



Strand: Drama  
Level: Grade 8  
Content: 45 minute broadcast + hands-on activities

## LIVE Arts: Verbatim Theater with Joel Bernbaum

Joel Bernbaum is a theatre artist and journalist. He specializes in “verbatim theatre” - making plays out of interviews. Students will be introduced to different ways of creating art with interview material, including script writing and movement pieces. Joel will teach students about the art of asking engaging questions, and lead them through an interviewing exercise. The main objectives are to learn how to generate interesting interviews and how to use the material to create short theatre pieces.

\*The **Teacher-Guided Post-Broadcast Activity** on pages 3-5 will give students the opportunity to apply what they have learned during the broadcast.

### About the Artist

Joel is an actor, director, educator, journalist, playwright, and the founding artistic director of Sum Theatre. He is a graduate of Carleton University and the Canadian College of Performing Arts, where his Masters’ thesis on Verbatim Theatre’s relationship to Journalism passed with high distinction. As an actor, Joel has performed across Canada with companies including The Belfry Theatre, Carousel Theatre, Puente Theatre and Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan. Joel toured Italy and Switzerland with ACLE Theatrino and worked for the Usuki Board of Education in Japan using drama to teach English. Three of Joel’s plays have been professionally produced: *Home Is A Beautiful Word* at the Belfry Theatre (Victoria BC), *Operation Big Rock* at Dancing Sky Theatre (Meacham SK) and *My Rabbi* (co-created with Kayvon Kelly) at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival/Canadian tour. Joel was selected as the 2015-2016 Urjo Kareda Outstanding Emerging Artist in Residence at Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, the first person from Saskatchewan to receive this honour.

### Curriculum Aims & Goals

#### Creative/Productive:

Students will learn how to create a short scene from material gathered during interviews.

#### Critical/Responsive:

Students will learn how to craft effective interview questions and how the use of verbatim material differs from acting out a traditional script.

#### Cultural/Historical:

Students will learn about the origin and practice of verbatim theatre.

**Curriculum Outcomes:** [www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca)

[CP8.5](#)

Investigate how theatrical elements (e.g., story, character, design, space) are combined to achieve dramatic purpose.

[CP8.6](#)

Express student perspectives on social issues (e.g., poverty, racism, homophobia, sustainability, gangs) in drama and/or collective creation.

[CR8.2](#)

Investigate and identify ways that today's arts expressions often reflect concern for social issues.

**Broadcast Program (45 min)**

**Artist Bio**

**Activity 1** Warm-up

**Activity 2** Asking questions

**Activity 3** Asking better questions!

**Presentation** Verbatim theater mini-history

**Activity 4** Gestures/ symbolic representations

**Activity 5** Gesture/ symbolic representation monologues

**Artist Demonstration** How to work with verbatim material.

**Questions/ Wrap Up**

If you are watching from a distance text questions to 306.291.7355 or email

[liveartsaskatchewan@gmail.com](mailto:liveartsaskatchewan@gmail.com) during the presentations or activities to have your questions answered on air.

**Materials/ Resources  
needed during broadcast**

- Each student will need a pencil and a few sheets of paper.

# Teacher Guided Post-Broadcast Activity: Collaborative Scene

OVERVIEW: The post-broadcast activity has two parts. In the first part, students will write questions, conduct an interview, and take notes/ transcribe the interview. In the second part, students will combine their raw material into a short scene.

\*Note that this activity can be done either by taking notes or by recording and transcribing interviews. Joel has created a short transcription exercise to assist those teachers who wish to try this with their students- you will find it at the end of part 1

Joel has created sample questions in line with the following Arts Education Curriculum Outcomes for each grade.

## CR8.2

Investigate and identify ways that today's arts expressions often reflect concern for social issues.

### Part 1: Develop Questions and Conduct Interviews (60+ minutes)

1. During the broadcast, Joel discussed how to ask open-ended questions. Lead a group discussion with your class to review.  
For example;
  - using good question words: how, why, describe, finish the sentence
  - staying open ended
  - picking a theme
2. Choose a theme and discuss with your class. We recommend using the conceptual focus for each grade (Grade 8: Social Issues). With the class, brainstorm a list of questions that students can refer to while conducting interviews. Write them on the board or ask students to write out the list on paper.

