

What Theatre Students Learn

By Bruce Miller

Students who study theatre learn to develop their common sense, their will power, and their courage. They have to, because these qualities are essential to learning the craft of acting, or stage management, or design, or directing, or playwriting. Theatre students also develop the muscles of their creativity. Again, they have to in order to do well.

Unlike most academic subjects, the arts require a student to extend beyond abstract thinking. But theatre students also develop their abilities to think logically, to analyze, to synthesize, and to make practical choices as well as artistic ones. Theatre students learn how to talk to people, how to listen to people, how to work with people collaboratively. They learn to use their time wisely or pay the consequences for not doing so. They learn to make the best choices in situations where there are no good choices. They learn to think and work independently. The creative and problem solving aspect of theatre training help our students learn who they are, and who they aren't. As a result, they learn to accept themselves or deal with themselves more effectively than students who have not studied the arts.

Our students also learn how to step inside the shoes of someone other than themselves in ways that no other art form or academic subject provides for. They learn to empathize and sympathize. They learn to experience their feelings and to analyze them in ways that are not available in any other course of study. The collaborative nature of theatre forces students to learn how to accept others, or, at the least, how to deal with them effectively. Theatre students learn how to succeed, and how to fail. They learn how to watch others succeed and fail. They learn passion, and compassion. Most importantly, they learn to love something other than themselves, and they learn *how* to love something other than themselves.

In short, theatre students learn many things that an academic education alone will not teach them. One of the most important qualities that theatre students acquire is the ability to work independently and to teach themselves what they need to learn. In many ways this is something more important than accumulated knowledge, because it means that each of our students will be learning for the rest of their lives. The ability to learn independently and the hunger to do so is a wonderfully important gift, one that even four years in college doesn't always bring.