

PLAYBILL

Museum of Science, Cahners Theatre



The Roots We Follow

MARCH 7 at 10:30 A.M. | MARCH 9 at 3:00 P.M.

written and directed by Johnny Blazes
featuring The Students of Neighborhood School

Letter to the Authors of Braiding Sweetgrass

"As young people, you are much closer to remembering than adults. Remember a time when you felt connected to all living beings, not only the humans in your life but also the plants, animals, and the earth herself. It would bring me such joy to know that perhaps you have never forgotten that connection." - Robin Wall Kimmerer

"Everyone is saying that the world is going to catch on fire in ten years, but it's ON FIRE NOW!" - Level 4 student

A letter of gratitude to Robin Wall Kimmerer, Monique Gray Smith, and Nicole Neidhardt:

Dear Robin, Monique, and Nicole,

The 5th and 6th grade students of Neighborhood School have created a play called *The Roots We Follow*, which grew from a five-month study of your book *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults*. Classroom teachers, Haeli Warren and Lisa Nam, created this curriculum and drama teacher Johnny Blazes wrote the play. The play is about a group of city kids grappling with climate change, learning about Indigenous ecology, and re-growing their own roots in order to be better stewards of the earth. We took to heart Robin's invitation:

If Indigenous wisdom could be medicine for a broken relationship with the earth, the moral obligation to share the healing must be paired with a prescription to avoid misuse. I hope to inspire an authentic revitalization of a relationship with the land, not by borrowing it from someone else, but by finding your roots and remembering how to grow your own. (Wall Kimmerer, 2022, p. 293)

We want to thank you for your stories. Each of your chapters has rooted us as we've explored our city, our history, and ourselves.

We used "Allegiance to Gratitude" and "Wiingaashk" to help us create classroom rituals, rhythms, and agreements about how we wanted to be with each other as a community. "Maple Nation" taught us about the carbon cycle as we measured carbon storage in the trees around our school, and the chapter helped us feel inspired and less alone when we went to our State House to demand that our governor stop the building of new fossil fuel infrastructure. When we tended land at a beautiful farm in our community, which is in the process of rematriating their land to their Nipmuc friends and neighbors, we experienced "The Gift of Strawberries" and "The Honorable Harvest" firsthand. We visited community gardens in our city to look for "The Three Sisters", and we used microscopes to investigate dicot and monocot germination up close. "In the Footsteps of Nanabozho: Becoming Indigenous to Place" reminded us to combat our species loneliness, so we used field guides and the power of observation to meet many species of lichen, moss, plants, fungi, and birds in the park where we have recess every week. Your grandfather's story in "The Council of Pecans" gave us

a different relationship to all the masting trees this fall, while we dug into primary sources about the Trail of Death, the Indian Removal Act, and Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

We created art about the way trees and fungi share resources, and how different that is from the colonial ideologies needed to create institutions like Indigenous boarding schools and reservations. Studying how colonization happened at institutional, interpersonal, ideological, and internalized levels helped us imagine how decolonization can also happen in those ways.

“Putting Down Roots” and “An Offering” showed us the possibilities of healing our communities and our minds, and it led us to inquire about language loss and assimilation in our own family histories. We thought about how poetry translation can create a reciprocity between languages, instead of the language hierarchy created by the dominance of English, and we worked with family members and other mentors to translate poems from our various heritage languages. Through the ritual of translating the languages that our ancestors lost, we hoped to answer your call to find our own roots in some small way.

Alongside these academic projects, in drama class, we created tableaux and theatrical scenes to filter these ideas through our somatic experiences. We also used dance as a ritual to connect and trust each other.

As teachers, we see intimately how much anxiety this generation of children carry as they face an uncertain future, particularly as the global climate crisis looms larger each day. This play is an offering to our community: a suggestion, a glimmer of hope, a thread we hope will be followed. We hope that this show inspires our audience to read your book, and to be grateful.

With love and gratitude,

Haeli Warren and Lisa Nam, Level 4 Lead Teachers
Johnny Blazes, Drama/SEL teacher



Neighborhood School

Neighborhood School is a purposefully small, artistically strong, and intentionally diverse independent school in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Founded by Joyce and the late John Mallory, Donna DeVaughn, and Tricia and Scott Morrow with just 7 children in 1986, it has grown to include 60 students in grades from Kindergarten through 6th grade, grouped in four mixed-age levels. A mixed age model ensures that students have different positions in a level's age continuum from year to year, and helps create an atmosphere of acceptance for many layers of learning to happen simultaneously. Some of the school's pioneer students are now current parents and staff, including teacher/director/playwright, Johnny Blazes.

