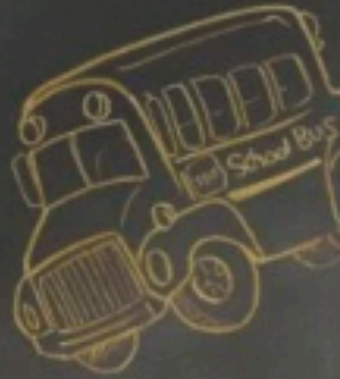


# How to SURVIVE Middle School

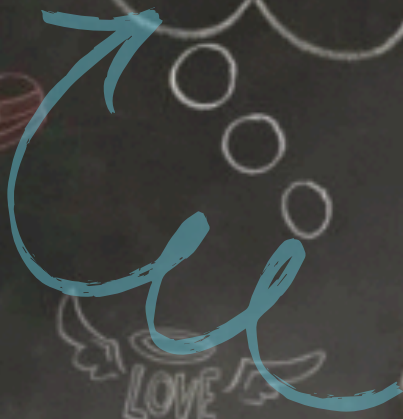


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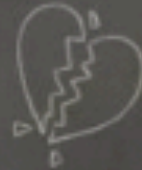


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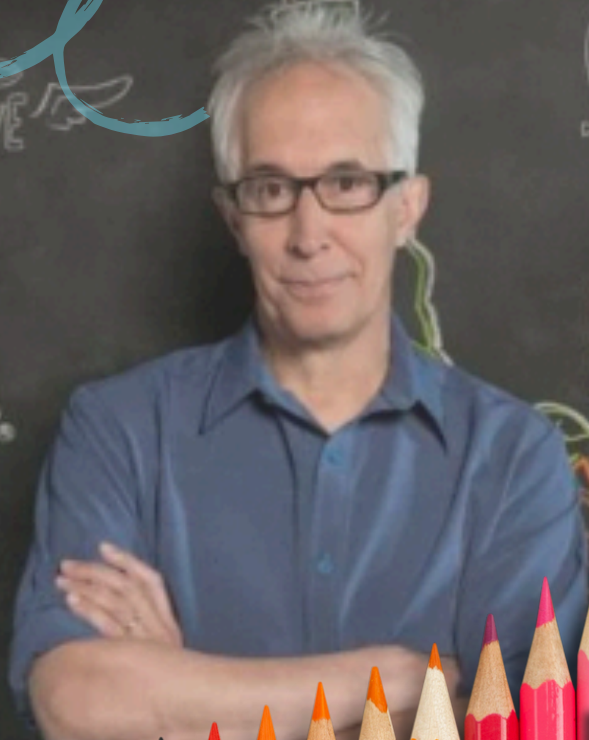
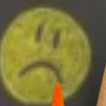
BULLYING



LOVE

PRESSURE

DRAMA!!!



FIELD  
TRIP  
EDUCATOR  
GUIDE  
2024/  
2025

# Dear Educators,

Welcome to ArtsBridge’s 2024-2025 Field Trip Season!

We are thrilled to present **How to Survive Middle School** to you and your students.

Thank you for sharing this special experience with your students. We hope this field trip guide helps you connect the performance to your in-classroom curriculum in ways that you find valuable. In the following pages, you will see guidelines regarding your field trip, contextual information about the performance and related subjects, as well as a variety of pre and post discussion questions and assessment activities. On page 22, you’ll find the Curriculum Connections included in **How to Survive Middle School**. Please “pick and choose” materials and ideas from the guide to meet the unique needs of your class.

We look forward to inspiring and educating your students through the arts on Tuesday, February 18, 2025 at the world-class Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre!

See you at the theatre,

**The  
ArtsBridge  
Team**

## Guide Contents

About Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre .....	3
Field Trip Guidelines .....	4
Transportation Information .....	5
Directional Map .....	6
Local Dining .....	7
Theatre Etiquette .....	8
Pre-Show Activities .....	9
Theatrical Vocabulary .....	10
About Robert Post .....	11
About the show .....	12-14
Teacher Introductions .....	15
Activities .....	16-20
Resources .....	21
Curriculum Connections .....	22

# About Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre

The landmark Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre is a cultural, entertainment and special events venue of a national significance. Atlanta's first major performing arts facility in four decades, Cobb Energy Centre boasts state-of-the-art systems, amenities and design features that allow the expression of any artistic idea and captivate performers, patrons and event planners. The Centre's strong suit is versatility. It can accommodate events as diverse as Broadway, concerts, corporate functions, private parties and family entertainment.

The Centre's distinctive façade and three-story lobby – highlighted by a 65-foot, floor-to-ceiling glass curtain wall – offer visitors a grand welcome and stunning introduction to a venue of great warmth, elegance and possibilities. Nothing speaks "special occasion" like the majestic lobby – a gathering space and promenade with two grand staircases, specially designed, colored-glass chandeliers and walls of Venetian plaster.

The Centre's 2,750-seat John A. Williams Theatre captures the richness and intimacy of vintage theatres. Yet, it incorporates modern touches and technology – including advanced sound, lighting and acoustical elements – that allow fine-tuning for each performance. With equal poise, the Theatre can host concerts, opera, drama, comedy, lectures, dance and spoken word.

The Cobb Energy Centre is a premier location for black-tie balls, galas, wedding receptions, corporate meetings, banquets, bar and bat mitzvahs, and parties.

- 10,000-square-foot ballroom, divisible into 3 sections, holds up to 630 for a seated meal, 800 in theatre setting and up to 650 for a reception
- 2,750-seat theater ideal for graduations or general sessions
- Unique special event spaces on theater stage, 3-level lobby, and outdoor terrace.

The Centre is equipped to ensure ArtsBridge's vision of making sure everyone has access to arts experiences. Designated seats in various locations are available at every event for guests with disabilities and those needing special assistance. The venue is equipped with wheelchair accessible restrooms, elevators, plaza ramps, wheelchair accessible ticket windows, phonic ear devices, wheelchair accessible drinking fountains, and handicapped parking. Visit [www.cobbenergycentre.com](http://www.cobbenergycentre.com) to learn more about accessibility, including the new WaveCast app that is available to download to mobile devices and sign-language interpreted performance.

For safety purposes, ArtsBridge follows the **Safety-First Guidelines of the Centre.**

## DID YOU KNOW?

- More than 250,000 patrons visit the Cobb Energy Centre each year.
- The Cobb Energy Centre opened in 2007.
- The Cobb Energy Centre has two main spaces:
  - John A. Williams Theatre, 2,750 seats
  - Kessel D. Stelling Ballroom, 10,000 square feet
- No seat is more than 160 feet from center stage in the John A. Williams Theatre.
- There are 1,000 parking spaces on site.
- The Centre is located one mile from the new Braves stadium and only 15 minutes from downtown Atlanta.
- ArtsBridge programs began in 2007 and reach 30,000 students each year.



