

Looking for Lilith

Arts Programming Overview + Teaching Artist(s) Bio

Programming

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YOUTHSPEAK/GIRLSPEAK: AN INTRODUCTION TO DEVISING RESIDENCY

Theater Residency

In this engaging residency, participants create original scenes through devising—a collaborative theatre process that centers their voices and experiences. Guided by Looking for Lilith teaching artists, participants explore real-life issues that matter to them, developing confidence, creativity, and communication skills. Whether student-driven or aligned with partner goals, each YouthSpeak/GirlSpeak residency is tailored to your group. Students learn ensemble-based techniques, build scenes around meaningful themes, and see their stories come to life on stage. *YouthSpeak/GirlSpeak* empowers young people to speak up, think critically, and connect through storytelling—with lasting impact in and beyond the classroom.

Grades: 4-12

Max # of Students: 30

of Sessions: 3-10

Program Length: 60 min. per session

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EVEN PUPPETS HAVE PROBLEMS: INTERACTIVE DRAMA FOR MANAGING CONFLICT Theater Residency or Workshop

In this fun, interactive workshop or residency, students help a group of puppet friends solve a conflict—learning how to handle big feelings along the way. With humor and heart, they explore calming strategies, practice role-play, and even voice puppets themselves. Designed for younger students, this program builds key social-emotional skills like empathy, communication, and peaceful problem-solving. The extended residency includes deeper role-play, emotional vocabulary building, and tools to manage anger and peer conflict. Even Puppets Have Problems empowers kids to navigate everyday challenges and become peacemakers in the classroom—and beyond.

Grades: K-2

Max # of Students: 30

of Sessions: 1 (Workshop) or 3 (Residency)

Program Length: Workshop - 75 min.; Residency - 45-60 min. per session;

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THE ANCESTORS PROJECT is an evolving community art making and performance project, using workshops led by Looking for Lilith with community partners throughout the Commonwealth. In the workshops, LFL artists will lead participants in activities exploring stories of their personal ancestors who have inspired and guided them, and transforming these stories into pieces of visual and performance art that are shared with fellow participants. Scenes and visual art created in these workshops could be a part of a larger community-based performance.

Grades: 9-adult

Max # of Students: 30

of Sessions: 1(Workshop),

Program Length: 3 hours per session

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AFTERSCHOOL DRAMA CLUBS - Grades K- 2 participate in story drama, using their actor tools to explore the characters and environments of folk tales and other children’s stories from around the world.

Grades 3-5 develop acting skills through improvisation, creating a character, working with a script and working with scene partners. All classes emphasize social emotional skills.

Grades: 9-adult

Max # of Students: 15

of Sessions: 8-10

Program Length: 1 hour per session

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MONSTERS UNDER THE BED: COPING WITH FEAR AND ANXIETY

Theater Residency or Workshop

This imaginative workshop or residency helps students face fears and big feelings—one friendly monster at a time. With guidance from a Looking for Lilith teaching artist, students create their own monster characters to explore emotions like fear and anxiety in a safe, playful setting. Through drama and storytelling, they externalize tough feelings, practice age-appropriate coping skills, and build confidence, empathy, and emotional awareness. Whether a single session or multi-day experience, Monsters Under the Bed turns fear into understanding—using creativity to foster emotional resilience and self-expression in young people. Where imagination becomes a tool for growth.

Grades: K-2

Max # of Students: 30

of Sessions: 1 (Workshop) or 3 (Residency)

Program Length: 60 min. per session

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THE BOOK WOMEN: INSPIRING LITERACY, EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

Theater Residency or Workshop

Bring history to life with this interactive theatre workshop or residency, inspired by the real Pack Horse Librarians of the 1930s. Students step into their stories, exploring themes of courage, literacy, and community through dramatized scenes and primary source materials. Perfect for integrating ELA, history, and the arts, this program fosters empathy, creativity, and collaboration. Students create original performances that connect past and present—learning how storytelling and books can transform lives. This powerful experience shows how ordinary people, with determination and a story to tell, can make an extraordinary impact. Standards-aligned and deeply engaging.