Sample questions Grade 8:

Have students choose the social issue that is most interesting / important to them, then use open ended

### **Materials/ Resources for Post-Broadcast Activities**

- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Pencil, paper
- Space to move around and act out scenes
  
- Optional: If you would like students to record and transcribe their interviews, each student will need some kind of recording device such as a tablet, ipad, phone or audio or video recorder. If you don't have audio recording apps, use a video app (such as the camera) and point the device to a blank wall or desk to record only the audio. \*\*\*If you do not have access to recording devices for your students, they may take notes during interviews instead.
  
- Optional: headphones for each student to use while they are transcribing
  
- Optional: If students will be recording and transcribing their interviews, you may do the Transcription Exercise (#3) with them. Download the audio files Joel has prepared in advance and play them for the class using a computer and speakers. They are located on the Verbatim Theater Program page.

<http://www.liveartsaskatchewan.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Transcription-Exercise-Example-A.m4a>

<http://www.liveartsaskatchewan.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Transcription-Exercise-example-B.m4a>

questions to unpack that issue.

For Example;

Theme: Homophobia

Homophobia is...?

Describe your first experience with homophobia...?

How should society deal with homophobia?

3. If your students will be recording and transcribing interviews, the following transcription exercise will prepare them. If students will not be using a recording device and transcribing the interviews, but will instead take notes, skip to #4.

### Transcription Exercise

- a) Discuss the concept of transcription. This is the act of capturing what is said with text. A common example is a courtroom during a trial, where a transcriber types exactly what was said.
- b) Explain that in verbatim theatre it's not only the words that are important, but the pauses, the stutters, the laughs, and the way people talk. So in verbatim theatre transcription itself becomes a bit of an art.
- c) Listen to the audio tracks titled Transcription Exercise A and B. They can be found on the Verbatim Theater Program page on the LIVE Arts Website;  
<http://www.liveartsaskatchewan.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Transcription-Exercise-Example-A.m4a>  
  
<http://www.liveartsaskatchewan.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Transcription-Exercise-example-B.m4a>
- d) Ask students to write down exactly what they hear. Encourage them to be creative. For example - How will they transcribe a pause?

Example A = I like, I, I really love, like REALLY LOVE ICE CREAM! *Uh huh huh huh yeaah*

Example B = Its so um, important, to (coughs twice) think about ... about how we .... .... treat each other.

- e) Invite students to make up their own "language of transcription." For example in the exercise  
Short Pause (3 seconds or less) = ...  
Long Pause (more than 3 seconds) = ... ..  
Laughter = (in *italics*) *uh huh huh*  
Volume Increase = (in CAPITALS) LOVE YOU  
Coughs = (indicated with brackets) really think than (coughs twice)

- f) As students to share some of their rules for their language of transcription. Explain there is no one “right” way to transcribe for verbatim theatre, but that it is very important to be consistent.
4. Do interviews in pairs OR interview a family member or someone else outside of the school setting (have students record the interview or take notes). *Interviews should last about ten minutes.*  
\* If students are taking notes, encourage them to write down the sounds their interview subject makes as well as the words they say (for instance uh, um, laughter, etc.)
5. If students made audio recordings of the interviews, give them time to transcribe them. They should transcribe a minimum of 2 minutes of audio, or roughly 20 sentences.

## **Part 2: Use interview material to create a short scene (60 minutes)**

1. During the broadcast, Joel demonstrated how he works with verbatim material using gestures and transcripts. Review this process with the students. For example:
  - What are symbolic representations/ gestures?
  - How did Joel arrange portions of the transcripts? (using cue cards)
2. Divide students into groups of 4. Each group will work together to combine the material collected during their interviews and write a short scene. Have students:
  1. Share their transcripts or notes with members of their group by reading them aloud.
  2. Edit transcripts/notes together using at least 5 sentences from each group member.
  3. Pay close attention to the order of the sentences. How does order change the overall meaning of the scene?
  4. Think of non-literal gestures that could be added to reinforce the text.
3. Have each group of 4 students practice reading their scenes and then take turns reading them in front of the class. Remember that there is no “acting” needed, these are real people’s lines, not characters. Ask the students to respect the exact words and punctuation.
5. As a class, discuss the experience.
  - What was it like to be the interviewer? Interviewee?
  - What was is like to transcribe and edit?
  - What did you take away from the process?