SOUTH BEND CIVIC THEATRE

SHEIN TRUST



AUGUST WILSON'S "FENCES"

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

SYNOPSIS | THEATRE ETIQUETTE | EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS | SUGGESTED READING

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AUGUST WILSON'S "FENCES"

SOUTH BEND CIVIC THEATRE
WILSON AUDITORIUM

RECOMMENDED FOR PATRONS 14 & UP

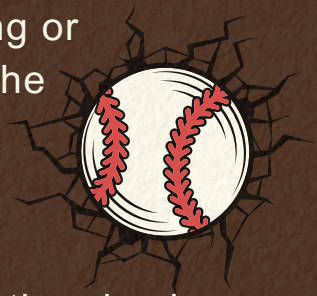
Thank you for joining us on this journey to Pittsburgh's Hill District! If you've ever dreamed of being on stage, creating sets, or helping bring stories to life, we'd love to have you join our community. There's a place for everyone, both on and off the stage!

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THEATRE ETIQUETTE & ACCESSIBILITY

NO PAPARAZZI PLEASE

Leave cell phones, tablets, hand held games, and other distracting electronics at home or turn them off completely. No texting or photography during the performance.



TAKE YOUR SEAT

When the lights dim, the play is about to begin! Take your seat and stay seated.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN (UNTIL IT ISN'T!)

To ensure you and your fellow audience members have the best experience, focus all of your attention on the play. We ask that you refrain from talking to your neighbors as it distracts the actors onstage. Feel free to laugh and react naturally as the play unfolds. Applauding at the end of scenes and at curtain call is encouraged!

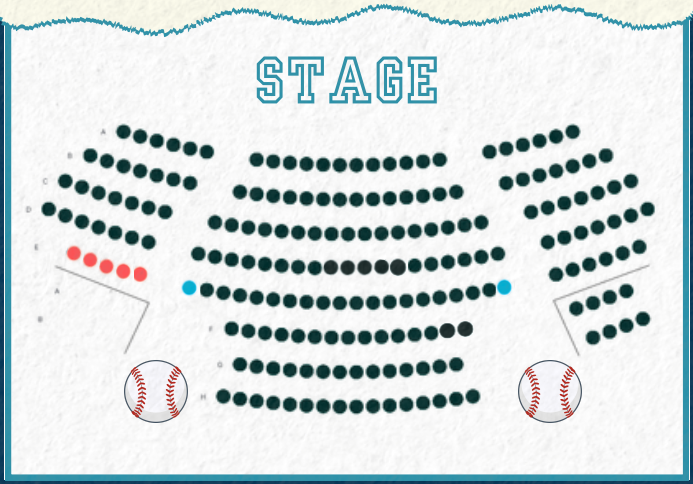
ACCESSIBILITY

Exits located on either sides of the aisles marked with baseballs.

Two **wheelchair accessible seats** are marked in teal and can be found on either side of row E.

Five **armless seats** are marked in red and can be found on audience left in row E.

