

Social Issue based works for Children by Cori Anne Laemmel

Cori Anne Laemmel is a Nashville based playwright. She has written and created 9 plays and musicals for young actors and family audiences. These plays take on a social issue currently facing youth ages 6-18. Through a partnership with organizations who serve kids and families directly effected by the play topic, she conducts a series of interviews and writes pieces that help to give visibility to these people and their message, as well as creating a platform for conversations between kids and families around these topics. The plays are created to speak to all ages using music, comedy and relatable characters to create feelings of accessibility and empathy by making space for every person to relate with the leading characters. The shows often use an element of the fantastic. The mission of these pieces is not just to create art for children, but to create GREAT art for all people, where the leading actors just happen to be youth. The topics covered in her shows have been: Children with long term illness, bullying, children with special needs, adoption stories, social media, Depression and suicide, grief and loss, trans youth (gender dysphoria), Islamaphobia, anxiety, divorce and empathy for those different from you. Cori has recently applied for a grant for the creation of her newest work, "Shadow" about a blind teen. This show will address people with disabilities, but also they ways in which a young person is impacted when they cannot judge another by the way they look. The plays were created under the watchful eye of people who have lived these stories and work professionally in these communities to be sure that their stories are being told honestly and respectfully.

Plays:

The Barefoot Children in the City of Ward

Violet is a young writer who has stumbled up on the gates of a magical city called "Ward." Upon her arrival she meets a band of misfits who, like her, are dressed in pajamas with no shoes. As she enters she is taught the city rules by a precocious young girl named Genevieve:

5. The city is only for Children. The city is invisible and can only be seen by them!
4. Dance lessons are at 12:52 sharp! A child should dance every day!
3. Never say the forbidden words. I'd tell you what they are, but they are forbidden.
2. Always remember
1. Never forget

Violet learns that in Ward, whatever you see in your mind can come true. She creates a dazzling backdrop full of wonder and they set out on a mission to find the Forevery castle, a magical place hidden deep in the heart of the city. Genevieve's illness becomes increasingly worse and when she does not arrive for dance class, the children learn that she has passed. In a moment of grief one of the children speaks the forbidden words, "There is no castle. It's just a stupid game we made up to make ourselves feel better." As she speaks them, the magical words falls down around them, revealing the pediatric oncology Ward where the children are staying during treatment. In an effort to comfort Genevieve's grieving friend, the children convince Violet to help write her story so that her legacy will live on. Moved by the gesture, the children

imagine Ward again as it once was, but this time as a tribute to Genevieve, full of her favorite things. This play was written in partnership with the staff and families of Gilda's Club Nashville and is a tribute to a child's endless capacity for hope, and a means to help children understand their friends who are faced with serious illness.

Oddly Puddle is from Inner Space

Oddly Puddle is a tender 11-year-old boy who lives on Sycamore avenue with his sister, Clara, his best friend, Annabelle, his caretaker, Cecily, and a cast of quirky, lovable characters. Oddly is a non-verbal child with autism, and in the play his words are heard as a voice over, narrating his experiences as he is very aware of the world around him. He describes his experience being from "inner space." It's a lot like being from outer space, except that you can only tell he is different from the inside. The play takes place over the course of 6 years and in many ways is a typical coming of age story that covers friendship school, first loves and loss, but all through the lens of a child who sees himself as a star that never knew there were other stars in the sky. His community eventually learns that the greatest gift they can give him is not to try and make him more like them, but for them to find ways to understand him. This play was created in partnership with the staff and families of the Special Education Advocacy Center and is a way to give visibility to children with autism and other special needs as well as teaching students how to advocate for these children in their lives and communities.

