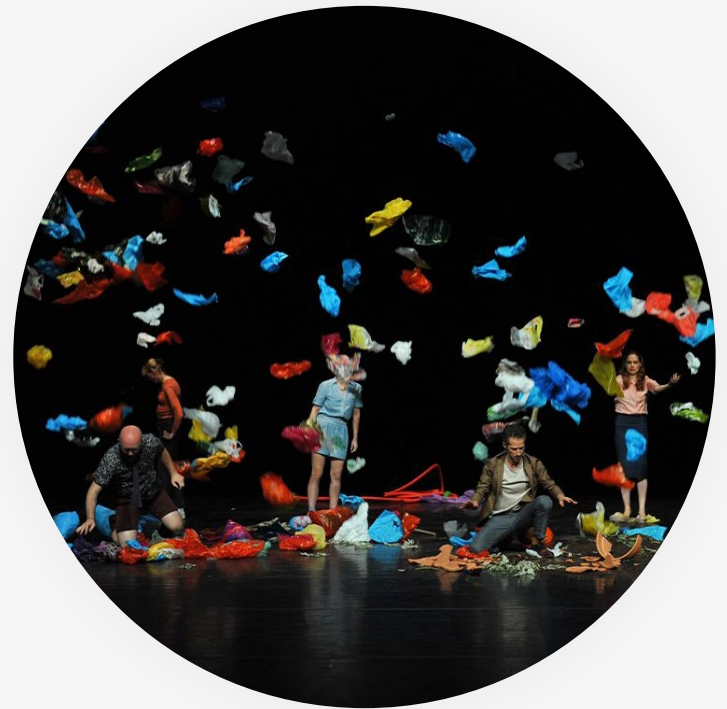


2022/23 Season | UMS Learning Guide



***Are we not drawn  
onward to new erA***  
by Ontroerend Goed



Friday, January 20, 2023  
Power Center

# How to use this guide.

Your class is attending a performance

***Are we not drawn onward to new erA***

This guide will help you prepare for the performance. Each section is organized around a question or activity connected to the performance.

This learning guide and event are intended for grades 8-12. In UMS learning guides these symbols will indicate the difficulty level of the material.



Grade  
**K-4**



Grade  
**5-7**

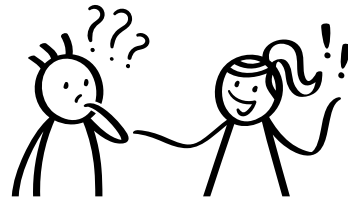


Grade  
**8-12**

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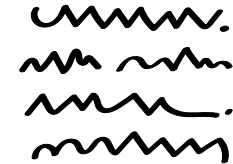
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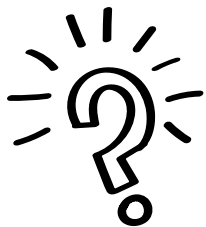
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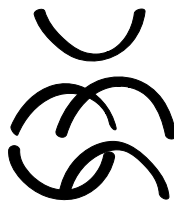
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# What is it like being in the audience?





