fm1: how Carson McCullers saved my life

February 28- March 18, 2012

By Sarah Gubbins
Directed by Joanie Schultz
DEAR TEACHERS & STUDENTS:

WELCOME TO THE SECOND SHOW OF THE 11/12 STEPPENWOLF FOR YOUNG ADULTS SEASON!

This year’s season offers an exploration of the process by which a piece of literature evolves through adaptation and reinterpretation. We explore the way original work can be born from the ideas and themes of a classic text—how the compelling work of one artist can prompt a bold response and fresh story of another. We are thrilled to involve students in this inter-generational conversation across time and across forms, from the book by Carson McCullers to Rebecca Gilman’s play *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as well as our second production this winter, Sarah Gubbins’ artistic response, *fml: how Carson McCullers saved my life.*

Gubbins’ play is about the way one deals with, and ultimately overcomes, adversity. As with Carson McCullers’ character John Singer, Gubbins creates vivid, dynamic “outsider” characters, and then shows us the courageous ways these individuals search for community and connection despite their “otherness.” *fml* is about being bold enough to know who you are, strong enough to stand up for yourself, and fearless enough to survive high school. Gubbins created *fml* based on inspiration she drew from McCullers’ classic novel. Her story shows us that literature still has the power to transform how we see the world. We look forward to discovering what inspires you? Throughout this study guide, you will see references to both plays in our season as well as questions for the classroom, suggestions for further reading, and classroom activities to guide your examination of these productions. If further questions arise for you, or if you need anything regarding your visit to the theatre, please contact us.

We look forward to welcoming you to Steppenwolf and investigating *fml: how Carson McCullers saved my life* with you.

-Hallie, Megan & Lauren
Carson McCullers was born Lula Carson Smith in 1917 to a middle class family in Columbus, Georgia. From a young age, she showed promise as a musician, and by age 10 was studying piano and making ambitious plans to one day become a famous pianist and composer.

At age 17, McCullers’ family made significant sacrifices to send her to study music at The Juilliard School in New York City. On the train ride to her first day of class, however, McCullers tragically lost her tuition money and with it, her dream of becoming a composer like Beethoven, Mozart or Schumann, all of whom she greatly admired. Instead of heading back to Georgia, McCullers stayed in New York, rubbing elbows with such writers as W.H. Auden, Gypsy Rose Lee and Reeves McCullers, whom she married at age 20. Inspired by these writers, as well as Russian authors Dostoyevsky, Chekhov and Tolstoy—with whom McCullers was endlessly fascinated—she began writing seriously and by age 21, had her short fiction published in Story, Harper’s Bazaar and The New Yorker. McCullers and her husband had a very contentious but passionate relationship, breaking up and getting back together numerous times and living in both New York and abroad, until Reeves committed suicide in 1953.

In addition to reaching literary stardom at age 23 with The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, throughout her successful career, McCullers wrote four novels, a handful of short stories, a Broadway hit, The Member of the Wedding and a collection of poems. She was awarded two Guggenheim fellowships, an Arts and Letters Grant, and the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award.

Plagued throughout her life by the lingering side effects of rheumatic fever contracted as a teenager, McCullers died in 1967 at age 50, just days before shooting began on the film adaptation of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.
Growing up in suburban LaGrange, it took playwright Sarah Gubbins, now 36, a long time to realize that she was gay. She sailed straight through 12 years of Catholic schooling as a tomboy—great at sports, passionate about golf, and, she says, blithely unaware of her sexuality. It wasn’t until college that it started to dawn on her, and even then, “It took me falling in love, and falling in love, and falling in love, and then realizing—oh, there’s a trend here: they all seem to be female.” It took her even longer to discover that she was a playwright. A theater major as an undergrad at Northwestern University, Gubbins took a series of writing classes with playwright John Logan, who was in residence during her senior year. Those classes were “amazing,” she says, but she came out of them thinking, “I’m not (Anton) Chekhov, I’m not Caryl Churchill. This is really embarrassing.” Out of college, unconvinced of her talent but unwilling to give up on a life in theater, she started working as a freelance dramaturge and turned out to be good at it. The best thing that happened, Gubbins says, is that she started specializing in new work: “I actually got into the room with some new plays, and that’s when I learned, this is how you make a play, this is how you rewrite, this is how you look for incident.”