# Field Trip Guidelines

Below are simple guidelines for ArtsBridge Field Trips to Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. Please read carefully and contact us at (770) 916-2805 if you have questions.



**Reservations:** All field trip admissions are to be made in advance. Please do not bring more than the number of seats reserved. Performances are expected to sell out and we will not be able to accommodate an increase in numbers at the last minute. All patrons, including teachers and chaperones, must have a reservation in order to attend these performances. Children under the age of three are not permitted to attend.



**Payment:** Payments must be made in full, 4 weeks prior to the day of show, or we will not be able to accommodate your reservation. An invoice will be given to you at the time your reservation is made. Once you have paid in full, we will send a confirmation, which will serve as your school's ticket into the performance. ArtsBridge reserves the right to cancel unpaid reservations after the payment due date.



**Transportation:** The Centre can accommodate school buses, vans and cars. Please be aware that vans and cars will incur a reduced vehicle parking fee. A third party contractor runs the Centre's garage and charges this fee. There is no charge for parking school buses. All buses, vans and cars must comply with directions provided by on-site staff.



**Arrival:** All vehicles should approach the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre from AKERS MILL ROAD (map enclosed). Upon entering the driveway, buses will be directed to the circular drive where they will temporarily pull up to the curb for unloading. A Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre representative will board the bus and check-in your school. Students will be immediately unloaded and buses will be directed to their designated parking areas.



**Seating:** Students are seated as they arrive, starting with the floor level, first row. The exception to this is for programs with older and younger students in attendance at the same time. In this case, students in kindergarten and first-grade will be seated in the first few rows of the theatre. There are three levels of seating, with the back row of the top level no more than 160 feet from the stage.



**Restrooms:** Please seat your entire group, before taking restroom breaks, so that you can be easily found. Students MUST be accompanied by adult chaperones when going to the restroom. We encourage that you take groups so there are fewer trips.



**Chaperones:** Chaperones have a job to perform while at the Centre. Please make sure that your chaperones are interspersed among students, and that they are prepared for the day's responsibilities. Please discuss restroom visits, emergencies, behavior, etc. with your chaperones prior to arrival.



**Behavior:** Students and teachers are encouraged to enjoy performances, applaud and express enthusiasm in a manner that is appropriate for the performance, yet not disruptive for others. We request that all phones, tablets and any other electronic devices be completely turned off or on silent mode during the performance. We ask that chaperones on upper levels watch for students tossing or throwing items to lower levels and prevent students from climbing or leaning on railings. No student can leave the audience chamber without an accompanying chaperone. Students/classes that are disruptive may be asked to leave the performance with no refund. (See *Theatre Etiquette* on Page 8)



**Departure:** Performances last approximately one hour. Upon conclusion of the performance, classes will be dismissed to the designated parking area to board their buses and return to school.



**Lunch:** There is no facility for students to eat lunch in the Cobb Energy Centre. We recommend students eat lunch at the Galleria Specialty Mall, Cumberland Mall, at a park on the route to/from the venue or on their bus. Check Page 7 for some of ArtsBridge's favorite restaurants to eat at around the theatre! Snack Packs will be provided for students, teachers and chaperones attending a field trip. For more information, visit [www.ArtsBridgeGA.org/snack-pack-program](http://www.ArtsBridgeGA.org/snack-pack-program).

# Transportation Information



**Buses:** All school buses must approach the building from AKERS MILL ROAD on the North side of the building. This will be crucial in assuring a fairly smooth flow of traffic. There will be Centre representatives guiding you. Buses will pull onto the site from behind the building and then drive to the front. PLEASE MAKE SURE YOUR DRIVERS USE THE MAP BELOW. There is no charge to park school buses on-site.



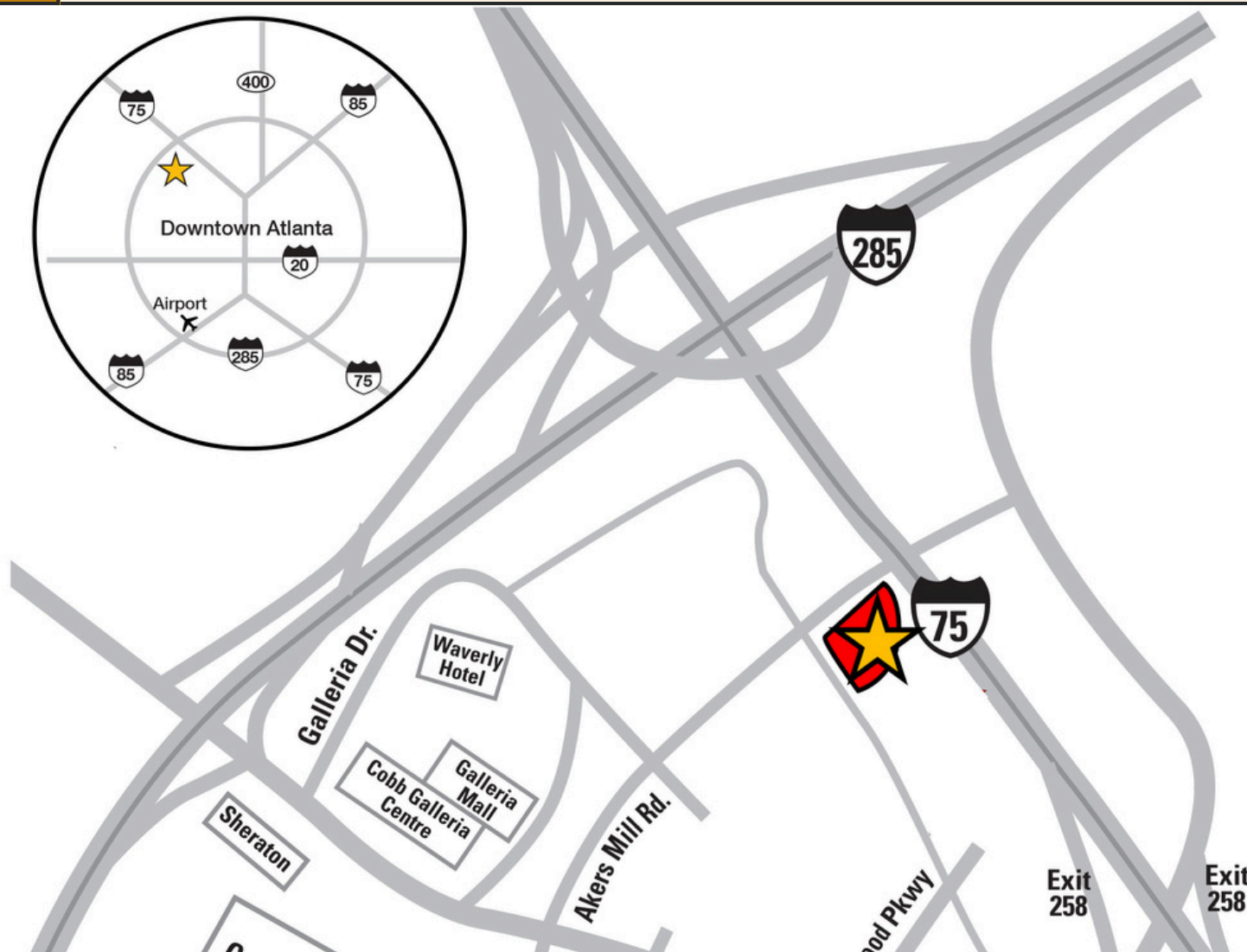
**Checking In:** When you arrive at the front of the building, a representative from the Centre will board your bus to check-in your school. You and your bus driver will be given a large number that will be taped to the bus windows. Please remember your number, as it will help you find your bus after the performance.



