Adoption Play Project: About Play Workshops

**Our Goal:** To create a fully-staged production of a play about the adoption and foster care experience that is based on the true stories that have been shared with us by the community itself.

**Why Play Workshops?** In the past six months, we’ve held around 20 story circles, talked with more than 160 people, and gathered hundreds of stories. How do we put so many different perspectives on stage? How do we decide which stories to include? How do we create a play that honors the community and uses the creativity of theater to touch others? In workshops, we experiment with the answers to these questions, and we invite both community members and practiced theater artists to explore together.

We use movement and vocal exercises in addition to text and discussion to move from sharing stories to finding ways to transform them into theater.

**Further explanation for non-theater artists:** The workshop environment can feel unfamiliar and even strange to non-theater artists. You may find that we spend time entertaining an idea that we don’t eventually use, or we discover inspiration from a gesture that seemed unimportant at the time. We may not even talk about specific adoption stories during a workshop. In a sense, what may appear to be “failure” in other work environments is never considered failure during the creative process—everything is simply part of a process of discovery.

We invite you into this part of the process because this state of creative exploration can open up other avenues to both story-telling and story-understanding that you may not experience by simply recounting your memories in words.

**Nonetheless:** We want to make sure you understand that the play we’re making is predominantly made up of the stories that we have been honored to collect from the adoption community. People on stage will tell other people’s stories. People on stage will act out versions of those stories. In workshops, we’re looking to find elements that make the play "theatrical," that transform stories from memories retold to three-dimensional experiences that audiences understand and feel.

**A note on structure:** Sometimes we look for stories that already exist in our culture to serve as containers, or frames, into which we put the wealth of information we have gathered. The benefits of this approach are:

1. Stories that have lasted throughout time—myths, fairy tales, legends, epic poems—generally last because they contain wisdoms about human nature. They have survived because they are excellent stories.
2. Similarly, they are sturdy pre-made containers that can be customized easier for our purposes.
3. Finally, general audiences feel connected to stories that have lasted throughout time and often more able to open themselves up to the new information that we may deliver inside a familiar container.

**For example:** In our own experience with the Veteran’s Play Project, one vignette was modeled after the *Three Little Pigs* in this way: A young Private Piggy is instructed to make a home of straw to very specific arcane military specifications. As soon as the task is complete, he is ordered by a general, through a Sgt. Wolf, to blow up the straw house he just built. Then he is instructed to create a house out of stone. As soon as he is done, the same people instruct him to blow up that house. Finally, he makes a barracks out of brick and is instructed to blow it up. He protests that there are people inside the barracks, but the General and Sergeant, who are angling for promotions, refuse to listen. This scenario was invented during a workshop by a veteran, based on his own experience with the bureaucratic structure of the military, the motivations of some officers, and the tragedies of “collateral damage.” In performance, this scene was many audience member’s favorite, because it was more successful at dramatizing the horrors of “Private Piggy’s” situation, and the Private’s feelings about his own experience, than many of the other, more “realistic” story-telling devices we used.

We’re glad you’re here, and we encourage you to:

- Trust your own instincts. Don’t worry about whether you can explain your feelings or thoughts in words. Try to do the exercises and trust that you’re doing it well.
- Respect the creative process. We don’t know how this will all work either, but we know from experience that we will find the right way to get there.
- Be willing to fail. Experiments cannot work without the willingness to find what does not work. Also, know that no one outside this room needs to know about anything that doesn’t work. Only the best stuff, the right stuff, needs to be shared with others.
- Have fun. Sometimes simply playing, even when addressing very serious topics, can be as exciting as any final performance might be.

Thank you for being creative with us!