Gubbins says her work is political not autobiographical despite those who may find that hard to believe. Her protagonist Jo, in fml: how Carson McCullers saved my life, is a lesbian, growing up in LaGrange. Not autobiographical? “Not autobiographical at all,” Gubbins says. “Listen, I’m gay. And I was a teenager. And I had to go through a huge awakening as a writer. And I had very influential English teachers. All these things happened to me.” But, she cautions, there’s a crucial difference:


Gubbins says she finds today’s adolescents who are out “astonishingly brave and inspiring.” The times are different, of course. There was no gay-straight alliance when she was in high school. And the whole notion that gays would be married? “Unbelievable,” she says. Now, “there’s more visibility. You don’t have to presume that everybody’s straight. And yet the homophobia, homo hatred, gay bullying continues.” As a sexually oblivious tomboy in LaGrange, Gubbins “wasn’t chased, wasn’t identified,” never suffered the beating inflicted on her protagonist. “It’s so complicated,” she says. “What is it about being out and confident that is so threatening to other people?”

“Things are so much better today, and absolutely as bad.”

By Deanna Issacs
Reprinted with permission from The Reader, August 25, 2011
Synopsis | *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* follows John Singer, a deaf man who resides in a local boarding house, and four other vivid but desperately lonesome residents in a Georgia mill town during the 1930s on the eve of the Great Depression. Mick Kelly, a 14-year-old tomboy who dreams of becoming a concert pianist; Benedict Copeland, the town’s only black doctor; Jake Blount, a drunken political activist; and Biff Brannon, a recent widower and owner of the town’s diner and bar. As each finds solace in Singer’s ability to listen, they all unintentionally overlook their confidante’s profound isolation in this timeless tale woven from the lives of ordinary people.
Character Descriptions

**JOHN SINGER**
John Singer, a deaf man who works as a silver engraver at a local jewelry store, is the central focus of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Even after his friend, Antonopoulos, is sent away to an asylum, Singer remains his loyal companion.

**MICK KELLY**
Mick finds sanctuary in Singer, who owns a radio and gives her access to music. Mick dreams of learning the piano and one day composing a famous symphony.

**DR. COPELAND**
As the only black doctor in town, Dr. Copeland struggles with the injustices African Americans face at the time. Father of Portia and Willie, Dr. Copeland often feels estranged from his children for what he sees as their acceptance of racial injustice and what he perceives as an over-emphasis on religion.

**JAKE BLOUNT**
A wanderer and an alcoholic prone to violent outbursts, Jake confides in Singer. He has become radicalized by the economic inequality he sees around him, but his attempts to organize workers in the town prove unsuccessful.

**Biff Brannon**
Owner of the New York Café, a central diner in town, Biff is a recent widower without any children. As he notices her coming of age, Biff is oddly drawn to Mick.
Synopsis | *fml: how Carson McCullers saved my life*

The novel *fml: how Carson McCullers saved my life* centers around Jo, a junior at St. Paul’s Catholic School in La Grange, IL who is smart, creative, thoughtful and not afraid to embrace who she is—which intimidates and puts off her peers. When Ms. Delaney takes over Jo’s A.P. English class and introduces her to Carson McCullers’ classic novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Jo is instantly taken with the book and with her new teacher. She fantasizes about being friends with ‘Ms. D’ outside of school, causing her friend, Mickey, to warn that others at school are noticing Jo’s infatuation.