**After the Show:** After the performance, buses will be parked in the Centre's surface lot in numerical order and representatives will assist you in locating your bus(es). We encourage everyone to board their buses as quickly and safely as possible. For safety reasons, we hold all buses until everyone has boarded, so please make your way directly to the surface parking lot following the performance (see map below).



**Cars/Vans/SUVs:** You will approach the building in the same manner, but will park in our parking deck. Please note there is a reduced *per-vehicle* parking fee for cars/ vans/SUVs. After you have parked, make your way to level 2 of the deck and to the west side (theatre side) of the building. When you emerge from the parking deck, there will be a Centre representative to check you in and direct you to your seats.



# Additional Map for All Vehicles Attending



- ★ ENTRANCE
- ➔ ARRIVAL
- ➔ DEPARTURE

# Local Dining

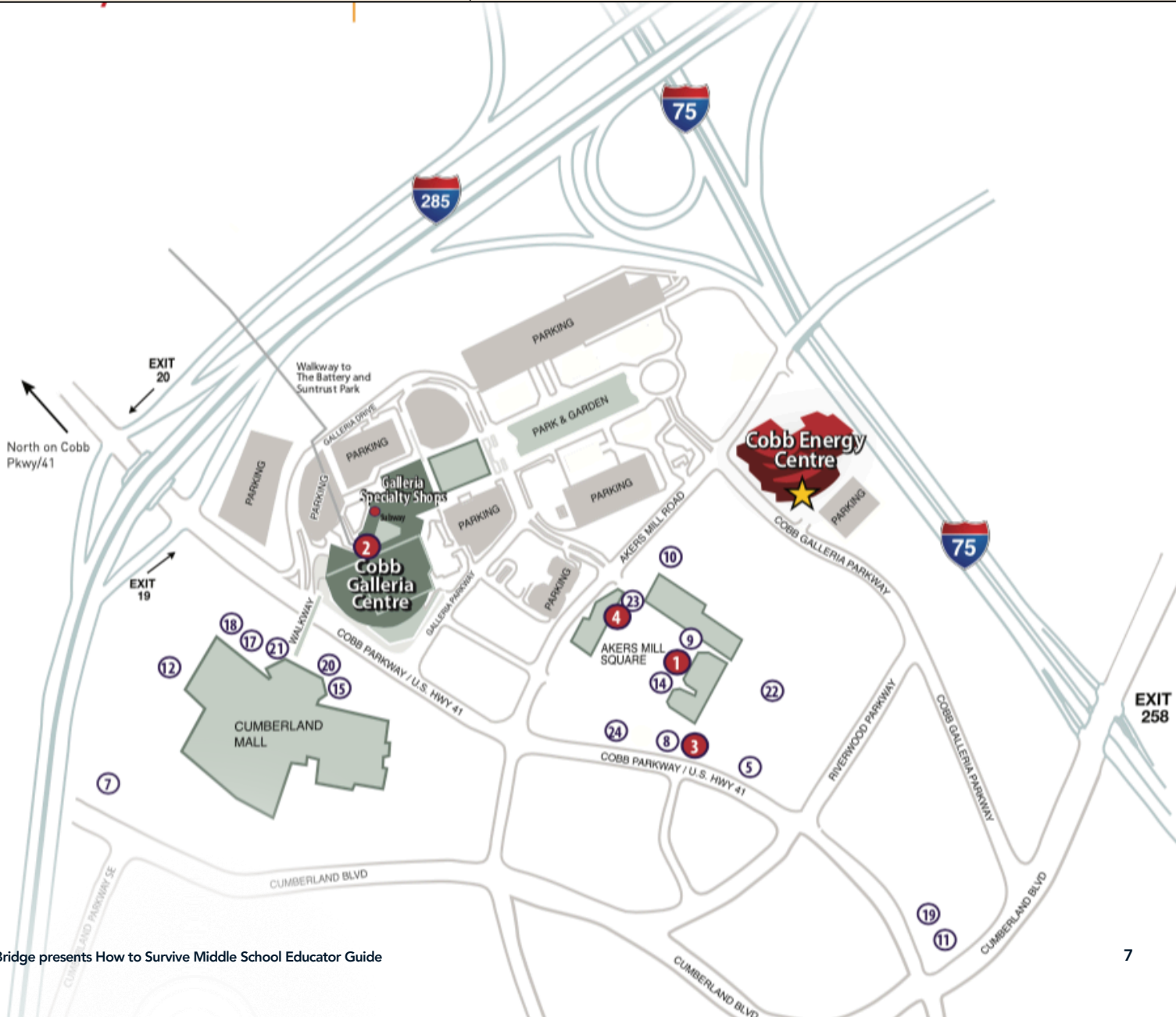
## Food Sponsors

ArtsBridge Program Food Sponsors within driving distance of Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre:

1. Hopdoddy Burger Bar
2. Murph's
3. Chick-fil-A
4. Subway

## Other Nearby Restaurants

5. Bonefish Grill
6. C&S Seafood and Oyster Bar
7. Carrabba's
8. Chipotle Mexican Grill
9. Korean BBQ & Hot Pot
10. Cinco's Mexican Cantina
11. Copeland's of New Orleans
12. Fresh To Order
13. Kuroshio Sushi Bar & Grill
14. Longhorn Steakhouse
15. Maggiano's Little Italy
16. Olive Garden
17. P.F.Chang's
18. Stoney River Legendary Steaks
19. TacoMac
20. Ted's Montana Grill
21. The Cheesecake Factory
22. Top Spice
23. Blaze Pizza
24. CAVA





# Theatre Etiquette

A live performance is a unique experience shared between performers and audience members. Unlike television or movies, audience distractions can disrupt the performers, production and audience. Before you arrive at the Cobb Energy Centre, please review the following information with your students and chaperones, and help ArtsBridge create a meaningful experience for all.

