

THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY

is committed to creating theatre experiences that educate, challenge, and inspire young people. It is our hope that by presenting significant themes that affect young people's lives in our community, we can help to foster dialogue and active participation in important areas. It is with this in mind that we offer THE STONES, by

Tom Lycos and
Stefan Nantsou.



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AN EXPERIENCE IN THEATRE CAN BE A GATEWAY into a greater understanding of who we are; it can enhance our understanding of life. You may come to THE STONES for a fun break in your school routine. However, you may walk away having glimpsed a significant truth about the world and how we live in it. It is important to take the time to process your experience of the theatrical event itself. Even more important can be using the topics introduced by the play to springboard into other areas of your curriculum.



The Big Ideas:

- THE STONES is based on a true story. Art is an important tool for dealing with issues that challenge our schools, our culture and our world.
- Every action has a consequence. Casual beginnings can produce profoundly life changing outcomes.
- Peer pressure is a powerful force, and like any power can have either constructive or destructive impact.

NOTE: In the performance of THE STONES two adult actors play a number of characters ranging from teenage boys to police officers, media personnel, and bystanders. They do this without props or elaborate sets. They also create a sound scape with screaming electric guitars. The result is incredibly honest; funky and fascinating, in your face rather than politically correct, and occasionally peppered with mature language. The play originated and is performed by a company from Melbourne, Australia which is reflected in the "street" language.



THE STONES is based on the actual case of two Australian teen boys charged with manslaughter for throwing rocks from an overpass and killing a motorist. Two virtuoso actors with amazing skill, humor, and high voltage energy, play electric guitars, create a sound track, and create multiple characters in this haunting - and unexpectedly hilarious - story. What can happen in less than a minute when a prank turns into a tragedy; when one minute you're fooling around and the next nobody is laughing? In the end, the audience becomes the jury, so when things get stirred up be prepared to surprise yourself.

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Minnesota Academic Standards Addressed:

Arts: The student will understand and use artistic processes to create, perform, and interpret art works in theater. Read, understand, respond to, analyze, interpret, evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of fiction, poetic, and nonfiction texts.

Reading and Literature: Writing: The student will write in narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive and critical modes.

Language Arts: Writing, Speaking, Listening and Viewing: The student will compose various pieces of writing (informative, expressive and persuasive) and the student will communicate effectively through listening and speaking in a variety of forms.

Theater: The student will understand components of theater including vocabulary; and create a character based on fiction of life experience using movement, voice, costume and props.

FOR PROCEDURE OR EXACT RUNNING TIME CALL THE
 CTC BOX OFFICE: 612-874-0400.



THE STONES - A Synopsis

of the play created by Zeal Theatre



Two teenage boys looking for kicks stumble on an idea to break into a warehouse. Inside they find a BMW with hood ornaments (badges) that will bring a nice price on the street. When the boys pry them off they activate the car alarm, and the boys run.

Police are puzzled as they investigate the warehouse. Elsewhere, the boys play with gasoline they took from the warehouse. They get progressively more dangerous. They torment a cat. They run to the edge of water where they collect stones and take them to an overpass on a highway. They incite each other to see if they can hit

a truck as it passes. They start having fun, and the younger boy, 13 years old, kicks a stone that goes through the windshield of a car.

The boys run. They know something serious has happened, but they have no idea they've just killed a man. The next morning the younger boy hears the story on the radio, and tells his mother what has happened. They go to the police and soon the other boy, 15 years old, is brought in. Both boys are interrogated, charged with manslaughter and reckless endangerment, and kept overnight in jail.

Both boys get out on bail until the trial. The older boy gets very little support from his family. His mother takes him to a boarding school and then to an uncle instead of having him at home. He runs with a dangerous crowd, and gets destructive. At one point he deliberately burns his own hand.