WILSON AUDITORIUM



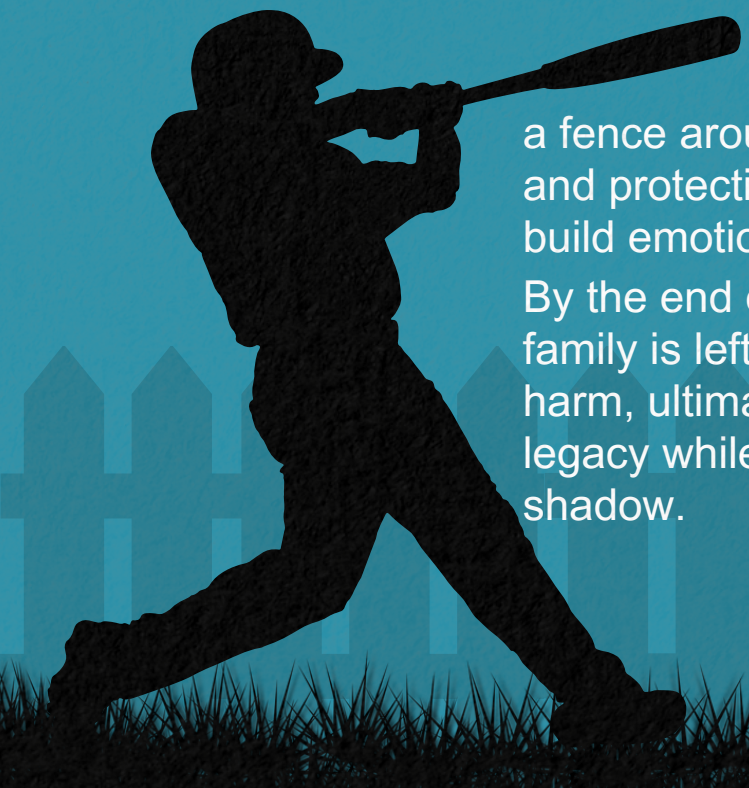
SYNOPSIS



August Wilson's *Fences* is set in the 1950s and centers on Troy Maxson, a former Negro League baseball player who now works as a garbage collector in Pittsburgh. He is a complex, proud, and often difficult man who feels deeply shaped, and limited, by the racial barriers he faced in his youth. The play follows his strained relationships with his wife Rose, his son Cory, and his brother Gabriel, revealing how his unresolved disappointments shape the way he parents and partners.

At the heart of *Fences* is the tension between protection and restriction. Troy insists he is shielding Cory from the racism that derailed his own baseball career, discouraging him from pursuing college football. However, Cory experiences this protection as control, leading to a rupture between father and son. Meanwhile, Troy's long-standing infidelity, particularly his affair that results in a child, fractures his marraige with Rose, forcing her to confront betrayal while also redefining her sense of identity and commitment.

The metaphor of the fence runs thorughout the play, symbolizing both emotional barriers and the desire for connection. Rose wants Troy to build a fence around their home, representing stability and protection, while Troy's life choices gradually build emotional fences between him and his family. By the end of the play, after Troy's death, the family is left to reckon with both his love and his harm, ultimately finding ways to carry forward his legacy while also stepping out from under his shadow.



STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

NOTE: Referenced standards listed on the following pages

INDIANA STATE 9-12 LEARNING STANDARDS

August Wilson's *Fences* explores a variety of themes and concepts. A few Discussion Topics we believe are particularly relevant include **systemic racism, duty & responsibility, generational divide, love & betrayal, personal limitation & legacy**.

Watching this production and engaging with our Behind The Curtain audience guide can foster essential skills for navigating the modern world including: Creative Thinking, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Perseverance, Communication, and Growth Mindset.

Additionally, we believe this experience and the accompanying guide can assist educators in meeting various **Indiana State Learning Standards**. We've highlighted some standards that align well with specific articles and activities below. While we've selected a few examples, we encourage you to get creative and find other connections between what your students are learning and this theatrical experience!

ATTENDING A PERFORMANCE OF *Fences*

FINE ARTS

THEATRE ARTS | Anchor Standards 7-11

PROFILE OF THE PLAYWRIGHTS

FINE ARTS

THEATRE ARTS | Anchor Standards 7-9

ENGLISH & LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION | 11.RC.1 & 11, 9-10.RC.1 & 9

THEMES & DISCUSSION TOPICS

HEALTH & WELLNESS

HS.1.2, 2.1, 2.5, 2.8, 4.1-4, 4.7, 4.9, 5.1, 5.3-6, HS.6.3, 6.5-6

ENGLISH & LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION | 9-10.RC.1-3, 6, & 12, 11-12.RC.1-7 & 13

WRITING | 9-10.W.1-2, 4.a & 4.c., 11-12.W.1-2, 4.a, & 4.c

COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION | 9-10.CC.1-2 & 4, 11-12.CC.1-4

SOCIAL STUDIES

HISTORY | USH.2.5, 3.4, 5.4, 5.6, 6.1-2, 7.1-2, 7.6, 10.1, 10.3, 10.5

CIVICS & GOVERNMENT | USG.1.6-7, 2.6, 5.2-3, 5.7

SUGGESTED READING

ENGLISH & LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION | 9-10.RC.1-7 & 9-13, 11-12.RC.1-14