Meanwhile, Jo’s burgeoning friendship with Emma, a popular new student and Jo’s chemistry lab partner, is growing, much to the disapproval of Emma’s protective boyfriend, Tyler, who worries that since Jo is a lesbian, she will ‘turn Emma gay.’ When Jo’s locker is vandalized with the word faggot, she downplays the event, wanting to keep it a secret and draw as little attention to herself as possible. Later, in the gym where Jo is practicing free throws for an upcoming basketball game, Ms. D confides that like Jo, she has faced adversity, and like John Singer in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, lost someone very close to her. Despite that, however, Ms. D believes life does get better, even if it sometimes gets worse first. A few days later, Jo is badly beaten in the locker room after a game by a gang of hooded, unidentified guys who call her ‘faggot’ and ‘freak.’ While recovering in the hospital, Ms. D implores Jo to never stop being proud of who she is, and to finish the graphic novel she is writing. As she recuperates from the attack, Jo writes the first three chapters of her book, eager to return to school and share her work with Ms. D. Upon arrival, however, she learns that Ms. D has been transferred to a new school. Devastated but ultimately inspired by what she has learned from her beloved teacher, Jo finishes her novel—dedicating it to ‘Ms. D and Carson McCullers, thanks for saving my life.’
Character Descriptions

**JO**
*played by Fiona Robert*
Jo, who comes from a working class family amidst many wealthier classmates, is a courageous tomboy who plays basketball, writes graphic novels, and challenges the school administration for not being allowed to wear pants instead of a skirt as part of her uniform. When Jo discovers Carson McCullers’ *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, she immediately identifies with the characters, in particular Mick Kelly, who describes a peaceful ‘inside room’ she goes to when she listens to classical music. Jo’s inside room is fulfilled when listening to Ms. Delaney, her beloved A.P. English teacher, read aloud from the novel. Although Jo is bullied at school for being gay, she doesn’t seek retribution against those who torment her, choosing instead to focus on the novel she is writing, and trusting that one day, it will get better.

**EMMA ROGERS**
*played by Zoe Levin*
Emma, who recently moved from California with her mom, is torn between her role as popular cheerleader and friend to Jo, who is ridiculed by classmates for being gay. Although at times Emma’s feelings towards Jo verge on romantic, she is complicit when her boyfriend, Tyler, mocks Jo’s sexuality. When Jo is hospitalized from the incident in the locker room, Emma at first keeps her distance, seemingly deterred by the remorse she feels for not being able to protect her friend. In the end, however, Jo assures Emma’s guilt, and their friendship is made stronger than ever.

**MICKEY WINDLAP**
*played by Ian Daniel McLaren*
Mickey is Jo’s outspoken gay best friend whose defensive attitude is a result of feeling isolated at both home and school. Convinced no one will notice if he disappears, Mickey often ditches school and sits in the Art Institute in front of the Chagall windows, which is his peaceful, happy, ‘inside’ place. Jealous of anyone close to Jo, Mickey is both her cheerleader and defender.

**REED**
*played by Bradley Grant Smith*
Reed, Jo’s older brother, is the opposite of his academic, ambitious sister, whom he greatly admires—failed out of college and currently out of work, Reed is consumed with his fledging career as a DJ and unaware of his sister’s torment at school. When Jo is attacked, however, Reed’s guilt manifests into a desire to avenge Jo’s perpetrators and fully realize his role as big brother.

**MS. DELANEY**
*played by Lily Mojekwu*
Ms. Delaney, St. Paul’s new A.P. English Teacher, encourages Jo to finish her graphic novel, seeing not only potential, but a bit of herself in Jo as well. Ms. D confides in Jo that like John Singer, she, too, lost someone close to her—a woman she loved very much. After Jo is twice victimized at school, Ms. D blames herself, persuaded that she—and the rest of the school administration—failed Jo by not properly protecting her. After Jo’s locker room incident, Ms. D assists students at the school with the creation of a Gay/Straight Alliance. Right before Jo returns to school, Ms. D is transferred from St. Paul’s based on ‘irreconcilable differences’ with the administration.
In Jo’s autobiographical graphic novel, her alter ego takes the form of a daring superhero, St. Michael the Archangel. In the three main Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, an archangel refers to an angel of the highest rank. In Catholicism, the three archangels are St. Gabriel, St. Raphael, and St. Michael, the head of all angels. Often depicted with a shield and sword, St. Michael is both warrior and protector, a symbol of strength, peace, and safety. In the Book of Revelation in the New Testament of The Bible, St. Michael defeats Satan in the War in Heaven. As a result, Satan is forever cast out of heaven and St. Michael becomes the most celebrated angel in history. In Jo’s novel, although St. Michael’s wings are torn apart when she is beaten in the locker room, she ultimately triumphs over evil. In the end, Jo focuses on finishing her book instead of seeking revenge against her attackers—rendering them powerless and emerging as a hero.
DIALOGUE FROM FML: HOW CARSON MCCULLERS SAVED MY LIFE

MICKEY: Whoa! [Holding up Jo’s drawing.] Who do we have here? You took my idea! Your superhero persona. What’s he called?