The younger boy dreads the approaching trial. And when the trial comes it is hard on him. It lasts a month. The wife of the man who was killed is there sometimes. Then, as the jury deliberates two men talk in a bar – the case is in the news and they argue about the guilt and/or innocence of the boys. One feels that it should be taken into consideration that the boys are young and have made a horrid mistake. The other believes they are old enough to know the consequences of their own actions, and they should be punished as if their crime was intentional.

The audience is, in effect, a jury hearing two distinct points of view. We are being asked to decide how best to enact justice. The result is unforgettable.

THE STYLE in which THE STONES is performed is as riveting as the story it relates. The two actors, Stefo Nantsou and Tom Lycos, enter a stage that contains little besides a ladder, a couple of sawhorses and two electric guitars. With these few items they create a soundscape of searing intensity and various locations including a garage, a highway overpass, a courtroom, and a neighborhood hangout. Each man plays multiple characters using nothing more than a turn of a cap, the zip of a sweatsuit, and an astonishing ability to capture a distinct personality in a few seconds.

In contrast to the serious message the play delivers, the style creates hilarious, clever, exhilarating moments that become the signature feel of the experience. The desperately real and important conflict that is the heart of the play is delivered as a captivating and amazing exploration of possibilities.

NOTE: this performance uses mild mature language.



Zeal Theatre: What they do and why



Tom Lycos and Stefo Nantsou

Zeal is a small company based in both Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, that produces hard-edged, theater performances that tell it like it is. The multi-skilled ensemble uses an eclectic mix of musical and theatrical styles and has created 35 original productions; more than half of which have been specifically created for teenage audiences. **THE STONES** created by Zeal founder, Stefo Nantsou, and actor/writer/acrobat/musician Tom Lycos in 1996 has since been performed well over 1,000 times and has toured Australia, Europe, Asia and North America. **THE STONES** has also been translated and per-

formed in 18 languages, and Stefo and Tom have directed the show in Dutch, Welsh, Hungarian, Danish, German and Canadian.

One of the key areas that has sparked so much interest in Zeal is their edgy, realistic social theatre dealing with gritty issues and stories in a hard hitting, direct and truthful way. Zeal has found that generating their work first for Australian youth audiences means the theatre has to be tough, direct, immediate and relevant in order to hold up in performance. They present shows that provoke discussion, opinion, lateral thinking and an exploration of what other perspectives, judgements and possibilities may surround an issue.

They acknowledge that it can be difficult for teachers to really address specific truths surrounding an issue. It is possible to discuss an issue presented theatrically without individuals having to personalize and expose themselves. Zeal's shows aim to challenge and provoke questions without apology. It is important, however to debrief and discuss, a chance for audience members to reflect and make sense of what they have seen. As a policy Zeal's shows avoid sending moral messages or supplying the audience with answers on how they 'should' think about a topic.

Created in 1996, THE STONES is based on true events. Two teenage boys threw stones off a freeway overpass, and ended up killing a doctor when one of the stones went through his windshield. In the play, as in the real situation, the issues of guilt and responsibility are left unresolved, but the story brings up questions related to blame, guilt and consequence.

Prior to seeing the show, have a discussion based on this article.

- First read the article.
- Then divide into small groups with the direction to answer the following questions:
 - What are some plays (or movies) you have seen that were based on real life events?
 - Did you feel the play/movie dealt with the subject honestly? Why or why not?
 - Based on what you've read, what issues do you expect **THE STONES** to deal with?
- Ask small groups to choose a representative to report on their discussions to the class.
- Record these expectations so you can check in on them after having experienced the play.
- Urge the students to notice what parts of the play seem to be "real" to them as they watch it.

After seeing the show:

- Talk about how the play matched your expectations.
- How did the theatricality of the play mix with the reality?

Much of the content of this page comes from an article by Elena Vereker published in Lowdown Magazine, October 2003.



What Really Happened: Translating news into art

THE STONES is based on true life events. It was inspired by a newspaper article, and uses the facts of the real story as well as imagined details, characters and new events. It also uses several different theatrical styles to convey the story. Sometimes characters speak directly to the audience, sometimes actors speak in monologues (one person speeches) and other times in dialogue (conversation with each other). Other scenes have no spoken element at all, but are completely physical or visual.

