

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

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NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Presents “Story Hour with Jenny” Virtual Series Starting Sunday, March 14

Live, interactive readings of social justice picture books for grades K-3

Westport Country Playhouse will launch “Story Hour with Jenny,” a live, virtual series to engage children, grades K-3, in an interactive reading of social justice picture books, beginning Sunday, March 14. The series will continue on Sundays, April 11, May 16, and June 6, with two live readings each day, morning session at 10 a.m.; evening session at 6:30 p.m. Jenny Nelson, who is the Roz and Bud Siegel director of education and community engagement at the Playhouse, will lead the one-hour sessions via Zoom.

“Looking back, I have such fond memories of being read to by my parents, teachers, and especially our neighborhood librarian, Mrs. Dean,” said Nelson. “Now, as a teacher myself, I continue to find such joy in reading to children and engaging them in different experiences outside of their everyday world. This story hour will be lots of fun and a great introduction to the values that center our new education department.”

The books in the series are written and illustrated by BIPOC artists. Their themes center on the four pillars of the Playhouse’s education department: Empathy, collaboration, activism, and literacy. For each “Story Hour with Jenny,” kids will receive the book and an activity packet. All books were purchased by the Playhouse from People Get Ready, a Black-owned community book space in New Haven. <https://www.peoplegetreadybooks.com/>

“Please, Louise,” written by Nobel and Pulitzer Prize–winning author Toni Morrison, and her son Slade Morrison, illustrated by Shadra Strickland, ©2014, will be featured in “Story Hour” on March 14, representing the Playhouse pillar of education, literacy. Inspired by Toni Morrison’s experience working in a library as a young girl, this engaging picture book celebrates the wonders of reading, the enchanting capacity of the imagination, and, of course, the splendor of libraries.

“Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood,” written by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell, and illustrated by Rafael López, ©2016, will be read on April 11, for the Playhouse pillar of education, collaboration. Based on the true story of the Urban Art Trail in San Diego, California, the book reveals how art can inspire transformation, and how even the smallest artists can accomplish something big. This book will also be read in Spanish.

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“Wings,” written and illustrated Christopher Myers, ©2000, reflecting the Playhouse pillar of education, empathy, will be read on May 16. The book asks the question: Are you brave enough to be your true self? Ikarus Jackson is, but it isn't always easy. The people in his neighborhood point at his wings. The kids at school laugh. The teachers call him a distraction. One girl identifies with Ikarus, but she is too shy to speak up for herself, let alone for him. Maybe I should have said something to those mean kids, she thinks, when their taunts send him drifting into the sky. Inspired by Ikarus's own courage, she sets out in search of him and so begins her own journey of self-discovery, leaving both of them transformed. The author said, "I wanted to create a book that tells kids never to abandon the things that make them different, to be proud of what makes them unique. Every child has his own beauty, her own talents. Ikarus Jackson can fly through the air; I want kids to find their own set of wings and soar with him."

“Lubaya’s Quiet Roar” by Newbery Honor winner Marilyn Nelson, paintings by Philomena Williamson, ©2020, will address the Playhouse’s pillar of education, activism, on June 6. This lyrical, impactful story tells how every child, even the quietest, can make a difference in their community and world. Young Lubaya is happiest when she’s drawing, often behind the sofa while her family watches TV. There, she creates pictures on the backs of her parents’ old protest posters. But when upsetting news shouts into their living room, her parents need the posters again. The next day her family takes part in a march, and there, on one side of the posters being held high, are Lubaya’s drawings of kids holding hands and of the sun shining over the globe—rousing visual statements of how the world could be. “Lubaya’s roar may not be loud, but a quiet roar can make history,” said the author.

Jenny Nelson, who will lead “Story Hour with Jenny,” hails from Arizona where she received her bachelor’s degree in theater, master’s degree in theater from the University of Arizona, and a second master’s degree in education from Fairfield University. She is the associate artistic director of Collective Consciousness Theatre, a social justice theater in New Haven. She has taught at several universities, including City College of New York in the graduate program for theater professionals and educators. She has also worked as an artist and educator at several theaters, including Long Wharf Theatre, Shubert Theatre, and Yale Repertory Theatre. Recently, Nelson was a nominee for the Tony Teaching Award of Excellence.

Each “Story Hour with Jenny” session, including picture book and activity packet, is \$40 per family. There is also a pay-what-you-can option, minimum \$10. Enrollment is open three weeks prior to each session. Limited enrollment; first come, first serve. To register, visit <https://tickets.westportplayhouse.org/overview/storyhour>, call the Playhouse box office at (203) 227-4177, or email boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org.

Education programming at Westport Country Playhouse is generously supported by Roz and Bud Siegel.

Due to the global pandemic, the Playhouse campus remains closed since March 2020. The 2021 Season is scheduled to begin in April, online and in-person. Playhouse management will be following the science and the State of Connecticut Department of Health guidelines in deciding when and how to safely open its buildings to the public.

For Westport Country Playhouse information, visit westportplayhouse.org, leave a message on the box office voicemail at (203) 227-4177, or email at boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org. The Playhouse’s physical box office is closed during the pandemic, but staff is working from home, returning phone messages and answering emails. Please understand with the high volume of inquiries, it may take up to 72 hours to respond. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), follow on Twitter (@WCPlayhouse), and on YouTube (WestportPlayhouse).

ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

The mission of Westport Country Playhouse is to enrich, enlighten, and engage the community through the power of professionally produced theater of the highest caliber and the welcoming experience of the Playhouse campus. The not-for-profit Playhouse provides this experience in multiple ways by offering live theater experiences of the highest quality, under the artistic direction of Mark Lamos; educational and community engagement events to further explore the work on stage; the New Works Initiative, a program dedicated to the discovery, development, and production of new live theatrical works; special

performances and programs for students and teachers with extensive curriculum support material; Script in Hand play readings to deepen relationships with audiences and artists; the renowned Woodward Internship Program during the summer months for aspiring theater professionals; Family Festivities presentations to delight young and old alike and to promote reading through live theater; youth performance training through Broadway Method Academy, Westport Country Playhouse's resident conservatory program; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round. Charity Navigator has recently awarded its top 4-star charity rating to the Playhouse in recognition of its strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

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