

**From:** John Sarrouf  
**Date:** Thu, 13 Jan 2011 12:44 AM  
**To:** 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Parents  
**Subject:** Re: Winter's Tale

Dear Families,

I wanted to drop a note to all of you as we are just past the half way mark of our short but rich time together. Our students are doing incredible work and we had a powerful rehearsal on Tuesday. They are committed to the process and to each other. I thought I would let you in on a few things we are talking about and working on.

- We are talking a great deal about the actor's instrument -body and voice - and the need to be flexible, nimble, breathing fully. This includes releasing tensions from the many places that the body holds tensions. Tension cuts off the resonance of the voice and our ability to access our own emotional range and connect with the audience's emotional life. Imagine what your body does when you are trying not to cry in sadness or whoop in joy - you probably hold your breath, tense your jaw or shoulders. We grow accustomed to those tensions; they help us much of the time to get through difficult situations without showing vulnerability. But vulnerability is what we need to show as actors - to show pain, sorrow, love, rage. If we had years to work together, we would spend a long time learning to release these places of tension. When we have two and a half weeks, we use simple exercises to help them get a sense of what it is like. If I ask an actor simply to run back and forth in the parking lot and then come in and do her monologue, the deep breathing connects her to those emotions and what we see is remarkably alive.
- We are learning a lot of new words. Shakespeare's vocabulary was amazing and the freedom with which he adapted words to new purposes is inspiring. It is not unlike what kids do with slang. Some of my favorites: countenance (verb), sluiced (verb), vexation.
- We are learning about how to be aware of an audience and how to use a three-quarter thrust stage. Usually the students are asked to play proscenium stages - the traditional stage where the audience is in front and the line between actors and audience is flat. We have designed a set that has them playing inside the audience and behind it. This can make a show more dynamic, but it also makes the blocking and connections with actors and audience much more complicated. They are doing great, but it is a steep learning curve.
- We learn about status and how it gets played out between people. What does a king look and sound like? What we learn is that it is at least as much about how others treat a king that lets us know he is a king. Not unlike the study of identity, we learn who we are from how others react to us and so we create characters in the context of a whole system. The Elizabethans had a clear sense of class and status and people knew where they fit in. What is exciting is to see status shift unexpectedly, to see when a king gives status to a servant because he needs something from her.
- We play a lot of red-light/green-light. Why? Because you should see how focused a bunch of teenagers can be for a long period of time when

given a clear task and a desire to achieve a goal. It is thrilling to watch - it looks like life or death - which is what we are trying to achieve on stage.

- The French have a theatrical word - *complicité* - which is about the ensemble, the give and take, the sixth sense communication, the ability to move together, anticipate the other. The work this group has been doing for years now has given them an incredible sense of *complicité*. Their work on verse, eurythmy, gymnastics, basketball, theater etc. has given them a feel for each other that any acting company in the world would die for. We are working to develop that further.

There is much more to say and much more to do, but this is just a taste of the work we are about and I am so grateful for your support in all of it. If you have any questions, problems, insights, or concerns, please contact me freely.

If you get to work with your children on their lines, make sure they know them word for word. Have them do their blocking with their lines because we don't get enough time on the stage to cement the blocking. If you don't understand what they are saying, ask them what they are saying and why?

All the best,

John