

Waco Arts Initiative Programs: The Theatre Arts Program

Since Grace Ladd began WAI in 2008, the organization has grown to include various forms of art. In the spring of 2011, WAI introduced a new program: the Theatre Arts Program. Shane Weikel, director of the theatre arts program, was approached by Grace Ladd after she heard about him through a friend of his. Shane was thrilled to be able to share his love for theatre with students, and soon, the theatre arts program took shape.

Children in the theatre arts program grow accustomed to speaking and performing in front of others by reading aloud scripts selected by the program director. Theatre classes are a combination of one-on-one instruction with mentors and group practice. The director selects a play and children each receive different roles. The children rehearse their lines with their mentors and then come together as a group to perform the play. In the theatre program, children also write short plays, which they perform at WAI's exhibit at the end of the semester. In addition to performance skills, children in the theatre arts program are taught a different aspect of theatre each week, such as lighting technique, directing, and costume design.

In the theatre arts program, children not only learn about the technicalities of theatre; they also develop valuable skills that they can apply to every aspect of their lives. The theatre program helps to develop children's social skills by having the children work together on plays. Through the theatre performances, children find their own voice and learn to embrace their individuality. Warm-up exercises, such as improvisation games, where students sometimes portray an animal or make certain sounds or movements on the spot, get the students to start thinking on their feet and develop confidence. Reading and learning lines improves the children's literacy. Moreover, by reading and rehearsing a play, children improve their listening skills. WAI believes that acting is much more than learning lines; it is responding honestly to a fictional circumstance. Even though the play is staged and what the children say is planned, the children's responses and the way they approach a scene is real. When children are asked to envision a script, a scene, or a character, they learn to make connections between their experiences and what they read because they engage and respond to the script.

The WAI Theatre Arts Program has a lot to offer a child. The program gives children the opportunity to develop a sense of identity and foster self-esteem. It teaches children to think creatively and work well with others. Through the WAI Theatre Arts Program, children grow to be confident, insightful individuals and valuable members of society.