## Power Center

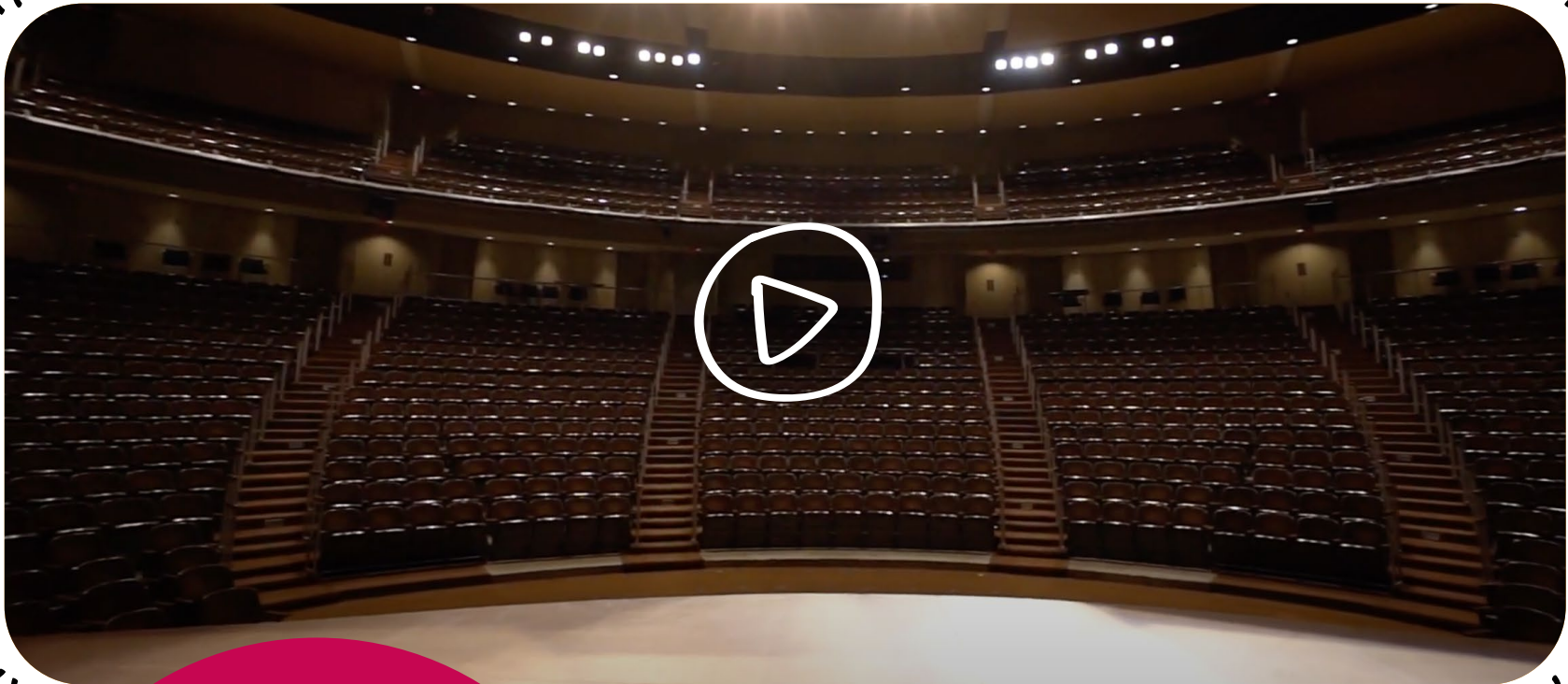
The Power Center seats over 1,200 people and is the largest proscenium theater on the university's campus. Check out interesting facts about the venue on the next page.





## How can audience members see and hear from so far up in the auditorium?

No one is far from the action. The theater may look big, but each seat is less than 72 feet from the stage. For hearing, there is a sound system, but also the structural design contributes to the good acoustics, or ability to transmit sound. Take a peek inside the Power Center with this [short video tour](#). [1.5 minutes]



**Stop &  
think!**



### Before you watch:

Were you ever in a scenario where it was hard to hear someone speaking? What factors make it difficult to hear?



## How will the theater be different when there are people present?

Here are some of the people you can expect to see at a live performance.



### Ushers

People who greet the buses, lead you into the building, and help you find your seat; many are retired teachers, and may even have taught at your school.



### Stage Crew

People who manage what happens on the stage; you probably will not see them, since they work behind the stage, unless they move scenery or set pieces before or between scenes.



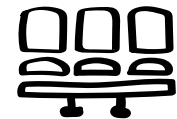
### Lighting & Sound Operators

People who control the lighting and sound for the performance; you might see them working in the back of the auditorium.



