

Seven times this year, high school students filled an MTC theatre for what they and their teachers generally reported to be among their richest learning experiences of the year – attendance at a student matinee of a play from our season. All told, roughly 2,500 students saw a play at the Biltmore Theatre or on one of our two stages at NY City Center. All of them came through either our *Core Program*, which enables students to explore a play’s themes and issues before seeing it, or through *Write on the Edge*, which empowers students to write original plays based on an MTC work after they have studied and attended it.

Informed encounters with live theatrical performance form the bedrock of MTC’s educational philosophy and practice. During the past year, plays like John Patrick Shanley’s Tony- and Pulitzer Prize- winning *Doubt*, Craig Lucas’s *Reckless*, or Donald Margulies’s *Brooklyn Boy* confronted students with powerful images and complex questions. When must we act despite incomplete knowledge? How does one go on when cherished beliefs are shattered? How do we live without a parent’s love? These are just some of the challenging issues students examined and explored in studying and attending these and other plays.

Students in our programs wrestle with such questions not through traditional lecture and discussion methods but by engaging with them through hands-on, theatre-based activities. They write scenes and do improvisations that address key ideas or character dynamics in the play under study. For example, preparing for Jeffrey Hatcher’s *A Picasso*, based on an actual encounter between the renowned artist and a Nazi bureaucrat, students wrote scenes about thwarting authority and protecting something precious. In relation to Donald Margulies’s *Brooklyn Boy*, which depicts a writer’s troubled relationship with his family, students wrote about seeking approval from an emotionally distant parent.

Writing assignments like these point simultaneously in two directions: forward to the performance students will attend at MTC and inward to their own storehouses of life experiences. By drawing on autobiographical material similar to that which animated the writer whose work they will see, they forge links between the play and their lives. The scenes they create illuminate the play even as the play amplifies and clarifies their personal experiences; the process ultimately deepens and extends their understanding of themselves and the world.

*Write on the Edge*, our playwriting program, further extends this exploration process by enabling students to develop embryonic scenes into completed plays. In bringing their works to fruition, they deepen their examination of the root question, issue, or experience they’re writing about. And since these subjects are connected thematically to the MTC play that students study and attend as part of the residency, writers like John Patrick Shanley, Donald Margulies, and Craig Lucas become tacit mentors to our nascent playwrights as they give dramatic form to their emerging ideas.

The work on MTC’s stages thus becomes a source of the richest kinds of learning, enabling students to shape and understand otherwise unexamined, inchoate personal experiences and to make connections between these experiences and larger, more universal truths. A student’s play

drawn from personal dealings with an unloving parent, focused and shaped through the lens of Donald Margulies's *Brooklyn Boy*, deepens his understanding of his particular relationship while linking it to larger, general questions about the ways our roots both nourish and bind us and about how accepting where we come from may help us realize who we are.

This is the kind of learning we seek to foster in MTC's Education Program. In the ensuing pages we will provide a sense of how each of our particular programs connects to this overall vision and philosophy.

David Shookhoff  
Director of Education