

Working with a Guest Artist in your Classroom

A helpful guide from APT Education

If you are a teacher who has never had the opportunity of working with an APT Guest Artist in your classroom, you probably have a number of questions. This guide helps explain the role of the APT Guest Artist, and addresses questions and concerns you may have about Guest Artists and APT Education in general.

What is a Guest Artist?

At American Players Theatre, our Guest Artists are working stage actors who have experience and training in basic classroom management. They have also been trained by APT to teach the season's educational programs including the workshops you've requested.

What's the value in using a Guest Artist?

Bringing an APT Guest Artist into your classroom provides your students with a unique opportunity to experience the play from the perspective of an actor. By working with an APT Guest Artist, your students experience the use of the text as a tool to explore the balance and relationship between the poetry, passion and story of the play. Guest Artists facilitate and strengthen your student's understanding of plot, themes and characters within the play through practical, hands-on activities. Ultimately this engages your students imaginatively, emotionally and physically with the text, helping them discover the link between the experience and dilemmas of a human being in the sixteenth century with the people of today.

How do we prepare for the workshop?

When booking a workshop, APT will ask that you fill out a pre-workshop form with details of your class-size, past experiences and workshop location. In the classroom, APT workshops need no advance preparation. They are themselves preparation and enriching experiences for the plays. Depending on the workshop you've chosen, the APT Guest Artist may assume your students have had or have yet to have certain experiences, ranging along the lines of "just saw the play", "will be reading it next week", "will be seeing the show tomorrow", etc.

Can I request a particular Guest Artist?

Yes. In the past, our Guest Artists have developed working friendships with teachers and many of these teachers look forward to seeing them in their classrooms again and again. However, due to a number of logistical concerns within the APT performance schedule, that particular Guest Artist may not be available on the day your workshop is scheduled. We will make every effort to honor your request but meeting their responsibilities as actors are our Guest Artists first priority.

They walked in the door now what?

Before the workshop begins, find a moment to speak with the Guest Artist about any changes that may have come up, for example: a change of space, class schedule, early departures or anticipated interruptions. We would also very much appreciate knowing any of the particulars of the class itself: potential discipline problems, special needs students, sensitive community events (deaths or accidents).

Although the title is Guest Artist, APT looks to provide you with effective tools for you to use in your classroom. Please feel free to engage with the Guest Artists before, during and after to help them provide as an enriching experience as possible for your students.

How should I introduce the Guests Artists?

Part of the training an APT Guest Artist receives is in introducing themselves, APT and the workshop. APT believes the particulars of the Guest Artist's name or the title of the workshop should never be an obstacle for you the teacher. You are welcome to give as much or as little introduction as you care to. We do ask however that you as the authority figure formally transfer the handling of the class' activities. This can be as simple as, "We have some guests joining us today, and I'll let them introduce themselves and what we'll be doing."

My students aren't where I thought they'd be in the reading, is that okay?

No problem. Our educational program focuses on the big ideas of the play and then manifests in them in the particulars. If your class is not where you thought it would be the Guest Artist can shift the workshop slightly to accommodate. If this situation does occur, please let APT know as soon as possible so that we may provide your students with the best experience possible. Simply speaking with the Guest Artist beforehand will often suffice.

Who handles discipline problems?

APT Guest Artists honor teachers as the ultimate authority on safety, appropriateness and discipline in the classroom. APT Guest Artists anticipate and have been trained for a certain degree of classroom management but will always defer to a teacher's judgment when it comes to problems with discipline.

Do I get to play too?

As a teacher, APT not only welcomes you to participate but encourages it. Depending on the workshop you've chosen opportunities to participate may vary. You are also welcome to observe the format and ideas of the workshop itself or to take the opportunity to assess your students' learning. Unless you notify them of your interest beforehand, Guest Artists will not ask you to participate.

Can I switch the workshop I asked for?

There are many occasions where teachers and Guest Artists have mutually decided to switch workshops for the benefit of the class. Often times, the effectiveness of a workshop can be difficult to determine from the workshop's description and Guest Artists will suggest changing workshops to accommodate any number of factors they feel relevant. When this happens, our APT Guest Artists will always speak with you before making any changes. A workshop will never be changed without your consent.

How do I follow up the workshop?

Having time to review and reflect on the workshop and how it pertained to the performance will allow your students to consolidate and reinforce their experiences. Helping your students explore how the workshop supported or enriched the performance often leads to enlightening dialogue. Simple, open questions like "How did the workshop support what the play addressed?" and "What other workshop could APT have done with this play?" APT tries to provide elements that can be integrated and referred to throughout the study of a play. Adapting these useful elements will also help reinforce your students' learning.

I'm still not sure if this is right for my class. Is there another teacher I can talk to who's done this before?

We recognize that your class time with your students is a precious resource. We also recognize that our workshop descriptions may not answer a particular question you may have concerning how we interact with your students. To that end, APT will make available to you a number of teachers in your area who have had APT workshops in their classrooms in the past. We highly encourage you to contact them and speak to them peer-to-peer, addressing any questions or concerns you may have that we cannot answer for you.

I'd like to make a comment on the workshop, who would I speak to?

The success of APT Education is built upon the partnership and open communication that we have established with many Wisconsin teachers. If you would like to share a comment with us about a workshop or a particular Guest Artist please email us at education@americanplayers.org or call our Education Office at (608) 588-7402 ext. 107. We welcome your comments.