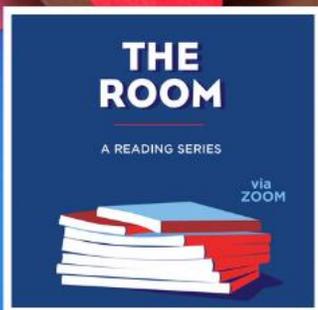


The Thanksgiving Play

written by
Larissa FastHorse

directed by
Elyse Dolan



BACKSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at
AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

THE THANKSGIVING PLAY

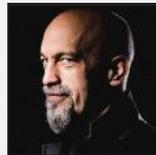
by Larissa FastHorse

Directed by Elyse Dolan*

FEATURING



Audrey Billings*



Lindsay Jones*



Zach Kenney*



J.G. Smith*

Good intentions collide with absurd assumptions in MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship recipient Larissa FastHorse’s wickedly funny satire, as a troupe of terminally “woke” teaching artists scrambles to create a pageant that somehow manages to celebrate both Turkey Day and Native American Heritage Month. Featuring an all-star cast of American Blues artists, including two-time Tony Award nominee Lindsay Jones.

**Ensemble Member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues*

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ABOUT THE ROOM—A READING SERIES

The Room is an online reading series that brings original work, plays in-development, and new stories to Chicago audiences. Offering in-depth discussions as well as action steps for patrons that intersect with themes of the plays. *The Room* is a virtual, accessible series on Zoom.

[Learn more about *The Room*.](#)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



LARISSA FASTHORSE she/her (*playwright*) (Sicangu Lakota Nation) is an award-winning writer and 2020-2025 MacArthur Fellow. Her satirical comedy, *The Thanksgiving Play* (Playwrights Horizons/Geffen Playhouse), was one of the top ten most produced plays in America. She is the first Native American playwright in the history of American theater on that list. Selected additional produced plays include *What Would Crazy Horse Do?* (KCRep), *Landless and Cow Pie Bingo* (AlterTheater), *Average Family* (Children's Theater Company of Minneapolis), *Teaching Disco Squaredancing to Our Elders: a Class Presentation* (Native Voices at the Atrium), *Vanishing Point* (Eagle Project), and *Cherokee Family Reunion* (Mountainside Theater). Her newest play is being written for a co-production with Second Stage and Center Theatre Group. In 2019 Larissa re-entered film and television by co-creating a series at Freeform. Since, she has set up projects with Disney Channel, NBC, Dreamworks, and is writing on a series for Apple+. She is also in development on projects with Taylor Made Productions, Mountain A, Muse, and Concord Theatricals. Film and TV feel like coming home to Larissa who began her writer training as a Sundance Native Feature Fellow, Fox Diversity Fellow, ABC Native American Fellow, and as the creator for shows at Fox and Teen Nick. Over the past several years Larissa has created a nationally recognized trilogy of community engaged theatrical experiences with Cornerstone Theater Company and her collaborative partner, Michael John Garcés. The first was *Urban Rez* in Los Angeles. The second project, *Native Nation*, was the largest Indigenous theater production in the history of American theater with over 400 Native artists involved in the productions in association with ASU Gammage. Their current project, *The L/D/Nakota Project* is set in Larissa's homelands of South Dakota. Their radical inclusion process with Indigenous tribes has been honored with the most prestigious national arts funding from Creative Capital, MAP Fund, NEFA, First People's Fund, the NEA Our Town Grant, Mellon Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Native Arts and Cultures, and others. Some additional theaters that have commissioned or developed plays with Larissa include The Public, Yale Rep, Guthrie, Geffen Playhouse, History Theater, Kennedy Center TYA, Baltimore's Center Stage, Arizona Theater Company, Mixed Blood, Perseverance Theater Company, The Lark Playwrights Week, the Center Theatre Group Writer's Workshop and Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor. Larissa's additional awards include the PEN/Laura Pels Theater Award for an American Playwright, NEA Distinguished New Play Development Grant, Joe Dowling Annamaghkerrig Fellowship, AATE Distinguished Play Award, Inge Residency, Sundance/Ford Foundation Fellowship, Aurand Harris Fellowship, and the UCLA Native American Program Woman of the Year. Larissa's company, Indigenous Direction, is a consulting company currently working with national clients including Western Arts Alliance, Guthrie Theater, Roundabout Theater Company, Macy's, and Brown University. She is co-vice chair of the board of directors of Playwrights Horizons and represented by Jonathan Mills at Paradigm NY and Liza Montesano of Schreck Rose Dapello Adams Berlin & Dunham LLP. She lives in Santa Monica with her husband, the sculptor Edd Hogan.

