

Act for Advocacy Script

Wendy: Hello! Welcome to Act for Advocacy! This is an interactive applied theatre workshop that empowers people with disabilities to advocate for themselves and each other.

Wendy: My name is Wendy Duke. I am the Managing Director of The Center for Applied Drama and Autism, otherwise known as CADA.

Ruben: Hello my name is Ruben Ryan, I am CADA's Director of Online Programming. We'd like to introduce you to our performers today. They are part of Theatre on the Spectrum, CADA's performance troupe.

Amanda: My name is Amanda Bugenske, and I've been acting since high school. I joined CADA in order to continue my theatre journey.

Wendy: JT, tell us a little bit about yourself.

JT: My name is JT Styles and I been acting for five years for CADA.

Wendy: What else do you do JT?

JT: I got a YouTube channel and JT Styles World Productions and I'm an advocate for people with disabilities, and...

Wendy: You're a musician too, aren't you?

JT: I'm a musician and I do music and everything.

Wendy: Fantastic! Sid, how about you?

Sid: My name is Sid Kranz. I started with CADA when I was 8 years old. Now I am 21! CADA has helped me with my acting skills including voice and articulation. I love comedy and improv! I am starting my own YouTube channel.

Wendy: Before we begin, I'd like to share that the main source of our method is based on Augusto Boal's book, Theatre of the Oppressed and his later work with Forum Theatre. Boal's theatre work used acting to address community issues in the working class villages and neighborhoods of Brazil.

Ruben: Basically, we use improvisation to act out a real life situation that involves an obstacle or challenge that limits accessibility and inclusion.

Wendy: In our extended workshop version, we usually begin with some basic acting warm-ups, both physical and vocal.

Today we'd like to share one of our absolute favorite warm-ups even though we are recording this on Zoom and not actually with you live. We think it is very important that all of you watching this should have the opportunity to get up and dance and move with us to a very special song written by disability rights advocate and musician, Jeff Moyer. This song is called We're People First. And here we go! Dance with us!

We're male — We're male
Female — Female
But we're people first.
We're dark — We're dark
We're pale — we're pale
And we're people first

We're people, just people
People living our lives
We're people, just people
And we're glad to be alive

We walk — we walk
We wheel — we wheel
But we're people first

We think we think
We feel — we feel
And we're people first

We're people, just people
People living our lives
We're people, just people
And we're glad to be alive

We're deaf — we're deaf
And we hear — we hear
But we're people first
Now we're brave — we're brave
We fear We fear
And we're people first

We're people, just people
People living our lives
We're people, just people
And we're glad to be alive

We're blind — we're blind
We see — we see
But we're people first
With our own — with our own
Dignity — dignity
And we're people first

Round the world!
We're people, just people
People living our lives
We're people, just people
And we're glad to be alive

We're fast — we're fast
We're slow — we're slow
But we're people first
We stop — we stop
We go — we go
And we're people first

Everyone!
We're people, just people
People living our lives
We're people, just people
And we're glad to be alive

Yes we're glad to be
Yes we're glad to be
Glad to be alive

Wendy: The concept of Act for Advocacy:

Ruben: By acting out situations of discrimination experienced by our actors and by the audience, we can examine the situation as it unrolls before our eyes.

Wendy: Through “rehearsal” we can practice effective ways to advocate!

Ruben: We are going to start with a real life story that happened to one of our actors, JT Styles!

Wendy: JT, this is a story about what happened to you and a friend — where were you?

JT: It was at a concert.

Wendy: Alright, well as the director I get to cast you! JT will play himself and Amanda you get to be his friend. I will play the usher at the concert. Ruben and Sid get to play the workers who are loading the elevator. So everyone: places! We’ll start with Amanda and JT sitting in the auditorium waiting for the concert to begin.

JT: Yeah, this looks like it’s going to be a good concert.

Amanda: Uh yeah, I can’t...I can’t wait to hear all the music and stuff.

JT: Yeah, this is going to be good!

Amanda: This is going to be an awesome concert.

JT: I gotta go to the restroom before it starts.

Amanda: OK hey um I saw an usher in the back that we can ask where the accessible restrooms are — let's go ask.

JT: Ok, let's go.

