

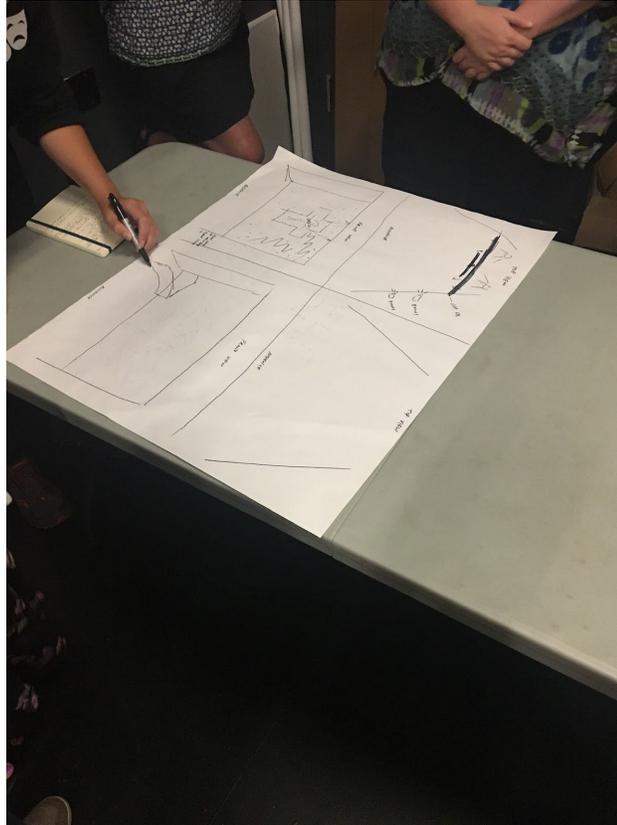
Sharing the Power of the Arts to Educate and Transform: Expanding Techniques to Teach Drama

Thanks to a Rising Third Year Award from the Miller Arts Scholars, I was able to attend the Broadway Teachers Workshop in New York City last summer. The [Broadway Teachers Workshop](#) is a 3-day, immersive experience for theater educators that includes over 8 master classes and workshops with professional theater directors, actors, educators, technical crew, and more. The Workshop is aimed at providing educators and directors of young (K-12) to college-aged students with strategies, tools, and skills to improve quality of teaching and inspire individual artistic work. Additionally, a large component of the BTW is the interaction and networking with other educators and instructors, and engaging one-on-one with professionals and Broadway artists and instructors.

I attended the Broadway Teachers Workshop because I serve as Artistic Director and Instructor with the educational theater nonprofit I founded, Empowered Players, that focuses on affordable and accessible arts education. I wanted to attend the workshop to further my knowledge of best practices for theater instruction, and gain a better understanding of my work as an artist, director, instructor, and performer.

The schedule for the workshop was jam-packed, and one that certainly left me feeling better equipped to teach my students and engage in my personal work. First, I took a choreography class with the Public Theatre's Alex Sanchez. Engaging with Mr. Sanchez gave me a vocabulary and new way of thinking of how to teach students movement and create visual pictures through dance.

Then, completely outside my wheelhouse, I took scenic design classes that taught new concepts of lighting, structure, creation, and more--all creating on a low budget. This class was especially applicable because it challenged me to think outside the box when it comes to set design, particularly given that Empowered Players does not have an extensive budget.



Designing a set for **Jesus Christ Superstar** in Scenic Design workshop with **Newsies'** Tobin Ost

A favorite experience was a Directing Master Class with Leigh Silverman, Tony-nominated director of *Violet* and *Sweet Charity*, to name a few. It was this Master Class that I found most beneficial, as Silverman shared her personal experiences and gave specific pointers for directing students and peers. Silverman engaged in a mini-directorial project, directing two actors in a short scene and giving tips and tricks along the way.



Directing workshop with Leigh Silverman

Another workshop that was incredibly meaningful was a Playwriting workshop with John Cariani, actor and author of *Almost, Maine*. The workshop consisted entirely of playwriting exercises and activities to help students find and share their voice--which is a hallmark of EP and what I find most impactful in my work. Cariani also offered advice for young playwrights, encouraging creation even when no ideas seem present, and to constantly work through writer's' block by doing shorter exercises instead of forcing longer projects.



Me with John Carini after the workshop

Other memorable experiences were a musical theatre workshop, a Q&A with Broadway's Andrew Rannells, and curriculum development work that was much more hands-on and reflective.

One of the best classes was a devised theater workshop with Moises Kaufman's Tectonic Theater Project. As someone interested in devised work and someone who devises pieces frequently with students, this class not only got me excited to create, but also gave me tools to add to my creative toolbox. In this class, we engaged with Moment Work, the Theater Project's

main structure and mode, and a model I would go on to utilize in my devised work in the New Works Festival this past spring. Getting to engage with a company member experienced in devising was not only educational, but inspirational, and it is this inspiration and experience I am most thrilled to share with my students.



Musical Theater Workshop performers with Tony Award nominee Lonny Price

Finally, in addition to the Workshop, while in the city I was able to see additional shows and performances. Most notable was the Summer Shorts series with Throughline Artists. Featuring 3 short new plays, the structure of the evening was very similar to the New Works Festival at UVA, and the energy around the new pieces was remarkable. The best part was I met and discussed with author and playwright Chris Bohjalian after his show, and he shared tips and tricks of producing new pieces. Part of growing as an artist is experiencing and digesting others' work as well, so I am incredibly grateful to have had this experience to see these 3 new shows in one evening.



Meeting with Chris Bohjalian at the Throughline Artists Summer Shorts

Upon returning from NYC, I planned to offer a workshop on Grounds offering students many of the tips and tricks I had learned during my time at BTW. Given scheduling limitations, I was unable to have a one-time workshop at UVA; however, I was able to offer a similar workshop for the Student Arts Mentors (advanced high school students) of Empowered Players, offering many of the exercises and practices I learned in New York. The Mentors work with Empowered Players consistently, teaching classes, directing scenes, and offering mentorship. Thus, the knowledge I shared from the Workshop was not only helpful in helping solidify how I teach *others* how to teach, but was helpful for the mentors in their application and work as well. I have seen them apply techniques I shared from BTW in their work with EP's younger students, and it is wonderful to witness their growth as educators.

I am tremendously grateful to the Miller Arts Scholars program for affording me this incredible opportunity! Special thanks to the Miller Family, the Miller Arts Scholar program, director Michael Rasbury and my faculty sponsor David Dalton for making this possible and for constant support. The Broadway Teachers Workshop not only gave me incredible knowledge and thought, but sparked a re-filling of my creative well. It was the perfect combination of education and inspiration, a bridge the Miller Arts Scholars program is built on and one I hope to continue to foster. I look forward to furthering the work that I began from this experience, and sharing my passion for teaching and creating with others.