www.hoganhorsestudio.com

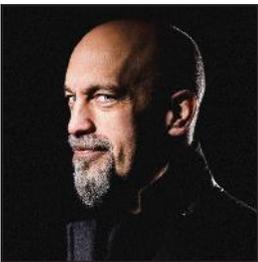


ELYSE DOLAN she/her (*director*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater where she is also the Associate Producer. Here at Blues she has directed several short plays in past editions of *The Ripped Festival*; directed staged readings in the annual *Blue Ink Festival*; has been Assistant Director on a handful shows including *Six Corners* and *Little Shop of Horrors*; and is the Set Dressing/Properties Designer for the annual production *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*. Recent directing credits include the Zoom reading of *Other Rockpools* at The New Coordinates, the Chicago premiere of *If/Then* at Brown Paper Box Co., and she was two weeks away from opening *Nine* at Blank Theatre Company at the time of the pandemic shut-down. Her directing work has been seen across Chicago at The New Coordinates, Broken Nose Theatre, Prop Thtr, Commission Theatre, Babes with Blades, 20% Theatre Company, and more. Elyse holds a B.A. from Denison University.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



AUDREY BILLINGS she/her (*Alicia*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. She was last seen as Mary Bailey (and others) in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, here at Blues. Previous credits include: Christmas Eve in the long-running production of *Avenue Q* at the Mercury Theater, Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Antonia in *Man of la Mancha*, and Hodel in *Fiddler on the Roof*. She has worked at the Paramount Theatre, Marriott Theatre Lincolnshire, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Theatre at the Center, Lookingglass Theatre Company and is a proud member of Actor's Equity. Much love to Nick, and thanks for joining us in our Zoom Room!



LINDSAY JONES he/him (*Caden*) has been an Ensemble Member of American Blues Theater since 1998, and will be making his first appearance as an actor since 1994 in this production. Although he received a BFA in Acting from the North Carolina School of the Arts, he has since become a successful composer and sound designer for theatre and film, most recently receiving two Tony Award nominations for his sound design and original score for *Slave Play*. He is currently in the process of creating his new solo show *Get Hot or Get Out* with director Meredith McDonough, and his previous solo show *Audio Blues: Following Son House* premiered at Geva Theatre in 2015. Previous acting roles include Joseph in *No Exit*, Jacques in *As You Like It*, Marco in *A View from*

The Bridge, and his final acting role was understudying all of the male roles of *All in The Timing* at Northlight Theatre. www.lindsayjones.com



ZACH KENNEY he/him (*Jaxton*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate at American Blues Theater, where credits include *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* and *Waiting for Lefty*. Zach has also worked with Indiana Rep, A.C.T., Asolo Rep, Geffen Playhouse, Victory Gardens, TimeLine, The Inconvenience, Steppenwolf, Goodman, and others. Television credits include *Chicago Fire* (NBC), *The Young and the Restless* (CBS), and *Perry Mason* (HBO).



J.G. SMITH she/her (*Logan*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. She is an actor, model, filmmaker, and performance artist. She made her feature film debut in Jennifer Reeder's acclaimed teen thriller *Knives and Skin*, and has performed onstage with American Blues, Lookingglass, Northlight, Vision Productions, and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. J.G. co-devised and produced the dark comedy variety hour *MARYSHELLEYSHOW* with Barbara Begley, which toured nationally and won an Audience Award at Chicago Fringe. She also wrote and produced the short film *Hire Me Spielberg* (Official Selection, NOLA'S Hell Yes Film Festival). Her performance art has shown at Chicago's Salonathon, NYC's Undiscovered Countries, and

TransVisions' virtual SOFT PALETTE festival. In Fall 2021, J.G. can be seen in ads for Cannabist and Andre Champagnes. She is proudly repped by Paonessa Talent. Artistic Affiliate, American Blues; Associate Artist, Undiscovered Countries. AEA, SAG-AFTRAe. JGSmithActor.com

SHANDEE VAUGHAN she/her (*stage manager*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater and happy as always to be back with her Blues family! Blues credits: *Roan @ the Gates*, *Five Presidents*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey*, *On Clover Road*, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago (2016 & 2018-2020)*, *Flyin' West*, *The Buddy Holly Story*, *The Columnist*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Other recent Chicago credits include: *Time Is On Our Side* (About Face Theatre), *Deathscribe X* (WildClaw Theatre), *Night in Alachua County* (WildClaw Theatre), and *The Woman in Black* (WildClaw Theatre). Shandee is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.

INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT LARISSA FASTHORSE

Below is an excerpt from an October 2018 interview with playwright Larissa FastHorse by Victoria Myers for *The Interval*. Read the full interview [here](#).

In another [interview](#), you said you started writing this in response to theatres not producing your work because they said they couldn't find the actors, and so you wanted to write something where they couldn't say that. What was the genesis of the idea from there?

