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An Open Spot for All:
Theatre Within Disabled Communities

by
Kailey B. Kyle

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors In Discipline Program in Theatre and the Theatre of Department and Dance

East Tennessee State University

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Introduction

Throughout my academic career at East Tennessee State University, I have become increasingly interested in the world of accessible theatre and its applications. Within this journey, I decided to major in both Theatre with a concentration in acting and Psychology, leading to questions regarding how the two interweaved. Ultimately, I found many principles, studies, and organizations that applied these two fields in positive ways, described throughout my thesis.

Also, I began to look for spaces where accessibility in the arts is taught and performed. Stumbling upon OpenSpot Theatre in 2020, I describe my path with their inclusive theatre classes built specifically for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and how I am now teaching my sixth class with OpenSpot in Southwest Virginia. Above all, I hope to promote accessibility and inclusion within theatre, and firmly believe that theatre should reflect all lives, including those within the disabled community.

Disabled Community Terminology

It is important to notate the acceptable terminology used within disabled communities. I have included a chart in the appendix that details current acceptable terminology. It is important to use a “person first” language when speaking of anyone, but especially those with disabilities. For example, it is inappropriate to label a community as *the disabled* or *the handicapped*; instead, one should opt to use person first language and say, *people with disabilities* or *the disability community*. Similarly, you will see the terms, *person with a developmental disability*, *person who has a learning disability*, and *person with a speech impairment*, among other similar phrases, used throughout this paper. Taking a step further, the disabled community includes an extremely broad spectrum of individuals. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

defines developmental disabilities as, “A group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person’s lifetime” (CDC, 2022). The CDC defines physical disabilities as, “Impairment in a person’s body structure or function, or mental functioning, activity limitation, and may affect functions in cognition, mobility, vision, hearing, behavior, and other areas” (CDC, 2022).

What is Accessible Theatre?

Accessibility is defined as the quality of being able to be reached or entered, understood, or appreciated, and easy to obtain or use. We typically hear it in a sense of what is accessible to us personally. Is a plane ticket easily accessible to you; is a grocery store readily accessible? Depending on one’s culture, including their socioeconomic status, gender identity, physical location, mental health, and numerous other factors, some things may be easier to access than others. Very few subjects are accessible to all, including healthcare, art, education, and social relationships. Throughout this paper, I will be focusing on art, specifically drama, and its accessibility to others within three theories: applied theatre, devised theatre, and affinity therapy. Narrowing this topic down even further, I will discuss accessible theatre within the disabled community and its positive impact I witnessed personally through my involvement with OpenSpot Theatre. To discuss accessibility in theatre, I must be accessible in my language as well and certain terms must be defined. Although, terminology regarding this subject is constantly changing and progressing, as is the field itself.

Applied Theatre

To begin, applied theatre is a term that has continuously gained popularity and application since 2004. Applied theatre is a term that refers to drama practice in an educational, community, or therapeutic context (What is applied theatre, 2022). Many theaters and theatre practitioners have been drawn to this practice because of its accessible nature and its ability to travel, educate, and empower. The arts, and theatre specifically, have a healing aspect that have gained the attention of many professionals and researchers, thus causing the progression and rise of applied theatre throughout the 21st century. Applied theatre is used in many contexts, including workshops in businesses to promote problem solving and teamwork, in hospitals to increase hope and fulfillment, and among various other non-theatrical settings. The Center for Applied Theatre states that, “[Applied Theatre] workshops offer a unique amalgam of techniques from the Theatre of the Oppressed and The Virtues Project – enhanced by additional techniques – to create a space for dialogue and exploration.” The impact of applied theatre in a multitude of settings stems from applied theatre’s principles of accessibility, such that no previous theatre experience is required of participants. It simply serves to promote discussion, creativity, and self-expression among a population using techniques found in theatrical texts such as Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of The Oppressed*. I was drawn to applied theatre due to its inclusive nature and its many applications, which led me to discover the world of applied theatre within disabled communities and its many positive effects for those involved.

Devised Theatre

Theatre practitioner John Walton defines devised theatre as, “a process in which the whole creative team develops a show collaboratively” (Green-Rogers, 2016). It is a form of art

that creates important social conversations regarding beliefs, morality, and intrinsic values. All people involved in the production, including directors, actors, designers, and others, pitch in ideas, characters, and thoughts to create a touching show with valuable lessons (Green-Rogers, 2016). For example, in the inclusive theatre class that I am involved with, which will be discussed in detail later on, students choose their own characters and an overarching theme for the show, and then we develop a script and performance together. Devised Theatre typically involves the following elements: a stimulus, research, the establishment of aims and objectives, practical exploration, genre/style/form, structure, and the refinement of the final performance (Green-Rogers, 2016). There is no outline for devised theatre other than incorporating these elements, which can be freeing for many people accustomed to the rigidity of some modern practices. This method is an exciting approach to creating theatre and has a multitude of uses in the realm of accessible theatre.

Affinity Therapy

Affinity Therapy is a therapy technique created by two parents, Ron and Dorothy Suskind, and guided by a clinical psychologist, Dr. Dan Gri (Suskind, 2014). This team of people began developing affinity therapy after noticing improvements in the communication from their son with autism when he would watch his favorite character on a television show. From then on, they used this character to promote communication, and his improvement soared. This form of therapy focuses on an interest or passion of the person being treated and connects that interest to improving emotional, physical, and communication skills (Suskind, 2014). It involves dancing, role playing, and language arts, among many other creative art modalities to express one's character. This builds confidence because one is able to clothe themselves with their favorite

character and equip themselves with tools for success, simply by using something they are already familiar with. Personally, I have witnessed students not only displaying the voice and actions of their chosen character, but the confidence and attitude of the character as well.

Research Studies

As accessible theatre is a relatively new subject of interest, there are many interesting, exciting new research studies and organizations emerging. Numerous research studies emphasize the importance of the arts, and specifically drama, in encouraging people within the disabled community to express themselves, find creative freedom, and build skills within a safe space. Musicka-Williams and Cook developed a research study with drama therapists that attempted to use drama therapy techniques such as role play, visual storytelling, and puppetry to assist disabled participants articulate their thoughts in interviews that the researchers gave to participants (2022). These interviews contained questions regarding how the participants felt performing certain activities. This research study equipped individuals with an alternative language to use during the interview; what they were not able to express using words, they could express using drama therapy techniques (Musicka-Williams & Cook, 2022). Researchers Musicka-Williams and Cook found that offering different creative ways to engage increased participants' involvement, meaning that providing individuals who are disabled with accommodations in artistic fields promotes fulfillment and joy among those involved.

Another interesting study explored the relationship between dance/movement therapy as alternative methods for those with intellectual disabilities to share their views (Hens & Dunphy, 2020). This study aimed to increase participants' engagement in and capacity for reflection and self-assessment. They focused on how offering creative ways for individuals with intellectual

disabilities to express their thoughts gave them more support to give direct feedback on their experiences and make meaningful choices about their services. As we can see in this study, giving accessibility to theatre using the principles of accessible theatre promotes not only joy and confidence for performance, but has many realistic applications in autonomy for individuals struggling to achieve this. The concept of an alternative, self-expressive, creative language is a beautiful tool that one can be equipped with, and a beautiful gift to give.

In Christene Maas' literature review for improvisational theatre for children with autism spectrum disorder, she gathers data from multiple studies that determine the results of theatre used in the autism community to improve social relationships and participation (2021). She states that improvisational theatre aims to support the social communication development and social participation of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) with promising feedback from stakeholders (Maas, 2021). Within her review, she focused on feedback from individuals with ASD and their perspective of how improvisational theatre impacted them. These individuals claimed that the creative outlet of theatre helped decrease their anxiety and improve social skills. In one interview with a young man on the autism spectrum who participated in theatre, he described how theatre arts helped him with understanding, compassion, empathy, and sympathy through the shows he was in. This is one example of the impact that the theatre arts can have on people within the disability community.

