Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.

Theatre—and other art forms—do not exist for the purposes of putting on a show or selling tickets. They exist for connection. Regardless of who is in the audience, every individual brings something with them. Their own experiences allow them to connect; and every individual connects in a different way. Many elements of artistic work have a unique capacity to engage people in thinking and talking about civic or social concerns or simply with each other to build trust or find common ground. That is the power of the arts.

The goal of this toolkit is to allow each theatre to tailor conversations about empathy around a given performance and empower the attendees to create conversations of their own. As we say at The Humanity Theatre Project, it all starts with empathy.

Thank you for your interest in our project. Because of you, we are able to take a major step toward our mission: to spread, teach, and model empathy. Please let us know any way that we can help you in this collective journey of difference, similarity, and humanity.

Daniel and Pat
The Humanity Theatre Project

"You never really understand a person until you consider things
from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."
-- Atticus Finch, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

As you plan your "round table" discussion or "talkback," please consider how artistic elements in the creative work such as the following can foster a deeper engagement:

- STORY within the art can bring forward the human implications of issues, connect lived experience to issues, foster empathy, and build trust and bonds;

- METAPHOR can create fresh associations and expand the form and vocabulary of the dialogue;

- HUMOR in the art can break down barriers and establish common ground;

- ABSTRACTION can open space for multiple interpretations and perspectives;

- PROVOCATION can help challenge assumptions, unlock stuck conversations, reveal emotions underlying difficult issues;

- AMBIGUITY in the art can underscore the complexity of the issue and gives permission not to jump to answers;

- **EMOTION** evoked by the art can validate emotional dimensions of issues to be explored;

- **JUXTAPOSITION** within art forces new or unlikely relationships or connections that can open up thinking and dialogue;

- **HISTORY** embedded in art, objects, historic sites, anniversaries, etc. can offer touchstones for understanding and engaging in contemporary concerns.

For your empathy discussion or "talkback," these questions may assist you in starting the conversation:

- What character moved you? Why?
- Was there a character you hated? How might it feel to wear his shoes and to understand his circumstances?
- Did you see evidence of any of the characters demonstrating empathy? How?
- What are the blocks to empathy that a character in this play may feel? Or that may block you from feeling empathy toward a character?
- Do you feel empathy, sympathy, pity, or compassion toward the characters in this play? What is the difference?

- What were the challenges of your role? Does empathy play a part in your process of understanding your character? How?
- What "acting tools" do you use (in this role or another) to communicate a character's capacity for empathy?
- Is there a role you have played where there was a character you could not empathize with? What role/play? Why?

Share examples of how you have shared empathy with someone else? What were the challenges for you?

- In your personal life, who is the most empathetic person you know? Did any of the characters in the play remind you of that person? Why?
- In your personal life, is there someone that you simply cannot empathize with? Why?

IN CONCLUSION

- How will you start a discussion about empathy tomorrow?

The three pages that follow are for you to distribute to the attendees of your empathy-focused "talkback" discussion. These pages are designed to empower your attendees to carry the conversation with them: in their homes; at their workplaces, and via social media platforms. As we aim to create a "ripple effect" that treats the cancer of hatred afflicting our society, this is a critical step in turning these ripples into waves.

- Conversation Starters
- Activity
- "Selfie" Sheet

If possible, please print a few copies of these for your event. If we can assist in any way, please let us know.

Thank you for your interest in the Humanity Theatre Project. You are a vital part of creating conversations about empathy in your community, and we hope that you will take the conversation to work, to bars, to social media, to people you know and people you don't. It all starts with empathy, and it all starts with you. We are all The Humanity Theatre Project.

Here are some conversations starters that may help you start your own conversations:

- What is your definition of empathy?
- What is the opposite of empathy to you?
- Is there a celebrity you empathize with? Why?
- How have you been shown empathy this week? And how have you shown empathy this week?
- For you, how big of a role does listening play in being empathetic?
- Can empathy be both good and bad? Tricky used car salesmen play on people's empathy to manipulate sales. Torturers actually need empathy to torture.
- Is it easier for you to empathize with people or animals? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask me?