SOCIAL STUDIES

HISTORY | USH.2.5, USH.3.4, USH.6.1, USH.7.1-2 & 5-6, USH.10.1-5

CIVICS & GOVERNMENT | USG.1.6-7, USG.2.6 & 4, USG.5.3-4

EQUITY VS. EQUALITY & FURTHER LEARNING

ENGLISH & LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION | 11.RC.1 & 11, 9-10.RC.1 & 9

SOCIAL STUDIES

HISTORY | USH.2.5, 3.2, 3.4, 5.4, 5.6, 6.2, 7.1-2, 7.5-6, 10.1-5

CIVICS & GOVERNMENT | USG.1.7, 2.5-6, 5.2-3, 5.5 & 7

SPOTLIGHT ON KATHERINE WALDEN

ENGLISH & LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION | 9-10.RC.1-2, 4, 7, 9-10, 11-12.RC.1, 5, 8, 11

SOCIAL STUDIES

HISTORY | USH.2.1 & 5, 3.4, 4.1, 10.1-3

STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

ACTIVITY PAGES

SOCIAL STUDIES

HISTORY | GHW.7.2; USH.6.1-2, 7.1-3, 7.6, & 10.1-2

GOVERNMENT | USG.5.5 & 5.8

ENGLISH & LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION | 11-12.RC.1-2 & 13; 9-10.RC.1-2

WRITING | 11-12.W.5; 9-10.W.5-7

COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION | 11-12.CC.2 & 6-7; 9-10.CC.1-2 & 7

FINE ARTS

THEATRE ARTS

Anchor Standards View Theatre Arts Standards

COMMON CORE

ENG. & LANG. ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION, COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION, AND WRITING

11-12.RC./W./CC. View 11-12th Grade Standards

9-10.RC./W./CC. View 9-10th Grade Standards

SOCIAL STUDIES

GEOGRAPHY & WORLD HISTORY, UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, & UNITED STATES HISTORY

GHW. View Geography & History of the World Standards

USG. View United States Government Standards

USH. View United States History Standards

PROFILE OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

AUGUST WILSON



PC Michelle McLoughlin/AP

August Wilson (1945-2005) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright best known for his groundbreaking *American Century Cycle*, a series of ten plays chronicling African American life throughout the twentieth century. Born Frederick August Kittel in Pittsburgh's Hill District to a Black mother and white father, Wilson later adopted his mother's surname and drew deeply from his experiences growing up in a racially divided and economically challenged neighborhood. After dropping out of high school at age 15, accused of plagiarism, Wilson turned to the public library and the community around him for education. He credited the "four B's" as his artistic influences: the blues, Romare Bearden, Amiri Baraka, and Jorge Luis Borges.

Though he began as a poet, Wilson found his voice in theatre in the late 1970s after cofounding the Black Horizons Theatre in Pittsburgh and later moving to St. Paul, Minnesota. There, he developed the early works of his cycle, starting with *Jitney*. His Broadway breakthrough came with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), followed by *Fences* (1987) and *The Piano Lesson* (1990), both of which earned him Pulitzer Prizes. Across the ten-play cycle, Wilson explored themes of identity, history, systemic racism, family, and the black cultural experience, which was anchored in music, particularly the blues, and spoken in a lyrical, vernacular voice. His plays have attracted major talent, and several have been adapted into award-winning films.

Wilson received numerous accolades, including seven New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, and held Guggenheim and Rockefeller fellowships. Following his death in 2005, the Virginia Theatre on Broadway was renamed the August Wilson Theatre, the first broadway house to honor a Black American. His legacy endures not only in his plays but in the generations of artists and audiences moved by his truthful, poetic exploration of Black American life.

THEMES

SYSTEMIC RACISM

Fences examines how segregation and racism shape Tory Maxson's life, particularly his exclusion from Major League Baseball, and how those experiences influence his worldview and parenting.

DUTY & RESPONSIBILITY

Troy strongly believes in providing for his family through steady work and discipline, even when his methods feel harsh or limiting to those he loves.

GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

Troy's strained relationship with Cory highlights the tension between protection and control, as Cory seeks opportunities his father was historically denied.

LOVE & BETRAYAL

Troy and Rose's marriage is tested by infidelity and unmet emotional needs, revealing how love can coexist with hurt, loyalty, and disillusionment.