JO: St. Michael. And it’s a girl.

MICKEY: Wings and all. Very Catholic. Very nice. I want a cut when you publish!

QUESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM:

• Why do you think Jo chooses to model her alter ego after St. Michael?

• What does this tell us about Jo’s personality and character? About how she sees herself? Wants others to see her?

• If you were to create your own “superhero alter ego” what traits would he or she have? Would you model your alter ego after a specific figure (i.e. archangel, politician, athlete, etc.)? How would you be similar to your superhero persona? Dissimilar?
Sarah Gubbins on her Artistic Response to *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*:

“A novel is a very personal relationship between the writer and the reader that is not in a theatrical form. It is a wonderful two-way street that is very private and solitary. One way of adapting a novel is to open it up to theatrical interpretation and put the characters in a physical form on stage. What I am doing with *fml* is a response to source material. It is allowing the moment of engagement with literature to influence me in such a way that I can create new material. *fml* is inspired by Carson McCullers’ novel rather than an adaptation of it.”
Drawing a Reader into a Story

DIALOGUE FROM FML:
HOW CARSON MCCULLERS
SAVED MY LIFE

MS. DELANEY: In just a moment I’m going to read aloud the opening paragraphs of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. But before I do, I’d like you all to take a second and think about beginnings. If you were going to write a story and begin with this moment in time how would you express it? What would you want your audience, your reader to understand about this world?

FROM THE OPENING PARAGRAPHS OF THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER:

“In the town there were two mutes, and they were always together. Early every morning they would come out from the house where they lived and walk arm in arm down the street to work. The two friends were very different. Every morning the two friends walked silently together until they reached the main street of town. The thin mute, John Singer, nearly always put his hand on his friend’s arm and looked for a second into his face before leaving him. Each day was very much like any other day, because they were alone so much that nothing ever disturbed them.”

STEP 1: As Ms. Delaney says, let’s think about how Carson McCullers invites readers into her story. Knowing The Heart is a Lonely Hunter has become a classic, what makes the point of entry into this story so memorable?
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: WRITING EXERCISE

**STEP 2:** Write down a list of 10 things you learn about the world of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, or any book you are currently reading, from its opening paragraph, such as:

- Who is this story about?
- Where does this story take place?
- What do we know of the protagonist(s) thus far?
- What is the mood or tone of the story?
STEP 3: Think about the way in which an author grabs his/her audience and immediately immerses them into the world they have created. Free write for 10 minutes and create the opening paragraph of any story you can imagine.
STEP 4: Answer these questions about what you have just written:

• What do you think a reader can learn about the world of your story based on its opening?
• What elements of your story are you most curious about based on the opening sentences you created?
• If you were to continue your story, what would happen next?
• Why do you think the beginning of any novel/film/play is so important?
ATTENTION TEACHERS
TELL YOUR STUDENTS HOW TO GET INVOLVED AT STEPPENWOLF!

THE YOUNG ADULT COUNCIL is a unique after-school program for passionate and motivated high school students who want to learn the inner-workings of professional theatre from the most celebrated artists in the city. In addition to invaluable face-time with these leading professionals, Council members attend the best plays in Chicago, learn how to analyze and speak about these plays, and organize events for their peers around Steppenwolf productions in hopes of inspiring a new generation of theatre enthusiasts and practitioners.

APPLICATIONS GO LIVE ON MARCH 1ST.

Like the Steppenwolf Young Adult Council on Facebook!
Or visit steppenwolf.org/youngadultcouncil for more information.