### Actors

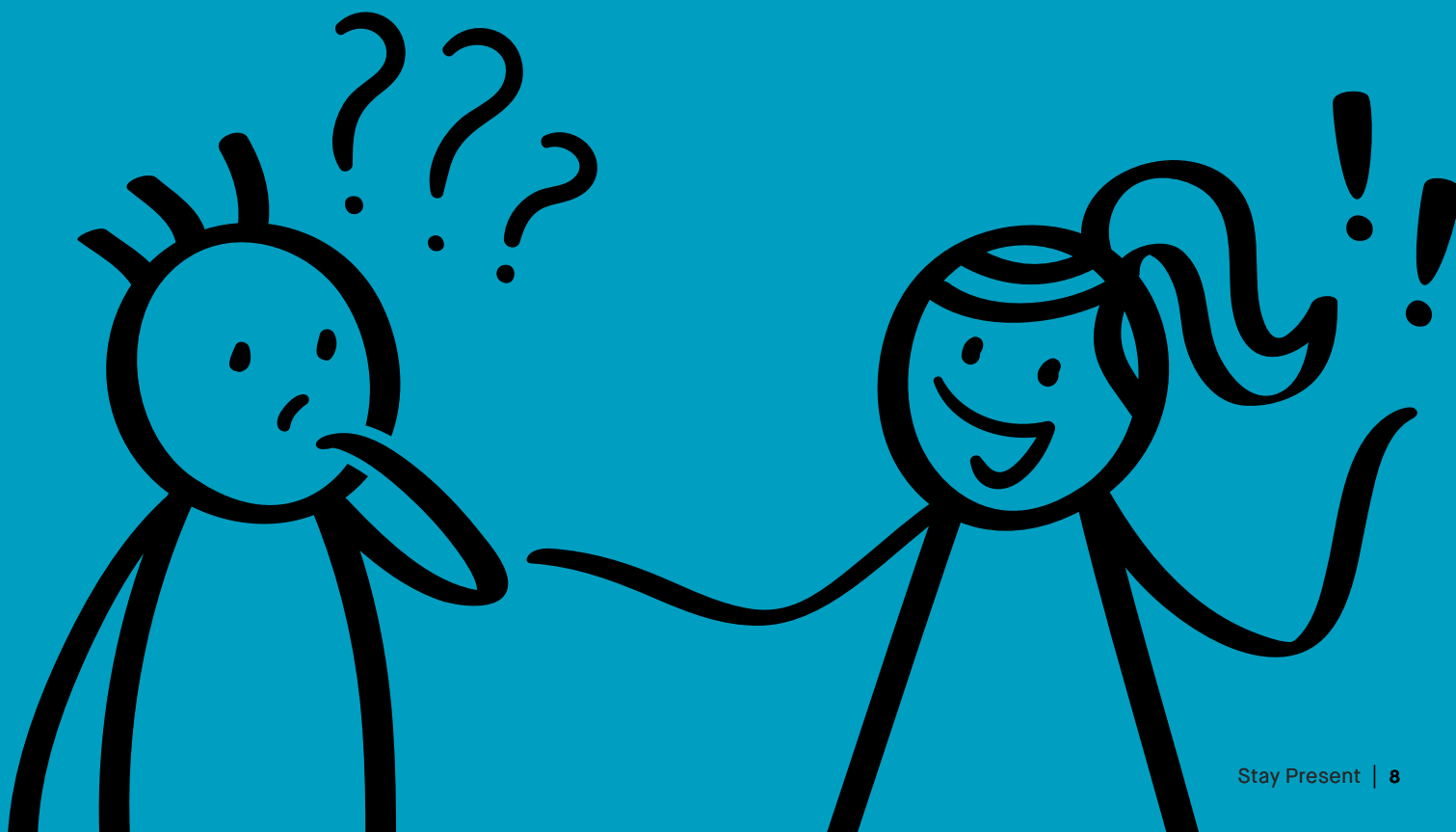
People who act on stage using their voices and bodies to portray characters to tell a story.



### Audience Members

You, your classmates, and other students and teachers from around Michigan.

# Who is performing?







## Ontroerend Goed

This Belgian theater company is known for pushing the boundaries of modern theater. Their performances are often experimental and take place in unexpected and non-traditional locations or with unique concepts, such as environmental reclamation, experiencing teenage struggles, or the ritual of grieving at a funeral. Some of their performances have been designed for audience members to experience one at a time. One featured a sole audience member blindfolded and moved through the space in a wheelchair.

Ontroerend Goed (*pronounced own-TRU-nd GOO-d*) was founded In 1994 in Ghent, Belgium, by Alexander Devriendt, David Bauwens, Jeffrey Caen, and Joeri Smet. Later Sophie De Somere joined this core group. It was originally formed as a place for each member to share their writing, thoughts, and poetry. Over time they began performing and creating theatrical pieces and have made it their trademark to be unpredictable in content and form. The phrase *Ontroerend Goed* is a pun that roughly translates as “Feel Estate.”





## About the Show



One of the inspirations for this performance was examining the history of Easter Island, a small remote territory in the southeast Pacific Ocean. The history of the people became a metaphor for the performance. Around 1200 AD, the growing numbers in population and an obsession with building moai (stone statues) led to increased stress on the environment. By the end of the 17th century, its inhabitants had deforested the island, triggering war, famine, and cultural collapse.

This performance begins at “point zero,” the moment in time when humanity has caused so much damage to the planet, that it has become uninhabitable for our species. From that point, the performance goes back and forth, creating a palindrome of inevitability and melancholy contemplation. The message of the performance is to recognize our culpability in this destruction and to take responsibility for our behavior.

The important question to ask:

**Can we reverse our actions  
to repair the damage?**

# What is acting?





# What is acting?

Acting is a form of storytelling where a person tells a story by portraying a character. You might think of an “acting” performance happening in a theater, in a movie, or on television, but acting and storytelling can happen in any number of venues, places, or digital platforms. More important than a

space, an actor’s goal is to share a story or point of view. That can happen anywhere!

Want to learn more about building a character? Check out this cool instructional video and Google slides on [UMS Performance Playground](#) featuring professional actress Katie Banks McBride.