Another example of effective benefits that stem from accessible theatre is found in Hilde Guddingsmo's study titled, *Growing a Method for Empowerment With Applied Theatre* (2022). Within her study, she hosts creative workshops for people with learning disabilities in order to develop a method for empowerment among those living in group homes. At these workshops, they use roleplay and the imagination to create a method of self-empowerment and self-

determination, which is unfortunately below average in most group homes for people with learning disabilities (Guddingsmo, 2022). This method was curated using theatre techniques commonly found in applied theatre, including roleplay, imagination, play, and improvisational games and scenarios.

Experiences with Theatre and Inclusion

I first became involved in theatre in the sixth grade with a production of *A Christmas Carol* directed by a passionate, underpaid choir teacher who used his own resources to produce the show. In fact, I loved theatre so much that after the closing performance of *A Christmas Carol*, I threw glitter up in the air during our last bow to prove it. I slowly found my love for the theatre as I discovered myself within the art form. Throughout middle school, high school, and college, I developed strong relationships with my fellow cast and crew members, and grew not only as a performer, but as a person. In addition to relationships, I also now had the freedom of self-expression that so many young adults crave. Through improv games, character exploration, and memorization of lines and staging, I unknowingly developed discipline and a sense of purpose.

I am extremely grateful for my personal journey with theatre, although I realize that this is a privileged experience, and not one that everyone has the opportunity to follow. As I am sure other theatre artisans would agree, there are numerous negative encounters with theatre. Among those, we see the lack of inclusivity, toxic environments, and an unfair hierarchy within companies. Specifically, the theatre is not always accessible and inclusive towards those with disabilities or in need of accommodations. This realization occurred to me as I reflected on the performances and casts that I had participated with, and as I began reading more plays in the

latter years of high school. The majority of people in every cast that I had worked with were entirely able-bodied. Similarly, many plays tell the story of a person within the disabled community, but it is common to see an able-bodied people cast in that role. Unfortunately, directors and producers in theatre and TV/film sometimes choose to forgo accommodations and cast an able-bodied person in a role instead of listening to the needs of people that would accurately portray the role. Sarah Bahr, a reporter at The New York Times wrote that, “Significant depictions of disability on film and television shows have nearly tripled over the past decade, however, almost all of those titles still don’t feature disabled actors” (2021). This reinforces the idea that the field of disability awareness is increasing in theatre, although there is still room for progress, namely in introducing this community to theatre in the first place. Theatre and media are sources of storytelling and truth, and I believe that the actors cast in roles must reflect this as well.

Claudia Alick, artist, and inclusion expert, spoke to the Equity’s Equal Employment Opportunity Committee in June 2021 regarding inclusive casting and specific accommodations for people with disabilities in theatre, and within Actors Equity Association. Alick spoke about ways that artists can create more accessible theatre environments both onstage and off by having quiet spaces, increased signage, hiring an intimacy coordinator, content warnings prior to shows, and utilizing digital technology that exists to facilitate accessibility (2021). While this progressive shift in accessibility within the theatre is wonderful, theatre must be accessible in adolescence and throughout adulthood as well, not only in professional theatres. I hope to join others working in this field to build a realm of theatre in schools, community theatres, and professional spaces where accessibility is expected and applauded, because everyone deserves to see and tell their story.

A source of inspiration for me when I began questioning the lack of inclusivity within the theatre was Deborah Emmy Nowinski, the artistic director of Dionysus Theatre in Houston, Texas. She began a theatre with the mission of inclusivity and accessibility, and was so successful in her efforts, that she wrote a guide to integrating actors with disabilities and non-disabled people in theatres titled, *Your Role in Inclusion Theatre*. Within this book, I found statements that greatly influenced my future experience with an accessible theater company, and discussions that we will return to throughout this essay. Norwinski's overall mission is to "Educate to the soul." To do this, she urges directors and teachers to hand creativity back to those who have been outcast, yet written about over the centuries (Norwinski, 2015). To do this, she outlines ways to reframe one's image of accommodation and representation and question our purpose of doing theatre in the first place. Among these methods are including actors with disabilities in the process of establishing a positive, safe environment for them, casting someone with a disability in roles that call for someone with a disability (and those that do not), and using the key ingredients of creativity and imagination to include everyone in a production or class. Many actors from Dionysus Theatre went on to work professionally as actors, such as Jamie Brewer for her performance in *American Horror Story*. I believe that this theatre's success story is a wonderful example of how inclusion can impact actors and communities, and actually improve the quality of productions and rehearsal atmospheres. In Deborah Norwinski's words, "The disabled community deserve the same experience as everyone else." It is these words that inspired me to continue diving into the world of inclusive theatre and discovering the wonderful benefits that flow from it.

First Encounters with Accessible Theatre Programs

While researching accessible theatre programs near my small town of Coeburn, VA, and in East Tennessee, I was surprised to find that the options were few. POP Arts – Power of Performing Arts, was a theatre company that established accessible theatre classes in the East Tennessee area in 2012 and continued vigorously supporting inclusive theatre in the region until 2020. Although the company derailed after the Covid-19 pandemic, their company impacted many individuals and families in the region and established an amazing opportunity for involvement in the performing arts. I began to search a larger radius of locations, and found several national theaters dedicated to accessible theatre, including Identity Theatre in Astoria, NY, Detour Company Theatre in Scottsdale, AZ, and The Apothetae in Brooklyn, NY. Researching these theaters and reading their mission statements inspired me to analyze the lack of accessible theatre programs in my area and work to establish conversations about starting one in the southeast Appalachian region. I dove into research, reading stories of how accessible theatre brought hope and a sense of purpose among artists and audience members. I found research papers detailing their studies on the interaction of theatre and psychology, and the impact that theatre has on various elements of mental and physical health, especially among the disabled community. Unsurprisingly, accessible theatre impacted communication skills, social development, and relationships, and granted an unwarranted freedom of expression for people. Although I was excited to start this journey of bringing accessible theatre to Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee, I had no idea where to start. Soon after, the entire world was left questioning where to start during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Like most of us, I was searching for a sense of purpose and motivation during the pandemic. My pre-pandemic days were filled with inspiration from classes and friends

suddenly became days filled with silence and online grocery orders. I missed the drive and passion that once weaved throughout my days. And then one day, when casually researching accessible theatre programs in the United States, I stumbled upon a company: OpenSpot Theatre. I scrolled through their social media and website pages to discover that they taught accessible theatre classes in Detroit, Michigan. I became enthralled with their description of classes, techniques, and programs. They served every age range and were extremely passionate about their responsibility to the disabled community. Although they were based out of Michigan, I decided to take a leap of faith and contact OpenSpot Theatre, asking to set up a phone call to discuss the beginning process of establishing an accessible theatre program, and what my first steps should be once the pandemic ended. I was pleasantly surprised when they quickly emailed me back consenting to schedule a phone call.

Eager to learn from their experience and gain knowledge in the field, when speaking to Annie Klark and Katie Dziklinski, the young founders of OpenSpot Theatre, I explained my interest in accessible theatre and they kindly invited me to observe their Zoom classes. I was thrilled at this opportunity, and found motivation within Katie and Annie's story of OpenSpot Theatre and their resilience in the field of accessible theatre.

OpenSpot Theatre, recently celebrating their 10th anniversary of accessible theatre programs, focuses on teaching theatre through music, drama, and movement therapy techniques to people of all abilities. Katie and Annie launched their first OpenSpot class in 2012, and have continued to bring the joy of theatre to thousands of people since then. Throughout their classes, they focus on exploring three components of performance: singing, acting, and dancing, along with sign language interpretations.

[Introducing OpenSpot Theatre - 2021](#)



Their mission statement, “Bringing accessibility to theatre with fun, creative, and therapeutic activities” builds on the foundations of inclusivity, special education, expressive arts therapies, and in their words, “most importantly... FUN” (OpenSpot Theatre, 2022).