Usher: Hello, may I help you?

Amanda: Ah yes, my friend has to go to the restroom. Do you perhaps happen to know where any of the accessible restrooms are?

Usher: Well usually, they are on this floor but there's a plumbing problem and ...uh...you can't use it. So you're going to have to go to the second floor. But unfortunately we don't have an elevator—in the theatre, that is.

Amanda: OK.

Usher: I know. You can go through the lobby. Go in the way you came. Go out the front door and turn right. And then turn right again and go around the building and you'll

find the loading dock. And there you will find a freight elevator. And if you press the button, it will come down and you can go up to the second floor, no problem for your wheelchair, ok?

Amanda: OK, thank you.

Usher: Good luck!

Amanda: Thank you.

JT: Thank you!

(Usher exits. Amanda hums as they roll out the theatre to find the freight elevator.)

Amanda: Let's go around the building. (She continues to hum. They go around the building and find two workers loading boxes on to the freight elevator.)

Amanda: Hey...um...My friend has to use the uh restroom. Can we use the freight elevator because the bathroom is on the second floor.

Worker Sid: Well it's half full so...

Worker Ruben: Yeah geeze like he said, we got it full of boxes right now uh we're kind of in the middle of this...

JT: Well I gotta go bad!

Sid: Well can we take the elevator up and unload the boxes and then come back down and you can use the elevator?

Ruben: Yeah we'd have to unload them anyways.

Sid: Yeah.

Amanda: Sure. Go ahead

JT: Yeah, go ahead. (The freight guys shut the door and take the load up.)

JT: So how do you think the concert's going to be when we get there.

Amanda: Well I don't know I'm really excited for the concert, I can't believe we bought our tickets a year in advance and the concert is finally here.

JT: I wish that they would hurry up so that we don't miss the concert.

(The elevator freight door opens and the guys begin loading more boxes not paying attention to the two people standing there.)

Sid: Oh you're still here?

Ruben: yeah.

JT: Yeah, we're still here because I gotta go really bad.

Amanda: My friend has to go to the bathroom really bad.

Sid: So there's a gas station two blocks down. It has a bathroom

Enter Wendy as Facilitator

Pause — the Action!

Wendy: At this point, at the climax of the scene, we will stop the action and ask the audience for their suggestions as to what JT and his friend should do. But since we don't have a live audience here, I'm going to ask Sid to step out of his role as "freight-loading guy" and become an audience member. Can you give any suggestions for JT and Amanda what they should do?

Sid: Sure. If I was JT or Amanda, I would be like, well these workers are not listening to us. I don't want to go to a gas station that is two blocks down. I want to use the bathroom upstairs. So I would advocate for myself like "Hey! Let me use the bathroom!" (Saying it very loud!)

Wendy: Excellent! Ruben, I am going to ask you to step out of your role as "freight guy" and become an audience member — do you have any suggestions?

Ruben: I would take this opportunity to try and remind the freight operators about basic human dignity and the amount of indignity they are trying to put on to JT Styles. Essentially appeal to their humanity and hope that it shames them into doing the right thing.

Wendy: Good suggestion Ruben! Alright actors, you've heard that — be really firm and assertive, and tell those freight loading guys that it is not right for them to prevent JT from using the restroom. Are you ready?

Actors: Yes!

Wendy: Action!

(Freight guys continue loading the elevator.)

Amanda: My friend needs to use the rest room really bad.

JT: Yeah, why can't you take off some of the boxes so I can go on the freight elevator so we won't miss the concert.

Sid: We could do that. I think.

Ruben: I guess we could take a smoke break here.

Sid: Yeah.

JT: No! You gotta move the boxes off before you take the smoke break. I have to go to the restroom right now!

Sid and Ruben: Ok ok, we'll get them out of there. (They quickly unload the boxes so JT can wheel into the elevator.)

Wendy: And End Scene! Victory for JT and Amanda!
Excellent!

Sid: Good job you guys!

Wendy: Good job!

Amanda: Thank you!

Wendy: All right! So after doing this, we would normally ask the audience if they had any stories to share about a time when they were discriminated against, but since we don't have a live audience here and we only have twenty minutes, we're just going to share some of our experiences from past workshops. Ruben, can you share a couple of scenarios that we've have acted out?

