J*Company Youth Theatre: 13 – A New Musical – Educational Guide

SAN DIEGO CENTER FOR JEWISH CULTURE

J*COMPANY YOUTH THEATRE

INSIGHTS

A J*COMPANY YOUTH THEATRE EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

for

13 – A NEW MUSICAL

About the one thing we never stop doing – GROWING UP!

Book by Dan Elish & Robert Horn, Music & Lyrics by Jason Robert Brown

The story concerns the life of 13-year-old Evan Goldman as he moves from New York City to Appleton, Indiana, and his dilemma when the move conflicts with the celebration of his Bar Mitzvah.

Directed by Joey Landwehr
Musical Direction by Jason Chase
Choreographed by Deven P. Brawley

For

יה J*Company Youth Theatre Turns 18 – A Chai Season Celebrating Life! יה

December 3 – December 12, 2010

Original New York production
Directed by Jeremy Sams and Choreographed by Christopher Gattelli

Created by Joey Landwehr J*Company Artistic Director
INTRODUCTION

13 – A New Musical, is a fantastic coming of age story which is soon to become a classic and a staple for high school and youth theatre everywhere. There are many lessons one can take away from 13 – A New Musical: Growing up is fun and difficult for everyone, just in different ways, What it means to be a friend, understanding that everyone has their own hang-ups no matter how “cool” they are. And most importantly that no matter our differences, no matter what the world throws at us, when it comes right down to it we are all the same and we are all in this together and we need to support each other in this life. This Insights Educational Guide has been created to assist in making the play an enriching and enjoyable theatrical experience. Background information, discussion ideas, and suggested activities are included here to offer a variety of approaches to this process.

ABOUT 13 – A NEW MUSICAL

13 – A New Musical premiered on January 7, 2007 at The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, California and ran through February 18, 2007. The production was directed by Todd Graff, with choreography by Michele Lynch, and the cast and band were all teenagers.

The show was then presented at the Norma Terris Theater in Chester, Connecticut, by Goodspeed Musicals from May 9, 2008 through June 8, 2008, with direction by Jeremy Sams and choreography by Christopher Gattelli.

2008 Broadway

It opened on Broadway at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre on September 16, 2008 in previews, with an official opening on October 5, 2008 and closed on January 4, 2009. It has been widely noted that the main reason the Broadway production lasted such a short time was the timing. Unfortunately the opening came upon the heels of the largest recession in American history.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Created by Joey Landwehr J*Company Artistic Director
Two things are torturing twelve-year-old Evan Goldman: his parents’ upcoming divorce, and his looming, all-important Bar Mitzvah. (‘13/Becoming a Man”) His mother then informs him he will be moving with her from New York City to Appleton, Indiana, a flat, brown, Midwestern town. Evan will have to have his Bar Mitzvah and celebration there, away from all his friends and family.

Evan soon befriends his new neighbor, Patrice, a quirky girl who seems to be as much of an outcast as he is in Appleton ("The Lamest Place in the World"). Evan determines that in order to survive in the town, he must get the town's coolest kids to come to his Bar Mitzvah, especially Brett Sampson, the junior high's football hero. On the first day of school, Evan manages to earn Brett's respect after suggesting that a scary movie would provide Brett with the perfect opportunity to “make out” with head cheerleader Kendra ("Hey Kendra"), and his popularity begins to rise. However, jealous of Kendra's date with Brett, Kendra's best friend Lucy informs Kendra that Brett only asked her out to "make out". Lucy wants Brett for herself. However, Brett and the cool kids inform Evan that they will not come to his party if unpopular Patrice will be there. Under pressure, Evan rips apart Patrice's invite, devastating Patrice. Observing this is manipulative Archie, Patrice's friend who suffers from a disease making him have to use crutches. Archie tells Evan that he will smooth things over with Patrice if Evan gets him a date with Kendra. If Evan does not, Archie says he will show up at Evan's party and ruin the whole thing ("Get Me What I Need"). Archie tries to convince Patrice to forgive Evan, but Patrice refuses ("What It Means to Be a Friend").

Brett and his friends, Malcolm and Eddie, then tell Evan that if he wants them to attend his party, he must get them tickets to an R-rated horror movie: The Blood Master. Evan discovers that no one will refuse "a boy with a terminal illness" and manages to use Archie to get the tickets ("All Hail the Brain/Terminal Illness"). Evan believes the movie plan is perfect: Brett gets his date, Evan gets the credit, and Archie gets to sit next to Kendra at the movie, thereby fulfilling Evan's part of the bargain with Archie. In addition, Patrice agrees to come to the movie when Evan asks her out ("Getting Ready"). However, just as Brett and Kendra prepare to kiss, Archie shows up for his "date" with Kendra. In the ensuing pandemonium, Evan ignores Patrice while trying to control Archie and in one terrifying moment, well let’s just say the kiss doesn’t quite work out ("Any Minute"). Kendra runs out on Brett, to Lucy’s delight. When Archie explains that Evan set up this “date” with Kendra for him, Brett tells Evan that he and anyone who attends his party are “dead”. Lucy, sensing an opportunity, grabs Brett and kisses him, entrancing him. Patrice calls Evan out for being cruel and insensitive ("Good Enough").