PERSONAL LIMITATION & LEGACY

The play explores how Troy's fears, pride, and unresolved past shape his choices and the impact those choices have on his family. It also examines how legacy is both inherited and redefined, as each character decides what to carry forward and what to leave behind.

DISCUSSION TOPICS



How does Troy Maxson's experience with racism shape the way he makes decisions for his family?

In what ways does Troy believe he is protecting Cory, and in what ways does that protection become limiting?

Where do you see the tension between responsibility and personal happiness in Troy's life?

How does the idea of a "generational divide" show up in the conflict between Troy and Cory?

What differences do you notice between how Troy defines success and how Cory defines success?

How does Rose respond to Troy's choices, and what does that reveal about her values and strengh?

What role does the fence itself play symbolically thorughout the story? How does its meaning change? Write a 2-page paper answering this question.

Which character do you think changes the most over the course of the play, and why? Break into groups and dicuss.

The play ends after Troy's death. What do you think each remaining character carries forward from him, and what do they choose to leave behind?

Everything I Never Told You

by Celeste Ng
THEMES EXPLORED: Love & Betrayal, Generational Divide, Personal Limitation & Legacy
AGES 15-18

Topdog/Underdog

by Suzan-Lori Parks
THEMES EXPLORED: Personal Limitation & Legacy, Generational Divide, Love & Betrayal, Racial Barriers & Systemic Exclusion
AGES 16-18

The Nickel Boys

by Colson Whitehead
THEMES EXPLORED: Racial Barriers & Systemic Exclusion, Duty & Responsibility, Personal Limitation & Legacy
AGES 16-18

Fun Home

by Alison Bechdel
THEMES EXPLORED: Love & Betrayal, Generational Divide, Personal Limitation & Legacy
AGES 16-18

Out of Darkness

by Ashley Hope Pérez
THEMES EXPLORED: Love & Betrayal, Racial Barriers & Systemic Exclusion, Personal limitation & Legacy
AGES 16-18

A Raisin In The Sun

by Lorraine Hansberry
THEMES EXPLORED: Racial Barriers & Systemic Exclusion, Generational Divide, Duty & Responsibility
AGES 14-18

All American Boys

by Jason Reynolds
THEMES EXPLORED: Racial Barriers & Systemic Exclusion, Generational Divide, Personal Limitation & Legacy
AGES 14-18

The Hate U Give

by Angie Thomas
THEMES EXPLORED: Racial Barriers & Systemic Exclusion, Generational Divide, Duty & Responsibility
AGES 14-18

Persepolis

by Marjane Satrapi
THEMES EXPLORED: Generational Divide, Personal Limitation & Legacy, Racial/Cultural Barriers
AGES 14-18

SUGGESTED READING

Find these & other titles at the St. Joe County Public Library!

SPOTLIGHT ON DR. KATHERINE WALDEN & DR. GREGORY BOND



Dr. Katherine Walden is a faculty member in the Department of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame. As the faculty director for the Minor in Sport, Media & Culture, she works with students and faculty across campus who want to better understand what sport means and why it matters. Her own work looks at the intersection of sport and American culture, with a focus on baseball, labor, and globalization. She is actively involved in the Foundry Field Project, a local public history, community-engagement initiative that spans a physical baseball field project, mural wall, educational programming, and other forms of storytelling around baseball, race, and representation.

Dr. Gregory Bond is the Sports Archivist and Curator of the Joyce Sports Research Collection at the University of Notre Dame. His research interests include the cultural history of sports, the history of race and sports, the history of African Americans and sports, and the history of gender and sports. He is currently working on several research projects about the history of African American athletes at predominantly white colleges and universities.