In the spring of 2021, I connected to Zoom meetings every Tuesday and Wednesday evening to volunteer with and observe three different OpenSpot classes. However, the word “different” doesn’t even begin to describe them. Throughout my observation and participation in these classes over Zoom, it was obvious that each class had its own unique set of characteristics. In one class, students were extremely vocal and outgoing, while in another class, they needed more encouragement to begin playing acting games and dancing. One class had ages ranging from 4 to 12, while another had seniors leading the way for younger adult students. Similarly, student’s disabilities and accommodations varied, although I couldn’t see the full extent of this until I began instructing an in-person class. From what I could observe, I noticed that some students had dreamed of being performers since a young age and knew every theatrical term and

practice. On the other hand, some students had never followed along with dance choreography or developed a character before, but theatre for *all* encompasses these varying backgrounds and perspectives. After all, theatre artists are creative, and this creativity is not limited to the stage. This creativity must be utilized to give everyone a chance to experience theatre equitably.

The OpenSpot instructors that I was able to watch teach over Zoom, Molly Zaleski, Emily Lourim, and Karen Dickson, referred to in classes as Miss Molly, Miss Emily, and Miss KK, set wonderful examples of fostering this creativity to satisfy the individual needs of their students, while also driving the class towards a common goal. All OpenSpot instructors have experience in theatre and working with individuals with disabilities, whether this experience comes from an educational or personal perspective. Also, prior to teaching with OpenSpot, instructors and volunteers are required to attend a training with the co-founder Katie. Katie Dzikinski has a master's degree in special education, and experience with American Sign Language, and theatre, so she consistently checks in on classes and teachers to assure that the students are receiving good quality training and accommodations. I learned from the instructors' tactics, which obviously were developed from their experiences as artists and within their careers at OpenSpot. For example, Molly Zaleski, or Miss Molly, is a choreographer, so she adapted choreography from popular songs that the students enjoyed making it accessible to all abilities. Whether a student was a wheelchair user or became overstimulated by sudden gestures and loud music, she adapted the moves to fit the class. It didn't matter if the students were following along perfectly with the choreography, what mattered is they were engaging with the music and dancing! She often built-in freestyle sections of dance into the choreography to allow students the freedom to come up with their own combinations. In another example, Emily Lourim, or Miss Emily, is a passionate educator, so her strengths lie in never leaving a student behind.

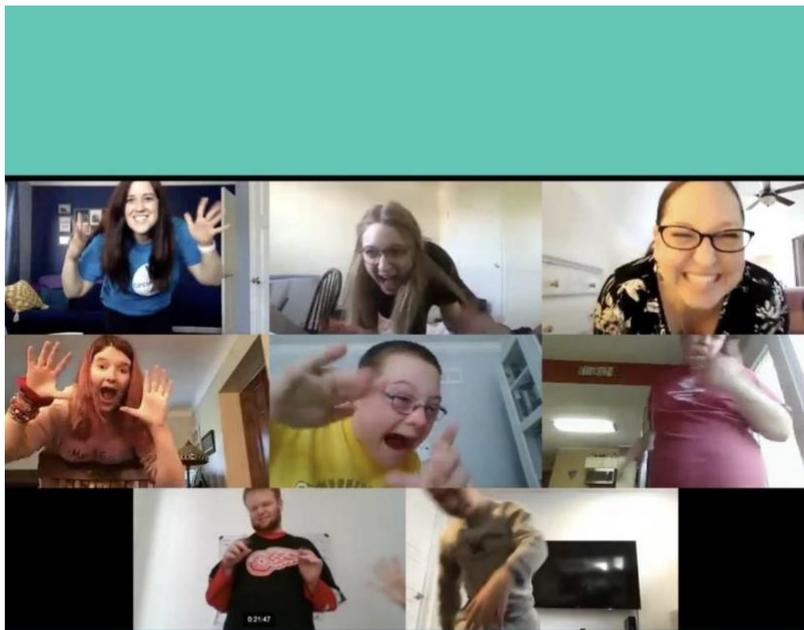
While students may learn at different paces, teaching the material that produces these healthy benefits must continue, so Miss Emily employed techniques such as using encouragement among peers and rewording activities to make them seem more appealing to a student's individual interests. I recall one moment where the class was asked to stand and begin an improvisational acting game, but one student was not interested in participating and continuously ignored Miss Emily. Miss Emily gave the student more time to prepare by giving her the option to go last, but when the time came, the student still ignored the teachers and other students. Instead of passively allowing the student to not engage in class, Miss Emily continued to explain the game to her, the reason behind playing it, and encouraged the student to participate. She gave her numerous options, and finally, the student stood up and took her turn, ultimately begging to play the game again the next week. I learned a valuable lesson that the other instructors commented on at the end of class, sometimes students simply need more attention and encouragement than others, and this is okay. Every person deserves to feel the effects of the expressive arts, and no person should be left behind in this mission. The last OpenSpot instructor that I had the privilege of working with was Karen Dickson, known as Miss KK, an enthusiastic actor and director that jumped in headfirst to the silliness of improv games and showed students how to have fun with this art form. She encouraged students to bring out their silly side, and allow themselves to freely speak, think, and move. She inspires me to continue to look for opportunities not only in class, but in my daily life, to remember the joy in theatre and life. Although I had to observe OpenSpot classes over Zoom due to the pandemic, I hope to one day meet these wonderful ladies in person.

Furthermore, not only were the instructors inspiring to watch, but I learned just as much from the students. The students constantly encouraged one another and spoke highly of their peers when giving feedback. I was able to watch theatre literally spark relationships, including a

five-year long friendship between two students who became inseparable after their first OpenSpot class together five years ago. In a Zoom meeting with fellow instructors, I learned that unfortunately, there are very few accessible, communal spaces for those with disabilities. Sometimes, people with disabilities struggle finding friendships because of this reason, and theatre is a wonderful tool to combat this phenomenon. Building relationships and social skills among students is one of OpenSpot's foundations, and they encourage this by giving space and time to foster these relationships in class, using group activities, partner games, and collaborative performance.

Along with relationship building and social skills, the teachers and students also worked to foster a positive environment, and this stemmed from the language used in the classroom. The narrative in class always included the students; no decisions were made without their consent and opinion. If a student really wanted to dance to a certain song, but there wasn't time to in class that day, they would be given the option to start the following class with that as a warmup activity. Although the language was very positive and accepting, it was also firm at times to create a structured, non-stressful environment as well. Above all, OpenSpot emphasizes the importance of learning and growth during class and rehearsals opposed to a final, perfected performance.

OpenSpot Theatre Zoom Classes - Spring 2021



OpenSpot Virginia and Resources

Observing OpenSpot classes over Zoom inspired me to further the idea of bringing accessible theatre to Southwest Virginia. Seeing the impact that accessible theatre has on students firsthand left a lasting impression that I wanted to share with others. Katie Dziklinski, one of the co-founders of OpenSpot, called me and proposed an idea that led me to where I am today. She said that OpenSpot had been discussing the desire to expand into various cities, but not as a chapter, as a singular pop-up class; this would allow for their unique classes to be shared with a greater population in the United States. A pop-up class differs from a chapter because within the pop-up class, the team at OpenSpot Theatre in Michigan manages the business side of work and handles finances and provides support to the class director as needed. Katie asked if I would be interested in stepping into the first class director position and starting a pop-up class in Southwest Virginia in Summer 2021. Needless to say, I was ecstatic.

The position of a class director included writing curriculum, organizing the location and time, promoting the class, and reaching out to potential students and their families in the area. Katie and Annie managed the business aspects of the organization including registration fees, necessary materials, and a plethora of knowledge and experience. I felt supported and thrilled to embark on this journey of bringing OpenSpot Theatre classes to Southwest Virginia, and step by step with the help of Annie Klark and Katie Dziklinski began planning for my first class!

Immediately, I reached out to an organization in Coeburn, VA that focused on planning and promoting events for people in the disabled community. This group, led by Crystal, the mother of a child with Down Syndrome, calls themselves the “Angels” and were thrilled to spread the word about OpenSpot classes to the community. Instantly, OpenSpot was met with acceptance and excitement, while at the same time, many families were hesitant. The events

promoted by Angels typically included basketball and baseball, and an annual prom event. Many families naturally had questions about what these classes would entail, and ultimately, if their child would be able to participate in them. The leader of Angels, Crystal, warned me that new events/organizations for people in the disabled community were sometimes met with resistance, because there is a history of not accommodating their needs within activities. I was grateful for OpenSpot's reputation because I could easily refer families to OpenSpot's website, YouTube channel, or personal testimonies from students who had participated in their classes.