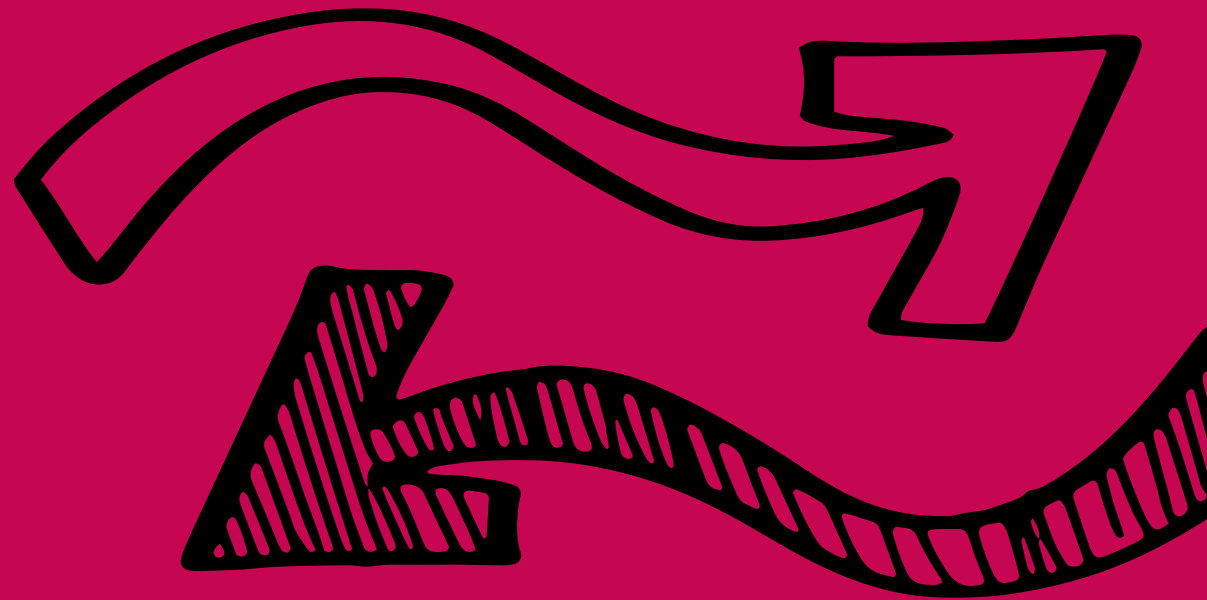
# What is acting? *continued*



[Watch this video](#) of a piece created and performed by the members of Ontroerend Goed, titled *Audience*.

- What do you think the company is trying to share with the audience?
- Why did they title the piece *Audience*?
- How did it make you feel?
- What surprised you?

# Artistic stop



## Going in Two Directions



## GOING IN TWO DIRECTIONS

# *Are we not drawn onward to new erA*

The performance of *Are we not drawn onward to new erA* is a palindrome in every way. The title is the same backward as forward, but so is the play. Even walking and talking are performed in both directions. Note that hearing the sound of speaking in reverse may sound very strange.

As a palindromic performance, you will see everything that happens twice, forward and backward. Also, it could be backward and forward. You'll see for yourself.



### pal·in·drome

*/ˈpælənˌdrōm/*

Is a word, number, phrase, or sequence that reads the same backward and forward.

- Can you think of other words that are palindromes?
- Can you put together a series of words that becomes a palindrome?
- Can you think of examples of palindromes in nature or biology?



## GOING IN TWO DIRECTIONS

# *Are we not drawn onward to new erA*

↗ continued

### Questions Before and After

To prepare for the performance, answer the following questions. After the performance, answer the same questions.

#### Step 1:

Answer the following questions. **There are no wrong answers!**

- How do you feel about spoilers?
- Do you prefer surprises when you watch a play or TV show? Can you recall a time when knowing the ending changed your experience as an audience member?
- Do you think art and theater should make a statement about the world? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt fundamentally changed by watching a work of theater, film, etc? What was it?

#### Step 2:

Attend and thoughtfully watch *Are we not drawn onward to new erA*.

#### Step 3:

- How do you feel about spoilers?
- Do you prefer surprises when you watch a play or TV show? Can you recall a time when knowing the ending changed your experience as an audience member?
- Do you think art and theater should make a statement about the world? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt fundamentally changed by watching a work of theater, film, etc? What was it?

#### Step 4:

- How have your answers changed?
- Do you feel differently about the performance? How and why?
- How do you feel about the theme of the performance?
- Do you feel compelled to take action? Why or why not?



# What are the origins of theater?





# What are the origins of theater?

Exactly when the art of theater began is a mystery. Prehistoric hunters acted out stories about their hunting expeditions. In Ancient Africa entire villages would perform rituals, often becoming characters representing spirits or animals. Ancient Egyptians performed sacred songs and danced for their gods in religious ceremonies, but the idea of theater as dramatic entertainment came later.



## Ancient Greek Theater

The first recorded form of performance theater began in ancient Greece around 600 BCE with a religious festival to honor Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and fertility. Dramatic poems and plays were performed in celebration of this deity. The audience sat on seats carved into the side of a hill overlooking a stage. Some ancient Greek theaters could seat as many as 20,000 spectators.