BEYONG THE COLOR LINE: BLACK BASEBALL IN SOUTH BEND

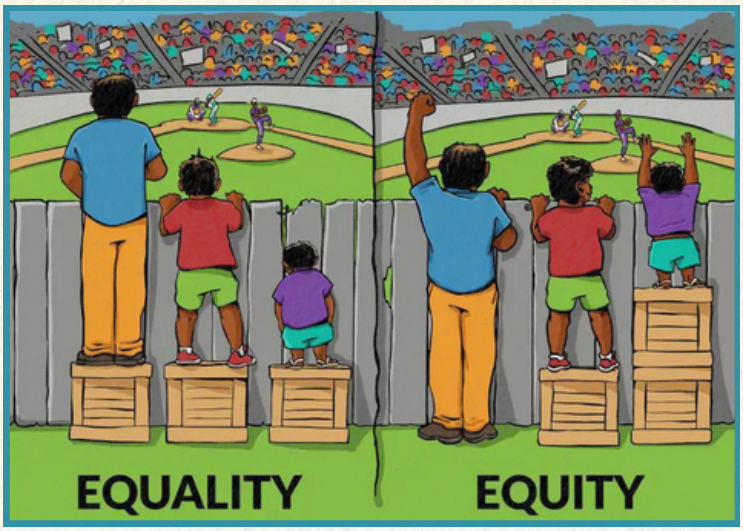
August Wilson's *Fences* centers on Troy Maxson, a former Negro Leagues star whose talent arrived just ahead of Jackie Robinson's arrival in Major League Baseball. South Bend has its own chapter in this history. In the 1920s through the 1940s, the Foundry Giants – a team composed of Black workers from the Studebaker foundry -- competed in the predominantly White industrial league. From community leaders Seabe Gavin Sr. and Alonso Poindexter to Negro League stand-out John “Big Pitch” Williams, this local history is part of a regional and national story.

Join us for a pre-show lecture on the history of Black baseball in South Bend, placed within the broader story of race, labor, and the color line in "America's pastime." The talk also explores how that history is being recovered and shared today through Foundry Field, a public-private initiative building a ballpark and public art project in South Bend's urban core.

EQUITY VS. EQUALITY

THE BASEBALL GAME ANALOGY

Imagine several people gathered to watch a baseball game from behind a tall fence. Because everyone is a different height, each person has a different view of what is happening on the field.



IC Interaction Institute for Social Change | artist: Angus Maguire

Equality means giving everyone the same resource. In this example, each person receives one identical box to stand on. While everyone has been given the same support, the outcome is not the same for everyone. A taller person may already have a clear view, whilea shorter person may still be unable to see over the fence.

Equity takes a different approach. Instead of assuming that everyone needs the same thing, it recognizes that people begin with different circumstances and may require different levels of support. The boxes are therefore different heights, allowing each person to see over the fence.

The goal of equity is *not* to give everyone an identical expereince, but instead to remove barriers so that everyone has a fair opportunity to participate. In this example, that means making sure each person has a clear view of the game, even if the support needed to get there is different.

EQUITY | PBS

Today much is said about equity vs. equality, according to Merriam Webster they can be described as fairness vs. sameness. Some equate calls for equity with Marxism and other Communist theory. Others call for equity as a long overdue promise of our constitutional democracy. On this episode Jason speaks with Dr. Monita Mungo, Rev. Dr. Willie Perryman Jr., and David Madden about Equity. AGES: 14+ | TIME: 26m46s

FURTHER LEARNING

JACKIE ROBINSON | PBS

Jack Roosevelt Robinson rose from humble origins to cross baseball's color line and become one of the most beloved men in America. A fierce integrationist, Robinson used his immense fame to speak out against the discrimination he saw on and off the field, angering fans, the press, and even teammates who had once celebrated him for "turning the other cheek." RATING: NR | TIME: Pt. 1 is 113m19s; Pt. 2 is 114m18s

FOR THE GOLD AND GLORY | PBS

In the 1920s, racial tensions created separation between black and white athletes. After being denied participation in the Indianapolis 500, Charlie Wiggins, "the Negro Speed King," created a national racing league for Black Americans. For Gold & Glory spotlights first-hand conversations with Charlie's wife Roberta and features interviews with former drivers, families, historians, and witnesses. RATING: NR | TIME: 30m

NEVER DROP THE BALL | PBS

Explore the journey of Black baseball players during decades of exclusion from Major League Baseball, culminating in Jackie Robinson's 1947 success. Their passion for the game led to the creation of the Negro Major League and Negro American League. Set in an era when Major League Baseball began but was segregated, these players' love for the game transcended Jim Crow laws and adversity. RATING: TV-PG | TIME: 55m37s

ACTIVITY

EXERCISE: Swinging for the Fences
GRADES: Grades 9th-12th
SUBJECT: U.S. History
TIME: 1hr+