Tom Lycos, one of the original writer/creators of THE STONES, describes himself as someone who notices a situation and becomes completely caught up in exploring the reality of a topic. He indulges in an extensive research phase, investigating and uncovering the multiple perspectives of a topic. Through this process the show develops texture and calls for various approaches. Sometimes a character needs to speak in monologue. Sometimes a relationship is expressed in dialogue. Often highly dramatic moments can be conveyed best is images and sound rather than words. The effect on the shows is that of a visible truth being presented on stage. Zeal aims to be as direct as possible and bring the story as truthfully as possible to the stage.

OPTION ONE:

Using the newspaper or some other reliable news source, find a story that interests you, and write a short play or scene about it. Use your imagination as well as fact to focus on:

- Who are the characters and what do they need?
- Where do you want the scene/s to take place?
- How do the characters look, act, speak, etc.?
- How will the play/scene begin and end?

OPTION TWO:

Work as a small group, or even as a whole class, and choose a story as described in the first option. Then have different people focus writing on whichever characters and scenes interest them. Experiment with different styles such as those described above - and more:

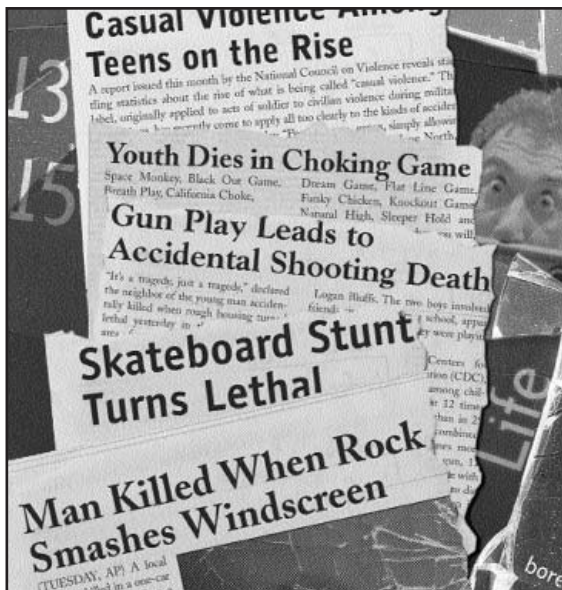
- Monologue
- Dialogue
- Speaking directly to the audience
- Rhyming speech
- Physicalization without words
- Slow motion, fast forward and playback

OPTION THREE GROUP WRITING:

THE STONES was written by two writers working together. The two worked on some scenes and characters together. Other scenes were written by one and edited by the other. This can be a difficult process that requires a solid understanding between writers.

Try it. Choose a story for a small group to work on together and ask each writer to create dialogue for only one of the characters.

Then build the script together, and read it to (or stage it for) the class.



Issues as Art: Anna Deavere Smith, research, compare and contrast

Anna Deavere Smith is an American artist currently doing work similar in many ways to Zeal Theatre's THE STONES. She writes her material based on actual events that any one of us could find on the news or in the paper, but she adds her own creative gifts to the process of turning them into art. Like Tom Lycos and Stefan Nantsou, she also plays multiple characters; her one-woman shows are filled with characters of both genders who often cross ethnic lines. And each of her plays explores an issue that is important in our culture.

For example, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, centers on the incident in which four police officers were tried after using excessive force in the apprehension of a speeding motorist, Rodney King, and the race riots that followed the trials. This is what Ms. Smith says about her performance of the play:

I played *Twilight* in Los Angeles as a call to the community. I performed it at a time when the community had not yet resolved its problems. I wanted to be a part of their examination of the problems. I believe the solutions to these problems will call for the participation of large and eclectic groups of people. I also believe that we are at a stage at which we must first break the silence about [issues] and encourage many more people to participate in the dialogue.
 – Preface to *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (xxiv)

Ms. Smith's investment in putting crucial cultural issues on the table for discussion is very much like Zeal Theatre's interest in their work for young audiences.