Leadership succession is underway as Tricia Morrow plans to retire in June 2025. NS teachers are united in their desire to welcome a leader in fall 2024 to work with them and alongside Tricia in her final year. We are looking for someone who is inspired by what we have done so far and who will join us in an interdependent process of learning how to educate together. We envision and teach towards a more radically liberated way of educating.


We believe that transformation of our world is possible. Our teaching and learning holds justice at its center—an intersectional view of justice that examines how forces of power and oppression have shaped our world, and how forces of resistance are woven throughout history and how they continue today. We believe in the inherent worth of every person and in creating a learning community where everyone can be their true self. In relationships grounded in trust, connection, and compassion, we engage in practices of transformative justice drawing from Indigenous forebears. We are exploring what it means to be an urban school that values environmental justice and values a return to the land. We teach and learn with gratitude, appreciating beauty and rich connection to each other.

We center liberation in our classrooms, relationships, and our lives by learning from others about how to do so. We seek, value, and amplify marginalized voices to provide more full and essential perspectives on history, culture, science, and current issues. We have important things to learn from hearing and discussing these perspectives and we understand that it is our responsibility as educators to forefront and explore them with our students. **To learn how to support us, please scan the QR code!**



House Notes

- Flash photography is not allowed in the theater. Personal photos and video clips can be taken from your seat but should not block the view or disturb other audience members. A filmed version of the play will be available for online viewing sometime later in March.
- The “Plant Stories” video contains images that change at a rate of about 3 per second. While this is usually considered a safe rate for people with photosensitive epilepsy, please be advised if this might affect you.







Commonwealth Circus Center
Center
Community, Collaboration, Creativity... Circus!

We are the one-room circus school in Jamaica Plain. We are dedicated to bringing people together to learn, self-express, and create through the joy and challenge of circus arts. We say YES to creativity, collaboration, and community! It's never too late to run away to the circus.

Join us for:

- Adult classes
- Youth classes
- Birthday parties
- Special events





Art Credits

A behind-the-scenes look into who made the art in this show and how

Poetry

Every year, Level Four visits **The Farm School**, a non-profit in north central Massachusetts that connects people to the land through their programming. To reflect on this year's visit, Level Four students learned how to write poetry in the style of Mary Oliver, to describe experiences of reciprocity with the land. "**The Root**" was written by Mandala Sindelar. "**The Honorable Harvest of Raspberries at The Farm School**" was created by collaging the other students' lines from poems. Please see the curriculum guide for more on the precepts of the Honorable Harvest.

"**Plant Stories from Our Parents**" is a collage created from interviews between Level 4 students and their parents. The prompt was: "What is a plant that was meaningful to you?"

"**Translation**" is an audio/visual collage (designed by Lisa Nam and Haeli Warren) that includes excerpts from poems translated by the Level 4 students as part of a heritage language translation project. Please see the curriculum guide to learn more about this poetry translation project, which was adapted from a curriculum created by educator Eric Fishman. By experiencing the ritual of translating poetry from a language that their ancestors would have spoken, students connected more with their own roots, as Robin Wall Kimmerer encourages her readers to do. In the audio collage, you hear lines from the original poems, as well as the students' translations, and their prose about their experiences of translating. The original poems are in Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Irish, Italian, Spanish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, and Yiddish. Poems quoted include:

Altra Luna "Another Moon" by Stefano Dal Bianco

Canción Amarga "Bitter Song" by Julia de Burgos

بالونات "Balloons" by Mostafa Ibrahim

האָפּ און גלייב "Have Hope and Faith" by I. L. Peretz

Abrazo "Hug" by Pablo Neruda

ירשה "Inheritance" by Eli Eliahu

Бібліотека "Library" by Yuri Andrukhovych

Freagra Scéine ar Aimhirghin "Scéine's Reply to Amergin" by Paddy Bushe

Падав сніг на поріг "Snow Swirled High in the Sky" by Platon Voron'ko

Có Bheith Bào Mọi Người "Telling Everyone that One is Falling Ill" by Zen Master Man Giac

זע ווי שייך "See How Free" by Ida Maze

— 0 "10" by Bing Xin

Art Credits (continued)

Music and Dance

"**I Won't Take Any More**" was written by Seth Hanson in collaboration with the students of Level 4. The lyrics are:

*I give my (voice abounds)
I give my (time abounds)
I give my (care abounds)
I give my (life abounds)
And I receive*

*I don't need more
I won't take anymore*

The music for the dance piece "**Moving to Transform**" was created by Seth Hanson in collaboration with the students of Level 4. Much gratitude to The Halluci Nation for the backbeat inspiration they provided in their song "Look At This - Remix". The choreography was created by Mar Parrilla in collaboration with the students of Levels 4, with some sections inspired by The Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address as it is relayed in Braiding Sweetgrass.