- Arrive early. Groups are seated on a first-come, first-served basis. Seats are not assigned for ArtsBridge events.
- Food, drink, candy, gum, etc. is not permitted in the theatre.
- Silence or turn off all electronic devices. We encourage you to share your ArtsBridge experience at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre via social media, but please refrain from doing so or texting during performances; the glow from your device is distracting.
- Photography and video/audio recording of any kind is not allowed in the theatre during the performance.
- Respect the theatre. Remember to keep your feet off of the seats and avoid bouncing up and down.
- When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- Talk before and after the performance only. Remember, the theatre is designed to amplify sound, so the other audience members and the performers on stage can hear your voice!
- Use the restroom before the performance or wait until the end.
- Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists on stage – they will let you know what is appropriate.
- If you need assistance during the show, please find your nearest volunteer usher.
- As you enter and exit the theatre, remember to walk and stay with your group.
- Open your eyes, ears, mind and heart to the entire experience. Enjoy yourself!





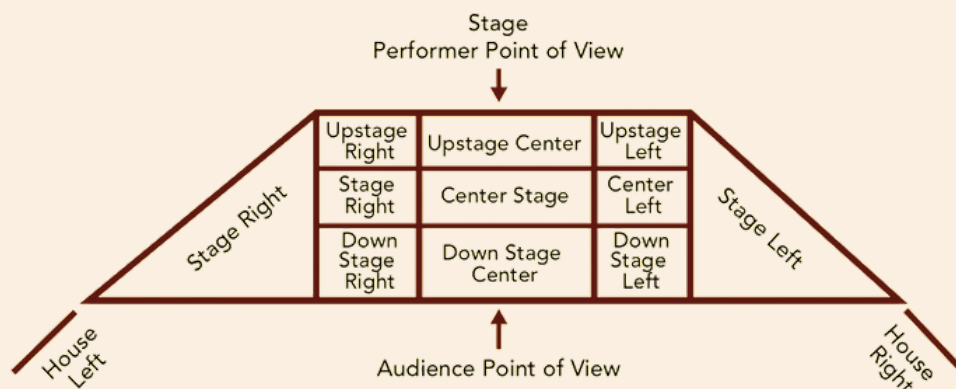
# Pre-Show Activities

Before attending an ArtsBridge Field Trip, review the following questions and vocabulary with your students:

1. How many of you have experienced a live theatre performance? What did you see?
2. What are some of the differences between going to the theatre and watching television or going to a movie?
3. The BAD Audience Member! A fun way to review theatre etiquette with your students is to have them point out bad audience behavior during a show. Here's one way to illustrate this concept:

- a. Have students present something to the class. The key is they are "actors" and the class is the audience.
- b. Once they are into the activity, you (the teacher) leave the room and then re-enter. Enter loudly, chew gum, step on people's feet, talk to them, etc. Be the worst audience member. Find a seat and continue to talk to others, ask what's going on in the performance, take pictures, talk on your cell phone etc.
- c. Ask the class to list all the bad behavior. Write these on the board.
- d. Ask the audience members how they felt when the bad audience member came into the theatre. Could they hear the actors? Were they distracted?
- e. Ask the actors how they felt. Could they concentrate on their performance?

4. Review the stage diagram below with the students . Draw the diagram on the whiteboard and have students come up and write in each part of the stage .



# THEATRICAL

Before attending an ArtsBridge Field Trip, review the following questions and vocabulary with your students:

**Author** – the writer of a script; also called the book

**Audition** – to perform to get a role for the production; usually includes singing, dancing, and reading scenes from the show; usually takes place in front of the Director & Creative Team

**Ballad** – a slow song for actors to showcase vocal clarity

**Blocking** – the specific movement of actors on stage; usually given by the Director

**Box Office** – a booth inside the theater where tickets are sold

**“Calling the Show”** – the process of calling out the lighting, sound, and scene-change cues during a performance; usually done by the stage manager

**Casting** – the process through which actors are chosen for roles in the production

**Casting Agent** – one who chooses actors for roles in the production

**Choreographer** – one who designs dance sequences and teaches them to the cast of the production

**Composer** – one who writes the music **Conductor** – one who directs the orchestra

**Costumes** – a set of clothes in a style typical of a particular country or historical period

**Curtain Call** – the appearance of one or more performers on stage after a performance to acknowledge the audience’s applause

**Director** – one who supervises the creative aspects and guides the artistic vision of the production

**Dress Rehearsal** – rehearsal in which performers practice with costumes, props, lights, and microphones

**Dresser** – one who assists performers with their costumes during dress rehearsals and shows

**Electrician** – one who works with the lighting designer to adjust and operate lighting instruments

**Ensemble / Chorus** – typically singers, dancers, or actors who perform in group numbers

**Head Carpenter** – one who builds the sets for the production **House Left** – the left side of the theater, when facing the stage (audience’s point of view)

**House Manager** – one who oversees all aspects of the audiences; responsible for ushers and audience safety

**House Right** – the right side of the theater, when facing the stage (audiences point of view)

**Lighting Designer** – one who decides where the lighting instruments should go, how they should be colored and which ones should be on at any particular time to affect mood, visibility, and to showcase costumes and sets.

**Lyricist** – one who writes the words to a song

**Makeup Artist** – one who applies cosmetics to a performer’s face and body

**Music Director** – one who teaches and rehearses the music with the orchestra

**Orchestra Pit** – the lowered area in front of a stage where the orchestra (musicians) sit and play during the performance

**Overture** – an orchestral piece at the beginning of an opera, suite, play, oratorio, or other extended composition

**Producer** – a person responsible for the financial and managerial aspects of staging a play, opera, musical, ballet, etc.