The next step in establishing this pop-up class was to find a co-instructor. OpenSpot encourages having at least two instructors in each class so one instructor can tend to a student individually. If necessary, the other can lead most of the class. They also ask that the individual has experience working with individuals with disabilities and a passion for theatre or education, or preferably, both. I reached out to a friend whom I met while rehearsing for a show in a local community theatre, Hannah Adams; she worked as a third-grade teacher and studied special education in undergraduate school and had volunteered with many events for the Angels. In fact, we even dressed up as characters for the Angels Prom, so not only was she a co-instructor, but she was the Queen of Hearts to my Alice as well!

Hannah and I at the Angels Prom in 2018



She quickly responded saying that she had been looking for opportunities to volunteer with the disabled community in our area and said she would love to join. With Hannah and Crystal's help, we began reaching out to schools, families, and group homes within the region.

Now that a team of people, including myself, Hannah, and Crystal were working to achieve the common goal of a pop-up OpenSpot Theatre class, we began to promote it within the community. This began the tedious work of countless emails, flyers, and social media posts. Hannah spread the word among the school she worked at in Pound, Virginia, and with other teachers she knew. Crystal encouraged families who participated in the Angels events to look into OpenSpot Theatre and register for classes. I personally began reaching out to local news stations, schools, and photographers/videographers within the region who would be interested in taking pictures/videos of the class in order to promote it in the future. Although this was a pop-up class, I hoped that it could continue seasonally, and eventually grow into a chapter. I had the opportunity to witness the incredible impact that these classes had on students, and I didn't want others to miss out on it. Also, I was hoping that by promoting the class and company itself so fervently, it could possibly inspire theatre teachers and directors within the region to establish a goal of accessibility for themselves.

Flier for OpenSpot Virginia classes

**OPENSLOT
THEATRE**

Saturdays 1/22 - 2/26
 Ages 5-13: 11am-12pm
 Ages 14+: 12:15-1:15
 Lays Hardware Center
 Coeburn, VA

Theatre for ALL

Visit Openspottheatre.com or
 email kaileykyle01@gmail.com
 to register!

As mentioned previously, accessibility refers to many outlets, including providing equal opportunities for those with varying socioeconomic statuses. According to the United States Census Bureau, the median income for an individual in Coeburn, VA is \$18,154 and 24.2% of Coeburn's population lives below the poverty line. This is unfortunately usually one of the determining factors for the lack of organizations and activities in the town. OpenSpot Theatre has a registration fee of roughly \$115 for six weeks of classes, although they started charging a "pay what you can" rate with a suggested amount of \$115 after the pandemic. However, this number deterred many potential students from looking further into OpenSpot Theatre classes. In the nature of accessibility, I began a conversation with Katie, OpenSpot's co-founder, and Hannah, to discuss this issue. We decided on finding sponsors within the community to anonymously cover the registration cost for students who wanted to participate but couldn't due to money. After the meeting, I created a form for those wanting to register for OpenSpot classes but interested in a sponsorship and reached out to potential sponsors. This idea was met with incredible generosity in the community, and all students who wanted to participate now could. Throughout this entire process, I was constantly amazed at the kindness, empathy, and openness surrounding me.

Curriculum

Now that students were registered and I could take a deep breath knowing that it wasn't just me who was excited for this, it was time to begin writing the curriculum and planning for class. OpenSpot Theatre shared a Google Drive with me that they share with all instructors. This Google Drive includes choreography, songs with American Sign Language, curriculum outlines, activity books. These were all great starting points to begin writing the curriculum and gave me

countless ideas for games, themes in performances, and a general idea of what is expected when writing curriculum. After all, I had no experience in writing lesson plans of any kind and was grateful for a helping hand as I began doing so. For example, this five-day curriculum outline for OpenSpot Theatre classes is an example of a resource provided by OpenSpot Theatre that I used to help influence writing my lesson plan. As seen in my lesson plan that I wrote attached in the appendix, this outline, along with song and dance video examples, proved to be useful tools in organizing and prioritizing events in class.

OpenSpot Theatre Curriculum Outline

Click link for full document:

<https://app.luminpdf.com/viewer/6439b0e16cde9cdc7f680e0e>

5 Days 'til Showtime

using Affinity Therapy to put on an amazing performance in five 60-minute rehearsals



*4th*wall*
BACKSTAGE

[OpenSpot Theatre Choreography Video Example - "Can't Stop The Feeling"](#)

[OpenSpot Theatre Song with ASL Video Example - "Stand By Me"](#)

Acting for Everyone

8 multi-level activities for students of all abilities



[OpenSpot Theatre Accessible Acting Exercises](#)

Music & Movement for Everyone

8 multi-level activities for students of all abilities



[OpenSpot Theatre Accessible Music and Movement Exercises](#)

As I began exploring these helpful guides written by Annie and Katie, with suggestions from other OpenSpot instructors, I began to develop a rough process of writing curriculum. Now, I have refined that process, so the curriculum is flexible and adheres to the specific group of students in class, although I still refer to the shared Google Drive constantly for ideas and inspiration! As seen in the materials linked above, devised theatre and affinity therapy are both used throughout the class. At the beginning of the class, there is not a script or performance to prepare for, as there typically is in a theatre class or rehearsal. Instead, I employ methods of devised theatre and encourage students to use the knowledge gained in class to develop their own characters and ideas for the show. Also, students unknowingly use devised theatre throughout each class in improvisational activities, or in reflections of said activities. After the basic principles of class are set, affinity therapy is set into action by students choosing what character they connect with and feel empowered by. The last three weeks include students moving like those characters, speaking like those characters, and interacting with others as those characters. Both devised theatre and affinity therapy are key components to the lasting impact that OpenSpot Theatre, and accessible theatre in general, has on students. They encourage students to step outside of their comfort zone and develop a creative image of themselves, their character, and ultimately, increase their confidence and comfort in a performance setting.

The key to writing OpenSpot curriculum, or any accessible theatrical lesson plan, is flexibility and open-mindedness. For example, each activity is written with various “levels,” each level increases in difficulty and is designed so that all students feel comfortable with the activity, while at the same time, it challenges them. An acting game that OpenSpot is famous for is the “Pass The Hat” game; in this game, students take turns putting on a hat or costume piece and say a line with an action that corresponds to the character. So, if I pull out a pirate hat, I may

say, “Argh Matey!” and make a hook with my finger. At the first level of this game, all students repeat the phrase and action after the instructor. At the second level, students take turns passing the hat and repeating after the first student with the hat on. At the third level, each student takes a hat and takes turns individually stating the line and performing the action. Typically, I like to introduce a game using the first level, and then depending on students’ comfort and interest level, increase the level throughout playing the game, or in the following week.

The curriculum typically follows a specific order, both for organization and for the comfort of students who succeed best when in a routine. We begin with circle time, where students introduce themselves and engage with the other students and instructors. I love to start with an activity that gets our mental and physical self moving. One of my favorites is asking students to say their name and perform a gesture that describes them, then the other students respond by repeating that gesture back to them. Or I’ll ask a fun icebreaker question like, “If you could be any animal what would you be and why” or, “If you could have dinner with any person, who would you pick?” These are always followed up by laughs or questions from other students, opening students up to the class a bit more than when they first arrived. Then, we move onto discussing the three rules of theatre and the three parts of theatre.