Grades: 3-12

Max # of Students: 30

of Sessions: 1 (Workshop), 3 (Residency)

Program Length: 60 min. per session

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EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES: NATIVE AMERICANS ENCOUNTER EUROPEANS

Theater Residency

This 4-day theatre residency invites upper elementary students to examine Columbus’s 1492 arrival through the eyes of the Taino people, the island’s Indigenous inhabitants. Using Jane Yolen’s *Encounter* and dramatic storytelling, students uncover overlooked perspectives and reframe a familiar historical moment. Through collaborative theatre activities, they develop original scenes, build empathy, and strengthen critical thinking. The residency supports ELA and social studies standards while encouraging inclusive dialogue, cultural awareness, and creative expression. *Exploring Perspectives* offers a powerful way to help students see history—and the world—through someone else’s eyes.

Grades: 3-5

Max # of Students: 30

of Sessions: 4

Program Length: 60 min. per session

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COMMUNITY UNITES: THE 1937 FLOOD

Theater Residency or Workshop

In this immersive theatre workshop or residency, students explore the real stories of Louisville residents during the 1937 Flood. Using letters, photos, and physical theatre techniques, they build a “living timeline” and create original scenes that reflect resilience and community. Designed to deepen understanding of local history and social-emotional learning, this program helps students connect past to present and see their role in shaping compassionate communities. Perfect for integrating social studies, ELA, and the arts, Community Unites offers a hands-on, hearts-on experience that brings history to life and empathy to the forefront.

Grades: 1-3

Max # of Students: 30

of Sessions: 1(Workshop), 4 (Residency)

Program Length: 60 min. per session

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Program Staff

Shannon Woolley Allison - she/her Shannon is a proud founding member of LFL. She served as Artistic Director from 2001 to 2014, and as Co-Artistic Director from 2015 to present. She holds a BFA in Acting from SMU, and an MA in Educational Theatre from NYU, where she studied Theatre of the Oppressed techniques with Chris Vine at the Gallatin School. Favorite LFL projects over the years include directing Erin Fitzgerald’s GOOD GRIEF and Diana Grisanti’s THE PATRON SAINT OF LOSING SLEEP, playing Jules in Allie Fireel’s NOTE, performing ALICE IN BLACK AND WHITE Off-Broadway, serving as Devising Director for CLASS OF ’70, FABRIC FLAMES AND FERVOR and PREVAILING WINDS, and especially every fun and crazy touring adventure she’s been on with various ensembles in the last 20 years!

Jennifer Thalman Kepler - she/her - Jennifer is an LFL Co-founder and Co-Artistic Director, as well as actor, director, devising director and teaching artist. She has performed in CROSSING MOUNTAINS, WHAT MY HANDS HAVE TOUCHED, CLASS OF ’70 (2004, 2013), FABRIC FLAMES AND FERVOR, BEYOND THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, 10 YEARS, 7 STORIES, GETTING OUT, LUZ, CAREFULLY TAUGHT and JUST LIKE US. Jennifer originated the role of Alice Austin in ALICE IN BLACK AND WHITE in both Louisville and New York. Jennifer has served as devising director for WHAT MY HANDS HAVE TOUCHED and WE. ARE. HERE. , and as devising/production director for CHOICES, BECOMING MOTHERS, and THE KENTUCKY SUFFRAGE PROJECT. She also directs the devising process with young people and develops curriculum through LFL’s GirlSpeak program and in-school residencies.

Ebony Jordan - she/her - Ebony is a Louisville-based Theatre Artist who acts, directs, teaches, and devises for various companies, including Looking for Lilith Theatre Company, where she's also an ensemble member and serves on the Board of Directors. Her passion for social justice and giving voice to marginalized communities is reflected in her work, which often includes working with youth across the Jefferson County school system to create short, original pieces often presenting issues they see in their communities. Past onstage credits include Prevailing Winds, Defining Infinity, Carefully Taught (all with LFL), and Romeo and Juliet (KY Shakespeare). Directing credits include Defining Infinity and The Lifecycle of a Blackberry (both with LFL), a show based on the works of 2020 KY Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson.