I've been a playwright for quite a while. This is my first play in New York City, but I worked regionally for a dozen years, full time, and I work primarily under commission. The number one reason I hear that my productions don't get second or third productions is because of casting. I have one play that has one half Native American woman in it and I was told it's un-castable. It was just a crazy, over the top word. I got tired of that, so I set myself the challenge of writing a completely castable play. I decided to write a play with all people who could be mistaken for white—and they do not necessarily have to be white, they are not all playing white, but they could all be mistaken for white folks—but that still deals with the issues of what it means to be a contemporary Indigenous person in America. Fortunately, the play is something I really love and it says so many of the things I've always wanted to say in the world. I think it truly is what it's like to be me walking through the world today as an Indigenous woman. It's exactly what I experience, only what I actually experience is worse. I think if we wrote down everything I've experienced as an Indigenous person in this country just walking down the street, it would be such a depressing tragedy that no one would want to watch it. So instead, I made it a comedy, within a satire, to make it a little more fun for everybody.

The plot and theme meet in a very metatheatrical way. How did that come about?

I'll say it may or may not represent American theatre. [In the play] we have some very well-meaning liberal white folks that are in charge of creating this play that's supposed to be for children. It's supposed to be educational and enlightening and progressive, and all the good things for Native American Heritage Month and Thanksgiving—and, for me, it's always ironic that we have Thanksgiving and Native American Heritage Month at the same time. It's always been fascinating to me that we have this really problematic holiday that's supposedly celebrating Native American people and coming together, but in reality, A.) everything we've learned about it is a fiction, and B.) the



potential true origins of Thanksgiving are incredibly gruesome and really horrible and have nothing to do with peace and happiness, and they're actually about genocide. So obviously that means comedy. I put that together and was like, "This is how I see the world," and thought it was just such a natural way in to use those things together and see how we could explore the issues that American theatre has of trying to create things about American Indians without them. I'm the first Native American person that's ever been produced at Playwrights Horizons and in almost every theatre I've ever worked in, I'm the first Native American artist they've ever worked with. We're here, there are a ton of us, but American theatre is constantly trying to create things about native people without actually using native people.

Did it take you awhile to find the tone that you wanted for the show?

The tone's very much me. I think what's harder is the performance of the tone, because it's a satire but there's a comedy within the satire. The comedy is the sugar to make the medicine go down. We get to all laugh at ourselves in this show. To me, that is really important. We get to have

INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT LARISSA FASTHORSE

fun and enjoy being together and having that communal experience of theatre, but at the same time it doesn't let us off the hook. It makes all of us, hopefully, have to investigate why we believe the things we do and why we don't know any of these things. People come out [of the show] and they're like, "I didn't know any of this about Thanksgiving." Okay, well think about that: why don't you know any of these things? Why have you never investigated? Why weren't you told the truth about these things? Why don't you know that history is 90% wrong because it's been told through the eyes of the conqueror for a political agenda? Why don't you know that, and why don't you think about that? For me, that's really what's interesting.

What's harder is for the performers, because comedy feels good and satire is hard, being the butt of the joke is hard. So there's a tendency in the portrayal to really want to amp up the comedy at the sacrifice of the satire. Fortunately, all the directors I've had and the actors I've had here and elsewhere have been really smart and able to get around that trap because it's easy to want to do that.

When you're writing, do you see your plays as plays or do you see them as being played out in real life?

My writing process is really messy. I'm a self-taught writer, so I had to make up a process. I do a lot of research. I'm really into research. I could just research the rest of my life and be a happy person. I research a ton until a world starts making itself clearer. I've been known to go to the reference section of a library and wander up and down the aisles and keep pulling out every book that looks interesting until I have like 20 or 30 books, and then I just start reading them all and find new ideas and weird things to write about. From there, I find something that's interesting—in this case it was Thanksgiving—and I'll research like crazy until a world pops up in my head. I don't outline. I don't plan what I'm going to write. I keep putting information in there until characters show up and once they start talking, I just start writing. I don't know what the play's going to be about, I don't know how it's going to end, I don't know what the point is. I have no idea. I just trust that I've given these characters enough information that they're going to live their lives and I can write down what they say, and I just have to type really fast.