**Program** – a listing of the order of events, names of the cast and crew, and other relevant information for the production

**Property (Props) Manager** – one who manages all items used on stage that cannot be classified as scenery, electrics, or wardrobe

**Proscenium Arch** – the arch opening between the stage and auditorium; the frame of the stage

**Read-through** – the cast reads through the script without movement or music; typically done at the first rehearsal

**Set Designer** – one who creates the scenery for the stage **Sitzprobe** – the first rehearsal with both the performers and the orchestra, with no staging or dancing

**Sound Designer** – one who plans and executes the layout of all sound playbook and equipment for the show

**Sound Operator** – one who handles the sound playbook and mixing equipment for the show; works with Sound Designer

**Sound Board** – a desk comprising a number of input channels where each sound source is provided with its own control channel through which sound signals are routed into two or more outputs; controls all microphones and music

**Spotlights** – a lamp projecting a narrow, intense beam of light directly onto a place or person, especially a performer on stage

**Standby / Understudy** – one who studies a role and is prepared to substitute a performer when needed

**Stage Left** – the left side of the stage, when facing the audience (performer’s point of view)

**Stage Manager** – one who is responsible for the quality of the show’s production, assists the director, and oversees the show at each performance

**Stage Right** – the right side of the stage, when facing the audiences (performer’s point of view)

**Technical Rehearsal** – rehearsal incorporating the technical elements of a show such as the scene and property shirts, lighting, sound, and special effects

**Uptempo Song** – a fast, upbeat song for actors to showcase dancing and acting ability

**Usher** – one who guides audience members to their seats

**Wig Master / Mistress** – one who obtains and customizes wigs for performers to wear

# VOCABULARY

## About ROBERT POST

Comedian Robert Post barely survived Middle School. Struggling because of various learning disabilities, he found that making people laugh saved him. In this brand new multimedia performance, kids talk to kids in a compelling, funny and educational show. Dealing with real issues affecting students today including social media, testing, bullying and peer pressure these video testimonials by kids and their advocates (along with a generous dose of Post's signature humor) is sure to resonate with school and public audiences alike.

One of Robert Post's childhood report cards in Columbus, Ohio, gave a hint as to how his future might unfold. Not amused by Robert's antics, his teacher created a whole new column of categories describing maladaptive



stretched Post's talents but also developed his knack for playful give-and-take with audiences. He crafted his signature style during intensive workshops with Tony Montanaro, the legendary performer and teacher who ran Celebration Barn in South Paris, Maine. Post credits Montanaro for "flipping the switch," helping him see how he could combine his love of character work, movement arts, and improvisation.

And so the antics spun on, in a career spanning more than forty years. The sketches that make up Post's one-man variety show – Post Comedy Theatre – have captivated audiences across the United States as well as in Canada, Mexico, Japan, Turkey, and Europe. He has appeared on the Today show, and he was invited to perform for children in Beslan, Russia, at the school that had been devastated by a terrorist attack in 2004. A PBS special on his work, "Robert Post – in Performance," won an Emmy. The list of grants and other awards that he's received is now much longer than his teacher's listing of maladaptive behaviors.



behavior. Happily for audiences around the world, Post stuck with antics. The result: a dazzling performance career that continues to defy categories.

The creator of Post Comedy Theatre and Post from the Road (who did make it through elementary school) discovered the joys of the stage at Ohio State University, where he studied theater and dance before hitting the road with a touring mime and improv troupe. The experience of traveling up and down the East Coast in an old milk truck that served as a tour bus, performing everywhere and anywhere, and passing the hat for payment, not only

Post juggles – literally (he can keep the balls in the air) and figuratively, balancing his performance schedule with educational programs in schools, master classes, workshops, and stints as a director. He has directed for opera and ballet companies as well as for schools and universities. He has also served as a visionary coach and mentor for individual performers, much as Tony Montanaro helped him find his own vision. His wide-ranging travels have led to Post from the Road, a delightfully quirky video series featuring his encounters with – and bemused observations on – the weird and wonderful byways of American culture.

# HOW TO SURVIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

***“An absorbing, authentic, and fun program to help students ride a roller-coaster time in their young lives – brought to you by an acclaimed performer and comic genius who started out absolutely hating school.***

---

***“Never in my educational career have I seen a large group of middle school students so deeply engaged in a presentation. Mr. Post’s show How to Survive Middle School was sensational, entertaining and engaging while giving middle school students a voice. Mr. Post was funny and connected closely with the students in the audience. The message from the students who were interviewed was clear and delivered a very impacting punch.”***

***-Joshua Guthrie, Jefferson 6-8 Principal***

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***“How to Survive Middle School was just the right balance of personal stories, video-recorded student interviews and Robert Post’s hilarious brand of physical humor to keep our students fully-engaged from beginning to end. The interviews discussing how middle school students struggle from time to time were authentic, and so was their development of compassion and acceptance for one another.***

***-Rachel M. Sorce, Executive Director  
South Milwaukee Performing Arts Center, WI***

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***“Your blending of humor, mixed in with the incredible insights of the students in your videos, really hit home with so many of our students.”***

***-Jeff Johns, McGuffey 6-8 Teacher***

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## BRINGING THE KIDS TO CENTER STAGE—AND GIVING THEM VOICE

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**PRESS LINK: [Warren Tribune Chronicle Review](#)**

Nobody has to tell teachers and principals how hard middle school students struggle to define themselves and fit in. New freedoms and new expectations, changing bodies, roiled emotions, gossip, dating, painful self-consciousness and nagging insecurities, the sense of being judged and being labeled: it all adds up to a time of confusion and pressure.

And today that pressure can be unrelenting because of social media. These kids are glued to their bright little smartphone and laptop screens, which seem to fill every minute of every day with banter and barbs. The unending stream of commentary too often veers into teasing and even vicious bullying.



There’s no simple formula for helping middle school students navigate this stretch of their lives. But Robert Post, a performer who captivates audiences nationwide with his hilarious one-man variety show, has created a new program that brings middle school kids and their deeply felt concerns right to center stage. “How to Survive Middle School” starts with a 55-minute show that blends fun and entertainment with honest talk about social and emotional issues – and then follows up with lesson plans and activities that teachers can use to help students handle these issues with greater confidence and control.

The real power of this program – and what has most impressed educators familiar with it – is the way it gives voice to the students. Interspersed with Post’s entertaining skits are short videos in which middle school kids speak candidly about the pressures and worries they face. Teachers speak candidly as well, underscoring how deeply they care about their students. The final video features high-school students looking back and talking about how they “survived” their middle school years, and reassuring the younger students that they, too, will survive.



For the students in the audience, it's absolutely absorbing, because it's authentic. The videos bring into the open, in students' own words, issues that every middle school kid can relate to. Those in the audience see that they're not the only ones worried about things like how smart they seem, whether their friends really care about them, or whether they're judged by the clothes they wear. They also see that their teachers are there for them, ready to help. Above all, they see that it's OK to talk about these concerns.

In this way, "How to Survive Middle School" opens up a crucial conversation. And that's an enormous step, because too often students bottle up their worries and emotions. The follow-up lesson plans and activities keep the conversation going. As a result, students who might feel helpless amid the pressures in their lives instead realize that they can grasp and deal with those issues, and that they can turn to their teachers for support. The program gives teachers a powerful tool to promote social-emotional learning.



