The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education

Mary McAvoy, Peter O’Connor

Little Red and the Wolf

Publication details

Dontá McGilvery, Claire K. Redfield
Published online on: 24 May 2022

How to cite: - Dontá McGilvery, Claire K. Redfield. 24 May 2022, Little Red and the Wolf from: The Routledge Companion to Drama in Education Routledge
Accessed on: 14 Dec 2023

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Devising with young people at Eastlake Park

Dontà McGilvery and Claire K. Redfield

DONTÁ: Hey, Claire.
CLAIRE: Hi, Dontà. Shall we dive in?
DONTÁ: Yes. Let me begin by asking a very broad question. How was it working in the Eastlake Park community with the youth that signed up for our theatre class?
CLAIRE: It was an amazing experience. We had such a great group.
DONTÁ: Claire, can you take us back to the start of class? At what point did you know that the work we were all engaging in would be something special?
CLAIRE: It was September 14th, 2019, only our second day of class, and already I started to see it. Maybe it was the way Giselle opened her mouth to taste an invisible raindrop or how Elijah snuggled into his invisible hoodie waiting for the bus, the perfect simulation of an introverted teenager. Or maybe it was the parents approaching after class, asking if we could come back and work with their kids more. I think we both started to feel it: the magic.
DONTÁ: That's awesome. I did feel that magic as well. For me, the magic was in the smiling faces, the eagerness of the students who were ready to get started each day.
CLAIRE: The warm-ups?
DONTÁ: Yes, the warm-ups, but even before that. I am really talking about the way students entered the rehearsal space. They were bright-eyed and filled with joy. Before we get ahead of ourselves, should we back up a bit and talk about who we are?
CLAIRE: Yeah, sure. So, as you know, we began working together in fall 2017 when we both became students in Arizona State University’s Theatre for Youth and Community program. Almost the moment we met, we started dreaming of creating a theatre company that would represent and amplify the voices of the most marginalized. I remember in a lecture hall where we were TAing you said to me that we wouldn’t “roll up our sleeves and get to work” and then roll our sleeves back down again, you said that we would always be working in the communities we served, without sleeves (sleeveless!), and so Sleeveless Acts was born! Our mission is complex but simple: to join communities to co-create theatre with radical imagination.
DONTÁ: That’s right. Although we are a secular arts ensemble, we often collaborate with historically marginalized communities served by our partner organization, the 115-year-old First Institutional Baptist Church (FIBC) located in Eastlake.
Park in downtown Phoenix. We partnered with FIBC because of the justice-oriented reputation the church has in the Eastlake Park community and the city of Phoenix as a whole. FIBC is a predominantly Black church that is known for its social initiatives such as feeding the homeless, participating in protest against injustice, and fighting against police brutality. For me, it was a given that our company would partner with an organization that is already known for doing the kind of work with communities we wanted to work with as well. Like many downtown urban communities across the US, the Eastlake Park community has a reputation for high numbers of homelessness, high crime rates, and gentrification that forces Black and Brown people out of their community. Because of segregation, Eastlake was once the only park where Black and Brown people could go for recreation in the city of Phoenix. So, we partnered with the church because Black churches are seen as pillars for the folks in the Eastlake community; it was the case for Black people historically and, in many ways, the same is true today.

CLAIRE: That’s right. And historically, Eastlake Park is also the center of Phoenix’s Civil Rights history hosting legendary figures over the years such as Booker T. Washington, Rosa Parks, and George Washington Carver. Sleeveless Acts began an ongoing partnership with Eastlake Park Community Center the previous year with our spring 2019 project, Celebration Eastlake, a site-specific theatrical performance devised with and for community members. Our fall drama residency was the first one at Eastlake Park for a while, possibly the first one ever, and we decided we would offer it to any park member free of charge: any young person between fourth and eighth grades who wanted to participate and could make the ten classes could perform. But Dontá, maybe we should talk a little bit about how we worked together for this residency? What was the process like?

DONTÁ: Absolutely! Claire and I switched off preparing lesson plans weekly based on our individual pedagogical approaches and then we facilitated classes together. While one person facilitated the other person participated fully, and we did our best to constantly transfer leadership smoothly.

CLAIRE: Like this essay!

DONTÁ: Bingo! This strategy, combined with weekly meetings after class, helped us both feel comfortable working together. This is not to suggest that we are two peas in a pod; there are differences in our styles that had to be acknowledged up front, though we understand that difference does not equal deficiency. In fact, we’ve come to understand our differences as sources of strength and balance. Here are some of them:

CLAIRE: I’m very structured.