Visual Art/Video

The **multi-media collages, watercolor paintings, and sidewalk gratitude mandalas** you see on the screen were all created by Level 4 students, often collaboratively, with the guidance and mentorship of Jovielle Gers, Lisa Nam, and Haeli Warren. The "Embodied Reciprocity" watercolors look at the gas exchange between human lungs and trees, the reciprocal needs of both, and the mirrored branching of lungs and trees. The **puppets** were created by Jovielle Gers, with help from Level 4 students, Jai Underhill, Jun Zhao, Melody Wei, and Chakora Sindelar.

Photographs are by Jesse Epstein, Lisa Nam, Haeli Warren, and Jovielle Gers. The **video** that accompanies "Plant Stories" was co-created by Level 4 with Jesse Epstein. It was created using a technique called "direct animation". The students collected pieces of nature and attached them directly to a strip of film to create a collage that moves through time.

The **fabric** that weaves its way through our story was created in collaboration with the NS community of kids, parents, teachers, and family members. Community members were prompted to write on the fabric about rituals, places, and words that make them feel connected, in English and in their heritage languages. Jai Underhill transformed that community activity into the beautiful piece of art you see before you, with help from Jenny Zhao, Mandala Sindelar, Jun Zhao, Melody Wei, and Jovielle Gers.



Curriculum Guide

Scan me for more resources about the content of this play!

JPTAEKWONDO



- * **Regular classes**
Adults, Teens, Kids (3.5yrs~)
- * **April mini-camp**
4/16/2024 ~ 4/19/2024
- * **Summer Camp**
6/17/2024 ~ 8/30/2024

JPtaekwondo@gmail.com

Program Order

ACT 1

*Setting: a subway car in Boston, Massachusetts
Ancestral territory of the Massachusetts, Pawtucket, Wampanoag,
and Nipmuc Peoples*

En Route: But will it be enough?

The Wisdom of Trees

Poem: The Root

En Route: Intangibles

Species Loneliness

En Route: *What could we possibly take from the past?*

The Three Sisters

Poem: Plant Stories from Our Parents

En Route: Resources or gifts?

Song: I Won't Take Any More

ACT 2

Mutually Beneficial, performed by the Level 2

En Route: *Two minds... or more?*

Poem: The Honorable Harvest of Raspberries at The Farm School

The Future Perfect

Gratitude

En Route: *How did we become so disconnected?*

Poem: Translation

Dance: Moving to Transform

En Route: *What do we bring?*

Creative Team

"All flourishing is mutual." - Robin Wall Kimmerer

Director & Playwright	Johnny Blazes
Choreography	Mar Parrilla
Videography	Jesse Epstein
Music Direction	Seth Hanson
Sound Design	Jesse Epstein, Johnny Blazes, Lisa Nam, Seth Hanson
Level 2 Interlude	Laurie Bozzi, Tricia Morrow
Stage Management and Crew	Drew Curtis, Haeli Warren, Laurie Bozzi, Lisa Nam, Malena Castilla, Tricia Morrow
Design Coordinator	Jovielle Gers
Costume Team	Elizabeth Potter, Jai Underhill, Jovielle Gers, Sheena Anello
Properties	Jai Underhill, Jovielle Gers, Jun Zhao, Melody Wei
Set	Brendan Higgs, Darren Rosebrugh, Lonn Drucker, Trip Potter
Poster Illustration	Jovielle Gers
Poster and Program Design	Priscilla Saul
Lighting Design	Brittany Trymbulak

Gratitudes

Thank you to Robin Wall Kimmerer, Monique Gray Smith, and Nicole Neidhardt for sharing your talent, research, and hearts through the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* for Young Adults. Thank you to the hundreds of generations of Indigenous wayshowers who led to the publication of this beautiful book.

Our deepest, most loving gratitude to The Museum of Science Boston for hosting us and making this magic happen! Thank you especially to James, Bethany, Meg, Katie, Sarah, Andrew, and Kevin. Thank you for taking on this unknown thing with such grace and enthusiasm, and making us feel truly welcome.