The first draft of this play, I wrote it in ten days. When I get

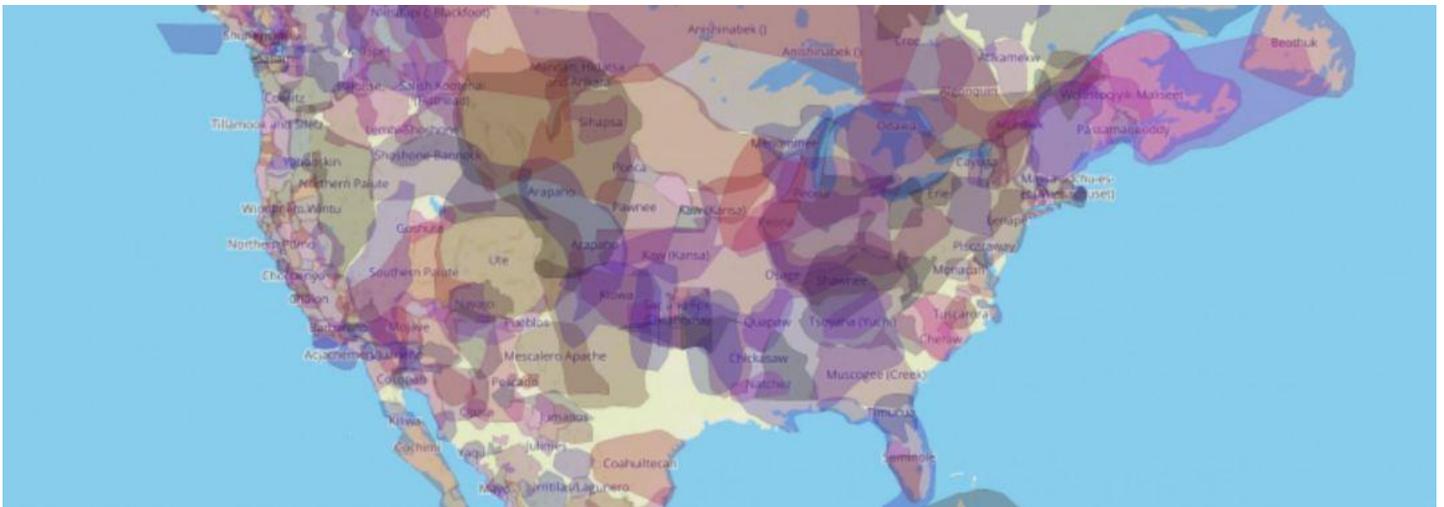
to the writing part it goes very fast, because that's the last part. I've already been giving these people plenty of information to work with, so suddenly it ends, and it's over, and I had no idea what was going to happen until I got there. After that, that's the part of being a dramatist. Then I have three years of workshops and refining, and learning what the play is about. It often will take me three or four drafts before I know what the point of the play is, or what they're trying to say.

Do you feel that there's an added pressure of altruism placed on you and your work? The play is a comedy and satire, and have there been people who have wanted to take it very seriously and reverently?

Absolutely. We just started having some audience talkbacks and I slipped a spy in last night. This one guy, who clearly identified as the good white liberal, was really taking things personally and getting very upset, and my spy was like, "I just wanted to say to him, dude, it's a satire. Chill out. And maybe you're so upset because you should look in the mirror." These characters are doing performative wokeness. They want to seem really woke, but it's very much a performance that they do when it suits them and not when it's needed and not for the people it's needed by.

I mean it's the whole thing I've been whining and yapping about ever since the [2016] Presidential election and the Women's Marches, and all this stuff. It's like, where have you people been? People of color have been marching and protesting and talking about these things for decades, and where were you? It's just an ongoing thing. My hope is that America in a couple years, if things change, they don't just say check, we're done, and go back to it, because it's not affecting white people anymore. And that's really what it is. Everything's affecting white folks. There's a white woman talking at the Supreme Court hearings, there's a white woman being depicted in a sexy Handmaid's Tale costume. There are still dozens, dozens of costumes sexualizing Native American women and I read recently that one in two Native American women has been sexually assaulted. So every other Native American woman you meet has been sexually assaulted, and that's horrifying. And yet, white women will go out and put on costumes sexualizing us as items to be worn on the street for Halloween and no one is protesting that. My hope in writing this play, and writing it the way I did, is that we can listen and see and have a laugh, and then do things differently.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



YOU'RE ON INDIGENOUS LAND.

The offices of American Blues Theater are located in Chicago, the traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations. City of Chicago was founded by the son of an enslaved African woman who was regarded as the first non-Indigenous settler. His name was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable.

Many other nations including the Myaamia, Wea, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Thakiwaki, Meskwaki, Kiikaapoi, and Mascouten peoples also call this region home. This land has long been a center for Indigenous people to gather, trade, and maintain kinship ties.

Today, Chicago is home to one of the largest urban American Indian communities in the United States, and the country's oldest urban-based Native membership community center, the American Indian Center Chicago (AIC).

American Blues Theater makes this acknowledgement as part of our commitment to dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.

To learn more about land acknowledgements visit nativegov.org.

To learn more about & engage with the American Indian Center Chicago, visit aicchicago.org.

To learn more about the map, visit native-land.ca.

DIGITAL LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To create art in a new digital format, we use equipment and high-speed internet not available in many Indigenous communities. This technology, which has now become central to our daily lives, leaves a significant footprint and contributes to changing climates that disproportionately affect Indigenous people. As we make use of this digital format, it is imperative that we recognize the Indigenous Land, regardless of our geographical location. It is land once occupied and inhabited by hundreds of Native tribes and stolen from these Indigenous people by European settlers. The genocide and forced removal of Indigenous people from these lands is a history that must be acknowledged, and the current struggles of Indigenous people must be brought to the forefront, so that their plight is never forgotten.

This digital land acknowledgement is inspired by the work of producer & artist Adrienne Wong. Learn more [here](#).

“UNDERSTANDING THANKSGIVING FROM OUR SIDE OF THE TABLE”

The below piece is from [First Nations](#)—a nonprofit organization which improves economic conditions for Native Americans through direct financial grants, technical assistance & training, and advocacy & policy. Read this article on their website [here](#).