Inside Out Atlas

Mary has just walked through a door to a magical world called "The Meantime," the place where you aren't where you were and you aren't where you are going. She is desperate to answer the questions, "Where do I come from?" and "Where do I belong?" She meets a wild woman named Madge Overshare who directs her to "Smencil's Pencils" the only shop in town that sells maps. Upon her arrival she is handed a blank piece of paper that Mr. Smencil describes as an "Inside Out Atlas." He explains that she is what is known in the Meantime as a "Map Maker" and that the only way to answer her questions is to create the atlas for herself. Mary leaves confused when out from behind her door pop three strange new friends, "Grief, Loss and Celebration." They explain to her that they are a part of her map, and as she starts to understand them better, she will start to know how to draw it. Frustrated by their cryptic messages, Mary once again tries to start her map. Throughout the play she meets a band of mapmakers who are willing to share their atlases and join her on her journey. With the encouragement of her friends, Mary decides to knock on the door to her past where she once again meets Grief, Loss and celebration, but with sadness, realizes that many of her questions will remain unanswered. She sits with grief and her new friends, and the audience learns that being a mapmaker means that each of these children are part of a different adoption story. Mary realizes that the door to her past may never have the answers that she longs for, but the door to her future is wide open and contains a beautiful unknown of her making. At the end of the play Mary finally starts her Atlas and enters the door answering her questions by declaring "I am Mary. I come from Love and I belong wherever I am, wherever I've been, and where I will go next." Inside Out Atlas is a steam punk fairytale created with the staff and families of Miriam's Promise, an adoption organization, with a mission to help children who are part of an

adoption story process their feelings, and for their peers to better understand how to advocate for them.

Secondhand Wings

(please note the use of them/they pronouns in the synopsis as this show covers gender dysphoria)

As a young child, Robby is eager to learn the words and meanings for things discovered in the world around them. “Run” and “Sky” and “Fast” all felt just like they should, but when Robby is called “boy” something doesn’t feel right, and Robby yearns to find the word that matches their heart. One day in the park Robby sees a robin in a tree and struggles to explain to friends and family the pain of being born a bird without wings. Confiding in Astrid, a young girl in the same class, Robbie tells her about being a bird and wanting to be called Robin instead of Robbie. In a kind moment, Astrid offers Robin her dress up wings. Robin’s sister, Naya, struggles with this change, but ultimately decides to help by letting Robin wear wings to the school concert. When Robin arrives the children refuse to let Robin in the bathroom because there is no “bathroom for birds” at the school. During the concert Robin is flooded with the memories of hurtful voices and wets themselves on stage. Desperate, Naya searches the internet for answers and finds a vlogger who helps her to understand her sibling. Robin asks Naya the question, “If I die, will I be a bird in heaven? If I die, will I look like myself.” Overcome, Naya hands Robin a feather and says the words, “I believe you and I love you.” One by one each actor enters with a feather and says the same words until Robins arms are full. They then lift Robin into the air and fly them out of the theater, helping us to understand that a community truly can help a child to fly. In the last scene we see Robby at the park once again as a child, but this time in the tree it is a young girl named Robin, and not a bird. Robby discovers who she truly is. This play was created with the staff and families of “The Rainbow Squad” in an effort to provide visibility and support for trans youth, and a chance for them to see their story reflected in art.

You’re Still Here

Soon after the death of her Father, Mia starts to see her Grief personified. She is dressed just as Mia was at her father’s funeral, and follows Mia like a shadow. At first, Mia is frustrated with her new friend’s presence, but soon learns that as her friends and family see her Grief, they give her the attention and understanding she needs while she is healing. Her friends are always willing to come over and talk. Her mom gives her special time away from her young twin siblings. Her teachers give her extensions on projects at school. The boy she likes has taken a sudden interest in her. As time goes on, less and less people are able to see her Grief and Mia wonders if she is the only person who can see her, why is she still here? Grief is a constant distraction, making her school and home life increasingly difficult, and creating a divide between Mia and her friends. Her pain is still raw and Grief, desperate to be seen, talks Mia into vandalizing her own locker. Immediately after, Grief is seen and heard even stronger than before, and her friends and family rally for her in her time of need. Ultimately, Mia must reconcile what she has done and make things right, even if it means being alone again with her Grief. A classmate Will comes to Mia and confides that he is also being bullied. His text books

have homophobic words written across the front and he is scared to be at school, not knowing who did this. Mia starts to tell him the truth when Grief, in a panic, silences her by putting her hand over her mouth and reminding her that if she tells everyone that she was the one who vandalized her own locker, that no one would be able to see them again and that she would be alone. Will leaves, and Mia breaks down to another classmate, revealing her secret, and the truth of her Grief. The next day, Mia asks her Grief to stay at home and she makes her way through a full day of school without her, apologizing to her class and finally presenting her overdue project which is about Grief and the loss of her father. When she gets home she has an honest conversation with her mom and once alone again, she tells her Grief that she knows that she will always be with her. When Mia goes to sleep, Grief kisses her goodbye and exits. The next morning Mia dresses for school and for the first time, Grief is not there. Just before she leaves, she checks the mirror and Grief enters, this time, dressed differently and looking happier. Mia smiles and says that they have never met before. "I'm Mia Weston." She says. Grief smiles and replies, "It's nice to meet you Mia, I'm Hope."