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Though distressed, Evan vows to Archie that he will take control of his life and fix the mess he created. He overhears Brett's friends, Malcolm and Eddie, lamenting that Lucy has Brett under her control ("Bad Bad News"). Evan states that he has a plan to help Brett be rid of Lucy and get Kendra back. However, when Evan rushes to talk to Brett, he freezes, realizing he does not know what to say. Patrice, having been begged by Archie to help Evan, shows up just in time. She tells Brett just talk to her, honestly and from your heart, and apologize ("Tell Her"). Brett rushes to break up a fight between Kendra and Lucy. Brett breaks up with Lucy and, using the words he heard Patrice and Evan say, apologizes to Kendra.

Jealous and angry, Lucy spreads a false rumor about Kendra and Evan dating. She then arranges for Kendra to meet with Evan to thank him for reuniting Brett and herself ("It Can’t Be True"). Just as Kendra is giving Evan an innocent ‘thank you hug’, Brett and the other kids arrive, and Brett lashes out at Kendra. Evan stands up to Brett and publicly calls him out as a bully and a jerk, just in time for Archie and Patrice to see him in his glory. All does not end well however, Brett leaves with his new girlfriend, Lucy.

Exhausted and disillusioned, Evan decides to call off his Bar Mitzvah celebration. However, Archie and Patrice will not give up on him ("If That’s What It Is"). Evan’s Bar Mitzvah service is not a disaster after all: his new best friends come, as does his father, who proudly sits with his mother. Evan realizes that his life is just beginning and that many more mistakes and choices will be made, but you can only look forward, and no matter what you do, you cannot go back ("A Little More Homework"). Then, everyone celebrates ("Brand New You").

**Characters**

The characters are thirteen 13-year olds.

- Evan
- Archie
- Brett
- Cassie
- Charlotte
- Eddie
- Kendra
- Lucy
- Malcolm
- Molly
- Patrice
- Richie
- Simon

**Questions/Discussion Ideas**

* What is a Bar Mitzvah? What is its tradition? What purpose does it serve and why is it so important in the lives of the Jewish people?
* After a young boy becomes Bar Mitzvahed at the age of 13 or a young girl Bat Mitzvahed sometimes at the age of 12 but also 13; what are the rights and responsibilities of that young person?
* For Bar and Bat Mitzvahs there are many ceremonies and traditions, reading from the Torah, post ceremonial meal, the giving of gifts and a more modern tradition is the celebratory party. Why is this party of such importance? What is the purpose of the party?
* Bullying is a common theme within this musical. What kinds of bullying are there? Can bullying be done by girls as well as boys? What are some ways to stop bullying?
* Do you know a person with a physical limitation or handicap? What are the ways in which people with physical limitations are treated, good or bad?
* One of the final songs in *13 – A New Musical* is called “A Little More Homework To Do.” What does this song mean? Is there a message conveyed in it beyond the obvious homework theme?
* What does it mean to be a friend? There are many ways one can be a friend? Is there really a gradation among friends; such as acquaintances, buddies, BFFs? Is it possible for everyone in the world to be friends and would that create peace in the world?

**Activities**
* Find a big piece of paper, lie down upon it and have a friend trace around you, then you do the same for your friend. Color in the piece of paper to look like a self portrait of you. Then cut the body out of the paper. Hold the bodies up and ask your friend what different ways there are to bully someone. Every time you find a bullying tactic crumple a part of your body portrait. When you are done finding 20 different bullying tactics look at your body portrait. What does it look like? Is that how a person feels when they become bullied?
* Now tell work with your friends and classmates to figure out things you can say or do to a person that might make a person feel good about themselves, the sort of counter bullying idea. Every time you say one unwrinkle your body portrait. Do the wrinkles ever really go away? Does the bullying stay with them forever? Discuss ways you can not wrinkle someone in the first place.
* Write a story describing what you think happened to Evan and his friends after the show finished.
* Many people, like Evan, who live or lived in New York City think it is the greatest city on earth. Do some research and discover if you agree or disagree with these people and tell your class why or why not.
* Appleton, Indiana is described as “The Lamest Place On Earth.” Draw a picture of what you think the lamest place on earth would look like.
* Using the conventions of a formal letter, write a letter of thanks to J*Company Youth Theatre.
* Write a theatre review of the performance you saw.