Native communities have their own diverse practices to celebrate family, resilience, community and giving thanks. And giving thanks doesn't just happen around this holiday we call Thanksgiving. We hope this year, you will take this time to celebrate Thanksgiving by supporting Native communities, challenging historical myths and learning about Native resilience.

UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINS OF THANKSGIVING

There are many versions and myths surrounding the origins of Thanksgiving. Today, the myth of Thanksgiving suggests that Native people and Pilgrims came together to celebrate the survival of the fragile Plymouth colony. Native people are said to have taught the Pilgrims how to plant corn, beans and squash and the first thanksgiving was a celebration of Pilgrim survival, perseverance and adaptation to the foreign soils of northeastern North America. In this version of history, Native people play a supporting cast to the Pilgrims who paved the way for American prosperity. This version of the first thanksgiving is a myth.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE FIRST THANKSGIVING?

[Most historians document that in 1621 there was indeed a First Thanksgiving](#) but Native people were not invited guests to this celebration. Nonetheless, Wampanoag soldiers showed up to the Pilgrim celebration after hearing celebratory gunshots and screams from Pilgrim settlements. The Wampanoag soldiers, historians suggest, thought the pilgrims were under attack and showed up as part of a diplomatic treaty of mutual defense between the Wampanoag nation and Pilgrims.

Beyond the first Thanksgiving, Standing Rock historian and Harvard Professor Philp Deloria notes that Abraham Lincoln declared the last Thursday of November as a national holiday in 1863 as a means to heal from the Civil War. It wasn't until after the formation of the United States that narratives of a harmonious celebration between Pilgrims and Wampanoag were created to justify westward expansion and “manifest destiny.” And we know today that this westward expansion led to the theft of Native land, devastated Native languages, cultural practices, food systems, and much more.

But Native nations are still here. Native people are strong and resilient. They are developing and leading efforts to improve their local communities and economies. This Thanksgiving, we hope you will support Native communities as they grow strong and healthy local communities and economies and learn more about Native American people and history.

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

- **Support:** Support food sovereignty and language preservation efforts by investing directly in Native-led initiatives. Visit First Nations grantee database to identify grassroots Native-led initiatives across the U.S. that you can support by visiting firstnations.org/grantee-directory/.
- **Reclaim Native Truth:** Learn more about the efforts of people to combat stereotypes and myths by reading our [Reclaiming Native Truth](#) reports, highlighting ways you can help challenge myths and misconceptions of Native people today.
- **Learn More:** Learn more about Native food sovereignty, Native language preservation efforts and Native youth-serving programs in Native communities by reading publications on First Nations' [Knowledge Center](#).
- **Share resources with people in your network.** [Share stories](#) of Native community resilience, and read more about Native people and communities by visiting [our book list](#).

TEACHING THANKSGIVING IN A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE WAY

The below article is from [Learning for Justice](#)—a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center which provides free resources to educators who work with children from kindergarten through high school. Read this piece on their website [here](#).

School Thanksgiving activities often mean dressing children in “Indian” headdresses and paper feathers as they sing “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” or “Mr. Turkey.” Some teachers might even ask their students to draw themselves as Native Americans from the past, complete with feather-adorned headbands and buckskin clothing. These activities might seem friendly and fun, unless you are aware of [how damaging this imagery](#) is to perceptions of contemporary Native peoples. This imagery contributes to the indoctrination of American youth into a false narrative that [relegates Indigenous peoples to the past](#) and turns real human beings into costumes for a few days a year. It’s not just bad pedagogy; it’s socially irresponsible.

Native Americans have been speaking out and writing back against the colonialist narrative of Thanksgiving for as long as the American narrative has existed. More recently, comedian Jim Ruel (Ojibwe) includes Thanksgiving in his act ([starting at 1:40 in this clip](#)), Dr. Debbie Reese (Nambe Pueblo) [writes about children’s books](#) that “set the record straight,” and [Native American students speak out about what Thanksgiving means to them](#).

Doris Seale (Santee/Cree) and Beverly Slapin (Dakota/Cree/Abenaki) edited [A Broken Flute](#) in 2005, which includes a chapter that deconstructs the myths perpetuated about the first Thanksgiving. This chapter also includes critical reviews of many books on the market or readily available in libraries and classrooms. Providing ample evidence that many non-Native publishers, illustrators and writers are missing the mark in several critical ways, these books exemplify the ineffectiveness of good intentions, the perpetuation of misinformation and the exclusion of Native American voices and experiences.



TEACHING THANKSGIVING IN A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE WAY

Teaching about Thanksgiving in a socially responsible way means that educators accept the ethical obligation to provide students with accurate information and to reject traditions that sustain harmful stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. Thankfully, there are excellent online resources that can help educators interested in disrupting the hegemonic Thanksgiving story.

