



Richard Hopkins
Producing Artistic Director

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FST LAUNCHES LIVE, INTERACTIVE THEATRE EXPERIENCE —ZOOM INTO PLAYWRITING— STREAMED FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

(Sarasota, FL) – **Florida Studio Theatre** (FST) is proud to debut *Zoom Into Playwriting*, a live and interactive educational entertainment offering for elementary school students using the conferencing platform Zoom. Performed live from FST’s Bowne’s Lab stage, the performance is streamed in real time straight into students’ classrooms or home learning spaces. With this innovative approach to theatre performance, FST can continue to inspire the next generation of playwrights with the art of live theatre.

“This is our 30th year of inspiring children to write plays, and I wanted to prove that we could still make that happen, despite the challenge of not being able to gather together in person,” explained **Caroline Kaiser**, FST’s Director of Children’s Theatre. “For the past three decades, we’ve seen children express themselves in so many ways. Sometimes it comes out as a dramatic piece about fear of a parent losing a job or the sadness around the loss of a beloved pet. Other times it comes out as a hilarious comedy about a dragon with hiccups or an underwater rock band. Children’s imaginations are endless and should be encouraged, celebrated, and shared—perhaps this year more than ever.”

First, students see FST Acting Apprentices **Deon Barksdale Jr.** and **Abigail Young** perform original short plays written by young playwrights. While the actors are distanced at least 6 feet apart onstage throughout the performance, the magic of Zoom makes it appear that they are actually side-by-side.

Next, Barksdale and Young review the fundamental elements of a play: **Character, Setting, Conflict, and Dialogue**. Following this lesson, students are invited to suggest alternate endings to one of the previously performed plays by sharing their ideas with their in-person teacher, or with the program’s host, one of FST’s Resident Teaching Artists. The actors then implement student recommendations and bring them to life, improvising a brand new play ending on the spot for their virtual audience.

“What I’m most proud of is that we were able to figure out how to do this program in a medium that is live *and* interactive,” said Kaiser. “So much of what makes theatre special is the connection between the audience and the actor. Through Zoom we are able to see and hear the students in real time. The students completely come alive when they realize this isn’t television—this is a connected experience where their ideas and suggestions are brought to life by professional actors. It’s so much more than a performance, it is truly an experience.”

Finally, the host guides students through writing a play together as a group, incorporating their ideas for the play's characters, setting, conflict, and dialogue. Once the class's script is finished, Barksdale and Young perform the play for the students, so they can see their ideas acted out on stage.

Following the performance, teachers will be provided with pre-recorded video lessons reviewing the four fundamental elements of a play along with step-by-step writing guides, so that students can deepen their understanding of playwriting. All participating students are encouraged to submit their own original plays to FST's Young Playwrights Festival playwriting competition, which receives submissions from more than 6,000 playwrights each year. Every script is read at least twice by FST staff and community volunteers, ultimately selecting a dozen plays for a full-scale professional production by FST.

Zoom Into Playwriting is part of FST's **WRITE A PLAY** program, an award-winning arts-in-education initiative, giving students the example, inspiration, and the skills to write their own plays. With this innovative new virtual approach to live theatre, this program, which has primarily served students within the state of Florida, now has the possibility to reach children in all 50 states.

Teachers, educators, and group leaders interested in FST's WRITE A PLAY program should contact FST's Director of Children's Theatre, [Caroline Kaiser](#) or call 941-366-9797.

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Florida Studio Theatre (FST) is Sarasota's contemporary theatre. Founded in 1973, FST has grown to a village of five theatres located in the heart of Downtown, Sarasota. Each theatre is small in size and large in impact— providing intimate and engaging settings for high-quality, professional performances.

Today, FST has established itself as a major force in American Theatre. FST is the largest subscription theatre in the state of Florida and among the largest in the country, serving more than 230,000 live attendees each year across its six core programs: Mainstage, Cabaret, Stage III, Children's Theatre, Education, and New Play Development.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to as many people as possible. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Richard Hopkins, FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. Hip and historical, entertaining and challenging, we are the theatre where the street meets the elite — where everyone is welcome to engage in the art of theatre.

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