If using questions to start a conversation is not natural or helpful for you to start a conversation about empathy, try this simple exercise:

Ask someone (whether a friend or a stranger) how their day is going and what is going on in their life. When the person pauses for more than two or three seconds and you are ready to talk about your interests, summarize instead. If he/she resumes talking, continue listening. If he/she does not resume, talk.

The talker may feel encouraged to continue talking after knowing you understood his/her words. Or he/she may pause because she is not sure you want to hear more but is reluctant to ask. However, when you summarize his/her words instead of talk about your interests, she may conclude you want to hear more.

Summarizing is, of course, acknowledging the talker's words, not his feelings. For this exercise summarizing what was said is sufficient. It makes the exercise easy to do and has value. Letting the talker know you have heard and understood his/her feelings is a plus if it is apparent and easy to do. You are modeling empathy, and it becomes contagious.
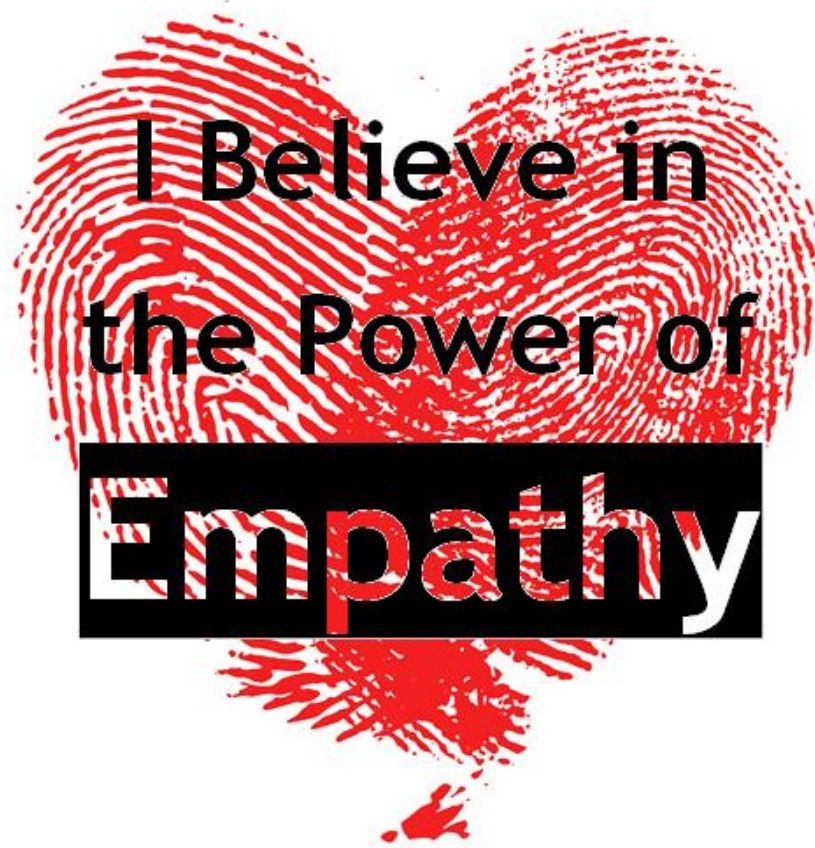
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I Believe in the Power of **Empathy**

Because...

As you may know, the goals of The Humanity Theatre Project are broad and reaching. We will take what we have learned from our efforts here and work to improve the project so that we may share it with other communities across the country. We hope to create a wave of empathy events nationally, but we need your help!

Please take a moment to answer a few questions about this toolkit so that we can improve it.

- Was this toolkit helpful in facilitating your discussion?

- What areas were most useful?

- What are areas that you think could be improved upon?

- What other suggestions do you have for making the entire project more accessible and beneficial for other theatres?

- Other comments: