



Crossing Borders: Connecting the Past, Present & Future Building Bridges Through Storytelling and Theater

During a one week visiting artist residency with workshops led by Judith Sloan from EarSay (Queens, NY) in collaboration with Erica DeLarosa and Clint Taylor (Jump-Start), we worked with a group of 20 to 22 community members, artists, educators, and members of the refugee community to build a script based on the prompt of “What’s in a Name?” The workshop was held in the evenings and was open to seasoned performers and beginners and we were able to have a group that included people ages 14 to 72. Most of the group was able to come to all four evening workshops which culminated in a work-in-progress staged reading of the script that grew out of the workshops, directed and staged by Sloan at the Jump-Start theatre space. In addition to the evening workshops Sloan visited several schools and community centers to work with youth. The exercises were geared to create a space for individual stories and histories to be shared in words, poetry, movement and drawings with the goal of understanding who we are in 2019 by sharing specifics about histories/herstories, family legacies, identity, race, religion, through unpacking details about our names, how we were named, what we carry with our name and stories about our names that have traveled through time. The evening workshops were structured to develop an ensemble that would use interviewing techniques, movement and writing to create a group performance open to the community on the fifth night of the workshop session. The youth workshops were single event workshops and were structured to engage young people in listening, exploring and sharing stories.

These workshops took place in February 2019 and grew out of our shared interest in finding ways to build bridges between disparate communities through artistic expression.



Evening Workshops took place for four nights, Monday through Thursday, culminating in a performance presentation on Friday evening. Approximately 2 hour workshops with one 15 minute break. In the final night of the residency, Saturday evening, Sloan performed excerpts from her work for the community.

Evening ONE: Exercises focused on team building and finding a common physical language. We started out with exercises that focused on communication without words. 1. The group had to create and find what was a perfect circle. Using only eye contact people chose a partner to decide when to move across the room. This was followed by some basic group mirroring exercises where the entire group moved as one entity, followed by a simple passing movement and sound around the room. Once everyone was used to moving quickly, listening and following the next exercise focused on names. Stating your name and passing that name around the circle where everyone had to repeat the name so we got used to pronouncing the various names in the group. We took a break and needed to explain the purpose of doing these kinds of exercises given the range of experience in the room. This was a good lesson for the facilitator to not assume that everyone has experience understanding that building an ensemble with theatre exercises can lead to developing a script and developing a deeper understanding of each other. The second half of the workshop was focused on pairing people up to interview each other about their names.

Evening TWO:

Started with a warm up and built on the physical exercises by having the entire group move around the room without interacting, then moving around the room freezing in a spot and simply looking up at another person. The second half of the evening focused on writing and crafting the stories of our names.



Evening THREE: All participants came in with a short excerpt of their name story and as a group we began finding themes and a structure and an arc of how a script could be crafted. We also created a small chorus for some of the text that lent itself to repetition. The second half of the evening focused on staging ideas for the entire piece by using many of the physical exercises from the first two evenings. This went fairly quickly given that everyone had a common language. Sloan directed the overall structure but broke the group up into smaller rehearsal groups to start crafting a performance. We had everyone share their stories in a google doc and Sloan crafted the elements into a structure and brought a final script in on the fourth night based on everyone's stories.



Evening FOUR focused on rehearsing for the final presentation. The group was divided into smaller subsets and we did a walk-through and read through. The process of building teams and creating the work together helped create a space for people who were not used to taking direction to participate in staging and focus on creating a theatrical piece.

Sloan suggested that everyone wear some combination of reds, blacks, and purples, and to wear whatever clothing they felt most comfortable and powerful in and we were able to create a cohesive look while keeping everyone's individuality which was also a focus of the stories that were revealed.

Evening FIVE:

The performance for the community took place in the theatre.

The following is an excerpt from the beginning of the script *What's In a Name?* Maria is a journalist and this was her first time writing and performing in a theatre piece.

Maria

Mi nombre es

Yo soy

I am

You can call me

I am here.

I don't know who is ____.

Or ____.

My friends call me ____.

I am here.

I was confused,

It is such a long name.

I know how wonderful

She was so scared. She prayed, and prayed,
and prayed

My name gave my mother courage.

My name gave my mother strength

How will the world take me?

She named me for safety.

I am_.

I am_.

My name is a song.



Evening SIX

Sloan performed excerpts from two of her works that grew out of her life in Queens, NY the most ethnically diverse locality in the United States.

There were discussions following the performances. We were able to create a real sense of longing for our common humanity in this current political climate.

Youth Workshops

Exercises:

We started with freeze frames based on emotional states of being. Kids listed a range of emotions and chose which emotions to portray. After finding physical gestures that represented those emotions, the group was divided into smaller groups to create their own 'pictures' of what those feelings looked like. Then each group would pick two more emotional states of being and would create a picture for each of those emotional states. Then each group would morph from one emotional state to the next in slow motion, creating a movement piece from their three images.



When the time and space permitted we were able to have kids share stories about their names and create drawings and poems from those stories.

For more information:

<http://jump-start.org/>

<https://earsay.org/>