The Three Rules of Theatre:

1. Be safe
2. Be brave
3. Always be respectful

The Three Parts of Theatre:

1. Acting
2. Singing
3. Dancing

After this welcome circle, we start a physical warm up where we stretch and increase our awareness of our bodies in space. Due to the varying ability levels in a class, I always encourage students to listen to their bodies and ask for modifications. Also, students are always given the option to either stand up or sit down when warming up. Some common stretches we do are tensing our bodies, and then relaxing them, shaking our hands and feet in sets of seven, and making ourselves as high or low as possible. A warmup game that I love is pretending to pass a ball to one another; as this game goes on, the ball may turn into a vase, or a puppy, or a dollar bill. When throwing this item, students must imagine the shape and weight of the item, and the strength of the person throwing it to them. This game, and others similar to it, increases focus and encourages teamwork and imagination. Another warmup game that challenges students to think and act quickly is one that I learned in my Theatre Movement class and is inspired by Augusto Boal. In this game, students create images of the words, “High” “Low” “Wide” and “Narrow.” Then, prompted by the instructor or another student, everyone creates these images either individually or in a group. Making a common theatre activity, such as this one, accessible doesn’t mean completely starting from scratch, but instead, challenging students while making room for alterations and accommodations within the game. For example, whenever this game was played in class, one student with limited movement due to a physical disability created

images of the words with his hands, while another very active and flexible student used his entire body and jumped up and down while playing.



Circle Time!
Reviewing the 3 parts and rules of theatre



Stretching to warm up
for class

Using the three parts of theatre as a guide, we move onto acting activities next. In the first couple classes, I like to build from students' comfort levels and then add elements into games that explain theatrical terms and concepts. A common one is charades; all students typically know what charades is, but after playing one round of simple charades, then I'll add various situations, choices, and characters into the game. So, instead of acting simply like a tiger (which is what the first level would be), students may act like a duck doing ballet. The third level involves a competition or team effort of some sort, so now there are two people in a grocery

store, and one is a crazy cat lady and the other is a firefighter who only sings. As the difficulty of the game increases, students find comical or dramatic ways to portray their characters. Slowly, the anxiety and discomfort melts away and is replaced by ideas and laughs. Of course, not every student may feel ready for these additional elements, which is why each student is met individually at their personal level. As with all theatre classes, some students are naturally outgoing while others are more reserved. Another acting exercise that adheres to students' varying abilities is the "A Million Ways to Walk Through The Door" game, where students walk through the door as various characters, animals, and emotions. I may ask, "How would anger walk through the door?" or, "How would a ballerina walk through the door?" then the students would walk through the door as that character. As class continues, I include this game in the last two weeks and ask students to walk through the door as their character they have chosen for the play. It amazes me watching students' confidence and comfort in front of their peers grow weekly.



Students moving as their characters in an OpenSpot performance



Playing an Acting Game in OpenSpot Class

Then, the class moves onto music and movement activities. Each class, we work on a dance and song that includes sign language that will be showcased at the performance. In my experience, dancing is typically the most favored activity in OpenSpot classes! I either use the choreography videos posted on the shared Google Drive for OpenSpot instructors or create new choreography to a song that will correlate to the performance. This choreography is designed to be repeatable and accessible, so moves may look different depending on the student, and that is okay. Many students in my classes have been huge Michael Jackson fans, so we've performed dances to *Thriller*, *Blame It On The Boogie*, and *Beat It*. Also, before learning choreography, we play the mirroring game, where students mirror the movements of their partner. The song, on the other hand, will typically be slower and involve the theme of the show and is also performed with sign language. In 2022, I wrote a play with a fairytale theme for the students, so we sang and signed *A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes*. In the first OpenSpot show in 2021, we sang and signed *This Is Me* by The Greatest Showman. When learning these songs and dances, I encourage students to first listen to the lyrics and mood of the song and let that influence their movement. To practice this, we play an activity where I will play songs of different genres and ask students to move in the way they feel it compels them to. So, the genre and therefore movement may switch from rap, to classical, to funk, to country. The incorporation of these various elements allows for students to express their interests and creativity freely, while teaching about theatre and all the art form's moving pieces.

Students mirroring one another



Learning the dance to “September”

Spring 2023 OpenSpot class

<https://youtube.com/shorts/7vxwzvr>

[GnzM?feature=share](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/7vxwzvr)



Ribbon Dancing

Personal Testaments

Preparing for accommodations is nearly impossible, unless they are a returning student, or their guardian specifically describes their needs when registering them. As with all classes, there are situations that must be dealt with during class and may affect other students learning. It was a delicate dance that I am still learning the steps to, and most likely will be for the duration of teaching OpenSpot Theatre classes. On the other hand, there are wonderful, unplanned moments that occur during class and remind me of my passion for this field. As previously mentioned, activities, dances, and the songs are built to be accessible for all with varying levels and expectations for various students. However, it still takes time, patience, and encouragement for many students to realize their creative potential, or to even step out and play a game with the rest of the class. After teaching six OpenSpot Theatre classes and volunteering with two more, I have encountered many stories of each kind.

Several students attending class require assistance with vision or hearing. One student was hard of hearing and nearly blind, so to assure that he was able to fully participate in class, an instructor stayed with him and helped guide his movements if needed and would repeat instructions as necessary. Another very young student was extremely timid at first and became easily overstimulated in class. To calm her, an instructor would employ the use of playdough or a fidget toy of the student's choice and sit with them at a booth near the rest of the class. After the student felt ready to join the rest of the group, they were happily ushered in. Several students, specifically on the autism spectrum, have a difficult time remaining in one place and will pace around their chair. This is welcomed, because many students on the autism spectrum find that certain actions, such as pacing, helps with focus and attention. There is a fine line in OpenSpot classes with discipline and freedom, as there is with all classrooms.

While there are many joyous moments in class and in accessible theatre, there are also challenges. I once had a student who faced many behavior challenges in school and posed many obstacles in class for their classmates and me. I was determined for this student to have the best experience possible, but because of many behavior issues, this proved very difficult. I called the co-founder, Katie, to discuss the next steps to take in class. This particular student wanted undivided attention from instructors, and would cry, talk over other students, and make inappropriate statements throughout class. The true problem, however, arose when she made other students feel badly about their performance or ideas and when she walked out of the classroom, that's when the other instructor and I knew we needed to come up with better solutions. After talking with Katie, I decided to reach out to the student's grandmother and discuss these issues and employ certain strategies in class to improve the environment. Generally, I had to become firmer and not allow the student to walk over me. When the student would interrupt abruptly or talk over other students, I had to tell them no or remove them from the situation, explaining why they were being disruptive. I also asked a volunteer to stay with them throughout class, to divert their attention to something else when an issue came about. I learned a valuable lesson about managing a classroom for the benefit of the students. Even after all these guidelines were put into place to assist the student, a teacher at the school told me that this student told them that they couldn't wait to go back to acting classes.

While OpenSpot is designed for students varying disabilities, it's also designed for students varying in age. The age range in my class typically falls between 8 and 64, with a mixture of attitudes, backgrounds, and goals. While this does provide challenges, it also is a wonderful opportunity for students to establish themselves as role models and practice leadership. Often, the older students who have taken OpenSpot classes before will help assist

other students in class, encouraging them in activities and offering a helping hand when needed. I recall that before a performance I overheard two students, an older, veteran student, and a younger, new student, discussing their nerves. The older student continuously assured the younger student that he had been nervous for his first show as well, but that she was going to do great and simply had to shake the nerves out. One of the youngest students was 9 when he attended his first OpenSpot class and hasn't missed a class since. He is on the autism spectrum and has a limited vocabulary, although his ability to clearly express his ideas and thoughts has only grown since first meeting him two years ago. He loves music, especially Elvis Presley, and dancing. Watching him grow has been an amazing experience; in his first class, I would often repeat instructions and questions, and mirror movements for him to follow. Now, he will lead a game with no problem, even trying to trick the instructors into messing up the game! He has developed numerous characters and contributed greatly to the performances, playing characters such as a Lego man, power ranger, Winnie the Pooh, and of course, Elvis Presley. His mother, who is an occupational therapist, said that he loves to practice the songs and dances at home, and constantly asks when the next class is going to be.