## Ancient Roman Theater

In 300 BCE, Romans were inspired by Greek art and culture, writing Latin versions of Greek plays. In the Roman theater, slaves served as actors. Unlike Greek theater, women were permitted to appear on stage, but they did not play lead roles. The Roman theater competed for the audiences that attended chariot races, gladiator contests, and public executions. This brought about the need for impressive public theaters. For the next two centuries, Romans built about 125 structures. Eventually, plays included stage violence and crude humor. Christians began to disapprove and closed down all of the theaters.



# What are the origins of theater?

continued

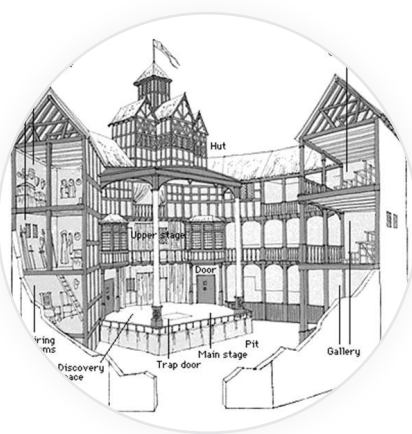
## Medieval Theater



Throughout the 6th to 13th centuries AD, theater buildings were not permitted to be open, but traveling players, known as minstrels, kept the theater alive, along with acrobats, puppeteers, jugglers, and storytellers. They created a stage by raising a simple platform wherever they performed in halls, marketplaces, and festivals.

Christians thought this kind of entertainment was a sin, so they started their own kind of theater. During an Easter Sunday service, priests acted out the meaning of the holy day to help teach people who could not read. These “miracle” plays became so popular that there was not enough room to perform in the church and they moved outside. They were still considered religious events and not entertainment.

## Renaissance Theater



During the Renaissance period, from the 14th to 17th centuries, an interest in classical Greek and Roman theater returned. Two major theater design traditions were developed at this time in Italy: the proscenium arch, which frames and divides the stage from the audience, and the art of painting cloths as backdrops for scenery.

Another major influence from Italy was the *commedia dell'arte*, which means *comedy of the profession*. This form of theater was an improvised, quick-witted style of performance. Actors wore masks to portray stock characters and made up their lines as they went along. The daughters and wives of the players were some of the first women to perform in theater.

In England, Queen Elizabeth I strongly supported the theater. During Elizabethan times, the most famous playwright in history began his career. Born in 1564, William Shakespeare was an actor and poet who wrote plays for his company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, to perform. Shakespeare was part owner of the famous Globe Theater. Many of his plays, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are still studied and performed all over the world today.



# What are the origins of theater?

↗ continued



## Japanese Theater

Theatrical forms flourished around the globe. In the 14th century a type of theater called Noh was developed in Japan. Noh combines words, music, and dance to portray legends. Using masks, men or boys play all the parts, including the female characters. The actors do not act out scenes, but instead use their movements and appearance as symbols to suggest the story.

In the 17th century, a new form of drama, called Kabuki, appeared. It focused on singing, dancing, and mime (movement without words). Actors in a Kabuki play wear striking costumes and makeup. They use elaborate gestures to show strong emotions. In Japan Noh and Kabuki are still popular today.



## Indian Theater

India has an old and long-lasting tradition of theater. Dating back to the 1st century AD, full-length poetic plays called Sanskrit Dramas were performed for royalty. Mainly written in the classical languages of Sanskrit and Prakrit, these dramas flourished between the 1st and the 10th centuries, during which time hundreds of plays were written. Sanskrit theater was performed by priests who had been trained in the necessary skills of dance, music, and recitation. Its aim was both to educate and to entertain. It utilized stock characters, such as the hero, the heroine, or the clown.





# What are the origins of theater?

continued

Theater Migrates to America



Site of the First Theatre

William Levingston, merchant of New Kent County, built the first theatre in English America on this site c. 1716. For three decades companies of actors entertained audiences at the "Play House" with latest successes from the London Stage. In 1745 the City of Williamsburg converted the frame structure into a municipal hall. The building was razed c. 1770 after construction of the Courthouse on Market Square.

## American Theater

The history of American theater begins in the colonial era, long before the United States became a nation. Bringing a repertoire from England that included productions like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the first American playhouse was built on the Palace Green in Williamsburg, Virginia, by merchant William Levingston in 1716. This theater was closely followed by the opening of the Dock Street Theater in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1730.

