

Regina play Deaf Crows hopes to bring insight to a hearing world

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Chella Man Is The Trans, Deaf Activist Changing the World

FEATURED BY 

One student remembers a children's game of telephone — in which a whispered message is passed along a group — but when he couldn't participate, he was sent from class.

Another wanted desperately to join a game of hide-and-seek, but couldn't hear the count. She too was excluded.

They are just some of the true stories teenage students from Thom Collegiate's deaf and hard of hearing program will share in an innovative production called Deaf Crows. It shows on Friday at 7 p.m. at the Artesian. (Donations are being accepted for tickets).

The play is the culmination of a year's work in the classroom focused on art, expression, literacy and communication with the help of artist-in-residence Chrystene Ells. Unlike most plays, this one will sound quiet, but speaks loudly about deaf culture and communicating in a hearing world.

“My biggest hope is to educate the public about what language deprivation does to people,” explained Joanne Weber, a teacher who is herself deaf and co-wrote the play. “It’s a human rights issue.”



(<https://postmedialeaderpost2.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/2016-thom-collegiate-teacher-joanne-weber.jpeg?quality=60&strip=all>)

Thom Collegiate teacher Joanne Weber

Ells said it was important the students tell their stories. “These kids have never had a voice.”

Their lines include: “I’m not stupid,” and “you’re not playing with me cause I’m deaf,” and “stop bullying me.”

They also wrote a new ending — about how they wish those experiences would have turned out. So, for example, the boy sent away during the telephone game meets a new deaf friend on the playground.

Ells and Berry Hi, a filmmaker who joined the team late last year, worked with the students to

create visual art, including crow masks used in the play, develop scripts and hone drama skills.

“People who are deaf don’t get to go to the theatre very often,” said Hi. The tables will be turned for the play’s hearing audience. Actors will sign and a storyteller interpret for the audience — with one, silent exception.

“We want the hearing people to know what it’s like to be lost, not know what’s going on, not being able to participate. Because we do that for hours and hours everyday,” explained Weber.

She said many deaf and hard of hearing students are “significantly language deprived” — possessing neither full skills in English or American Sign Language (ASL).

“I was trying to figure out a way to open that up, to try and get them to start using more expressive language, to try to somehow connect that through art so they can improve their reading and writing skills,” she said.

Deaf Crows fit the bill. The title comes from a drawing by one student who told Ells, “I’m a deaf crow in a cave.”

J.k Fink plays Jade. “No one will play with me cause I’m deaf,” the 17-year-old explained.



(<https://postmedialeaderpost2.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/2016-thom-collegiate-student-fatima-naf.jpeg?quality=60&strip=all>)

Thom Collegiate student Fatima Nafisa (L) as a crow is shunned by friends because she is different during a practise for a production called Deaf Crows.

Fatima Nafisa, who moved from Bangladesh a few years ago, plays Blossom. “People need to understand deaf and hard of hearing experiences,” she said, telling a story about people moving away from her because she’s deaf.

Weber said some deaf people are “victims” of a shift away from teaching sign language as cochlear implants gained more use. The thinking of the day was that if you taught sign language, it would diminish a child’s ability to learn lip reading and speech. Instead, some were left with little communication skills.

“You’re gambling with the child’s ability to develop language with providing only one way to do it,” she added.

The play has a 14-member cast, ranging from the six students to 70-year-old, deaf elder Allard Thomas. Ells said he’s shown the students what can be achieved, having gone to university.

Ells, now working on an art therapy degree, learned some sign language in the 1980s out of interest. She realizes now ASL isn’t simply translating words to English but a language unto itself. Having previously worked in puppetry, she said ASL is really “a puppet play with your hands.”

She’s seen the students grow and come out of their shell during the year.

“They started to heal themselves through the art. And that’s when things started to change,” she said. “It’s healing their souls.”

For more information, check out www.deafcrows.wix.com/DeafCrows (<http://www.deafcrows.wix.com/DeafCrows>).

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(<https://postmedialeaderpost2.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/sk-june-09-2016-from-left-thom-collegiate-student.jpeg?quality=60&strip=all>).

From left, Thom Collegiate students Jacqueline Fink, Fatima Nafisa, Tyson Zacharias, Shayla Tanner, Taylor Schwab during a practise for a production called Deaf Crows.

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