award, the NETC Aurand Harris Award and has been anthologized numerous times. Other notable plays include *In Bloom*, *Terminus* and *Qualities of Starlight*. Dean is currently an affiliated writer at The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis and a usual suspect at New York Theatre Workshop. He earned his MFA at the University of Texas at Austin's James A. Michener Center for Writers.

Hanna Dziadurski is a fifth grader from Honolulu. She likes to play violin and piano, and she plays in a family band with her sister and best friend. She also likes to swim and bake.

Lee Cataluna's work includes commissions from Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Arena Stage, La Jolla Playhouse, Honolulu Theatre for Youth and San Francisco Playhouse. Her play *Home of the Brave* has been produced in schools around the world. Her work has been supported by NEA grants. She writes both plays for young audiences and plays for grownups and has worked as a journalist for many years. She has an MFA in creative writing from the University of California, Riverside. She is of Native Hawaiian descent and lives in Honolulu.

Aditi Ganesh is an 11 year old from Chandler, Ariz. In addition to being classically trained in music and dance, Ganesh is training for her blackbelt in Taekwondo. In her free time, she can be seen reading, sketching, painting, sculpting, penning poems or writing her first novel, which she hopes to publish soon. She is also an avid science and tech geek who likes to code. After winning the state-level science fair last year, she now wishes to compete in the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair.

Suzan Zeder is a leading playwright for young and family audiences, with plays produced by professional, university and community theatres in all 50 states and internationally. She is a co-author of *Spaces of Creation: The Creative Process of Playwriting*, an innovative body/mind approach to creative writing. Zeder is a six-time winner of AATE's Distinguished Play Award and received the Campton Bell Lifetime Achievement Award. Most recently, she was selected as one of three "Inspirational Playwrights" by ASSITEJ International. She is the former head of playwriting at the University of Texas, where she held an endowed chair in theatre for youth/playwriting. She was honored to collaborate with Aditi Ganesh, whose imagination, creativity and generosity of spirit promises a bright and joyous future. Zeder currently lives in Santa Fe, N.M.

Sofia Gomez is a sophomore in high school from Oregon. In 2018, Gomez and her theatre troupe won a competition showcase award that culminated with a performance at the Disney Springs Waterside Stage. She enjoys playing piano and writing in her free time.

Ramon Esquivel's recent productions include *The Hero Twins: Blood Race* at University of Texas at Austin and Appalachian State University; *Above Between Below* at Seattle Children's Theatre; and *Luna* in schools, universities and theatres around the world. *The Shahrazad Society* won the NETC Aurand Harris Memorial Playwriting Award. Esquivel is developing his play *ZEQ* with Oregon Children's Theatre through a ReImagine grant from Write Now, TYA/USA and Childrens Theatre Foundation of America. He's published three plays with Dramatic Publishing: *Luna*, *Nasty* and *Nocturnal*. Esquivel is currently an assistant professor of theatre, playwriting at Cal Poly State University.

Taos Goodwin is a fourth-grade creative who loves drawing, chess and being outside. He is a big fan of *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Shaun the Sheep* and eating in hotel rooms. If he is not playing with his baby brother outside you can find him organizing books in The Upstairs Library, which he established and built this past summer. Goodwin believes someday he will be a food critic or a teacher.

Idris Goodwin is an award-winning playwright, breakbeat poet, educator and executive director of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College. He was recently named a 2021 United States Artists Fellow. In addition to *Can I Kick It?*, he's had several publications with Haymarket Books including *Inauguration*, co-written with Nico Wilkinson, *Human Highlight: Ode To Dominique Wilkins* and the play *This Is Modern Art*. He's appeared on Nickelodeon, HBO's *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*, *Sesame Street*, NPR, BBC Radio and the Discovery Channel. His plays include *And in This Corner: Cassius Clay*, *How We Got On*, *Hype Man* and *Jacked!*.

Anaysa Gradillo-Hoover is a 16-year-old female from the West side of Phoenix. Living at home with four of her brothers and sisters, a friend and her grandmother, she still finds time to be a high-school senior and cheerleader at Carl Hayden Community High School. She credits her love of theatre to her mentor and inspiration, Mrs. Galindo.