- Project Archeology [provides links to resources and activities](#) adaptable for all grade levels.
- The National Museum of the American Indian [offers a comprehensive resource](#) with teacher-facing ideas and activities for grades 4-8.
- Plimoth Patuxet has a [Just for Teachers](#) section that outlines professional development opportunities, workshops, a virtual Thanksgiving field trip and activities that incorporate the Wampanoag perspective. In one interactive activity, kids are detectives figuring out what really happened at the first meal.
- [The Mashpee/Wampanoag Tribe’s brief history and cultural timeline](#) outlines the nation’s “contact experience” from their contemporary perspective.

Challenging the dominant and inaccurate narrative about Thanksgiving, providing students with a more balanced perspective of this oft-romanticized holiday, and refusing to dress students in feathered headbands are socially responsible actions. They’re actions that every teacher should undertake to benefit their students and the society their students will inherit.

RELATED RESOURCES FROM LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

[Teaching the Truth About Native American History](#) - *When it comes to Native American history and culture, many textbooks are light on relevant content. Learn about a new Smithsonian program and state initiatives designed to support robust, accurate teaching about Native history and contemporary issues.*

[Teach About Native American Women Leaders](#) - *Build students’ media literacy by helping them contextualize stories about women candidates—and particularly Native women candidates—during election season and beyond.*

[Decolonizing the Classroom: Teaching with Indigenous Comics](#) - *Bring Native cultures, stories and perspectives out of the margins of your curriculum with comics by and about Native peoples.*

[Teach This: Native American Appropriation at the Super Bowl](#) - *The Super Bowl offers an opportunity to talk with students about appropriation and identity.*

[Seven Native American Films for High School Teachers](#) - *Films are a dynamic way to incorporate accurate instruction and promote cultural awareness of contemporary Native American experiences.*

[With and About: Inviting Contemporary American Indian Peoples Into the Classroom](#) - *There’s a long history of U.S. schools failing Indigenous peoples, cultures and histories. In this story, Native parents and educators share examples of how educators and schools still get it wrong—and the steps they can take to fix their mistakes.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Below are ten facts from [American for the Arts](#) illustrating the benefits of, support for, and challenges facing arts education in America today. You can read the full article on their website [here](#).

ARTS EDUCATION PROMOTES ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:

A [2020 study of over 112,000 public school students](#), the largest of its kind to date, showed that “highly engaged instrumental music students were, on average, academically over one year ahead of their peers.” These results were independent of students’ language/cultural background, neighborhood, or socio-economic status.

ARTS EDUCATION IS CORRELATED WITH HIGHER STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES:

High schoolers with more than four years of art and music classes scored [an average of 166 points higher on the composite 2016 SAT](#) than high schoolers who took half a year or less of art and music classes. Based on their composite scores, arts students averaged in the 62nd percentile of all test takers while non-arts students averaged in the 44th percentile.

ARTS EDUCATION REDUCES DISCIPLINARY INFRACTIONS:

A [2018 randomized control study](#) of over 10,500 3rd through 8th graders found that arts education experiences reduced the proportion of students in a school receiving disciplinary infractions by 3.6 percentage points. This study, which followed Houston’s Arts Access Initiative, also found statistically significant evidence that arts education experiences improve writing achievement and increase students’ compassion for others.

ARTS EDUCATION AND ARTS INTEGRATION INCREASE A VARIETY OF OTHER OUTCOMES:

According to a [2020 metaanalysis](#) of 27 arts integration studies and 20 arts education studies by the National Association of State Boards of Education, “an average child could expect to gain 4 percentile points in relevant outcomes as a result of participating in arts integration intervention and 15 points as a result of participating in arts education intervention.”

THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS ARTS EDUCATION:

According to Americans for the Arts’ public opinion survey [Americans Speak Out About the Arts in 2018](#), 91 percent of Americans believe the arts are a part of a well-rounded education for K-12 students. This near-unanimous support for arts education remained true whether asked about elementary school (94 percent), middle school (94 percent), or high school (93 percent) education.

DISTRICTS SUPPORT ARTS EDUCATION:

A [2019 survey](#) of over 1,000 superintendents found that 19% used the Title IV well-rounded education provision of the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) to fund music and the arts. This is more than the percentages who used Title IV to fund physical education, foreign language, and civics combined!

STATES SUPPORT ARTS EDUCATION:

According to the [Arts Education Partnership](#), all 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Arts Education standards as of 2020, with at least 27 states adopting or adapting the 2014 [National Core Arts Standards](#). Additionally, 44 states require that school districts or schools provide arts education in elementary, middle, and high school; 29 define art as a core academic subject; and 27 have arts requirements for high school graduation. While ideally these numbers would be 50 across the board, they are still indicative of the high value that many states place on arts education.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

ARTS EDUCATION REMAINS UNDERSTUDIED:

Only 19 states include arts as a key area of their [state accountability system](#), and just 13 have done a statewide report on arts education in the last 5 years. The last comprehensive national report by the U.S. Department of Education focusing on arts education is from the [2009-2010 school year](#), making that data over 10 years old. Comprehensive, statewide or national data collection about the accessibility of arts education is essential in order to understand, create, and evaluate arts education policy.