To all of the parents of NS for their support with shoes, costumes, lunches, line memorization, emotional support – everything you do to support the cast and creation of this show – thank you!

Gratitudes (continued)

To the Farm School, and the incredible farmers who are connecting people to the land, thank you for the lessons, the pasta, and poetry. Thank you to Esh Circus Arts for the fabric (and sharing Johnny's time so graciously!) and to The Forest Hills Covenant Church for being our rehearsal home. Thank you to the folks at Emerson College who helped our direct animation blossom, and to Sam Charpentier for teaching us about the legacy of Indigenous land stewardship through controlled burning.

Gracias, cảm ơn, 谢谢, grazie, תודה, Дякую, go raibh maith agat, شكراً لك, thank you to: Atara, Gibrán, Hanna, Jun, Khalid (and Fadi), Kristofer, Melody, Monica, Nhat, Renato, and Siofra for lending your voices to our multilingual poem! Thank you also to all of the language mentors who helped our students with their translations.

Special Thanks from the Director

To Mar Parrilla: thank you for the ways you shaped this narrative, maybe even more than you know. Our conversations very much inspired the strands of this braid, and I'm so grateful for your grounding and vision.

Thank you to Gibrán Rivera for your insightful responses to the script, and for reminding me of the power of the collective. Thank you to Brendan Higgins, Pamela Charpentier, and Hazel Higgins Blazes for supporting me through this wild and sometimes difficult year of creation. Thank you Atara, Carolyn, and Emily for being my lifeline, Kam for inspiring joy, and Erin Ball for expanding my thinking and lovingly re-directing me when needed.

Thank you to my colleagues for their reading, researching, responding, pivoting, improvising, and every other way you made this play come into being. To the students of Levels 2 and 3: thank you for your imagination, energy, and bravery! To the students of Level 4: thank you for every edit, idea, suggestion, improv, and character you created. We wrote this together, and you are brilliant. You're even pretty good at InstaBook.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.



Cast List

ARCHY	Mirah Anello
CHLOE REGINA	Ru Thomas-Epstein
HELENA	Alice Brooks
LIEN	Jane Wu
OWEN	Oliver Hwang
PETRO	Ben Rubin
VERA	Ruby Parker-Geller
ZEMÈ	Mandala Sindelar

APPLE (<i>Malus domestica</i>)	Sam Bernstein
BEANS (<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>)	Caleb Bor-Parrilla
MAPLE (<i>Acer rubrum</i>)	Darshan Riveratan
SWEETGRASS (<i>Hierochloe odorata</i>)	Jenny Zhao



Level 3 Cast



Level 2 Cast

Cast List (continued)

Level 3 Ensemble

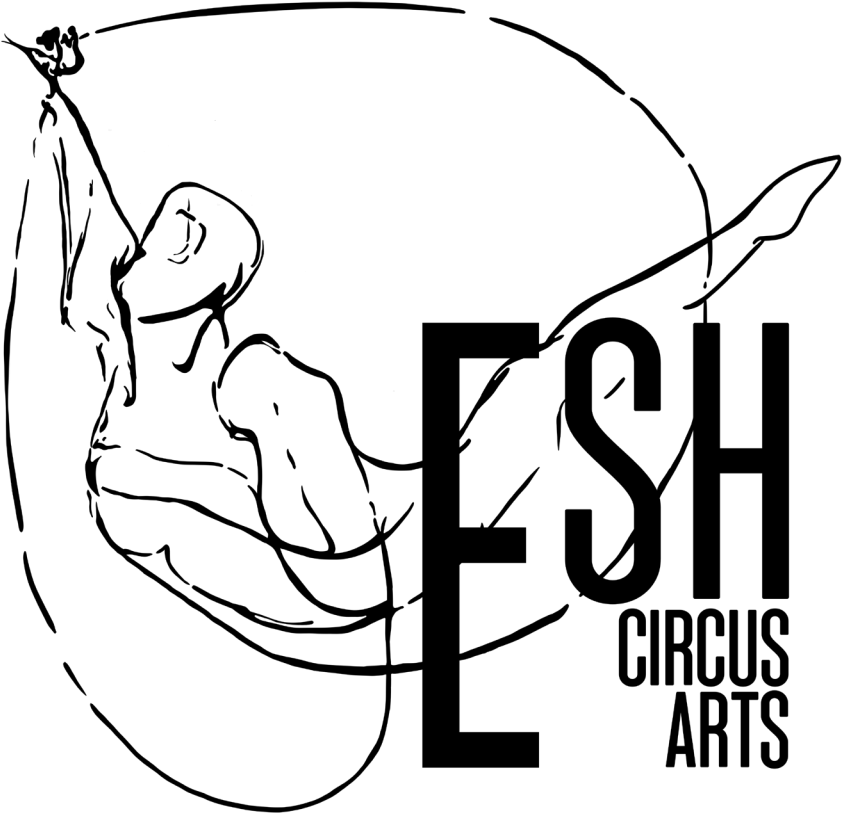
Chloe Regina's Body, Wisdom of Trees	Eli Brooks
Archy's Body, Wisdom of Trees	Eli Strang-Horwitz
Owen's Mind, Wisdom of Trees	George Clerisme
Petro's Body, Species Loneliness	Hannah Wood
Chloe Regina's Mind, Species Loneliness	Jahzara Senghor
Petro's Mind, Wisdom of Trees	Jean Transtamar
Helena's Mind, Wisdom of Trees	Lani Taylor
Lien's Mind, Species Loneliness	Lilou Potter
Owen's Body, Species Loneliness	Mateo Kiranga
Archy's Mind, Wisdom of Trees	Max Rosebrugh
Vera's Body, Wisdom of Trees	Micah Kean
Helena's Mind, Species Loneliness	Prem Srivastava
Vera's Mind, Species Loneliness	Reena Boxer
Lien's Mind, Species Loneliness	Tommy O'Connor