José Cruz González's plays include *Under a Baseball Sky*, *American Mariachi*, *Forever Poppy*, *Sunsets & Margaritas*, *September Shoes*, *Itzel: The Pirate Queen*, *The San Patricios*, *Among the Darkest Shadows*, *The Long Road Today*, *The Highest Heaven*, *The Magic Kite*, *The Sun Serpent* and *Super Cowgirl and Mighty Miracle*, among others. González was a 2016 PEN Center USA Literary Award Finalist. He is a member of the Kennedy Center's College of Fellows of the American Theatre. He is a professor emeritus at California State University, Los Angeles, and a member of The Dramatists Guild.

Makenzie Greer is from Dallas and is a freshman at Jackson State University. She's a criminal justice major hoping to own her own law firm in the near future concentrating on criminal law or domestic violence. Her constant hand over her community is what she is most proud of, such as working with the Dallas Police Department, founding Motivate Beautiful Youth, which creates a safe haven for all minority students at her high school, and serving as a mentor for Dallas Children's Theatre's Youth Chats for Social Justice.

Gloria Bond Clunie is an award-winning playwright, director and educator. She is a founding member of the Playwriting Ensemble at Chicago's Regional Tony Award-winning Victory Gardens Theater, where her plays *North Star*, *Living Green* and *Shoes* premiered. She is also the founding artistic director of Evanston's Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre. Other works by this Northwestern University graduate (BA in theatre, MFA in directing) include *Sweet Water Taste*, *Buck Naked*, *My Wonderful Birthday Suit*, *Last Stop on Market Street*, *#Lovestories: Inspired by Black Lives Matter* and *Giraffes Can't Dance*. Awards include a Chicago Jeff Award, Dramatists Guild Award, NEA and Illinois Arts Council grants, a CTFA Medallion and the Evanston Mayor's Award for the Arts.

Kira Hopgood is a sixth grader from Ypsilanti, Mich. She loves playing guitar, reading, writing and drawing. She is also an avid swimmer and loves hanging out with her younger sister.

Eric Coble's plays include award-winning adaptations of Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, as well as *The Storm in the Barn*, *Sherlock Holmes: The Baker Street Irregulars*, *Ghosts in the Machine*, *Swagger*, *Cinderella Confidential* and many others that have been produced on Broadway, off-Broadway and in all 50 states, including Dallas Children's Theatre, Childsplay, Metro Theatre Company, Oregon Children's Theater, First Stage, Adventure Stage, and many others. Awards include two AATE Distinguished Play Awards and the Charlotte Chorpenning Award for the body of work of a children's playwright. Visit ericcoble.com for more madness.

Amari Howard is a tenth-grade student from Forney, Texas. She is a member of Top Teens of America and enjoys hand-knitting blankets and listening to jazz.

Caleen Sinnette Jennings is professor emerita at American University in Washington, D.C., where she taught theatre for 31 years. She is the recipient of American University's 2013 Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award and their inaugural award for excellence in diversity, equity and inclusion. She was a founding co-member of The Welders, a playwrights' collective. Jennings is a consultant to the Folger Shakespeare Library, where she has been on the faculty of the Teaching Shakespeare Institute since 1994. She has published seven plays, and her *Queens Girl* trilogy has been performed at theatres across the country.

Ella Kohring is a sixth grader from St. Louis. She loves to sing, act, sew and bake. She spends a lot of time drawing people in interesting outfits and taught herself to crochet during the pandemic by watching YouTube videos. She is an only child, so she spends a lot of time with her dog, cat and two box turtles, Shelly and Shelita.

Dwayne Hartford is a playwright based in Phoenix, where he serves as artistic director at Childsplay. His adaptation of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* has been produced at theatres, universities and schools throughout the country and in Canada. He is a two-time recipient of AATE's Distinguished Play Award. Hartford is originally from the very small town of Smithfield, Maine. He studied at the Boston Conservatory and at Boston University.

Isabella Marie Lucas is currently a seventh grader at Apollo Junior High School. She plays double bass and will be performing with the symphony. She will also be on the volleyball team this year. In her free time she enjoys crocheting, gaming and researching subjects. She is passionate about changing minds and hearts for a better world.