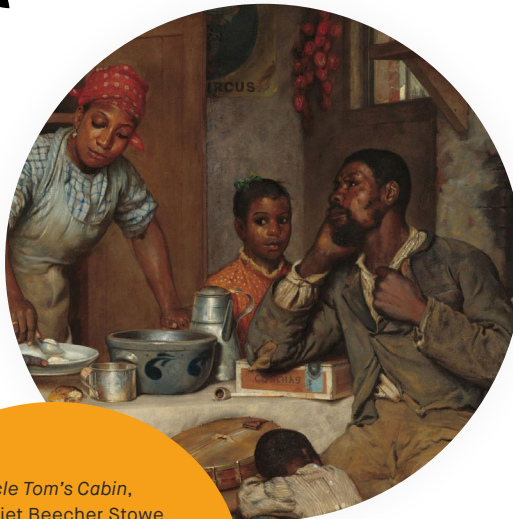
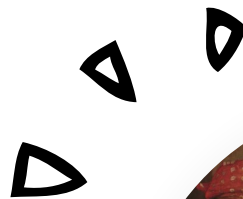
Theater in the New World struggled during the 18th century because of concerns over moral implications of both acting in and viewing plays. In the colonies of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, laws were passed to forbid the production and performance of plays. It was viewed in the same vein as vices such as gambling and animal fighting.



# What are the origins of theater?

continued

## Theater Migrates to America



*Uncle Tom's Cabin,*  
by Harriet Beecher Stowe



*The Octoroon,*  
by Dion Boucicault



As a result of these challenges, theater struggled to gain a true foothold in American culture until the 1800s, when fears over the morality of plays began to subside. Types of productions during this time period varied widely. While there was some development of a purely “American” theater, with plays like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Octoroon*, minstrel shows dominated as the popular entertainment form. Minstrel shows, which consisted of skits that denigrate people of African descent, were primarily performed by white actors in blackface. The shows date back to the 1830s, but continued until the early 20th century, with the last professional minstrel shows performed around 1910.



# What are the origins of theater?

continued

## Theater Migrates to America



*Hair*,  
music by Galt MacDermot,  
book and lyrics by Gerome Ragni  
and James Rado.



*Rent*,  
music, lyrics, and book  
by Jonathan Larson



*West Side Story*,  
conceived by Jerome Robbins,  
music by Leonard Bernstein,  
lyrics by Stephen Sondheim,  
and book by Arthur Laurents.



Traditional theater rose to prominence between 1900 and World War II, and as modern society began to develop, musical and dramatic theater progressed, particularly during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Theater attempted to address the social justice issues of the era, and musical productions such as *Hair* and *West Side Story* referenced subjects such as drug culture, racism, anti-war sentiments, and cultural divides. As a result, drama has historically become a way for playwrights to address social rights issues, share personal experiences, and challenge the status quo.

# Theater in activism







## Theater with a mission

Theater doesn't only act as entertainment; it holds up a mirror to society and encourages introspection. You can discover something new about yourself and the world you live in by watching what unfolds in front of you.

This particular performance of *Are we not drawn to new erA* addresses several themes, including the climate crisis, the creation of humankind, fascism, and the megalomania of civilizations past and present. It displays how humans have made a mess of the planet and presents, with hopefulness, the possibility of a better tomorrow — if we work together to act now.

The structure of the performance uses sound and imagery, simple in its form, but with multiple interpretations. The movements of the actors are created to get different meanings according to the context. An actor walking towards someone becomes a greeting; however, the same actor walking backwards becomes a farewell. An invitation can become a rejection, or looking towards something then becomes looking away.



**Think about how the intent of action can change according to circumstances.**



## The role of theater in activism

Throughout the 20th century, artists began to use theater as a way to analyze and critique political, economic, and social systems. Theater activists sought to use the theater to promote social discourse and potentially engage in dialogue to advocate for social change. Theater was no longer the privilege of the wealthy; playwrights invited both working- and middle-class patrons to participate in an interactive dialogue about class struggle as they envisioned a future of economic, ethnic, and gender equality.

The influence of political theater remains evident today. From Broadway shows to black box theater productions, to more experimental performances showcased in unique settings, political and social messages are still present in entertainment today. Next time you attend a play or watch a movie, think about the intent of the artist. Perhaps there is more there than meets the eye?

[Learn more about the history of 20th Century Modern Theater](#)

# What does this performance have to do with Michigan?







# What does this performance have to do with Michigan?



While the performers are from another country and continent, the message of the performance resonates here. The natural beauty of Michigan is undeniable; it is everyone's responsibility to make sure that what we have remains vibrant and healthy.