## How to Survive Middle School - The Show

*The show moves at a fast pace, in nine parts:*

1. It opens with a video that first showcases Post's life performing and touring on the road. The video transitions to middle school students and teachers introducing the struggles of finding one's path and individual gifts and talents and ends with students introducing Robert before he appears live on stage.
2. Then Post comes out on stage to pick up the theme, talking about how hard school was for him because of his learning disabilities. He points out how desperately adrift he felt until he began to appreciate his unique talents. He talks about how he came to appreciate his own imagination, and demonstrates that by performing portions of some of his works. The life lesson: we all have gifts, and we can all create a life that's uniquely ours.
3. Next comes a video about the realities of life in middle school. Post has filmed wide-ranging interviews with dozens of middle school students, and excerpts from those interviews form the heart of the show. In this section, the kids talk about the various social and academic pressures that pervade their lives, from dress and dating to state-mandated tests and the expectations of parents. Middle school is "drama, drama, drama," says one – and these videos show how that's true. Teachers appear as well, showing that they understand the welter of pressures students face.



4. Post emerges to introduce and perform one of the first pieces he ever created. The creation of “A Rather Unfortunate Evening for Burglar Burt” was a breakthrough where Post finally began to uncover his gifts. The work was a tribute to the comic genius of Sid Caesar, an artist Post watched repeatedly on television as a child. Post demonstrates that he finally learned that his learning differences became a huge advantage when it came to inventing his unique style. Next he performs a tango with red long johns, telling the hilarious story of how he created the dance that eventually led to a performance on the TODAY Show.
5. The next video focuses squarely – and honestly – on social media. Again, the power and authenticity come from real students and teachers talking about how social apps like Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr almost addictively draw kids to their smartphone screens throughout the day. The students speak, quietly but movingly, about the unfairness and cruelty of online teasing, and they talk openly about how bullying has led some kids to cut themselves or even attempt suicide. Teachers add to the conversation, talking about their worries and frustrations in the face of this inescapable force in the lives of their students.
6. After the video about social media bullying, Post lightens the mood by performing “Shticks” where he takes three sticks and shows how hard work and a healthy imagination can create a tour de force out of the simplest props.
7. The next video brings in the high school students, discussing their own memories of middle school. They’re just a little bit older than the students in the audience, and they’ve experienced the very same pressures. They can identify. They convey the message, in a way that teachers can’t: You can cope! You will survive!
8. Post then performs his final piece, “Pasquale’s Kitchen,” showcasing a dynamic and wacky chef whose catch phrase reflects the theme of the show: Let your light inside you guide you.
9. The final video and end of the show is a series of photos of a very diverse array of middle school students. On stage Post talks about his struggles in school but he closes with the message that all of us have something unique and amazing inside of us – a gift unique to each individual. The ending is uplifting and celebratory – leaving the students with a feeling of hope and possibility.



## TEACHER INTRODUCTION

Robert Post created “How to Survive Middle School” for very personal reasons. If you’ve seen the show – if you’ve seen any of his shows – you know that he’s an amazing performer who exudes joy, confidence, and a love for what he does. But Robert was so miserable in middle school, so confused, wounded, lost, and alone, that he couldn’t even talk about his memories until just a few years ago. In part because of a learning disability, school was torture. Robert’s biggest fear was having to stand at the chalkboard to answer a question, which he inevitably got wrong. He believed the whole class could see how dumb and lazy he was – a humiliation that deepened when he had to stay after school, repeating the right answer, to no effect.

$$C = \text{Sqrt}(a^2 + b^2)$$



**Doug & Robert Post**

he had invented as a kid, to get out of trouble when his mother was angry, might reflect unique gifts: gifts that could lead to a performing career.

The core message of this show is that there is something unique and amazing in all of us. For many kids, middle school is every bit as tough as it was for Robert. Even for those who are smart and successful in school, this time is a confusing one. Robert’s performance, incorporating his personal story, shows students that, however uncertain life may seem right now, they can accomplish things that will belong to nobody else. Moreover, it reassures every kid that, just as Robert had his brother and uncle, there are adults who care about *you*, who see the unique gifts that *you* have, and who want to help you make them your own.

But Robert was lucky. He had an older brother who helped him with homework, telling him, “There’s nothing wrong with you; we just have to figure this out.” He had an uncle who said to him: “I don’t know what you’re going to do with your life, but whatever it is, you’re going to be great.” And he had an inkling that there was something special inside him. He knew that he could be funny and that he had a quirky imagination. He was mesmerized by the talented performers who took the stage on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. He discovered that when he latched onto something, he could work at it for hours. By the time he was in college, he was able to recognize and focus on his own talents. He saw that the funny characters and voices which



# LESSON ACTIVITIES

The true power in the message of the show is the conversations that happen after the show. Robert Post is going to definitely make everyone laugh, but he will also touch a nerve with students at times. It's important for such a sensitive topic as this to debrief with students and continue conversations that help them to self-reflect and talk about their feelings.

There's no magic to the lesson activities. They don't need to be completed verbatim in a set amount of time. The fundamental core to their success is allowing conversations to take place. Feel free to adapt them in the moment based on the needs of the students and your personal comfort. If necessary, classes can be combined to co-teach them, but we highly recommend keeping them in small groups to build a tighter community of trust and open dialogue.



## LESSON ACTIVITY 1: FITTING IN

### Background

"What can I do – what can I be – to fit in?" Whether they articulate it or not, this question makes itself felt, day after day, in the emotional lives of many middle school kids. Sixth grade plunges students into a new world of harsh judgments – about their body type, their clothing, whether they're "smart" or "dumb," how many friends they have, whether they're cool enough. At school and home – and online – they carry the burden of needing to be liked and feeling that they have to do what others want. And all of this takes place when they're going through the physical and emotional changes of puberty; when their brains are not developed enough to withstand the daily barrage of gossip and criticism; and when they feel tugged between their desire for more independence and their continued reliance on adults.

Fear of not fitting in, of being "different," can lead students to encase themselves in an emotional armor. They keep out the hurt, but at the expense of living in a kind of denial. Because they're afraid that other kids won't accept them as they really are, they present a false front, thereby hindering their ability to blossom into their individuality. Robert's show and this activity is designed to help give kids the confidence to shed the armor and understand they are not alone.

### Instructions:

"Today, we will be talking about a fear middle school students tend to have in fitting in. Often, students think they are the only ones feeling like they don't belong or feel a certain way. Please clear off your desks with only a writing utensil and paper. I'm going to read 10 statements. After I read each statement, place a check on your paper if you have ever felt that way while in middle school. You can cover your paper with your hand if you would like; this will be confidential. Don't put your name on your paper. At the end of the 10 statements, I will collect your paper. No one else will see your paper. Once I have all the papers, I will tabulate the numbers. While we won't know which of the 10 statements each person marked, let's get a better idea whether you are alone.



1. Sometimes, I feel like I don't fit in anywhere.
2. Sometimes, I feel like no one gets me.
3. I have felt angry when someone made fun of me at school.
4. I have been bullied through social media.
5. I wish I had more friends.
6. I wish people knew the real me.
7. I feel like I have to pretend to fit in.
8. Some of my classes are hard
9. I have been made fun of for how I look.
10. I am scared to go to high school.