SUPPLIES: Pencil, Paper, Mean of Research

OVERVIEW:

In this project students will explore the lives and times of change-makers in U.S. History. Troy in *Fences* is held back from his dream of being a baseball player by racial inequality, and holds his son back from what he sees as the same fate. Other Americans, however, were able to break through this glass ceiling and become great. Students will explore the lives of these greats who overcame undue obstacles to attain their goals.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Introduce this activity by discussing the tension between Troy and his son Cory, and why Troy did not want his son playing sports. Once students have addressed the topics of segregation and sports, remind students that these policies were not just held for sports, but for most aspects of life post slavery in the United States.
2. Once students understand this, let students know that they will be studying and presenting information about one American in history who did not let these policies stop them from achieving greatness, even if they had to be the first to do it.
3. Students will choose one figure in American history, who because of their race, gender, or other identity had obstacles and challenges to breaking into their industry. Students will identify who this person is, what this person did, what official or unofficial policies tried to keep them from achieving their dreams, what they did to achieve those dreams,and finally any lasting impact this person may have had.
4. Choose between options a. & b.:
    a. If choosing to do a presentation, split your students into groups of four-five, and have them begin researching. Students must all be prepared to speak on the day of the presentation, and must include relevant media on the slides of their presentation.
    b. If choosing to have students write a paper emphasize to them the importance of determining valid sources, and that each must follow the standard essay format used in your classroom.
5. Have students share their work with the class, either via presentation or a brief speech.

ASSESSMENT:

- Were students able to identify the reasons Troy had for his son to not play football? Did they somehow miss this key piece of information when first reading/watching this play?
- Were students able to effectively research this topic and identify someone who met this criteria? Why or why not?
- Were students able to take the information their learned and present it in the format required? In the future how can we better support students going from the research to the implementation phase?

ACTIVITY

EXERCISE: Symbols and Meaning
GRADES: Grades 9th-12th
SUBJECT: Language Arts
TIME: 45min+

SUPPLIES: Pencil, Paper, Mean of Research

OVERVIEW:

Fences by August Wilson makes liberal use of symbolism to enhance its storytelling. From the physical fence being built throughout the play, to sports, to Gabriel and his trumpet, to the devil these symbols are ingrained in this story, trying to emphasize a deeper meaning to those watching it. Today your students will analyze these symbols for meaning in the context of *Fences*.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prior to starting this activity students should be familiar with the play *Fences* by August Wilson, either through seeing or reading the play. If your students are unfamiliar with symbolism, this topic should be reviewed prior to beginning this activity.
2. Once background information has been established, split your classroom into groups of four to five in the way that best fits your classroom structure. Inform students that in these groups today they will be discussing symbolism and its use in *Fences*. In these groups students will discuss: the fence, sports (baseball and football), the Devil, and Gabriel and his trumpet. Students will spend five minutes each discussing these symbols and how they show up in *Fences*.
3. Once groups have had time to discuss all of the symbols mentioned, allow groups time to pick one symbol to focus on for the project. Inform students that they will be creating a multimedia presentation on one of these symbols. Tweak criteria for your curriculum needs, but each presentation must: identify the symbol, identify what it represents, identify how it is used in *Fences*, and identify another way the same symbol is used in another piece of literature and media.
4. This can be completed by the end of class, or be a more long form research projects, but by the end each student must present their findings to the group in both visual and verbal format.

ASSESSMENT:

- Were students able to understand and contribute to a discussion about symbolism at a level appropriate for their grade? Were there some milestones they were missing?
- Were students able to verbally explain their interpretations in a clear and concise manner?
- How can we better support students forming their thoughts into coherent words?
- Did students find helpful accompanying images to demonstrate the point of their presentation? Why or why not?

WORK WITH US

Whether you like to be “in the spotlight,” or prefer to stay “behind the scenes,” South Bend Civic Theatre offers plenty of opportunities to volunteer in every aspect of theatrical production, including field trips, learning new skills, and even opportunities to see shows for free! Checkout our website to learn more!

SOUTH BEND CIVIC THEATRE

LEARN MORE AT SBCT.ORG

UPCOMING SHOWS

VISITOR





HOME

BALL STRIKE OUT