



Although plays have long been a beloved hallmark of the Green Vale experience, the massive undertaking of preparation and rehearsal has occurred at the homeroom level, without a dedicated drama or theater program.

This year, Green Vale piloted the introduction of drama as a weekly “special” in 1st Grade. Next year, it will be rolled out into 2nd and 3rd Grades as well. In this format, academic time is not disrupted for rehearsals (except the week of the performance), and of equal importance, students gain a thorough, holistic exploration of theater and the many skills it taps.

Plays in Lower School A New Approach



Jessica Beja came to Green Vale two years ago from Chapin in New York City. With a background in musical theater as well as music education, she was well positioned to launch this program with a focus on **1) process** and **2) skill-building over time**.

How was the 1st Grade play approached?

Jess Beja explains, “The audience may have observed something similar to other outstanding Green Vale performances. It is the process and intention that were new.

For the first several weeks, the children had a blast while exploring sophisticated theatrical techniques. Through games, they experimented with expressing different emotions and physicalities, honed their focus and concentration, and learned some acting terminology.

The children participated in script analysis, considering lines without knowing who said them, and using context clues to guess the speaker. We spoke about the central conflict and importance of persuasion in this story. Our young actors developed confidence, discipline, and public speaking skills along with a sense of connection to the source material. Each of them came to understand that they were an integral part of the larger ensemble. When they were finally cast in their roles and given their scripts, each child was ready to approach the storytelling process. In this way, the play became a natural extension of their new theater skills.”

Theater is More than Performance

Beja continues, “Theater affords an opportunity to combine so many important skills emphasized at Green Vale. Public speaking is just one aspect. Theater is social emotional learning: there is empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, collaboration, trust, delayed gratification, and decision making (what happens if a line is missed?). It also calls upon executive functioning skills of memorization (lines and songs plus cues, movements, and positioning), focus and presence, and extended attention span.”