An older student assisting a younger student during freestyle dance



The Green Power Ranger introducing himself during a performance

One of my favorite aspects of OpenSpot classes is learning about the students and their interests and incorporating them into classes. This is a feature of affinity therapy: using students' interest to encourage them and give them confidence to pursue an activity, like a rehearsal or performance. In classes, many students will ask to play certain songs, and I love to make time for this at the end of class to wind down. Finding the students' favorite music genres, characters, and working styles helps to create a well-rounded curriculum for the following classes that is accessible and exciting for them. For example, I am well aware that the group of students in the class I am teaching now love to play freeze dance and are mostly competitive, so I schedule time for freeze dance at the end of class and developing a game from that (like dancing to the genre of the music) and divide improv games up into two teams to encourage teamwork and their competitive nature. In the same fashion, I like to give students opportunities in classes to take a leadership position, whether they become the choreographer when dancing and everyone has to follow them, or they share their ideas about what the play should be about or what lines their character should say. Overall, it all goes back to the idea of being flexible and open-minded

during class and when planning out lessons. This allows for the utmost freedom of expression for students, and an unlimited amount of growth to follow from that.

As the saying goes, there's no rainbow without a little rain. So, naturally, there are challenges that arise during classes. Some of the challenges that I've encountered while working for OpenSpot Theatre are the multiple personalities within one class, families not attending class regularly, lack of participation, finding trustworthy volunteers/instructors, and becoming overwhelmed. I am extremely passionate about accessible theatre, which leads to vulnerability and high expectations for myself. I have found that finding a balance between throwing all of my effort into classes and sitting back and allowing students to discover new ideas in classes for themselves is difficult, and requires patience, which I am working on every day. Also, I have had the most difficulty with some students not attending class and missing out on valuable moments. This is especially concerning when a sponsor covers the student's registration fee, and their parent isn't bringing them to class. Personally, I avoid confrontation at all costs, and it is difficult to confront students and families with concern, but it is necessary to maintain a certain level of expectation for the program. Another concern of mine in class is when students with an outgoing personality overshadow the more timid students; I want to assure students that their ideas are important and worthy of being heard, while also hearing the other, shyer students' ideas equally. In these instances, I typically call on students who haven't spoken in a while and ask other students to practice listening and repeating what that student said. Although it isn't always this easy, I feel like I'm learning new tactics to overcome these obstacles every class.



Showtime!

PAGE 12 Friday, July 9, 2021 **The Coalfield Progress**

OpenSpot Theatre

Angels organization to host theatre for all in Coeburn

KELLEY PEARSON
STAFF WRITER

COEBURN — Kaitley Kyle fell in love with theater during her time on the Eastside One-Act team, winning five state championships as well as 12 acting awards. Now a pastor at RTSI inspiring theatre and psychology with the intent to work in drama therapy, Kyle brings that love back home to work with the Special Needs Angels organization with Virginia's first OpenSpot Theatre popup chapter.

Katie Martin and Annie Klark started OpenSpot Theatre in Detroit, Mich. in 2012. Their intent was to make theatre available to all people. Beginning in 2020, an additional chapter was added in New York. Coeburn's chapter is the first outside of Michigan or New York.

Kyle reached out to Crystal Clark Lawson, who is one of the leaders of the local Angels organization, after completing an internship with the OpenSpot program.

"I said let's go for it," Lawson said. "It's in Michigan and New York, so why not introduce it here to our hub of special needs people in Coeburn."

Lawson used to take her daughter to the Tri-Cities area of Northeast Tennessee for sports and activities, but wanted something closer to home for folks with Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder and others of varying degrees of physical or developmental abilities. Thus, the Angels organization was born.

The Angels have multiple events each year including baseball in the spring, basketball in the winter, the Fall Ball formal event in the fall as well as the 3-2-1 Day for Down syndrome. This will be the first theater-centric event for the organization.

The as-of-yet untitled play will be comprised of all of the actors' favorite characters and will play to each person's abilities.

"We're just kind of taking any particular characters that they want to play and we will write the play around that," Kyle said. "Some may want to sing, and some may want to dance. We'll work around that and make it enjoyable for everyone."

Another Eastside graduate, Hannah (Hill) Adams, is teaching alongside Kyle. She graduated from UVA Wise in 2018 with a degree in special education and currently works at J.W. Adams Combined School, as a special education teacher. She has volunteered with the Angels for the last 11 years.

Classes will be held at the Lay's Hardware building in Coeburn for the next two Tuesdays with the play being performed on July 27. Spots are still available. Lawson also advised that sponsorships are available to offset costs for any potential participant and Det. Wells is permitting the group to use the historic space free of charge.

"That's the great thing about this community," Lawson said. "We always have such support from anyone."

"It's amazing to me how our community proves itself over and over again," Adams said. "When something needs to be done, there's always more than enough help and volunteers."

Anyone with questions or offers of assistance can contact Kaitley Kyle at 276-219-3511, Hannah Adams at 276-337-7823 or Crystal Lawson at 276-219-3172.

The answer to 'Who likes watermelon?' is everyone!

Sarah Lawson (gray shirt) shares an inside story with her stepmother, also Sarah Lawson (tie-dye shirt), while Kaitley Kyle (pink shirt) finds the group discussion hilarious.

Eric Estep (yellow shirt) cracks everyone up telling a story.

The group (from left to right and counterclockwise: Sarah Lawson embracing stepdaughter Sarah Lawson, Ian Robinson, Emily Glover, Eric Estep, Tony Cheeks, Kaitley Kyle and Nick Wells) do a warm-up dance.

KELLEY PEARSON PHOTOS

Newspaper Article about OpenSpot Theatre in the Coalfield Progress in Coeburn, Virginia

After six weeks of classes, it's finally showtime! The show simply takes place of the last day of class at the same time, and people are invited to come watch the performance 30 minutes after the beginning of class that day. This is to give the students time to go through our normal routine of class, including the welcome circle and reading through the show one more time. We also use this time to remind ourselves of strategies to combat nerves and emphasize the pride they should have of themselves in that moment. The importance is always placed on rehearsals and the growth that students have underwent throughout class, and not the final product of the performance. The performance allows students to showcase their new skills and characters they have been putting together and gives families and friends a chance to celebrate their loved one and their hard work.

In the last two classes building up to the performance, the class works on developing their characters, memorizing their lines, and staging. We still participate in general drama activities and games, but most of our energy is devoted to the specific story and characters used in the performance. As mentioned previously, students have a wide array of interests, meaning that the characters chosen for the show are usually very different from one another. The cast list for the Fall 2022 OpenSpot performance, *The Enchanted Forest*, included the following characters: Elvis Presley, Elmo, Michael Jackson, Princess Belle, Dogman, Steve Urkle, Spongebob, and Scooby Doo. Another cast list for the Spring 2022 OpenSpot performance, *The Red Carpet*, included a guardian angel, green power ranger, unicorn, interviewer named Violetta Stevens, Even Steven, The Nutty Professor, Batman, Scooby Doo, Spongebob, and Carly from iCarly. This mixture of characters provides a plethora of attitudes and moments to build into the dialogue and creates a fun environment using devised theatre.



The Enchanted Forest – Fall 2022 OpenSpot Performance

One may question how the dynamics of characters such as Batman and a unicorn work together, and I must admit that I questioned this when writing my first OpenSpot script as well. The answer to this question is repetitive: flexibility and open-mindedness. In one script, characters were trick or treating in their Halloween costume when they ran into a house full of lonely monsters who just wanted to have a Halloween party. In another, characters walked the Red Carpet, introducing themselves to interviewers and showcasing their talent. Often times, it is helpful to use the ideology of Greek Chorus theatre, where a narrator states an action or statement that the characters then repeat. The themes of these shows typically revolve around

relationships, acceptance, finding joy in unfortunate circumstances, and finding courage to be one's authentic self, among many others. The overarching theme always lies in the impact of inclusion that the audience can witness.