Level 2 Ensemble

Goby fish	Ada Foley
Egyptian plover	A.J. Kiranga
Egyptian plover	Aria Abramowitz
Sloth	Chakora Sindelar
Nile crocodile	Cole Bernstein
Sea anemone	Devlin Anello
Hermit crab	Ezra Pimentel
Bumblebee	Fiona Parva
Bumblebee	Grace Hwang
Sunflower	Leo Drucker
Nile crocodile	Leo White
Pistol shrimp	Micah Brooks
Goby fish	Simona Milone Cohen
Pistol shrimp	Sophie "Kippy" Potter
Flower	Winnifred Simmons

"The most important thing each of us can know is our unique gift and how to use it in the world. Individuality is cherished and nurtured, because, in order for the whole to flourish, each of us has to be strong in who we are and carry our gifts with conviction, so they can be shared with others."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer



www.eshcircusarts.com





A standing ovation for our friends at Neighborhood School!

From the whole Meridian community, including:

Kayla Sanchez NS '18
Aya Abramowitz NS '21
August Fulton NS '23
Griffin Parker-Geller NS '23
Zoe Potter NS '23

And 11 other Meridian and NS alums!

www.meridianacademy.org
54 Brookside Avenue
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130



Creative Team Bios



Johnny Blazes (they/them) (NS Class of '94) is an educator, performer, and creator whose work centers on co-creating a more liberated, more joyful world through the imaginative potential of art. They currently teach theater, music, and social-emotional learning at The Neighborhood School in Jamaica Plain, MA, and dance, theater, and aerial acrobatics at Esh Circus Arts in Somerville, MA. Johnny has written/directed over 20 full-length shows including original youth theater, touring and community-based circus productions, and cabaret-theater shows. They have worked with students from infancy through elderhood, in collaboration with organizations including: Meridian Academy, Boston Latin School, The Theater Offensive, American Youth Circus Organization, The Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and dozens of other universities, colleges, and community arts organizations across the US. Johnny is currently pursuing a Master's of Education in Arts, Community, and Education at Lesley University. Their published works are included in the anthologies *Encounters with Contact* and *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, and they can be seen performing with their newly formed dance company, *Pluto Return*.



Jovielle Gers (she/her), an art educator at the Neighborhood School, is deeply committed to community enrichment. In recent years, she has created vibrant murals featuring endangered local species, orchestrated the *Wake Up the Earth Parade*, and actively participated in the festival's coordination. She has taught yoga and mindfulness around Boston and at Waltham Children's Hospital/ Walden Behavioral Care. She lived and worked in Northern India doing photography for the Norbulingka Institute, a Tibetan organization, as well as photographing the Dalai Lama. "I finds that engaging with creativity breathes life into our days and transforms us through the art we make as well as through the art we experience. Art acts as a mirror of our lives and our world."