After the students marked the number of statements they identify with, please collect the papers. To help students feel safe, walk around and collect them from each student. Then, create a scatterplot on the board to reveal how many students marked 1 statement, 2 statements, and so on.

Debrief with the students their reactions to the data. Ask the students which questions they feel middle school students tend to think are hard - be careful making statements that ask a particular student what he/she marked. As conversations take place, remind the students they aren't alone. The goal is for students to share their feelings with a trusted adult whenever they feel down.

# BULLYING

## LESSON ACTIVITY 2: BULLYING

### Background

Bullying has always been part of the intense social life of middle school students. But today "social life" includes the 24/7 torrent of words and pictures on social media, which allows for truly appalling cruelty because the bullies can remain anonymous, hidden behind a smartphone screen. Using fake accounts that render them invisible and untraceable, posting attacks that can't be proven because the app automatically deletes them after a moment, the cyber bullies feel totally uninhibited. They say things they would never say to a person's face, sometimes with devastating results. The news provides all too many stories of young bullying victims driven to hurt themselves or even commit suicide.

Robert's show has two important goals here. One is to tell kids: you're not alone; there are a lot of people who care deeply about you and want to help. The other is to open dialogue – to encourage the students to come out of their shells. It's revealing and helpful, for example, to watch the final video of Robert's show, when former middle school bullies, now in high school, admit that it was fear which drove them. They knew what they were doing was wrong, and they feel guilty about it now, but at the time they were terrified of being outcasts themselves. That's why they bullied others. Here, too, but in a different way, the message is: you're not alone.

### Instructions:

"Bullying can be defined as: an unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. It's important to understand the definition of a bully and examples of specific bully behaviors. Sometimes, we use other words to define our behavior and actions towards others like 'teasing' or 'joking', but when an incident takes place it can meet the definition of bullying. Our district/school has the following stance on bullying: [insert district/school policy or rules on bullying]. By understanding the definition and example, we can better realize what it looks like, so we can make sure it doesn't happen."

On a board, write down the following in three columns: Verbal Bullying, Social Bullying, Physical Bullying. Ask students to list specific examples of issues in each of the columns. Feel free to probe to get them to be specific. Here are some examples if needed:



Verbal Bullying	Social Bullying	Physical Bullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teasing</li> <li>● Name-calling</li> <li>● Inappropriate sexual comments</li> <li>● Taunting</li> <li>● Threatening to cause harm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Leaving someone out on purpose</li> <li>● Telling other students not to be friends with someone</li> <li>● Spreading rumors about someone</li> <li>● Embarrassing someone in public or on social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hitting/kicking/pinching</li> <li>● Spitting</li> <li>● Tripping/pushing</li> <li>● Taking or breaking someone's things</li> <li>● Making mean or rude hand gestures</li> </ul>

**"In our school community, it's important we recognize bullying behaviors, so we can help each other not to bully others. Not only should we pledge not to bully others, we need to look out for each other. So, if you "see something, say something" to a trusted adult. Like we learned at our last activity, we all need to work together to fit in."**

# PRESSURE

## LESSON ACTIVITY 3: PRESSURE & ANXIETY

### BACKGROUND

For middle school kids, pressure comes from all sides. In school, there are more serious academic demands, more testing, more freedoms and responsibilities. On the social scene, there's the continual drama of making friends and finding a comfortable niche, plus peer pressure – to look and act cool, to date, to drink or take drugs. Often, kids feel pressured to be someone different from who they really are. At home, they can be themselves, but parents seem to send mixed signals, treating them like children but expecting them to act more grown up.

It's not surprising that kids feel anxious, that they're confused about their identities. They wonder: who is the "real me"; how can I be true to myself? Often their instinct is to mask this vulnerability and push adults away. They may pretend that they don't need or want guidance; they may even take dangerous risks. Robert's show, coupled with follow-up activity, seeks to break down these barriers, encouraging the students to open themselves up while supporting teachers in their efforts to show care and offer help.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

"Everyone you know is feeling pressure or anxiety about something—a test, the sporting competition, or an argument with a friend or family member. You and 3 other classmates decide to help others to manage their anxiety by forming a company, called Pressure Solvers, to give advice to other students in your school. A stressed-out person can write you a letter, and you'll respond by providing suggestions for dealing with the stress. Start by reading the letters on the handout. Choose one and write a letter back to them to help them out. In your response, make sure to:

- 👉 Identify what's causing the person's stress;
- 👉 Provide one or two ways for reducing stress;
- 👉 Offer a suggestion for avoiding stress in the future."

Work with student groups to guide them in talking with one another and ensuring they have practical strategies to address each of the three areas above.

### Dear Pressure Solvers,

I am so stressed! I barely have a minute to relax all day long. Before school, I go to tennis practice, and after school, I work on the school newspaper and have violin lessons. On Saturday mornings, I volunteer at my church. Then the rest of the weekend, I try to catch up on the schoolwork that I didn't have time for all week. I never see my friends, and I always eat on the run. I'm starting to have headaches and stomachaches. What should I do?  
From Suzie

### Dear Pressure Solvers,

ARGH! Everything is going wrong. I have a social studies project due at the end of the week and it will take me forever to do because social studies class is hard for me. To make things worse, my best friend isn't speaking to me right now, and I'm not sure who else I can turn to who would just listen to me. With so much pressure, there are some days I just don't want to get out of bed.  
From, Kevin



### Dear Pressure Solvers,

My parents are getting a divorce, and I'm really anxious about it. I can't stop thinking about what's going to happen to my family. I don't feel like hanging out with any of my friends, and I don't think there's anyone I can talk to who will understand what I'm going through. When someone does try to talk to me, I snap at them and tell them to leave me alone. I have no clue why I do it! I don't know what to do to get this knot out of my stomach.  
From, Shahed



**Dear Pressure Solvers,**

All of my friends are going to a party on Saturday. I hear there might be alcohol. My parents would freak out if they knew I went there, but I also don't want to disappoint my friends. I'm afraid of being called names if I don't go to the party. On top of all this, I have homework and to study for tests! It is so hard to focus! Help!

From, Rajat

**DRAMA!!!**

**LESSON ACTIVITY 4:  
THE VIEW FROM HIGH SCHOOL**



**BACKGROUND**

This is an enormously valuable part of Robert's show because of the reassurance it offers, and teachers can build on it to open up conversation and keep dialogue going. All of the high school students whom Robert interviewed had fresh memories of middle school; they could deeply relate to what middle school kids are going through. And every single one pointed out that life got much better in high school. High school students begin to become more comfortable with who they really are, and so the anxieties about superficial things like clothes fade. It's easier to find like-minded people and build firm friendships. People feel less "different," because differences are more accepted and seem less threatening. Even the bullies have lost their power, either because they too have grown and changed or because others simply don't have time for them.