DONTÁ: I like more room for improv.

CLAIRE: I process through writing.

DONTÁ: I process through talking. I also want to make sure students understand the objective so that they will be able to speak about what they are doing in the future...

CLAIRE: And I prefer more time to do the exercise to help students learn by doing.

DONTÁ: Despite our different approaches, there are elements that we both feel are foundational in terms of working in community, one of which is the belief that communities of color are not voiceless. We believe, instead, that communities of color simply do not have the microphone, and our work as theatre artists is to pass the microphone to community members in order that their voices and stories are projected. We take our pedagogical approach from Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1993) and the “dialogue” approach to teaching. The “dialogue” approach focuses on the teacher–student
classroom relationship. In this approach, the teacher shows that they value their students’ personal experiences and knowledge by inviting students to speak about their thoughts and experiences on the given topic. This method is the polar opposite to the “banking” approach of education in which teachers act as if they possess all the information and the students are empty containers ready to be filled with the teachers’ ideas. For instance, in many drama education classes, the teacher selects the script and has students audition for a role. In these kinds of situations, students do not have as much of a voice in which play they want to perform, and they have very little voice as to which role they would like to play. The script is chosen, the roles are fixed, and the teacher holds the power throughout the entire process. By using the dialogue approach to drama in education, however, Claire and I chose to go against the grain. We acknowledge and cherish the humanity and creativity of every student in our drama class and we commit to connecting each and every one of their interests into the final performance. Claire, can you explain what that dialogue approach looked like with our class at Eastlake Park?

CLAIRE: Sure! Going back to our opening example of the second day of class. There we were—ten students staring up at us—ready to go. Dontá and I laid out a huge easel of paper on the ground. We gathered our students in a circle and asked them: what should our final performance be about? We scribed their answers as they talked. They told us their many ideas: from British stories like Alice in Wonderland to the South African tale “Crocodile’s Tears.” Ultimately, the idea of the fairy tale remix surfaced and stuck through until the end, becoming our final performance: “Little Red and the Wolf.” The remix idea was inspired by our class’s interest in hip hop but also because “Little Red Riding Hood” is found in so many countries and cultures (as demonstrated by anthropologist Jamshid J. Tehrani in his article “The Phylogeny of Little Red Riding Hood”). We even brought in different versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” from around the world for the students to investigate. Inspired by Anne Bogart’s The Viewpoints, students then created characters with taglines, physical gestures, and walks that then became the basis for devising scene synopses. The students worked in small groups to write the scenes, and then Dontá and I took that material and strung it together into our final script. Dontá, can you talk about some of the central themes of the piece?

DONTÁ: Our ultimate piece focused on confronting systemic injustice. We understood that students are aware of many of the injustices embedded within the fabric of society. The Wolf, in one of the versions of “Little Red Riding Hood,” was known to be the “bad guy.” However, in the students’ devised version of the play, the Wolf was not the bad guy: instead he was set up to look like a criminal based on a system that muted his voice and allowed his story to be told by others (i.e., the Narrators). The words below are taken from the climactic scene of “Little Red and the Wolf” just after the Narrators’ evil plot was exposed:

WOLF: Well, well, well. It looks like the real criminals here are the ones who have been responsible for narrating stories that make good people look like criminals to be feared. Narrators, the two of you are under arrest. I charge you with attempted murder, framing innocent people, and discriminating against people who are different from you. That’s it. You’re going to jail.

CLAIRE: I loved that part. And remember, we ended up having to perform as well because one of our students didn’t show up and one of them got sick last minute?

DONTÁ: Yes, that’s right. I remember. It was a lot of fun. I think the audience enjoyed seeing adults performing with the youth.
CLAIRE: I definitely think they did. Do you remember at the radio station too?

DONTÁ: Yes, three months later, following a successful performance of “Little Red and the Wolf,” you and I joined the cast at Desert Soul Media, a radio broadcast in Phoenix, Arizona, hosted by Calvin J. Worthen. The youth were invited to the radio station to discuss their experience working on their production.

CLAIRE: Yes! And when asked: “How was this experience of putting together a whole production?”

One of our students responded:

The experience for me, it was really cool how we got to choose the story... Most drama classes we wouldn't get to choose... this drama class we got to have a say in which story we pick so it wasn't like we were just there, but we did help in a lot of things...

(Soul Star Live 2020, 23:00–23:41)

DONTÁ: Her words brought it all back. A red cloak, a clock, a basket full of goodies, and our final performance day. This has been great. I love collaborating with you and working with the students.

CLAIRE: Yes! Me too.

References

