

Teacher Tip

Since 2019, I have had the privilege of working alongside Shahnaz Shroff, founder and director of the Westchester School of Speech and Drama. Prior to teaching, I never quite took the time to explore the benefits of theater outside the performing realm, and the lasting impact it can have on students. A majority of students who attend class are shy and struggle with social anxiety, and are typically signed up by their parents, so they are exposed to speaking in front of others with confidence and intention, versus participating in theater, although we do have many students who love theater and want to pursue it. Those who come in with no theater background or interest, soon develop a love for performing and find it as an outlet to communicate, connect and share with others.

Shahnaz advocates and promotes the benefits of theater and the integration of applying skills learned through improv and acting exercises to real life situations. When facilitating a lesson to the student “Actively and overtly make the connection of a theater and improv skill to a life skill. If you don’t make the connection in words, a child will not make the connection”(Shroff). For example, we teach our students how to warm up their voice and the importance of doing so in a theater setting. We further this by informing them every time they have to speak in public, at school, etc., they should spend a minute or two warming up their voice to ease their nerves and establish power within their voice. “Improv teaches students to think on their feet, inform them the next time they are in a tough situation, pretend they are in an improv and playing a role”(Shroff). Using theater as an escape and tool to cope with anxiety and nerves allows students to flourish in any setting and situation they may be presented with.