Using the testimony of these high school students, teachers can help their kids in middle school see that things will indeed get better. Life in high school means more freedom to choose classes, more choices about extracurricular activities, stronger bonds of friendship, and above all a greater sense of being comfortable in one's own skin. This part of the program offers middle school students an authentic, compelling, and optimistic look at their own future – a future that lies very close.



**INSTRUCTIONS:**

"Sometimes, it is hard to look in the future to see that things can get better. When we are faced with immediate challenges, it sometimes feels difficult to see how experiences can make us better with the proper vision. Having a clear vision of the future can be an extremely important motivator to yourself and help clarify the things that are important to you. Today, you will be creating your own Vision Board - a graphic with pictures that represent what you want to accomplish, how you want to feel, and want you hope to experience when you are in high school. Having a Vision Board can be a powerful way to display your goals and keep the proper view of choices you will need to make."

Depending on how much time you want to allocate to this activity, it can be done in 30 minutes or over the course of weeks. You can ask students to bring in or have magazines in which they cut out pictures. Make sure to preview the magazines for suitable pictures. Then, you just need glue, poster board, markers, and scissors.

You can also have students create their posters digitally by creating a collage from photos on the internet. While it is appropriate to do this activity online, the power of the Vision Board is to have a printed display to put in their homes. If students cannot print their completed board, we recommend using magazines.

Keep in mind the goal is not to create a poster for their life, job, or dream vacation. It needs to express their feelings, attitudes, hopes, and dreams of their high school experience in order to make connections to the next stage in their life.



## LESSON ACTIVITY 5: GETTING HELP

### BACKGROUND

Among middle school students, it's just accepted that if you're struggling with problems, you figure them out alone or with trusted friends. Kids are fiercely protective of their budding independence and feel that friends "get it" in a way that adults can't. This isolation can leave them dangerously unprepared when pressures build to the point of crisis.

It may be hard for the kids to accept that teachers are not in fact clueless and that teachers hold them in their hearts. "How to Survive Middle School" achieves its honesty and authenticity by giving voice not only to students but also to teachers. It shows that, whatever the issue – fitting in, social pressures, bullying – teachers know what's going on in their students' lives. They understand, empathize, and care. And they want to help.

The message that emerges in this program, again and again, is that if you reach out, you'll find help. The single most important goal of "How to Survive Middle School" is to convince kids that communication is vital and will make a difference. It encourages them to seek out caring adults – teachers and coaches, principals and counselors, parents and other family members. It encourages them, as well, to get involved in activities like sports, the arts, or volunteer groups: places where they can pursue their own interests, experiment with new possibilities, and thus fashion their own identities with friends who share their values.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

"There's a huge misconception that as we get older we shouldn't need help from others. No matter what, it's okay to get help from others. As a school community, it is important that each and every student is able to identify an adult and friends they can go to for help.

Take out a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side, take a few minutes to list adults and students in your life you went to for help last year. On the right side, list adults and students in your life you went to for help this year. It's okay if the list is completely different; and, it's okay if the list is the complete same."

Walk around the room and help prompt each student to identify at least one student and adult on each side of the paper. After students have had time to write down names on both sides, discuss as a class the following question starters to help students to think through their support system.

- ❓ What qualities do you see in the people you chose and why you chose them?
- ❓ What things tended to shift in the people who changed from last year to this year?
- ❓ How could you make your support system even stronger?



## RESOURCES

- **Schools:**
  - [CASEL.ORG in the Classroom](#)
  - [CASEL.ORG in Schools](#)
  - [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
  - [Moving from the Middle School](#)
  - [Smooth Sailing to Middle School](#)
  - *Owning Up*, by Rosalind Wiseman.
  - [Incoming! Tackling the Transition to High School](#)
  - *Working with Kids Who Bully*, by Walter B. Roberts, Jr.
  - *Teaching the Whole Teen*, by Rachel Poliner & Jeffrey Benson.
  - [Transitioning Young Adolescents from Elementary to Middle School](#)
  - *Coming of Age: The Education and Development of Young Adolescents*, by Kenneth Brighton
- **Students:**
  - *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Create Your Best Future*, by Amy Neward & Milton Boniuk
  - [StopBullying.gov for Teens](#)
  - *Wonder*, by R.J. Palacio
- **Parents:**
  - [CASEL.ORG in the Home](#)
  - [StopBullying.gov for Parents](#)
  - [Tips for Parents on a Successful Transition to Middle School](#)
  - *The Pressured Child: Helping Your Child Find Success in School and Life*, by Michael G. Thompson.
  - *Childhood Unbound: Saving Our Kids' Best Selves - Confident Parenting in a World of Change*, by Ron Taffel.
  - *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads: Dealing with the Difficult Parents in Your Child's Life*, by Rosalind Wiseman & Elizabeth Rapoport.



## SPECIAL THANKS:

### VERY SPECIAL THANKS to the Schools Participating in this Project:

[New Albany Middle School](#), New Albany OH

[Starling STEAM PK-8 School](#), Columbus OH

[Willard PK-8 School](#), Warren OH

[Phoenix Middle School](#), Worthington OH

[Briggs High School](#), Columbus OH

[Canal Winchester High School](#), Canal Winchester OH

[Indianola Informal K-8 School](#), Columbus OH

[New Albany High School](#), New Albany OH

[Warren G. Harding High School](#), Warren OH

[The Columbus Association for the Performing Arts \(CAPA\)](#)  
& Rich Corsi, CAPA's Vice President for Programming

[Diverse Media Zone, Inc.](#)

[Ohio Alliance for Arts Education](#)

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[Dr. Neil Gupta, Content/Resources](#)

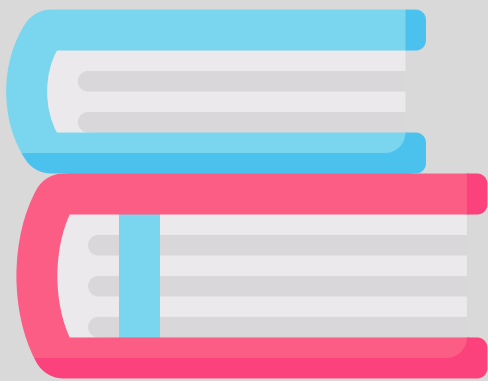
[Lisa McLymont, Design](#)

Visit [robertpost.org](#) for photo & video credits

**This show is dedicated to my brother, Doug (Dr. Douglas M. Post).**  
I couldn't have survived middle school without his support.



# Curriculum Connections.



**English Language Arts/Fine Arts**  
(Dramatic Arts)



**Health Studies**



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*creating the future through arts education*

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