Foundation support is provided by:
The Siragusa Foundation
Motorola Mobility Foundation
LGBTQ Terms: Defined

LGBTQ:

an acronym used to describe Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer persons

In **fml**, Jo’s locker is vandalized with the pejorative word faggot. Vandalizing a locker in this way is considered a hate crime, as hate crimes occur when, “a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her perceived membership in a certain social group, usually defined by racial group, religion, sexual orientation, disability, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, gender identity, social status or political affiliation.” Hate crimes of this nature are an attack on human rights. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton so aptly stated in her December 2011 remarks in recognition of International Human Rights Day, “Like being a woman, like being a racial, religious, tribal, or ethnic minority, being LGBT does not make you less human. And that is why gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights… It is violation of human rights when people are beaten or killed because of their sexual orientation, or because they do not conform to cultural norms about how men and women should look or behave. No matter what we look like, where we come from, or who we are, we are all equally entitled to our human rights and dignity.”

According to leading anti-violence organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign, Not in Our Town, and Stop the Hate, most hate crimes against gay persons stem from ignorance that in turn leads to prejudice, disdain and in extreme cases, violence. In an effort to end discrimination against LGBTQ persons, these social justice organizations advocate for education as a primary tool to combat violence stemming from misunderstanding. As former Canadian Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Lester B. Pearson said,

> “MISUNDERSTANDING ARISING FROM IGNORANCE BREEDS FEAR, AND FEAR REMAINS THE GREATEST ENEMY OF PEACE.”

With that in mind, educate yourself about the terms on the next page.
Terms Defined

Androgynous: a person with an ambiguous sexual identity; cannot be distinctly identified as male or female

Bisexual: a person who has a sexual orientation to both sexes

Coming out: process through which gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people reveal their identity to themselves, their families, their friends, etc.

Gay: a man whose sexual orientation is to men

Gender/Gender Identity: the culturally determined behaviors that are labeled as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’

Homophobia: an aversion to gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people

Intersex: a person whose biological sex cannot be classified as clearly male or female. In the past, one might have referred to intersex persons as hermaphrodites—an outdated term meaning a person with fully-formed male and female sex organs

Lesbian: a woman whose sexual orientation is to women

Transgender: an umbrella term for people whose gender identity does not match the cultural ‘norm’ for their sex

Transsexual: people born into one sex but who identify physically, psychologically, and emotionally as the opposite sex

FTM (transman): a transsexual person in the process of transitioning or who has transitioned from female to male

MTF (transwoman): a transsexual person in the process of transitioning or who has transitioned from male to female

Transvestite: a person who receives pleasure by wearing clothes associated with the opposite gender. There is no correlation between sexual orientation and transvestite behavior; transvestites are not necessarily homosexual—they may be heterosexual, bisexual, asexual or other

Sex (biological sex): the biological status of male or female

Sexual orientation: who you are attracted to sexually, emotionally, romantically or intellectually

Queer: umbrella term for sexual minorities
LGBTQ TEEN ISSUES: HOW YOU CAN HELP

Resources, facts & figures on bullying: Illinois students

ACCORDING TO THE GAY, LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK (GLSEN):

35% of Illinois students report that sexual orientation is the most common reason students are bullied or harassed.

THE EAST CENTRAL ILLINOIS SAFE SCHOOL’S ALLIANCE (ECISSA) PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING STATISTICS SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO ILLINOIS:

74% of Illinois students report hearing homophobic remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” from other students in school.

83% of Illinois students report hearing homophobic remarks such as “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” from other students in school.

48% of Illinois students report that teachers and other school staff rarely intervene when they hear homophobic language, perhaps because they do not know what to say or do not feel empowered to act.

For every 1 gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender student who reports being bullied or harassed, (4) straight students report being harassed or bullied for being perceived as gay or lesbian.
What are the consequences of bullying and harassment due to sexual orientation?

Lesbian, gay, or bisexual students are 3x more likely than their non-gay peers to miss school because they feel unsafe.

Lesbian, gay, or bisexual students are nearly 4x more likely than their non-gay peers to be in a physical fight that requires medical attention.