Musicals

Music for musicals were co-written with Eric Fritsch and Laura Matula

Showmance

Charlotte Conway. 15. This is Charlotte's first theatrical production. Ever. Charlotte enjoys songwriting, Jane Austen, and finding creative ways to get out of freshman PE. Charlotte has been a member of girl band, the vintage flowers since the 6th grade, and that is the extent of her performance experience. She has no idea what possessed her to sign up for auditions.

Betsy Lemberger, 14 and three quarters. Betsy is THRILLED to be gracing the Showmance Summer Stages Theatrical Program for Young artists, SSSTPYA, after her star turn in last summer's production of Glengary Glen Ross. Betsy enjoys Sondheim, re-writing her Tony acceptance speech and following Chenoweth on Twitter. Some of Betsy's favorite past performances include 9 different productions of Annie. She hopes that you are all moved by this performance, because she thinks it's really cool when she can make an audience cry.

Henry Stevens. 16. Last year three guys followed Henry home from school, grabbed him in an empty parking lot and left him there with three broken ribs and a fractured jaw. His dad couldn't look at him for over a month. He told him it was his fault. That he let it happen. And that he was ashamed.

Three kids all searching for one thing, a place to belong. After a history of bullying, theater becomes the place for these young people to find community and healing. Sure the cast is terrible. Sure the play is Godfather the Musical, Jr. Sure, the problems of their past still linger, but the spotlight has given them strength to be who they truly are and stand up to the people who have made them feel small. This show is a love letter to anyone who has ever struggled to find a sense of belonging.

Selfie the Musical

There was a time when we were all playing in a sandbox, figuring out how to share and not bite our friends and not eat the sand and learn how to socialize in a way that didn't totally mortify our parents or leave us to play dump truck alone because we smashed the kid next to us in the head with it.

And then, all of a sudden, we were teenagers and instead of a sandbox, we got tossed into a desert. A giant desert where all of your playmates are there all the time. Where you try to "use your words" like your mentors taught you, but you can't actually say them out loud. So they just hang there to be interpreted a zillion different ways and the mistakes we make are public, and permanent. I would love to meet the inventor of the "screen shot" and let them know that they have made adolescence a bazillion times harder. And don't even get me started on on "likes." Thanks social media for turning my entire world into a popularity contest. I mean, I can post a picture of my face and my friend can post a picture of her face and within minutes I can see who is better "liked." Because of their face. Awesome.

Edie, a 15 year old girl with aspergers has always longed to fit in, so when one of the popular girls at her high school talks her into posting an embarrassing photo of her best friend, Veda, online, she makes a terrible choice and does. Marla, also 15 posts a photo in her bridesmaid's dress and becomes the target of online bullying and body shaming. Meanwhile, Sam has decided to take himself totally offline to be with his sick mother. Being a teenager in the age of social media is a brand new kind of difficult. This musical addresses cyber bullying, body image, and navigating relationships when your whole life is online.

7 Ways to Sunday

Sunday Miller is a teenager with a secret-she has super powers. No Aunt Susan, this does not prove that Joss Wheedon is a Satanist. No Dad, this is not a "cry for attention." She was going to wait. To tell anyone, to try and use them but in a moment of weakness she used one to see her own future and now that she knows what happens at 6:12 tomorrow morning it seemed like now was the time. So she decides to re-live this day and try and change things.

The first time she uses her super power to control the weather to cause a storm on her walk home, so she must wait it out on long time crush Daniel. The two talk and connect and bond, but her depression still beats loud in her ears and she realizes that it will take more than a boy to fix things. For the second try she uses her x-ray vision to see that her younger sister June is being bullied. She cherishes the chance to be the strong one for her sister, and is motivated to keep trying. The third time, she uses her telekinesis to pull the fire alarm, creating a special moment between her and Jess, the girl who has it all, or so she thought. They connect, but instead of feeling empowered, she feels shame hearing that Jess has had so many struggles to overcome and she begins to wonder if anything will ever work.