Ruben: Absolutely. A close personal friend of the troupe shared a story with us once about how they were having trouble getting their landlord to deal with a bunch of black mold that had appeared in their apartment. We've also taken concepts from headlines in the news, such as a time in England where a comedian tried to enter a pub with his brother (NOTE: it was actually his sister!) who was disabled and in a wheelchair. And the pub tried to throw them out, saying quote "we don't do disableds." In the story, the comedian took to social media because he was a famous comedian in England and proceeded to shame the corporation (that owned the pub) with the support of his fans.

Wendy: I understand that this corporation had like two hundred pubs all over England.

Ruben: It was like three or four thousand, actually.

Wendy: Wow. I'd also like to point out that when we did the story about the black mold and asked the audience for suggestions, we got a couple of really great ones. One person said you should contact the local media, so I immediately cast one person as a reporter, who she called up and came into the scene and wrote a story about it. And then another person suggested she call a lawyer, so we added that character the story and got someone to play that part.

One of my favorite stories from a conference when we did this was a woman had brought her ten year old daughter who was very shy and the mom said "my daughter is bullied at school and she is too shy to tell the story so I'll tell it for her. So she told the story and we used a technique known as shadowing for the little girl. She acted out the part as herself but she had someone behind her as her shadow whispering in her ear words to say and the little girl very quietly would say the words. But when it got to the point where the little girl was supposed to tell the bullies off, the shadow said "tell the bullies off" and the little girl in the biggest voice we'd ever heard said **STOP IT YOU BULLIES LEAVE ME ALONE!** And we knew that Act for Advocacy was working because the little girl was so proud of herself and her mom was so proud of her too.

So we encourage you to experiment with the use of acting as a technique to act out those stories where people are being discriminated and oppressed in your communities.. Before we go I would like our actors to share some final words — what they have learned from doing Act for Advocacy. Let's start with JT Styles.

JT: Well what I have learned is that it is good to stand up for yourself. And I hope that this Act for Advocacy class will help somebody in the future to stand up for themselves. To let them know that they can stand up for themselves and they can make a difference. And they have to say it loud so that they can be heard! It's important to be heard!

Wendy: It is! How about you Amanda?

Amanda: I learned if you don't stand up for yourself you won't be able to speak up when someone is bullying you and you won't want to go to school anymore because there is a bully there. And it will ruin the rest of your life. So if you don't speak up it won't work.

Wendy: Finally Sid.

Sid: My thoughts are if you are getting bullied or your thinking it's going to handle itself — no it won't. It will

keep on going keep on going until it will only resolve itself if you do something about it.

Wendy: Oh I think what you said is so important Sid. So often we are afraid to speak up because we don't want to create a scene. We don't want trouble, right? We'd rather just fade away into the background.

All right! So we say to you "Advocate!" Everybody...

All: Advocate, Speak for yourself!

Wendy: Thank you very much!

Images from applied drama workshops:

1. Accessible Arts Expo, Cuyahoga Falls, OH
2. University of Akron Theatre Dept.
3. International Theatre Teacher Workshop, Blue Box Studio, Akron OH
4. Nordonia HS, theatre student workshop, Nordonia OH
- 5-7 Company members rehearsing, Blue Box Studio, Akron OH
- 8 OCALICON presentation, Columbus, OH

JT: This is a story about what happened to me and a friend when we went to a concert.

Wendy: JT will play himself. Amanda is his friend. I will play the usher, and Ruben and Sid will play the workers loading the elevator.

Characters: JT — himself
Friend — Amanda
Usher — Wendy
Guys loading elevator Ruben & Sid

Play scene.

When elevator guys say they are going to load the elevator for a second time and suggest the two go to a gas station, I will STOP the Action.

Wendy: At this point, we ask the audience, “what should JT and his friend do?”

Continue playing out the scene. JT advocates and gains access to the elevator. END SCENE

Wendy: After playing out this scene, we then ask the audience if anyone would like to share a scene that

happened to them. Ruben, can you share a few of those scenarios?

Black Mold

Comedian at the pub

Wendy: Little girl with bullies

Actors, would you like to share your thoughts about Act for Advocacy and what you have learned from participating in the workshops?