Creative Team Bios (continued)



AfroTaino artist **Mar Parrilla** (she/her) is the Artistic Director of Danza Orgánica (DO). She is the proud mother of Caleb (L4), an interdisciplinary movement artist, an educator, and a community organizer. Mar holds a BA in Languages from the University of Puerto Rico, and a Master's Degree in Dance Education from New York University. Parrilla is the founder of the Dance for Social Justice™ program, as well as the Boston-based multidisciplinary arts festival: We Create. Production-wise, DO has been focused on Proyecto Melaza-- in partnership with a cohort of Boricua artists based in Puerto Rico, and *Âs Nupumukômun (We Still Dance)*, in close collaboration with members of the Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe. Mar is thrilled to be working with NS and the L3/L4 students towards *The Roots*. Congratulations all around!



Seth Hanson (he/him) is a Minnesota-born musician who has been writing, performing, and teaching folks of all ages in and around Boston since 2018. He has self-produced and released over 15 albums of original music for children and adults, performed across the city, and has had his music featured on several local radio stations. Seth has loved becoming involved with the Neighborhood School Community and working with students as they develop the tools of musical expression and creation.

Creative Team Bios (continued)



Haeli Warren (she/her) is one of the lead Level Four teachers at Neighborhood School. Having grown up in Northern Vermont, Haeli first started teaching in environmental, agricultural, outdoor, and dance education spaces, where the land and stories were as much of her teacher as the young people and communities that she worked with. As an educator, Haeli is invested in liberatory education where young people, educators, and families are able to collaborate with community partners to envision and work towards a more just world through a variety of mediums. Haeli is incredibly grateful for those who inspire and teach her in this ongoing process, including the entire Neighborhood School community. She loves spending time in nature, taking long walks with friends, reading, and baking!



Lisa Nam (she/her) is one of the lead Level Four teachers at Neighborhood School. She has also enjoyed teaching at other K-12 schools in Boston, as well as teaching education courses at Wellesley College and MIT. She knows that Neighborhood School is a very special place. Each year at NS has brought an opportunity to be in loving relationships with so many amazing students, and to create integrated curricula inspired by the grassroots organizers, beautiful literature, and natural world surrounding the community. Learning from NS staff, students, and families has impacted Lisa's teaching, but also her life in general, to move towards slowness, generosity, playfulness, and creativity. She enjoys dancing, swimming, creating visual art, hosting jam sessions with friends, and camping!



Level Four Cast



Alice Brooks is 11 years old and in 5th grade. She plays the role of Helena. Alice would like to give a big thanks to her mom's Ashley and Michelle, as well as her siblings Eli and Micah, for helping her with her lines. She would also like to thank her teachers, Lisa and Haeli, for helping her with her blocking. Finally, Alice would like to give a big thank you to Johnny, Jovielle, Jai, Mirah, and everyone else who supported her. Alice loved helping Johnny pick out the play name. This is not Alice's first time acting. She has been in seven other plays inside and outside of school. An unusual fact about Alice is that she loves to cat-sit, but she is allergic to cats. Alice says that her favorite thing about her character is that they are very prepared. She really loves playing her character, Helena. Alice also really loves to dance, act, read, and tell bad jokes. Alice is really excited to see her Nana, Papa, Gigi, and Popop in the audience. She hopes that the audience sees the humor and work that everyone put into the play.

Ben Rubin is an 11-year-old boy from Boston, Massachusetts.

He is playing the role of Petro. This is his seventh year at Neighborhood School, and he is currently in the 5th grade.

Ben would like to thank his family for sending him to Neighborhood School, which lets him be in this play. He would also like to thank everyone who made this play possible. Ben enjoys sports in general and cooking. He also likes learning about history and spending time playing video games. One part of the play that Ben enjoys is the scene right before intermission. His previous acting experiences include some of the other plays during his time at Neighborhood School. Ben hopes that the audience enjoys the theme of the play.



Caleb Bor-Parrilla is a 10-year-old fifth grader who is playing Beans in this play. Caleb is grateful for their teachers, who helped them get through the harder parts of preparing for this play, and is also grateful to Franklin Park for helping them connect to nature in the city. Caleb enjoys swinging from ropes on trees and letting themselves go flying. Caleb loves that their character is also very energetic and bouncy. Caleb's other hobbies include playing video games, running around in circles until they get dizzy, playing the trumpet and upright bass, playing soccer, and walking their dog. They hope the audience enjoys the dancing and the humor in this play!