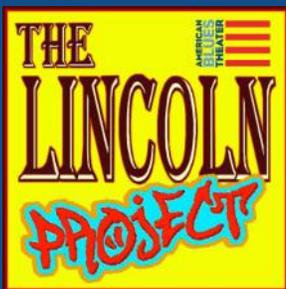
ARTS EDUCATION REMAINS INEQUITABLE:

An [academic outcomes](#) report published by the US Department of Education in 2018 revealed that “white students earned more credits in fine arts (2.0 credits) than Asian students (1.8 credits), and both groups earned more credits than Hispanic students (1.6 credits) and Black students (1.5 credits).” A 2019 longitudinal study following a diverse sample of over 30,000 students found that “Black students, males, those with disabilities, those in poverty, and those not yet fully proficient in English are not getting the same opportunities for exposure to the arts in public middle schools as are other groups.” These findings reflect broader inequities and access gaps apparent in both the K-12 education system and the arts & culture sector as a whole.

ARTS EDUCATION REMAINS UNDERFUNDED:

During the Great Recession (2008-2009), [public school per-pupil spending](#) fell by about seven percent nationally. As a result, districts around the nation saw drastic reductions in their art and music offerings; in Georgia, for example, [42 percent of schools eliminated art and music](#) due to the Recession. While it is too early to have extensive data on how COVID-19 will affect public school arts education, many districts have already seen programs eliminated and arts educators laid off due to budget constraints.

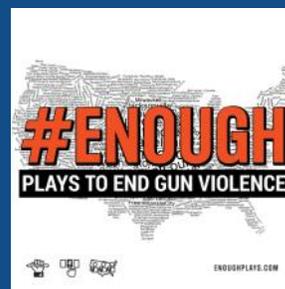
ARTS EDUCATION AT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER



Our award-winning arts education program that we provided to Chicago Public Schools from 2012-2020, serving thousands of students. Students watched scenes performed by actors, participated in discussions, and wrote their own plays.



Classes for all ages taught through one-on-one, individualized consultations in order to best fit students' learning styles. Class topics range from playwriting for kids & teens; guitar lessons; yoga; audition techniques; and much more.



We are a partner of this short play competition for middle and high school students. American Blues is one of 50+ communities, theatres, and schools across the country who participate in the annual nationwide reading of the winning plays.



Coming soon!
In 2022 we will be launching a new program, inspired by our annual *Ripped Festival*. Students will watch scenes performed by professional actors and write their own short plays inspired by current events.

RECOGNIZING PERFORMATIVE ALLYSHIP

Below is an excerpt from an article by Carmen Morris, published on the *Forbes* website on November 26, 2020. It has been edited here for length. You can read the full article [here](#).

Performative allyship is becoming the order of the day, with many professing support for marginalized groups. It has become a recurring theme in recent times, with many in leadership positions quick to lend rhetorical support to diversity and inclusion, particularly in the area of race equality.

With the onset of global reactions to the death of George Floyd, leaders who were once reticent in championing racial equality, have found their voices in an attempt to align to racial equity and express solidarity with the cause. Far from being supportive of an anti-racist agenda, performative allyship has a disturbing influence, which stifles progress and has the detrimental effect of suppressing attempts to foster genuinely inclusive workplace environments.

Now the dust is settling, and employees, of all backgrounds have had the chance to consider the key concerns around race equality, or the lack of it, issues around the authenticity of leadership, are taking centre stage.

Performative allyship has become an issue of concern across the race equality agenda, so much so that Black employees have begun to call out surface level activism in the workplace, and across social media. The problem with performative allyship, is that it maintains the status quo and renders illegitimate, any attempts to change processes that support structural racism, and other barriers.

WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Allyship is an authentic support system, in which someone from outside a marginalized group advocates for those who are victims of discriminatory behaviour, whether that is at an individual level, or systemically and process driven. With authentic allyship there is an obvious, and genuine attempt, to transfer the benefits of privilege to those who lack it, in order to advocate on the marginalized groups behalf, and support them to achieve change.

Performative allyship, by contrast, is where those with privilege, profess solidarity with a cause. This assumed solidarity is usually vocalized, disingenuous and potentially harmful to marginalized groups. Often, the performative ally professes allegiance in order to distance themselves from potential scrutiny. In many cases, organizational leaders use performance driven activity, in a way that they believe will protect company brand from being highlighted in a negative way. It is often referred to by Black employees and their supporters, as 'talking the talk, without walking the walk.'

PERFORMATIVE ALLYSHIP DAMAGES THE RACE EQUALITY AGENDA

In organizations that have consistently maintained a homogeneous leadership, the power of decision making and development of policy and processes, has largely been the preserve of white people, with little or no input from those of different hues. When performative allyship is enacted at the top of these organizations, employees of different backgrounds stand little chance of ever breaking through systemic barriers that have been designed by those in power.

There are many people across organizations, who do want to support the cause of race equality but may find it difficult, due to the fear of speaking out, and the associated, real or imagined, repercussions from leadership. This leads many, who would otherwise genuinely support racial equality, to maintain a performative stance within the workplace environment. This is an issue because as difficult and uncomfortable as it might be, the only way to truly break the chains of systemic racism is to speak up and engage in genuine allyship to support the agenda.