Walking The Red Carpet – Winter 2022 OpenSpot Performance

Looking Ahead: OpenSpot Virginia and East Tennessee

The spring 2023 session of OpenSpot classes is the sixth OpenSpot class in Southwest Virginia. Over the six classes, there has been seven instructors and volunteers, thirty-two students, and thirty-six classes in total. I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to teach

these classes and host accessible theatre in Southwest Virginia. Looking ahead, I acknowledge that there is much work to be done, while remaining conscious of the work that is occurring in classes now. I hope to eventually open a Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee chapter of OpenSpot that connects with multiple organizations within the area. Within this chapter, I hope to connect with more instructors and volunteers, families, and students. Specifically, over the next year I plan to host many single day workshops with various organizations and schools to showcase accessible theatre and OpenSpot, and hopefully reach new students and instructors who are passionate about theatre.

Accessible theatre is a growing, evolving field that uses many tools to its advantage. OpenSpot Theatre classes, and classes similar to it, are one way to introduce people of different abilities to theatre. As I continue to pursue a career in theatre and expressive arts therapy, I hope to discover new ways to implement accessibility and inclusion in theatrical environments of all kinds.

The Why of Accessible Theatre

The idea and definition of accessible theatre has been established; its benefits of creativity, imagination, acceptance, communication, and empowerment are reflected in students' experiences in OpenSpot classes, among other theatre organizations that share similar goals. So, why is this important? Why should accessibility in theatre be prioritized over other factors? Why are classes like OpenSpot Theatre necessary? I believe that if theatre aims to reflect life, then it must reflect all walks of life truthfully, and this is what accessible theatre aims to do. Every person deserves to tell their story and have their story told. Theatre, in my opinion, is one of the

most truthful art forms. If a work of theatre isn't truthful, then an audience sees right through it. If a work of theatre is truthful, then its impact creates a ripple effect.

Students that I have had the privilege to meet in OpenSpot classes are given the opportunity to showcase their artistic strengths, as all people should be able to freely do. This mission is far, far bigger than me, and I am thankful to play a tiny part in the progression of accessible theatre. I find the why behind accessible theatre in stories from families of OpenSpot students and am inspired by their passion, work ethic, and innovative ideas. After all, everyone deserves a creative outlet. Through accommodation, flexibility, and perseverance, accessibility will become more apparent in the industry and more people will have the opportunity to find their voices in theatre. This is the goal that myself and many others are working on, and I hope to be taking a step in the right direction with OpenSpot classes and continuing this journey of inclusivity throughout my life. "Not every mind or body will experience art the same way. But every mind and body is entitled to the experience" (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015).



Promotion Video for OpenSpot Virginia Classes – Summer 2021

<https://youtu.be/df0KY2amGz0>

Appendix

DISABILITY TERMINOLOGY CHART

When referring to people with disabilities, choose words that reflect dignity and respect. Use language that describes the person's disability without defining the individual as his or her disability. The following are just some examples.

INAPPROPRIATE	APPROPRIATE
The disabled, the handicapped	People with disabilities, the disability community
Crippled, suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with, victim of, invalid	Has a disability, is a person with a disability
Normal person, healthy, whole	People without disabilities, able-bodied, person who is able to walk, person who can see, etc.
The blind, the deaf	Person who is blind, person who is deaf or hard of hearing
Wheelchair bound, confined or restricted to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user
Handicap parking	Accessible parking, parking for people with disabilities
Dumb, mute	Person who cannot speak, has difficulty speaking, uses synthetic speech, is non-vocal, non-verbal
Stutterer, tongue-tied	Person with a speech impairment, who has a speech disability, speech disorder, or communication disability
CP victim, spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Crippled, lame, deformed	Person with a disability, walks with a cane, uses leg braces
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
Fit, attack	Seizure, epileptic episode or event
Crazy, maniac, lunatic, insane, nuts, deranged, psycho, demented	People with emotional disorders, mental illnesses, mental health disability, psychiatric disability
Retard, mentally defective, moron, idiot, slow, imbecile, feeble-minded, Down's person, mongoloid	Person with a developmental disability, person with mental retardation, person with a developmental delay, person with Down syndrome or person who is brain injured, has traumatic brain injury, is brain damaged, with a closed head injury
Slow learner, retarded	Person who has a learning disability
Dwarf, midget	Short stature, little person
Paraplegic, quadriplegic	Person with spinal cord injury, man with paraplegia, woman who is paralyzed
Birth defect	Congenital disability, birth anomaly
A post-polio, suffered from polio	Has had polio, experienced polio
Homebound	Stay-at-home, hard for the person to get out
Senile, demented	Person with Alzheimer's disease, person who has dementia

OpenSpot Fall 2022 Script – The Enchanted Forest

Written by Kailey Kyle for the purpose of OpenSpot Theatre performances

Scene 1

(All actors sing/sign “A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes”)

Narrator: Hello all! Today, you have been given the rare opportunity to break the barrier of the magical flower that protects the enchanted forest and all who dwell there. From famous musicians to princesses, everyone who lives here has a very special story to tell.

Steve Urkle: *introduces himself*

Spongebob: *Introduces himself*

Princess: *Introduces herself*

Scooby Doo: *Introduces himself*

Elvis Presley: *Introduces himself*

Michael Jackson: *Introduces himself*

Elmo: *introduces himself*

Dogman: *introduces himself*

Belle: *introduces herself*

SCENE 2

Narrator: All of a sudden, the people of the enchanted forest heard a strange sound and all looked around to see what it was. They looked up, down and to both sides, (*everyone looks around and becomes worried*), but still didn't know where the sound came from. Then...

Steve Urkle: Oh no, the flower!

Spongebob: Look, oh no!

Princess: The flower is dying!

Scooby Doo: Ruh-roh, what are we going to do?

Elvis Presley: We need the flower!

Michael Jackson: What should we do?

Elmo: Let's try to save it!

Dogman: Ruff ruff, but how?

Belle: Does anyone have any ideas?

(all characters raise their hand, eager to share their idea)

Scene 3

Narrator: It seemed like everybody had an idea they thought was better than the others, so they decided to each try their own idea to bring the magic flower back to life.

(Spongebob and Steve Urkle walk up to the flower)

Steve Urkle: I'm going to tell a joke... *tells joke/does Urkle impression*

Spongebob: I'll do my famous laugh... *laughs*

Narrator: But neither of their ideas worked, so they returned back home to brainstorm more.

Then, two more hopeful characters decided to take a chance at bringing the flower back...

Princess:

Scooby-Doo: Let me try! (*Howls*) Scoobie-Doobie-Doo!

Narrator: The Princess and Scooby-Doo walked back down the path, once again thinking of ideas. All of a sudden, the celebrities of the forest showed up and tried their hand at what seemed like an impossible task...

Elvis Presley: I'll dance! *Elvis dance/impression*

Michael Jackson: Now, my turn... *Michael Jackson dance/impression*

Narrator: Not even the smooth moves of Elvis and Michael Jackson could transform the wilting flower, so other friends stepped up to the challenge...

Elmo: Maybe the flower would like a cookie? (*Tries to feed the flower*) Oh well!

Dogman: I'll dig! (*Dogman barks and tries to dig the flower out, but no luck*)

Narrator: Unfortunately, neither idea brought the flower back to life, so Elmo and Dogman returned home to think... but what could the answer be?

(Belle walks up to the flower with a book)

Belle: I found a poem that may bring the flower back to life!

Magic flower, magic flower

Grow again at this hour

Narrator: The flower grew the tiniest bit, and everyone held their breath and watched... did the poem work? *(All characters hold their breath, waiting for the flower, and then let out an exasperated sigh)*

Belle: Wait, what if we all said it together?!

Narrator: Everyone stood frozen, they hadn't thought of working together to heal the flower because they wanted their own ideas to work, but maybe working together was the only solution... so they all said the poem... together

Everyone: Magic flower, magic flower, grow again at this hour!

Narrator: The flower began to slowly come back to life, and everyone cheered! They did it, together! To celebrate, they held a massive dance party in the enchanted forest!

(Actors Dance to "Shout")

"The Enchanted Forest" Playbill designed by Kailey Kyle

Thank you!

OPENSPOt VA PRESENTS

The
Enchanted
Forest

OCTOBER 22ND, 2022



For more information about
OpenSpot and upcoming events,
please visit
www.openspottheatre.com and
follow our facebook page,
OpenSpot Theatre!