Level Four Cast (continued)



Darshan Riveratan is a 12-year-old, sixth grade student, who plays the role of Maple in *The Roots We Follow*. Outside of school, Darshan enjoys fencing, physical activity, writing, and philosophy. Given his love of writing, Darshan especially liked the part of the play making process where students got to participate in writing the scenes, especially his work on the Future scene. One unusual fact about Darshan is that when he was nine-years-old, he started writing a chapter book that was centered around dark dystopian mythical ideas.

Some people in Darshan's that are important to him are his mom and dad. He really appreciates how his mom encourages and supports him to grow as a person and his dad's continued support. Darshan hopes that the audience enjoys the Gratitude scene in the play. Finally, Darshan would like to thank Johnny for their hard work in writing the play, his mom for helping him practice his lines, and everyone else who made the play possible.

Jane Wu, an 11-year-old in 6th grade plays the character Lien.

Jane would like to thank Johnny for being fun and helpful throughout the play process. Jane would also like to thank all of Level Four for being silly, focused, smart, and fun. In this play, Jane plays a darkly sarcastic, grumpy character. In real life, Jane is lively, energetic, and funny, except when getting into fights with her older brother. But Jane would still like to thank both of her older brothers for teaching her about sarcasm. Jane hopes that the audience enjoys all the humor, all the work put into the costumes, and all of the characters' personalities. Through the process of making this play, Jane's favorite moment was bothering Johnny about breaking the fourth wall! Finally, Jane would like to thank Haeli Warren, Lisa Nam, Sheena Anello, Elizabeth Potter, Jovielle Gers, Mar Parrilla, Jai Underhill, and Seth Hanson for supporting this play!



Jenny Zhao is a 12-year-old in 6th grade who plays the role of Sweetgrass in the play. They're grateful for the director, Johnny Blazes, who wrote this play along with many others. They are also grateful to the staff at the Science Museum for collaborating with Neighborhood School to make this show possible. Even though this is the first time Jenny has been a main character in a play, this isn't the first time they've acted! When they were 8, they acted in a play called *Second Story*, and when they were 10, they were in a play called *Brave*

Light. A fun fact about Jenny is that they have two parrots! Some of their hobbies include ice skating, crocheting, and drawing. Their favorite part of their character is their optimism and lightheartedness.

Level Four Cast (continued)



Mandala Sindelar, Zemê, is a fifth grade student. One of her favorite parts of the play making process was finding names for the characters. Mandala hopes that the audience understands how consumer culture affects our surroundings and that they can take and share the message of reciprocity with others in their communities. When she's not performing, Mandala enjoys spending time playing cello, singing, making art, gardening, and working with metal.

One of Mandala's favorite parts of her character is that Zeme has a willingness to learn even though she has strong opinions. Mandala would like to thank her teachers Haeli and Lisa, the entire Level Four class, and Johnny for being very supportive in the learning process of the play. She would also like to thank her family for helping her rehearse away from school. Finally, Mandala would like to appreciate Robin Wall Kimmerer for sharing Indigenous wisdom, which has been known for many years, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, so that we could all learn from her ideas and be inspired for this play.

Mirah Keady Anello, a 12-year-old in 6th grade, plays the role of Archy. They would like to thank Lisa, Haeli, Johnny, Jai, Jovielle, Seth, Mar, and all of their classmates. They also want to thank the costume and makeup team including Elizabeth and Sheena. A final person Mirah wants to thank is Robin Wall Kimmerer for inspiring Level Four's learning this year and for a lot of the ideas in the play. One of Mirah's favorite things about their character is that they love bugs, just like Mirah. Three of Mirah's hobbies are needle-felting, crocheting, and painting/drawing. Mirah also loves to read! Mirah loves Devlin (brother and sea anemone), Dominic, Sheena, and Artemis and Apollo (cats.) They hope you enjoy seeing the _____ (it's a surprise).



Oliver Hwang is an 11-year-old fifth grader, who plays Owen. He would like to thank all of the adults who made the play possible including his teachers, Haeli Warren and Lisa Nam, who taught him and his class about plants and Indigenous culture through the book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which is written by Robin Wall Kimmerer. He also wants to thank the director Johnny Blazes and everyone else who made the play possible. Oliver enjoys how his character Owen starts off only looking at the world one way until the plants help him see

the world in a different way. He hopes this change that Owen faces is something that people watching the play will understand and experience for themselves because this could help people understand research differently in order to help our communities and the climate. Oliver hopes that the audience enjoys the comedic parts of the play and also understands and takes in the message.