Lesbian, gay, or bisexual students are nearly 2x as likely as their non-gay peers to suffer from depression.

Lesbian, gay, or bisexual students are nearly 3x more likely than their non-gay peers to attempt suicide.

60% of boys classified as bullies in grades 6-9 were convicted of at least one crime by age 24 and 40% of them had three or more convictions.

What are the solutions?

THE GLSEN RECOMMENDS SCHOOL POLICIES BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY AS:

Training teachers on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity is the single most effective strategy for creating a safer school climate.

The frequency of homophobic remarks and harassment about nontraditional gender expression is greater at schools without comprehensive anti-harassment policies.

Students in schools with Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) or similarly supportive clubs report that teachers and other school staff intervene more often to stop homophobic language than students in schools without such clubs.

For further information, please visit illinoissafeschools.org
SNAPSHOT: ‘IT GETS BETTER PROJECT’
‘IT GETS BETTER PROJECT’ PLEDGE:
Everyone deserves to be respected for who they are. I pledge to spread this message to my friends, family and neighbors. I’ll speak up against hate and intolerance whenever I see it at school and at work. I’ll provide hope for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and other bullied teens by letting them know that “It Gets Better.”

SNAPSHOT: ‘IT GETS BETTER PROJECT’

**About:**
Young people who identify as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) have long been subjected to bullying, torment, and ridicule for being different. In the past few years, however, the dire circumstances young LGBTQ persons face has come into national focus with the large number of publicized suicides of gay teens. Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University freshman exposed online for his sexual orientation took his own life in September 2010 and a year later, Jamey Rodemeyer, a fourteen-year-old high school student in Buffalo, New York thanked singer Lady Gaga—an outspoken advocate for gay rights—in a final online post before taking his life. Since September 2010, life partners Dan Savage and Terry Miller have rallied more than 200,000 allies in support of a positive message to outcast teens, ‘It Gets Better! With supporters such as President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, pop star Justin Bieber, and more, the social media campaign has reached more than 2.5 million viewers and aims to bring hope and a new perspective to gay teens struggling with bullying due to their sexuality. In March 2011, ‘It Gets Better’ was published as a book. This collection of original essays and testimonials was compiled as an extension of the social media campaign and dedicated “For all the LGBT kids…”

**‘IT GETS BETTER PROJECT’ PLEDGE:**
Everyone deserves to be respected for who they are. I pledge to spread this message to my friends, family and neighbors. I’ll speak up against hate and intolerance whenever I see it at school and at work. I’ll provide hope for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and other bullied teens by letting them know that “It Gets Better.”

**Dialoge from FML: How Carson McCullers Saved My Life**

After Jo’s locker is vandalized, Ms. Delaney visits her in the gym while she is shooting free throws, and the two share this exchange:

JO: … it gets better. Right?

MS. DELANEY: Sometimes people don’t see it that way.

JO: I mean, that’s true right? You think that’s true?

MS. DELANEY: That it gets better?

JO: That’s what we’re told.

MS. DELANEY: I think it’s absolutely true.

JO: You do?

MS. DELANEY: Yeah. I think it gets much better. But sometimes it gets really, really hard before things turn around.

**Number of Videos Uploaded To Date:**
22,000+

**Number of Youtube Subscribers To Date:**
39,193

**To Get Involved Go To:**
itgetsbetter.org
Classroom Activity: ‘It Gets Better Project’

Inspired by the ‘It Gets Better Project’

In this activity, students will learn the various steps required to create a 3-minute video using a technique called storyboarding. Students will storyboard—and if possible, create—their own ‘It Gets Better Project’ videos. This exercise could be done in groups or individually.

Note: any school able to create an actual video will be highlighted on our Steppenwolf for Young Adults Facebook page and company website. We hope you will share your work! Please forward a link to your video to the SYA Team at lsivak@steppenwolf.org.
**STEP 1:** Visit the ‘It Gets Better Project’ website at [www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org) and share a few example videos with your students. Of particular note, videos by President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Musician Janet Jackson—all found in the ‘popular videos’ link at the top of the site.