**How To Write A Theatre Review**
When writing a theatre review, you must remember three main components: the acting, the technical, and the overall view.
The acting aspect is probably most important. It is a good idea to read the play before you go see it so that you are familiar with the script ahead of time. Make sure you know all of the characters' names and the actors who are playing them; a playbill is an ideal place in which to find all this information. Ask yourself if the actors understand what they are saying. How familiar are they with the script? Do they really know what the play is all about? Also look to see if each actor is connecting well with his/her character. (However, keep in mind that everyone has a very unique style of acting and maybe even comment on that.) How well are they giving and taking focus? Is there any one person who sticks out in your head as "hogging" all the attention?

The second aspect to look at is the technical. This includes everything from the lights and sound to the costumes and makeup. Someone once said that if the technical aspect of the performance becomes noticeable, then it was not effective. Keep in mind that the lights, sound, makeup, etc. are there to enhance the performance, not to be the main focus. (But as the reviewer, you should be looking for it.) For instance, the lights should be prospective to the time of day, the season and so on. Also, it should not cast any shadows on the actors' faces. The sound is usually just your opinion because everyone likes different kinds of music; however, it should accent the style and format of the play. If they are using microphones, look for the quality of sound coming from that. The costumes should portray the time period and part of each character's personality. The makeup should do the same, but as well, keep a look out for shadows and lines on the face. All these things are very important to the performance of the show.

The overall view of the theater will give the reader a feel of exactly how well you enjoyed your experience at this play. Include ticket prices here and your opinion of the worthiness of that cost. Also, keep in mind the quality of the theater and its facilities. The audience is also a major part of your theatre experience. Was the audience big? Were they perceptive and interactive? Remember, you shouldn't make this the main point, but it would be good to comment on it. This entire portion should convey your opinion and feeling of how the show went.

So in conclusion, remember the acting, the technical, and the overall view, and you'll have written a successful theatre review. Oh, and one more thing: Don't ever lie so as not to hurt someone's feelings. Constructive criticism will only do someone good. However the sign of a good reviewer is someone that can keep a well balanced review always leaning on the positive in order to help the performance grow and get better. Negativity never helps any situation whenever seeing any production always focus on and try to find the positive and good within each performance. Perhaps try to write the entire review without using words like not, no, never and nothing. Encouraging the arts is always the reviewer’s most important job. Keep all these things in mind when writing your review and it will be great. Have fun!

If you are doing this as a class feel free to send it to J*Company Youth Theatre as we are always looking to improve and to encourage young people in the arts and that includes writing a great review!

Created by Joey Landwehr J*Company Artistic Director
Example Of A Theatre Review

Recently I attended the Sarasota Player's Theater performance of "Sweeney Todd." Altogether it was a great show. What stuck out in my mind the most was how excellent the acting was. Susie Mace played "Charlene" and had a beautiful voice. She expressed each emotion with energy and tact. Many of the other roles really followed her example. Although she took much of the attention, when it was her turn to give, she had no problem. Every one of the characters understood the meaning and theme of the script, and expressed it well. Alan Barber, playing "Sweeney Todd," had a lighter voice, but definitely made up for it in his acting and character work. He was full of energy and spark. The entire cast played out the spooky and mysterious scenes very well.

All I have to say about the lights and sound is wow! Not only did the lights portray the darkness of the foggy London nights, but they actually set the mood for the entire scene. There were awesome sound effects and the orchestra played music to make you jump out of your seat! The makeup was also great. In most performances shadows on the face would be unwanted, but in this play the spooky shadows enhances the spooky, dead-like characters. The costumes weren't outstanding, but fit each character role well and added to the whole mood. Two thumbs up to the technical team.

The Sarasota Players is set downtown, across from the Van Wesel. The theater itself is a less than glamorous building, but just right for great community theatre. The cost of the show is $10 for adults and $5 for students and seniors. (And well worth it!) Tickets can be purchased by calling 555-555-5555 or by going to their website at www.sarasotaplayers.org. The audience needed no extra help getting in the mood, which made it much more fun. Altogether, this was a very fun experience for me. I would recommend it to anyone in the mood for a good scare!

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEATRE

J*Company Youth Theatre is an inclusive theatre company which offers a wide variety of theatre arts opportunities for students housed at the Lawrence Family Jewish Community and the state-of-the-art David and Dorothea Garfield Theatre in La Jolla, California!

SCHOOL-DAY SHOWS AT THE J*COMPANY YOUTH THEATRE

If you’ve enjoyed 13 – A New Musical, come back for one of these great plays this season:

   a. **Suggested for ages 10 and up.**

   a. **Suggested for all ages.**

   a. **Suggested for all ages.**

Contact Nan Pace, J*Company Managing Director at 858-362-1155 or nanp@lfjcc.com

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