Silvia Gonzalez S. is a prolific writer who writes plays, poems, blogs and is a weekly columnist in a local newspaper. She is co-founder of Hanford Multicultural Theater Company (HMTC). She adds puppetry to her fold and makes puppets for shows. She is also the co-host to HMTC's Behind the Scenes podcast. Gonzalez enjoys the all-inclusive environment of HMTC and is the current executive artistic director. She is also the CEO of Hanford Dia de Los Muertos, a yearly community event. She is also a standup comic in her spare time.

Madisyn Marchetti is a freshman in high school from Orlando, Fla. Alongside writing, she enjoys singing and the performing arts. She is a girl of talent, humor and encouragement for others.

Anne Negri is a drama specialist in the Evanston/Skokie Community Consolidated School District 65 and a playwright for young audiences. She received her degrees from Ripon College and Arizona State University. In addition to teaching and directing, Negri has written more than eight plays for young audiences and has three published works. Her play *With Two Wings* has been produced nationally and internationally. Other plays include: *Oz: The Land That Time Forgot*, *Girls Who Wear Glasses*, *Cave Boys*, *The JunGirl Book*, *Robyn Hood*, *Maddi's Fridge*, *Not a Test*, *The Dancing Dog!*, *The Case of the Missing Rooster* and *A Portal to Fairytale Kingdom*.

Alexis Muturi is a sophomore at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, where she studies music. She loves to listen to music, sing and play piano. She resides in Dallas and is set to sing at the world-renowned Carnegie Hall next year.

Shay Youngblood is an Atlanta-based writer, visual artist and educator. Author of several novels, collections of short stories and numerous essays, her published plays include a stage adaptation of *Amazing Grace* by children's author Mary Hoffman. Her current projects include two children's books, *Mama's Home* (Make Me a World/Random House, 2022) and *Family Prayer* (Convergent/Random House, 2022); *Luna*, a superhero graphic novel collaboration; and *The Architecture of Soul Sound*, a multimedia performance work about architecture, memory and the environment inspired by research in Japan, China and the U.S. She is a Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission board member.

William Page-Dale is a 9 year old from Wilmette, Ill. He enjoys creating video games, playing disc golf and writing horror stories to terrify his parents and teachers. He loves spending time with friends, especially if they own a trampoline.

John Dilworth Newman is currently the chair of the Utah Valley University theatre department and director of UVU's Theatre for Youth and Education Center. He is the author of *Playwriting in Schools: Dramatic Navigation*, which received the 2020 AATE Distinguished Book Award.

Augusto Rios is a sixth grader from Chicago. This is the second time he has worked on a play with his father. He likes to use VoxEdit to make video game characters. He also likes learning how to play rock songs on his electric guitar.

Alvaro Saar Rios is a Texican playwright living in Chicago. His plays have been performed in New York City, Mexico City, Hawaii, Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee and all over Texas. He enjoys creating plays with his son and wife. His award-winning play *Luchadora!* is published by Dramatic Publishing. He used to drive tanks for the Army, but now he teaches playwriting at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. For more information, visit: www.alvarosaarrios.com.

José Joaquín Salazar is a 14 year old from Whittier, Calif., who has just begun his freshman year of high school. His favorite things to do are fixing cars and playing video games, particularly Fortnite and Call of Duty. When he grows up, he would like to be a mechanic but makes it absolutely clear that he would like to keep his options open!

José Casas is a playwright and assistant professor who heads the playwriting minor in the department of theatre and drama at the University of Michigan. His plays include *the vine*, *14*, *la ofrenda*, *Desvelado*, *a rose grows beyond the wall*, *jj's place*, *a million whispers in the wind*, *somebody's children*, *Pedro y El Lobo* and *Flint*. His work has been included in a number of anthologies such as *The Bully Plays*, *Palabras del Cielo: An Exploration of Latina/o Theatre for Young Audiences* and *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre*.

Genevieve Schroeder-Arce is a sophomore at the Liberal Arts and Science Academy in Austin. She has performed in several plays with companies such as Teatro Vivo and Austin Shakespeare. You might have seen her in *Queen of the South* as Young Teresa. Schroeder-Arce is currently on her school's dance team and enjoys geeking out over video games and writing for pleasure. She hopes to pursue a career that she loves and that also helps her community.