ACTIVITY:

View Anna Deavere Smith's work *Fires in the Mirror*. It is available on video (filmed for public television). The piece centers around the 1991 riots in Crown Heights, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, triggered by the tension between African Americans and Lubavitch Jews and ignited by the injury of a child in a car accident and the subsequent stabbing death of another young man. The play is based on personal interviews and presents 29 characters - all played by Ms. Smith.



After you have seen both THE STONES and *Fires in the Mirror* discuss your responses. As part of that discussion answer this question: Do you feel theater is an effective tool for stimulating awareness of and debate about issues such as the ones presented in these two pieces? Why or why not?

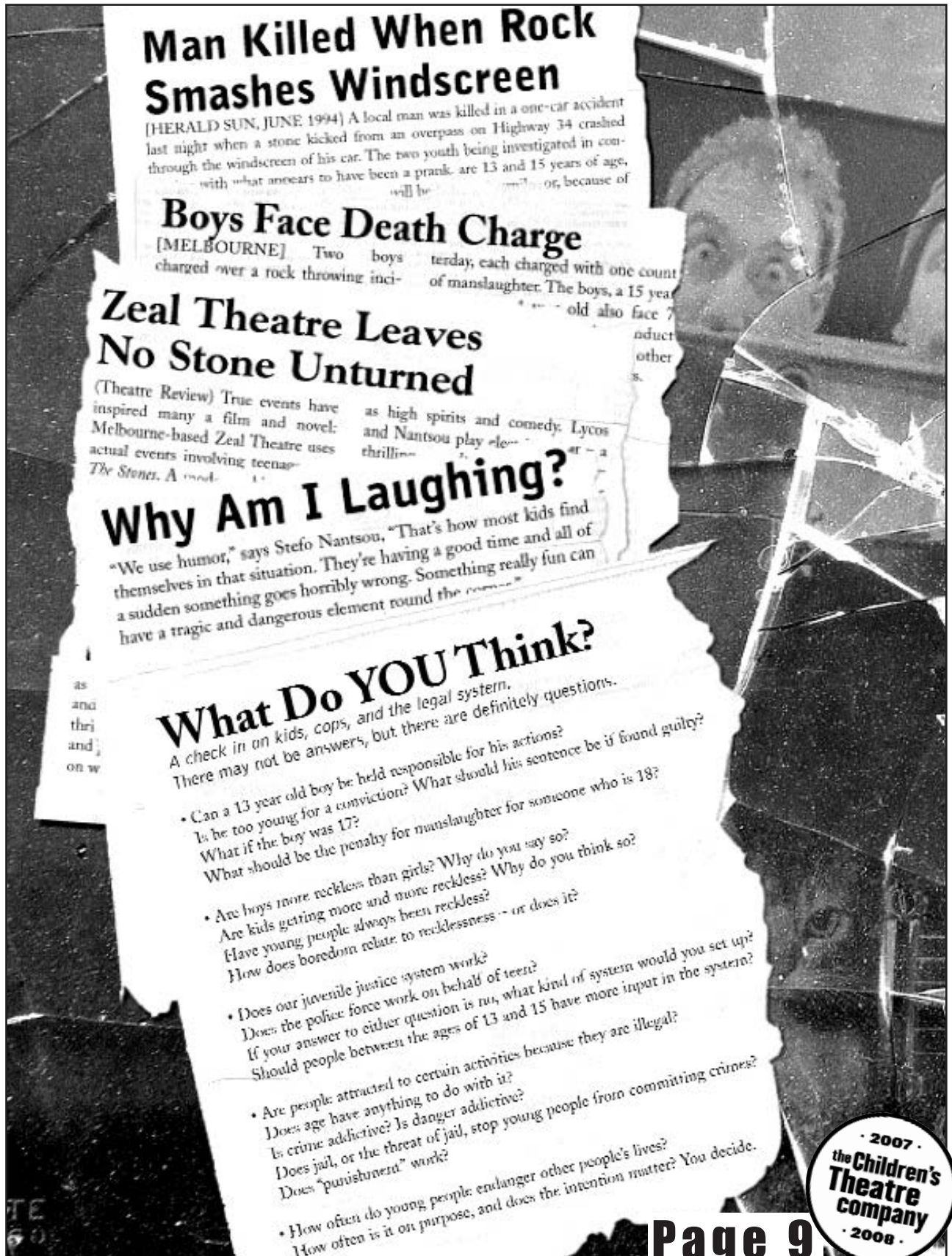
Then, have each student write their own essay comparing and contrasting the two shows.