The second act opens with Sunday using her ability to read minds to find out that her classmate, Andrew, has been hiding the fact that he is gay. She decides to talk to him and

encourage him, and finds out that he too has had thoughts of suicide. She longs to tell him the truth, but is just too scared. She decides to once again use her ability to see the future to say goodbye to her mom and assure her that she will be OK. She then explains to the audience that her real super power is that she is invisible. She walks through the same day we have now seen 6 times, but this time she appears to be unseen by every character. Sunday's mother then explains that she has taken her own life. We walk through her friend's and family's grief and then meet Andrew again, who, after hearing of Sunday's death, confides in his teacher that he too is having thoughts of suicide. He is able to get the help he needs and in his closing monologue, explains his depression and encourages everyone to understand that even in the darkest times, the sun will always come up. Life will always going to continue and it will get better...and worse...and better again and he might have missed it all. He wouldn't know what it's like to fall in love, or see Europe, or try Thai food. He wouldn't know who he was going to be when he grow up. So please, wait for the sun. Believe that it's coming because it will, even if it sets again. Wait for the sun.

7 Ways to Sunday was created in partnership with The Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network as well as under the oversight of suicide loss and attempt survivors. It was created to help teens suffering from suicidal depression understand that they are not alone and to give them the vocabulary to ask for help, as well as teaching prevention to their families and peers and giving them the tools to ask hard questions and get people the help they need.

If I Were You

If I Were You follows one year in the life of four young people who do not know each other, but share something in common. They were all born on the same day. The show opens at the birthday celebrations for Phoebe (8) Bailey (12) Noorah (15) and Jonah (18). We watch the four children have similar experiences in their schools, homes and relationships, but see how they experience them completely differently.

Phoebe struggles with anxiety that can make small things in the day feel difficult, Bailey is on the verge of becoming a young woman with recently separated parents and is trying to navigate through what seems to be ceaseless change, Noorah is a Muslim student in a school where she is the minority and is feeling the pressure of her teen years amplified by the feeling of being the sole representation of her culture for most of her friends, Jonah has been homeschooled his entire life and is getting ready to start his life away from home and family.

At the end of act one Noorah sings about how we might perceive each other differently if we couldn't make assumptions based on what we see, and who we might baselessly fear each other when we don't take the time to get to know one another in the song "I'm not Afraid of the dark".

Act two opens on the lives and families of our four, Phoebe, Bailey, Jonah and Noorah, but while the stories continue on their trajectory, the actors have switched roles. Each of the

leading actors now play each other and we watch an 18-year-old male walk through the life of a 9-year-old female with anxiety, a Caucasian child experience life in the world of a Muslim preteen...We experience life as someone else for a glimpse before returning to the life we knew. The show closes with our actors returned to their original roles, at their next birthday, a year further into each of their beautiful life journeys. This play asks the audience to question how they judge these children's experiences once the actors have switched roles? How does our empathy change seeing someone new in the story? "We wear this brand new day in a different way with a different view. We see the sky in all different shades of blue. The sun still sinks away in a different bay when the day is through. We're staring up at the same face up the moon, it's true, but what would I do If I Were you?"

Video Links

Secondhand Wings

Teaser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n8HO4I3j0I>

City of Boxes song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TSjvi11Wpw>

You're Still here

Behind the scenes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVEaLEvCd8g>

Oddly Puddle is from Inner Space

Annabelle an Oddly clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVcFnY23gwk>

7 Ways to Sunday

Behind the scenes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhlcVfQejYY>

Haiku Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ninOjJsG1-E>

The Barefoot Children in the City of Ward

Teaser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH2L6uzWZUA>

If I Were You

Teaser: <https://vimeo.com/227833035>

Teaser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9F6buQxB8I>

Showmance

Teaser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX1JE-LGxE0>

Audition day song (Gala Performance): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DjCSqH3ARo>

Selfie the Musical

Home video production clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDgrKDSBy18>