If those who embody privilege, are fearful of engaging with the race equality agenda then they too, are part of the problem. Performative allyship only supports the reinforcement of attitudes and behaviours that maintain discriminatory practices within the workplace.

PERFORMATIVE ALLYSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

When performative allyship embeds itself into organizational culture, particularly at leadership and managerial levels,

RECOGNIZING PERFORMATIVE ALLYSHIP

it sends the signal that it is right to show affinity towards racial equality, but that it is not important enough to do much, if anything about it. If performative allyship then becomes part of the corporate value system, Black employees are likely to suffer from the effects of operational, structural and racist micro-aggressive behaviours, which are likely to further marginalize them. This leads to a situation where there becomes embedded, a perpetual cycle of discrimination, which will ostracize genuine allyship, and worsen the workplace experience of Black and Brown employees.

For leadership, it is simply not enough to be 'woke' and make performative statements. It is time to listen to the concerns of employees and colleagues, who continue to suffer under systems that are in place to ensure that they remain marginalized. Anti-racism is part of the solution for race equality, and must form part of knowledge building activities for behavioural change to support a truly authentic, and inclusive environment. Putting on a performance is just that, but when the performance is exposed for what it is, brand image, personal, and professional reputations will be challenged and brought into focus.

MOVING FORWARD WITH REAL ALLYSHIP

Performative allyship does not engage on a complex level. It consists of low level, often ill-informed rhetorical statements that are usually obvious to Black and Brown employees and real allies, of the anti racist, racially inclusive agenda. It lacks genuine concern and does little to acknowledge the very behaviours that support structural and process driven racism.

It is essential for leaders to adopt an anti-racist stance that embodies real and authentic support for the race equality agenda. Black employees have heard it all before, and with the level of focus around race equality being maintained by the Black community and their allies, leadership may wish to consider anti-racist solutions for driving the race quality agenda forward.

Assuming that performative allyship will win the day, may well prove to be the one action that destroys individual careers and company brands, at a time where equality is of critical social concern. Real inclusion demands real actions, not an award winning performance.



ADDITIONAL **RESOURCES**

AMERICAN INDIAN CENTER

The oldest urban American Indian center in the United States. It provides social services, youth and senior programs, cultural learning, and meeting opportunities for Native American peoples.

CHICAGO AMERICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE (CAICC)

CAICC convenes organizational leaders and members of the Chicago American Indian community for dialogue, advocacy, and planning with the goal of empowering CAICC to better address the issues and needs of the American Indian community

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CPS)

Their mission is to provide a high-quality public education for every child, in every neighborhood, that prepares each for success in college, career, and civic life.

INDIAN LAW RESOURCE CENTER

The Center provides legal assistance to indigenous peoples of the Americas to combat racism and oppression, to protect their lands and environment, to protect their cultures and ways of life, to achieve sustainable economic development and genuine self-government, and to realize their other human rights.

INGENUITY

Ingenuity's mission is to ensure that every student, in every grade, in every school, has access to the arts as part of a well-rounded education.

MITCHELL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

Located in Evanston, IL, The Mitchell Museum of the American Indian is one of only a handful of museums across the country that focuses exclusively on the art, history, and culture of Native American and First Nation peoples from throughout the United States and Canada.

NATIVE GOVERNANCE CENTER

Native Governance Center is a Native-led nonprofit organization that serves Native nations in Mni Sota Makoce, North Dakota, and South Dakota. They support Native leaders as they work to rebuild their nations through our leadership development and Tribal governance support programs.

NDN COLLECTIVE

NDN Collective's mission is to build the collective power of Indigenous Peoples, communities, and Nations to exercise our inherent right to self-determination, while fostering a world that is built on a foundation of justice and equity for all people and the planet.

ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. **American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.** American Blues Theater follows three guiding values both on and off its stages—to be **accessible, responsible, and true.**

We are Chicago's **second-oldest AEA Ensemble theater.** As of 2020, our theater and artists received 221 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 40 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. Our artists work throughout the nation - including Broadway and regional theaters - and loyally return to our stage.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres. Our new play development consists of a variety of programs – including world and Chicago premieres, the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Playwriting Award*, commissions, *The Room* staged readings, *The Garage* concerts, and annual *Ripped Festival* of new short-plays.

We believe it is an honor and duty to serve our community. We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' commendable causes through creative collaborations. We hold food drives, distribute promotional materials, offer free post-show discussions, provide complimentary tickets, honor military personnel, hold exclusive performances for underserved communities, and raise awareness for children's surgeries. We donate proceeds from "Pediatric Previews" to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

American Blues Theater is your Chicago home for bold, exceptional, and relevant performances. **Your ticket purchases and donations help us make Chicago *the first city* in all our hearts.**

UPCOMING EVENTS AT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER



Visit AmericanBluesTheater.com to learn more.