- Research Zeal Theatre and Anna Deavere Smith on line for more information.
- Focus on style, content, method of performance, and the issues around which the art is built.
- How important is humor in presenting important issues?
- How do actors in multiple characters enhance this work?

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THE STONES: Asking questions, writing or discussion prompts

Use any of the points made or questions below as a basis for large or small group discussion, or ask students to pick a point and respond in an essay, poem or journal entry.



P.O.V., a debate



Zeal Theatre took its name from a word possibly more commonly used in Australian than American vernacular. It is a word with connotations reaching from “admirable enthusiasm” to “fanaticism.”

When dealing with issues such as those explored in *THE STONES* it is likely that the full range of zeal’s meaning will come into play.

A circle debate is a wonderful way to address a variety of opinions.

OBJECTIVES:

- To enable students to consider an important issue from different perspectives
- To facilitate contribution to a class debate
- To encourage students to express, explain and critically evaluate views that may not be their own

PREPARATION:

1. Formulate a specific motion to debate, such as:
Motion: A person accused of a capital crime should be tried as an adult, regardless of age.
2. Identify sources of information e.g. websites, people, books/articles
3. Acquaint the participants with the procedure of a line or circle debate (see below). This format encourages all students to make at least one point and to vote, and allows some to argue at length.

TO RUN A CIRCLE DEBATE:

1. Ask students to decide whether they are for or against the motion, or arbitrarily divide the class to speak for or against it. Make sure they understand the importance of being able to argue from points of view other than their own.
2. Give students time to prepare for their arguments.
 - Use a range of sources to research as mentioned above.
 - Become familiar with any definitional question that applies, such as “What is a capital crime?” or “What are the ramifications of being tried as an adult rather than a juvenile?”
 - Think about issues such as:
 - Personal freedom
 - Individual choice
 - Responsibility
 - Rules and laws; proposed changes
 - Harms that are not immediately perceptible
 - Effects on the “greater good”
3. Arrange the class in two rows facing each other, or in a circle, with one chair separated from the rest. This is called the 'hot seat'. Students sit on the side that is 'for' or 'against' the motion.
4. Each of the students from alternate sides of the debate takes a turn on the hot seat. They are not allowed to speak for more than one minute. Encourage students to respond to the argument made by the previous student. When everyone has had a turn, allow any students from alternate sides to sit on the hot seat.
5. At the end, ask all students to vote based on the arguments they have heard.
6. If students have been arguing from a perspective that is not their own offer the chance to raise any further arguments.

REFLECTION

Invite students to think how their own views have been changed or reinforced. Encourage them to say what they have learned from the debate.

Circle debate procedure based on information from: www.lifebytes.gov.uk



Related Resources

Books dealing with peer pressure, the consequences of violence and other contemporary issues of teen life.

Bang!, by Sharon G. Flake.

A teenage boy must face the harsh realities of inner city life, a disintegrating family, and destructive temptations as he struggles to find his identity as a young man.

Black and White, by Paul Volponi.

Two star high school basketball players, one black and one white, experience the justice system differently after committing a crime together and getting caught.

Breaking Point, by Alex Flinn.

Fifteen-year-old Paul enters an exclusive private school and falls under the spell of a charismatic boy who may be using him.

Complete Idiot's Guide To Peer Pressure For Teens, by Hilary Cherniss and Sara Jane Sluke.