Level Four Cast (continued)



Ruby Parker-Geller is a 10-year-old 5th grader who plays Vera in *The Roots We Follow*. Ruby loves crocheting, knitting, making origami, baking/cooking, watching TV, and listening to Taylor Swift. She has done one play in Neighborhood School when she was in 3rd grade, and has done 3 plays with the Freelance Players Acting Troupe. One thing Ruby likes about her character Vera is that she has various sides of herself. She is sometimes really kooky and likes coming up with conspiracies, but she can also be an empathetic friend and a good listener. She hopes the audience will enjoy the play, and notice the details and hard work that Levels Two, Three, and Four put into it!

Sam Bernstein is 10-years-old, in the fifth grade, and plays the role of Apple in *The Roots We Follow*. Their favorite part of the play-making process was getting to read their lines for the first time because they think it's so exciting to get to see what they were actually going to do in the play. Sam's previous acting experience includes the minor role @greeneggsandsam, an OurSpace commenter, in Neighborhood School's most recent production *Brave Light*. Sam, who describes themselves as a nerd, loves that their character in the play is, too. Outside of school, Sam enjoys spending time gaming, drawing, building Legos, reading, and learning more math. Sam would like to express appreciation to some of the people in their life who are very important to them: their parents, little brother Cole, friends, teachers, and grandparents. They would like to thank their director Johnny for writing, directing, and making this play possible. Finally, Sam hopes that the audience, who have seen previous Neighborhood School plays, will notice the reference to a previous show.



Ru Thomas-Epstein is in 5th grade and will be turning 11 this month. Ru is playing the role of Chloe Regina. She would like to thank Johnny for writing and directing our play. She would also like to thank Robin Wall Kimmerer for writing her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which helped inspire the play. Some of Ru's hobbies include baking, hanging out with her dog, and listening to Taylor Swift music. A fun fact about Ru is that she has double-jointed elbows. She hopes the audience will join us in changing their relationship with the land and animals. Ru has acted in six plays: four with the acting troupe Freelance Players and two with Neighborhood School. She appreciates her dog and parents for helping her practice and memorize lines!

Ways to Help

It takes many hands, a lot of heart and quite a few dollars to keep a small, not-for-profit, alternative elementary school afloat in Boston. Your contributions, both in kind and monetary, keep our books balanced and our spirits encouraged. **Donations of any amount** are greatly appreciated. **Offers to help** can come to any Sustainer (see below) or members of our Board of Directors: Aba Taylor, Jeremy Phillips, Jocelyn Heywood, Bruce Feibel, Johnny Blazes, Joyce Mallory, and Tricia Morrow.

Funding the Arts, Fair Share tuition, and Leadership Succession

Neighborhood School is an economically diverse independent school. Our commitment to Fair Share Tuition for all families helps address issues of accessibility and equity. Involving all students in visual, musical, and dramatic arts throughout the year culminates in rich experiences like our biennial play. Bringing a new leader on board a year before Tricia retires comes at a cost and a promise of great benefits. Your gift to our Annual Fund deepens Fair Share tuition, sparks the Arts, and funds Leadership succession.

Your tax-deductible contribution makes possible a sustainable future for NS, fulfilling its mission of providing transformative, justice-centered learning to children of all families of all economic means representing Boston's neighborhoods, helping students find their voice, form community, and make a difference. NS is a small school with a big heart! Neighborhood Schools, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

NS Sustainers

Sustainers are individuals (or families) who are connected to Neighborhood School as either parents, alums, relatives of alums, or friends, and have demonstrated their support for the school through their donations (monetary or in-kind), volunteer efforts, and/or expertise and resource sharing consistently over time. The **Sustainers' Circle** is the group of Sustainers who formally commit to be a part of this group, receive regular communications, attend periodic meetings (next meeting is April 14) and regularly commit time and resources to support the Neighborhood School and its ongoing mission. Currently two Board/Sustainer working groups are active: Leadership (chair Jeremy Phillips) and Fund Development (chair needed) and others could be revived! If you are interested in becoming involved, please contact neighborhoodschooloffice@gmail.com.

Our Wish List includes a van to replace our 2008 "don't mind the duct tape" model and a facelift for our interior spaces. Your gifts help dreams come true!





Level 4 visits with Robin Wall Kimmerer on 2/28

*"Raise a garden, raise good children, raise a ruckus."
- Robin Wall Kimmerer*



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