CAST

Nick Wells - Elvis Presley
Rowen Hubbard - Elmo
Tony Cheeks - Michael Jackson
Emily Glover - Belle
Ruby Huff - Princess
Alexander Register - Dogman
Eric Estep - Steve Urle
Brian Whitt - Spongebob
Ian Robinson - Scooby Doo

OpenSpot Theatre is a theatre program
for people of ALL abilities that promote
self-expression, creativity, teamwork,
social skills, and fun!

Each class we explore the three pillars of
theatre: singing, acting, and dancing,
along with sign language interpretation.
The play performed today is considered
"devised theatre" and is an original piece
of work written and performed by the
students, with characters of their choice!

INSTRUCTORS

Kailey Kyle
Katie Hall
Brady Adams
Breann Taylor

OpenSpot Curriculum – Fall 2022

Written by Kailey Kyle for use in OpenSpot Virginia 2022 Class

Fall 2022 OpenSpot Curriculum (9/17 - 10/22)

ASL Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmqXwDyIQGI>

Dance: "Shout!"

9/17

1. Circle Time
 1. Question: If you could be any animal, what would you be?
 2. Three rules of theatre: (Be Safe, Be Brave, and Always Be Respectful)
 3. Three parts of theatre: (Singing, Acting, Dancing)
 4. Explain the schedule for the rest of class, our end goal, and ask for questions
2. Warm-up
 1. Stretches (body & face)
 2. Go through the function of our body parts and how to honor and listen to our bodies
 3. "Throw the ball" to each other (watch and listen to each other carefully)
 4. Vocal warmup: Start with a "hmm" and increase or decrease the sound depending on where the instructor raises their hand to
3. Mirror Game
 1. Students partner up and mirror each other's movements
 2. Transition this into learning the ASL song
4. ASL Song - "A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes"
 1. Ask students to describe song and how it makes them feel
 2. Cover half of the song twice
5. Circle Time (Again!)
 1. Discuss what the theme of this year's show will be based on the song
 2. Announce Fairytale themed show; ask students to think about their favorite fairytale character or story, or

other characters and bring it w them to class next week

3. Goals for students
6. A Million Ways Acting Game
 1. Students take turns “walking into a door” like different people/emotions
 2. Do it together the first few times, then individually
 3. Use the hats!
 4. The student next in line can pick how the student before them “walks in”
 5. Emphasize their voices, actions, inflection, how it implies various ideas
7. Freeze Dance!
8. Ending Circle Time
 1. Remind students to come in next week with fairytale characters/fairy tales
 2. Power pose, think of one thing you’re proud of yourself for, take a deep breath, repeat power pose phrases
 3. Chant to end the day!

9/24

1. Circle Time
 1. Question: If you could had to eat one food for the rest of your life, what would you eat?
 2. Three rules of theatre: (Be Safe, Be Brave, and Always Be Respectful)
 3. Three parts of theatre: (Singing, Acting, Dancing)
 4. Explain the schedule for the rest of class, our end goal, and ask for questions
2. Physical Warm-Up
 1. Deep breaths; tense up limbs and release; big face, little face; pb mouth
 2. Walk around in different styles (having the best day of your life, running late, ice skating, big steps, little steps, slow motion, swimming, stepping in mud, tiptoe)
 3. Scoop up positive energy, shake out negative energy
3. Dance!
 1. Go over choreo for “Shout!”
 2. Go over dance moves without music first, then with music (remind them of mirroring)
4. Circle Time - Discuss characters/fairytales

1. Ask students for their fav fairytale characters and stories; write these down
2. Ask students to think about their characters; give them questions for their characters to think about over the next week
3. Questions: What is your character's name? How old are they? What is their favorite thing to do? What is their least favorite thing?
4. We will be doing "character interviews" next Saturday, where the instructors will ask these questions!
5. This isn't a _____, it's a _____ (ACTING)
 1. Students pass an ordinary object around, miming that it's something that it's actually not, then at any point, a student can "change" what the object is and keep passing it around
 2. Reflection of the game
6. Practice song w/ ASL
 1. Go over movements from last time, see how comfy everyone is with it
 2. Continue onto next portion of song if ready
 3. Remind everyone to think about their faces, how the song makes them feel
7. Choreographers
 1. Pair students up, and tell them they have 2 minutes to come up with a dance move together that they're then going to share with the class
 2. Give students the order they're going in, play music, and go!
8. Circle Time - End of the day
 1. Remind students about characters and character questions
 2. The dance, song w ASL, and script will be sent out this week
 3. Power poses
 4. Chant to end the day!

10/1

1. Circle Time
 1. Students say their name along with a gesture/pose, then everyone else copies that movement

2. Three rules of theatre: (Be Safe, Be Brave, and Always Be Respectful)
3. Three parts of theatre: (Singing, Acting, Dancing)
4. Explain the schedule for the rest of class, our end goal, and ask for questions
2. Physical Warm Up
 1. Stretches
 2. Jog in place, slow to fast motion to still, punch air, lift weights
 3. Faces - just ate something sour, surprised, thinking really hard, on a rollercoaster...
 4. Pass the bucket of water around
 5. Yoga - meditation, balance
3. Charades (Layered)
 1. Students pull actions and characters out of a hat, give students the choice of 1 or 2
4. Dance Choreo!
 1. Choreo for "Shout!"
 2. Remind students to think about the feelings in the music
5. Character interviews!
 1. Interview each student as their character
 2. Encourage students to applaud after each interview
 3. BECOME the character!
 4. An instructor will record info to put into play
6. Song w/ ASL
 1. Go over song "A Dream..."
 2. Encourage students to convey the emotion with their face
7. Freestyle Ribbon Dance
8. Circle Time - End of the Day!
 1. Discuss memorizing lines, costumes, and reading the script with others
 2. Power Poses
 3. Chant to end the day

10/8

1. Circle Time
 5. Question: Name, character name, where is your favorite place to be?

- d. Three rules of theatre: (Be Safe, Be Brave, and Always Be Respectful)
 - 1. Three parts of theatre: (Singing, Acting, Dancing)
 - 2. Explain the schedule for the rest of class, our end goal, and ask for questions
- 2. Physical Warmup:
 - Balance yourself, feel your feet on the ground (feeling grounded)
 - 1. Go through routine: walking, i see a bird, i try to catch it, I fall down, now the bird is mad at me, so I freeze, then make myself really small so the bird doesn't see me, then the bird scares me and i shake all over and then do it again!
 - a. 7 Shakedown - explain that this is really helpful for nerves
 - 1. 3 big deep breaths
- 3. Rhythm Imitation
- 4. Talk through play, we start w song w/ ASL
- 5. Read through
- 6. "Shout!" Dance
- 7. Four Corners
- 8. Listen to Tony's Elvis song to end the day! (Freestyle)
- 9. Circle Time - discuss costumes, memorizing lines,

10/15

- 2. Circle Time
 - b. Question: Name, what superpower would you choose to have? (or if anybody has any ideas for questions)
 - g. Three rules of theatre: (Be Safe, Be Brave, and Always Be Respectful)
 - 1. Three parts of theatre: (Singing, Acting, Dancing)
 - 2. Explain the schedule for the rest of class, our end goal, and ask for questions
- 3. Physical Warmup
 - 1. Deep breaths; body scan, how do I feel right now?
 - 2. Scoop up positive energy, release negative energy
 - 3. How are you feeling?
 - 4. Say how you're feeling and then do motion that goes along with it, passing it back and forth to one another

Walk around in different styles (in your favorite place/happy/peaceful, running late, ballerinas, angry, gallop,

stepping in mud, swimming, roller skating, looking for something you've lost, tiptoes/shhh, walk back to seats

1. Vocal warmups - chewing gum, fuddadudda, red leather yellow leather, sss sound like a snake and hold it out
1. Runthrough of the play!
2. Separate into couples to decide dance for end of show
3. Runthrough again
4. Power poses & chant to end the day

10/22

- Instructors arrive at 10:15 this day
- Performance @11:30, students arrive at 11:00

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