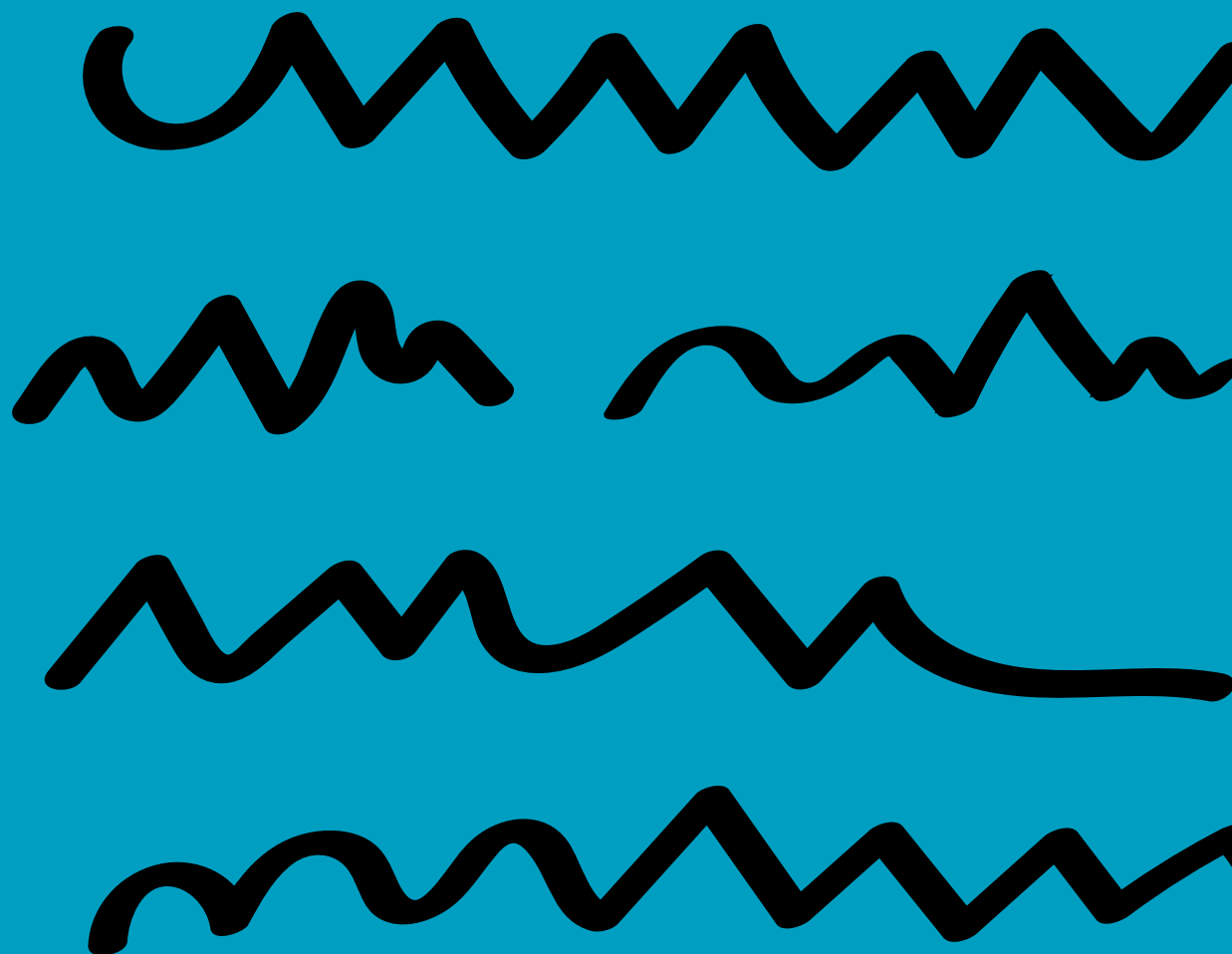
Programs exist across the state to preserve nature, but also to reclaim and revitalize spaces to their greener roots. With the demolition of long-abandoned factories and homes, new grass and trees are growing in places that were once covered in concrete.

Organizations like [The Greening of Detroit](#) are actively planting trees to revitalize the city. In Ann Arbor, a large plan is underway to create [The Treeline](#), a green pedestrian trail through the heart of the city.

There are also opportunities to clean up litter and recycle all over — in fact, there is likely a project near your home where you could get involved!



# How can I write about theater?





## Tell the performers what you thought about the performance.

Artists and writers have been inspired by theater for centuries. We hope it inspires you to draw and write, too! Don't worry if you've never written about the performing arts before. You don't need to use any technical terms.

Tell the actors what you thought about the performance. Start your letter with "Dear Ontroerend Goed." If you're not sure what to write, try answering a couple of these questions:

- What did you like most about the performance?
- What were you thinking about while watching the performance?
- Did you have a favorite actor or part of the performance?
- What was it like being in the audience?
- Do you have any questions for the performance about what it's like to create and act?