A must-have resource for handling the tyranny of looking and acting cool, dealing with sex, drinking and drugs, violence, and the many other forces and influences teens face today.

The Courage to be Yourself : True Stories by Teens About Cliques, Conflicts, and Overcoming Peer Pressure, edited by Al Desetta with Educators for Social Responsibility.

In 26 first-person stories, real teens write about their lives with searing honesty, inspiring young readers to reflect on their own lives, work through their problems, and learn who they really are.

The Courage to Change: A Teen Survival Guide, compiled by Brenda Zosky Proulx.

A compilation of stories, poems, and interviews by and with teenagers involved in Canada's Leave Out Violence (L.O.V.E.) program.

Inside Out, by Terry Trueman.

A sixteen-year-old with schizophrenia is caught up in the events surrounding an attempted robbery by two other teens who eventually hold him hostage.

Respect : A Girl's Guide to Getting Respect and Dealing When Your Line is Crossed, by Courtney Macavinta and Andrea Vander Pluym.

Girls need to know how they want to be treated, treat themselves that way, and let others know to do the same. This smart, savvy book debunks the myths and stereotypes that hold girls back.

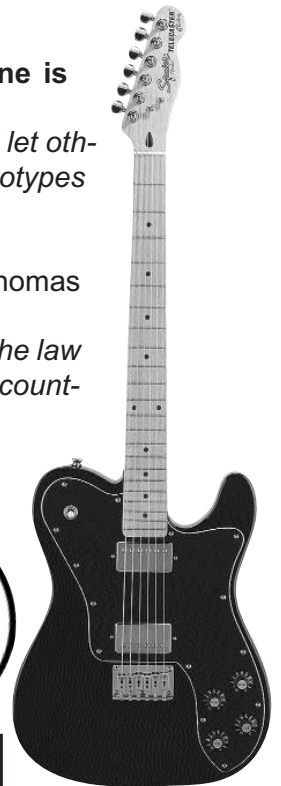
They Broke the Law, You Be the Judge : True Cases of Teen Crime, by Thomas A. Jacobs.

Letters from and interviews with twenty-one children and teenagers who broke the law reveal what it is like to be arrested, attend legal proceedings, and be held accountable for one's actions.

Rebel Without a Cause, directed by Nicholas Ray.

A Warner Brothers film.

This classic film features performances by James Dean, Natalie Wood, and Dennis Hopper. Originally released as motion picture in 1955. A stylized (and partly out-dated) look at the 1950s from the perspective of a troubled teen who faces a new school environment. A rich opportunity for comparison with contemporary realities.



Feedback your response is invaluable. Please take a moment to respond. Thank you.



1. Did using this Study Guide add to your theater experience?
 Yes Some No
2. How much of the Study Guide did you read?
 Didn't have time About a quarter All
3. What do you think of what you read? Mark as many as apply.
 Useful Enjoyable
 Nothing new Not for my students
4. Did you get the Study Guide in time to prepare to see the play?
 Yes No Comment _____

5. What sections of the Study Guide did you find most important?

6. How did the experience of preparing for and then seeing the play impact you students?

7. Did you spend more time working with the material BEFORE or AFTER the play?
 Before After About the Same

8. Which of the following best describes you?

- I teach: middle school high school
 home school
 other _____

Comments: _____

(continue on separate page if desired)

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The Children's Theatre Company, awarded the 2003 Regional Tony Award for sustained artistic excellence, is nationally and internationally acclaimed as America's flagship theatre for young people and families. Each year, CTC's public performances, school matinees, regional tour performances, and Theatre Arts Training Programs serve nearly 330,000 people.

Peter Brosius, Artistic Director

Louise Thoreson, Interim Director of Education

This Study Guide was written by Chris Kliesen Wehrman, January 2008. Reading list developed using resources from the Hennepin County Library. (hclib.org)
Thanks to Tom Lycos, Stefo Nantsou, and Robert Ocshner.

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