

Making Theatre Accessible for LGBTQIA+ Youth Article

This section is on creating open and safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth in the theatre. There is a strong focus here on what has attracted queer youth to the stage, but also how to keep them there.

When you look at popular theatre productions what do the recurring romantic relations typically look like? Unfortunately, the answer is mostly a cis-gender man and a cis-gender woman, and often any queer character is secondary, if there is one at all. One of the biggest barriers facing the inclusion of queer teens into theatre is the lack of representation of themselves on stage. No love of theatre can be blinded by the fact that they are seldom ever able to identify personally with characters or see themselves in theatre narratives. So how do we change this? How do we encourage LGBTQIA+ or questioning youth to join theatre groups, to engage with the stage? We use the tools that are right in front of us, follow this acrostic poem to create safe spaces and encourage all youth, but especially LGBTIA+ youth, to find themselves in theatre narratives.

L=Learning and Loving. L stands for creating an environment that embraces everyone with open arms, so they feel loved and cared for. It also stands for learning, a commitment to learn about everyone, and how their experiences differ from others. It is a commitment to learn and grow as we gain more knowledge, and to use that knowledge to create loving and safe spaces.

G=Grace. G stands for graciousness, or having grace, which means providing a kind, pleasant and comfortable space for teens to explore themselves and explore theatre. Giving them the grace to learn and grow into themselves.

B=Bravery and Beauty. B stands for bravery, being brave to share your story, and your life, and not being afraid of what others may say about it. It also stands for beauty, not on the outside, but on the inside, creating beautiful humans who are kind, compassionate, and brave, and giving them the space to grow into these beautiful humans.

T=Try and Tumble. T stands for try, because not everything in life happens on the first attempt. Try means to give everything a go even when you're nervous or unsure, try new things, try to get outside of your comfort zone. Tumble, there will be tumbles along the way, but that comes with trying, if you don't try, you don't tumble and you don't grow. Try, tumble, and get back up stronger.

Q=Equipped. Q stands for the q in equipped, our aim is to equip the teens with a sense of self, and a sense of belonging. We want them to be equipped with all the tools necessary to be themselves outside of the theatre space. We are equipping them with the skills to see themselves everywhere, and when they don't make themselves seen in every space.

I=Inspire. I stands for inspire, which means to give motivation to these students to write their own theatre narratives. To inspire is to positively push people to better themselves, and those around them. You also hope the teens will inspire you, to work on yourself, and see the good in things that we didn't see before.

A=Accepting and Acknowledging. A stands for acknowledging, acknowledging our own biases when building theatre programs and running plays. Acknowledging that narratives need to change and acknowledging the voices and perspectives of everyone. It also stands for accepting, with respect, the differences we all have, and embracing everyone for their uniqueness.

Follow these links for further resources and ideas on how to create safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth in theatre and help them be seen and heard.

References

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