## Write a creative review of the performance.

Imagine that you are writing a review about the performance for other high school students who didn't attend. Your review should include the logistics (what happened and where) and your opinion (was the performance worth attending?). But most importantly, you want your reader to understand the experience, what the performance felt like, even though they weren't there themselves. To do this, you should use language that captures the experience of the play.

Here are some options to get you started:

### Share...

what you felt as you watched the performance. Use as many senses as you can to describe the experience of watching the performance. Tell us about your emotions and what was going through your mind as you watched the actors on stage. How do your personal interests or practices affect how you experience the performance?

### Compare...

the performance uses visual art and interesting soundscapes to tell the story. Use similes and metaphors to show us how this comparison works (e.g., "The garbage bags floated down like snowflakes" or "The language sounded like a sliding trombone").

### Mimic...

the sound and movement of the actors. Were the movements or sounds smooth, slow, and drawn out?

### Try...

stretching out your sentences with extravagant adjectives or repeating soft and slippery "s" sounds. Were the movements... snappy? Chop. Cut. Break up your sentences. Use strong verbs.

## Experiment!



# How can I find out more?

Are you interested in learning more about the performers or other theater around the globe? Would you like to learn more about environmental causes? There are lots of great resources online and in Southeast Michigan.

[Ontroerend Goed](#)

[American Theatre Magazine](#)

[The Edinburgh International Festival](#)

[The Stage UK](#)

[The Treeline](#)

[The Greening of Detroit](#)

[Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Volunteer](#)

[University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability](#)

[University of Michigan Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences - Community Engagement](#)

[Michigan Department of Natural Resources](#)

Partner Institutions in Michigan:

[Ann Arbor District Library](#)

[University of Michigan Museum of Art](#)

[Detroit Institute of Arts](#)

[Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History](#)

[Detroit Historical Society](#)





# Who made this performance possible?

This School Day Performance was presented by the University Musical Society (UMS). UMS is a performing arts presenter, which means that they bring in music, dance, and theater groups that are touring to different cities across the world for Michigan residents to enjoy. UMS has been around since 1879!

Every year, UMS has 60-75 performances in many different venues in Ann Arbor and throughout Southeast Michigan, and it also offers over 100 free educational activities for students and community members. UMS has been recognized for its “lifetime of creative excellence” by the national government, receiving a National Medal of Arts in 2014.

## Other School Day Performances in 2022-2023

### **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wyton Marsalis**

Thu, Oct 13, 2022

### **Aida Cuevas with Mariachi Aztlán** ***Yo Creo Que Eys Tiempo***

Fri, Nov 4, 2022

### ***Anansi The Spider: Re-Spun*** **Unicorn Theatre**

Digital performance Dec 5-23, 2022

### ***Getting Dressed*** **Second Hand Dance**

Digital performance Feb 13-24, 2023

### **Step Afrika!** Mon, Mar 13, 2023



# Special thanks

## Thank you to our K-12 Education Supporters.

We are grateful to have donors and community partners whose generosity — through the establishment of an endowment or an annual investment of \$5,000 or more — extends creative learning opportunities to thousands of K-12 students, both in person and online.



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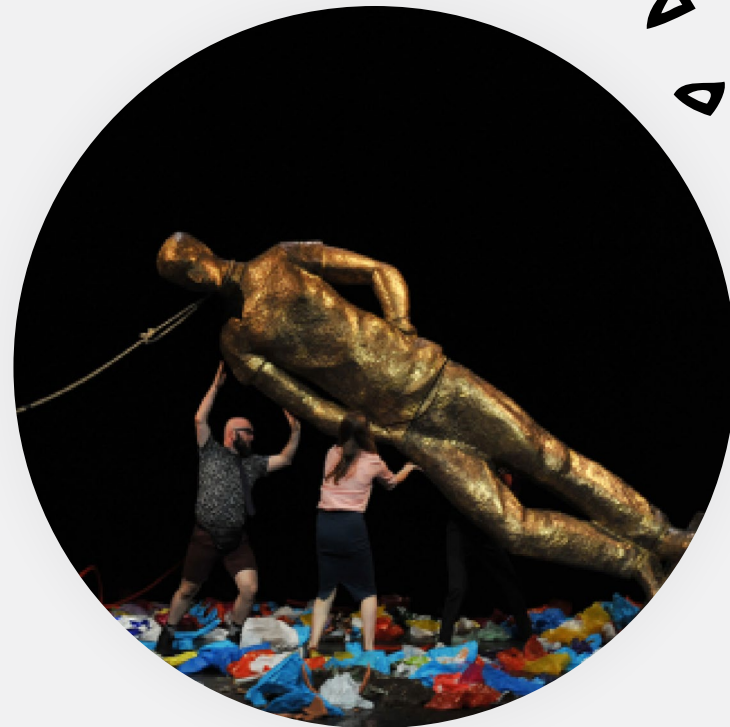
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