Remind students of the goal of the ‘It Gets Better Project’, namely, to show young LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) persons the levels of happiness, potential, and positivity their lives will reach—if they can just get through their teen years. The project reminds teens in the LGBTQ community, and all others, they are not alone—and it WILL get better.

As students watch each video, have them consider the following questions in regard to the videos they will create:

- What is the message you want your video to portray?
- What do you want audience members to take away from the video you create?
- What makes your voice unique?
- What is a personal story you can use to connect to the mission of the project?
- What thematic elements do you want to use for your video?
- How can you work to make your video different from others?

**STEP 2:** Using the Steppenwolf storyboard template provided on pg. 23, have students plan out storyboards to create their 3-minute video. Students should incorporate the following elements in their storyboards using the reference guide as needed:

- Plan a visual theme for video
- Create a Title Card for opening shot of video
- Include text from the ‘It Gets Better Project’ Pledge (see p. 20 for reference)
- Incorporate the use of music

**STEP 3:**
Once students have completed their storyboards, have them present their ideas to the rest of the class.

**STEP 4 (OPTIONAL):**
If possible, have students film and edit their videos and upload the videos to the ‘It Gets Better Project’ webpage (upload instructions provided there). And remember to send us a link, too!
### 'It Gets Better Project' Storyboard

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REFERENCE GUIDE FOR STORYBOARDS

For each shot of the video, students should plan the following:

Description of scene: Overall, what does this scene hope to capture?

Scene #: What scene number is this shot?

Location: Where is each scene going to take place; what is the backdrop and setting?

Visual theme: What is the theme of the video and how will you use color to achieve the desired mood? (ie. will the video be in color vs. black and white? Sepia? etc?)

Music: How and when will you use music/sound in the video? If a particular song, list the track and which portion of it you will use. (ie. “Song Title, 2:15-2:45.”)

Shot time: How long will this shot last? 1 minute? 30 seconds? 10 seconds? Remember: you have 3 minutes total.

Title card: What words or text will you use to convey information? Every video should utilize an opening title card and may choose to have title cards throughout the video.

Visual representation of action of scene: Sketch out what you imagine this scene looking like to the viewer (consider, where is the camera in relation to the subject? How much of the background do you want to see in the shot? etc.?)

Dialogue: Is there dialogue in this scene? If so, what? Who says it?
Further Listening:
Canadian Broadcasting Centre, Radio, 2011, Canada's national public broadcaster.
Radio broadcast that addresses how gay characters are purposefully left out of young adult novels

Further Reading:
Commentary from queer theatre artist Polly Carl, challenging the nature vs. nurture conversation through the lens of the American theater


U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton delivers remarks during the 2011 International Human Rights Day in Geneva, Switzerland, advocating the human rights of the LGBTQ community around the world

An intimate interview with fml playwright Sarah Gubbins as she discusses her work for LGBTQ audiences


Discusses the work of a classroom teacher who has set out to tackle the restraints of homophobic bullying in the classroom

It Gets Better Book: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living, 2011, edited by Dan Savage and Terry Miller
A collection of stories and confessions from celebrities, politicians, and everyday citizens responding to bullying of LGBTQ adolescents
See a production at Steppenwolf for a discounted price, and then explore the world of the play with your friends and Chicago’s most celebrated artists. It’s that simple.

**TICKETS ARE $15 (THAT’S CHEAP & INCLUDES FOOD).**

To purchase tickets call Audience Services at 312-335-1650 or arrive at the theatre 30 minutes before the show and purchase your tickets at the door.

For more information visit www.steppenwolf.org/sya or call us at 312-654-5637.

*Evening events include music, dance and slam poetry.

The Young Adult Council is generously sponsored by UBS. Foundation support is provided by The Siragusa Foundation and the Motorola Mobility Foundation.

**THE SCENE**

**STEPHENWOLF’S TEEN SERIES**

**FML: HOW CARSON MCCULLERS SAVED MY LIFE**
Saturday, March 10
@ 7:30pm

**TIME STANDS STILL**
Saturday, April 21
@ 3:00pm

**THE MARCH**
Saturday, May 12
@ 3:00pm
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