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Gaines Jury Project Proposal

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As an Arts Administration major, I am required to take Marketing for the Arts, a marketing class geared specifically toward non-profit organizations. Our major project for that class was to separate into groups according to our chosen artistic field of study (mine being theatre), and create a hypothetical arts organization. We then had to create a season for that organization, each person in the group in charge of one event.

My group created a children's theatre, Twinkle Twinkle Lexington Stars (TTLS). Part of our requirements as to our season was to have a piece created "by minority artists, for minority artists." I decided that I wanted to think outside the box concerning the word "minority," and began thinking of it as a word that refers not simply to race, but to anyone who is a statistical minority, who is not typically marketed toward when it comes to theatre productions. As the semester progressed, the show that I was in charge of gradually evolved into something that I thought would be a really extraordinary production. My show was to have TTLS collaborate with the Kentucky School for the Deaf to put on a production of Shel Silverstein's classic tale, The Giving Tree.

I wanted to allow the children at the School for the Deaf, who range from elementary school to high school age, to participate in a production that had the actors signing the dialogue while it was simultaneously being spoken, so that audience members who do not speak American Sign Language and those who do would be able to

appreciate and enjoy a tale where sight, sound, and movement blended together into a new form of storytelling.

The thought was inspired by a number of things, but mainly by a production of the musical *Big River* that was revived on Broadway in 2004. The production had originally premiered at Deaf West Theatre located in North Hollywood, CA, and though a number of theatre groups for the hearing-impaired exist around the country, this highly acclaimed production had deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing actors alike performing together, using American Sign Language as their own choreography.

During my research for the Arts Marketing project, I discovered that the Little Theatre of the Deaf, the children's theatre portion of the National Theatre of the Deaf, located in Hartford, CT had already put on a production of *The Giving Tree and Other Stories* in 2003. Featuring four actors who simultaneously signed and spoke the dialogue, it toured nationally, performing to audiences both hearing and hearing-impaired alike.

When I started to contemplate potential jury projects, this was the idea that first came to me. The jury project was defined as being something that I feel will contribute to the community. With the esteemed Kentucky School for the Deaf located in nearby Danville, KY, I hoped it would be a wonderful opportunity for the students to participate in an art form that is not always readily available to deaf artists. Giving the students at the school an after-school program or activity that is not always readily available seemed to me a definite contribution to the community, and I liked the fact that it could also be used as a tool to educate and inform audience members who are not fluent in ASL.

My initial hesitation was that I don't really know Sign, which seems a hefty barrier when wanting to work exclusively with children who are hard-of-hearing. But the

teachers at the School for the Deaf have been reassuring in that they do provide interpreters when needed, and I am determined to learn as much as I can about ASL prior to the project. Cooperation will be essential—there will be many who do not speak ASL, and there will be many who always speak ASL, and we will need to work together in order to make everyone feel comfortable and to accomplish our goal.

The hope is to coordinate a collaboration between the Lexington Children's Theatre and the Kentucky School for the Deaf, and to put on a final performance in the manner of the ones performed by the Little Theatre of the Deaf, incorporating sign into the storytelling. The timing of this idea turned out to be ideal, as the School for the Deaf was actually focusing on teaching their middle school students about the nature of drama this school year. The Children's Theatre is accustomed to working with schools to help them put on small-scale productions as a part of their Educational Outreach, and have agreed to help with the project. As the students at the School for the Deaf learn about drama throughout the school year, the teachers have invited me to come work with the students in class as well, perhaps leading a workshop or some other fun activity prior to the performance next semester.

This is truly leading me to realize that the Jury Project, like so many things, is about the process and now the product. While the final performance will be a fun and exciting culmination of the work put into it, I am more looking forward to the path I will follow as I reach that destination. Working with the students, the teachers, and the employees at the Children's Theatre is an exciting prospect.

Stepping into territory that is new and different for Lexington, I am unsure of how this project will eventually manifest itself. I have my ideas and hopes, but I know that the

ideas coming from the groups I plan to work with will shape this project in a way I never imagined. I know my starting point: I feel strongly that introducing deaf theatre to the people of the Bluegrass will be a wonderful thing for the community, and even the state of Kentucky. I am excited to see where that point takes me.