Resource Guide | for Educators and Audiences

We include information about our production along with creative activities to make connections both before and after the show. For educators, all activities are aligned to the Common Core Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards. Look for the symbol below throughout the guide.

NCES-TheaArts.(3-5).TA.A.1: Analyze literary texts and performances. NCES-TheaArts.(3-5).TA.A.1.1: Recall the basic parts of a story, such as characters, setting, and events.

Mainstage production
Recommended for ages 8 and older

By Cheryl L. West
Based on the screenplay
by Doug Atchison

Director
Corey Mitchell

Themes explored
fitting in, sense of identity, loss, community and belonging

Summary of Akeelah and the Bee

Akeelah has a crazy passion for words: the more abstruse and labyrinthine, the better. But this gift is almost overwhelmed by the challenge of her daily life in a tough, Chicago neighborhood. Living with her single mother and brother, everything in Akeelah's world seems to be working against her. With the help of a spelling coach dealing with his own personal losses, Akeelah finds the confidence to continue. Her aptitude earns her a spot in the National Spelling Bee, which inspires the people in her neighborhood, and brings community and family together.

Audience expectations

You may wish to have a discussion with your students about their role as an audience member. Live theatre only exists when an audience is present; their energy and responses directly affect the actors in performance.

Younger audiences should know watching live theatre isn't like watching more familiar forms of entertainment: there is no pause or rewind button, there are no commercials for bathroom breaks, and they can't turn up the volume if someone else is talking. Encourage your students to listen and watch the play intently so they may laugh and cheer for their favorite characters when it is appropriate. At the end of the play, your applause is an opportunity to thank the actors for their performance. Here are some other guidelines to remember as well:

• Respect other audience members. Stay seated and keep your hands to yourself.
• Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during the performance.
• Photography and recording of the performance is prohibited by copyright law.
• We do not permit food and drinks in the theatre.

The BIG QUESTIONS about the show

1. Akeelah and the Bee was a movie before it was made into a play. What is the difference between watching a movie and seeing a live performance on stage?

2. Akeelah has to deal with some difficult things in her life that make it tough for her to succeed. What are some of the difficulties that Akeelah encounters in the story? How does she deal with these troubles?

3. Akeelah's community plays a large part in her story. How does Akeelah's community help her as she is preparing for the spelling bee? Have you seen a community come together to help someone in need? When and where?

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Cheryl L. West’s plays have been seen in England, off-Broadway, on Broadway (Play On!) and in numerous regional theatres including Minneapolis Children’s Theatre, Seattle Children’s Theatre, Seattle Rep, Arena Stage, Old Globe, The Goodman, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Bay Street Theatre Festival, Syracuse Stage, Cleveland Play House, South Coast Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, and off-Broadway’s Manhattan Theatre Club, Second Stage and Primary Stages. Her plays include: Last Stop on Market Street, Akeelah and the Bee, Pullman Porter Blues, Motherhood Out Loud (co-author), Addie, American Girl Story (21-city tour), and Jar the Floor. She has written TV and film projects at Disney, Paramount, MTV Films, Showtime, TNT, HBO, CBS and is the Webby-nominated writer for the original web series Diary of a Single Mom. Ms. West is currently working on commissions for Chicago Goodman’s Theater and Seattle Rep, Seattle’s 5th Avenue Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Chicago Children’s Theater, Minneapolis Children’s Theater, Seattle Children’s Theater and UC Santa Barbara’s Launch Pad Program.