Roxanne Schroeder-Arce is an artist, scholar, teacher and administrator. She is currently associate dean of fine arts education and associate professor of theatre education at the University of Texas at Austin. She has published five plays with Dramatic Publishing, including *Yana Wana's Legend of the Bluebonnet*, which she co-authored with María F. Rocha. She has also published articles in journals such as *Youth Theatre Journal*, *International Journal for Education & the Arts* and *Theatre Topics*. Schroeder-Arce is deeply engaged in her community in Austin, and she is dedicated to arts advocacy and youth.

Salome Stein Kokin is an eighth grader from Phoenix. She lived for many years in Berlin and speaks fluent German. She loves to draw and spend time with her pet cat, Yaku, and plays club soccer.

Sandra Fenichel Asher's plays have been produced across the country and abroad. Her work has been honored with AATE's Charlotte Chorpensing Playwriting Award and Sara Spencer Artistic Achievement Award for her lifetime contributions to TYA. Three of her plays have received AATE's Distinguished Play Award: *A Woman Called Truth*, *In the Garden of the Selfish Giant* and *Jesse and Grace: A Best Friends Story*. All are published by Dramatic Publishing. Asher has also published books for young readers, including *Too Many Frogs* and *Chicken Story Time*. Visit her website at sandyasher.com.

Amity Warren is a high-school freshman in Orlando, Fla. She likes to write stories often and perform in plays. She is proud of what she has accomplished so far in life.

Julie Jensen has won a dozen awards, including the Joseph Jefferson Award for Best New Work, the LA Weekly Award for Best New Play and the David Mark Cohen National Playwriting Award. She has been commissioned by a dozen theatres including the Kennedy Center (twice), Actors Theatre of Louisville (twice) and Salt Lake Acting Company (twice). She has received grants from NEA, TCG and Pew Charitable Trusts, among others. Her work has been produced in New York, London and theatres nationwide. Six of her plays are published by Dramatic Publishing.

Alexis Wiley is a fourth grader from Tucson, Ariz. She loves swimming in the summer and riding bikes the rest of the year. She loves spending time with her stuffies and her dog, Fanny.

Jonathan Graham's plays have been produced by Childsplay, Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Metro Theater Company, Oregon Contemporary Theatre, Round House Theatre, Phoenix Theatre Cultural Centre, Pollyanna Theatre and many others. Chicago Dramatists, Bloomington Playwrights Project, Great Plains Theatre Conference, Utah Shakespeare, Theatre 33 and Write Now have helped develop his work. His published plays are available from Dramatic Publishing, Playscripts, Pollyanna Select Plays and Heartland Plays. Graham earned an MFA in theatre arts from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. He lives in Richmond, Ind., with his family and works at Bethany Seminary.

Nathaniel Wiley is a seventh grader from Tucson, Ariz. He loves acting, writing, playing the trumpet and watching baseball. He enjoys playing with his dog and chatting with his friends. He would like to thank his family and friends for inspiration and support.

Eric Pfeffinger is a member of the Dramatists Guild and the Writers Guild of America, East. His plays for young audiences have been developed by the Bonderman Fellowship, Write Now and New Plays for Young Audiences, and produced by Childsplay, Imagination Stage, the Geva Theatre Center and DePaul University. Pfeffinger's other plays have been produced by the Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Phoenix Theatre, InterAct Theatre Company, City Theatre of Miami and elsewhere. He's developed new work with PlayPenn, Page 73, the Lark, the Colorado New Play Summit, the Orlando Shakes PlayFest, Chicago Dramatists and others.

Danger Zeiler is a second grader from Evanston, Ill. Her favorite color is black and she plays piano, sings and dances including tap, ballet and contemporary styles. She enjoys art and writing and is always creating something. Zeiler loves Minecraft, her hot-glué gun and her chosen family.

Allison Gregory's plays have been produced nationally and internationally. She was recognized by TYA/USA as one of the Most-Produced TYA Playwrights of 2019/20. Her plays for families include *Go Dog Go!* (adapted from the P. D. Eastman book and co-written with Steven Dietz), *Even Steven Goes to War* (developed at the Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices festival), *Junie B. Jones: Toothless Wonder* and *Junie B. Jones Is Not a Crook* (adapted from the series by Barbara Park), *Ronia, the Robber's Daughter* (adapted from the Astrid Lindgren book) and a raucous *Red Riding Hood* (commissioned by Seattle Children's Theatre and developed at the New Harmony Project). For more information, visit: allisongregoryplays.com