Jessica Sharpenstein - she/her - Jessica is an award-winning educator and teaching artist whose work centers arts integration, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and trauma-informed practice. With advanced degrees in both education (M.A.T.) and exercise physiology (M.S.), she bridges creative expression, mindfulness, and literacy to support systemically marginalized and multilingual youth.

Jessica's work includes a multi-year, grant-funded mindful arts-based literacy initiative serving refugee and asylum-seeking youth in Kentucky. Through writing, drama, visual arts, and breathwork, participants share their lived experiences in performances and exhibitions using Literatura de Cordel—a Brazilian form of street literature. She has presented nationally at the National Conference for Teachers of English and published in The English Journal, with prior recognition including the Chuck Thompson Award and the Outstanding Master of Arts in Teaching Award from the University of Louisville.

Kirsten Kruska - she/her - Kirsten is a Louisville-based teaching artist and lifelong theater practitioner with an intensive background in performance, inclusive education, and youth development. She joined Looking for Lilith Theatre Company as a teaching artist in 2021 and has since helped lead programming across Jefferson County Public Schools, as well as with Girl Scouts of Kentuckiana, the Louisville Free Public Library's Cultural Pass, and Evolve502's Success League.

Kirsten's connection to Looking for Lilith and its founding members traces back to studying theater at the Youth Performing Arts School in the early 1990s, during which time she appeared in the Off-Broadway production Lights Dimmed Slowly on the Girl. She later studied at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, and continued her conservatory training at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco.

For 16 years, Kirsten also taught horseback riding to students with disabilities, blending her equestrian background with her commitment to adaptive and inclusive instruction. Locally, she has performed at the Kentucky Center for the Arts in productions such as 12 Angry Jurors and Moonlight and Valentino. In every setting, Kirsten helps young people explore creativity and self-expression through theater, always bringing a sense of fun, patience, and encouragement into the room.

Rachel Meadors - she/they - Rachel is a local teaching artist, stage manager, and actor. Previously Rachel has worked with Looking for Lilith as a before and after school teaching artist at a variety of JCPS schools. She has also worked as a stage manager with the company, managing The Book Women – Route 3, Defining Infinity, and the Staged Reading Series. She can also be found working with Kentucky Shakespeare as a teaching artist, stage manager (Untimely Ripp'd & Macbeth spring tour 2025), and festival manager (summer 2025). Other local credits include Much Ado About Nothing (three witches shakespeare, ASM), Over My Dead Body (This Bridge Theatre, SM), As You Like It (three witches shakespeare, Denis/Corin), and The Importance of Being Earnest (Highview Arts Center, Algernon).

Keri Costa - she/her - Keri holds a BFA in Theater with a concentration in Acting from Montclair State University, where she also studied playwriting and ensemble work. She later trained in Alexander Technique and Acting for the Camera at HB Studio in New York City. For six years, Keri taught in the NYC metro area for LEAP, an arts education program. During her time there, one of her students was selected for publication in a young playwrights' anthology by Samuel French. Keri eventually moved to Louisville, where she began working with the Looking for Lilith Theatre Company.

Tiera Bowman - she/hers Louisville native Tiera was most recently seen in COMMON THREADS, and, previous to that, as Georgia Nugent in FROM BARDSTOWN TO BROADWAY: THE ROAD TO VOTES FOR WOMEN/THE SUFFRAGE DRIVING & WALKING TOUR, but has been working with Looking for Lilith Theatre Company since she was in high school. She joined the LFL team through one of their community outreach programs that was hosted at Fern Creek High School, called CHOICES: AN INTERACTIVE PLAY ON CYBERBULLYING AND SUICIDE. After high school, Tiera got her bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts at Northern Kentucky University and immediately found a home at Looking for Lilith. She has been a Devising team member & actor for THE KENTUCKY SUFFRAGE PROJECT and COMMON THREADS' "High School Reunion". She is also a teaching artist for various community outreach programs.

Artistic Content of Programming

The artistic content varies by program and can be adapted to fit the needs of the program. Many of our programs focus on the creative process with a low stakes sharing but can have a fuller performative aspect if the partner desires.

The GirlSpeak/YouthSpeak Program and the Ancestors Project focus on collaborative play development through improvisation and character building. Through this process participants learn to develop basic acting skills as well as vocal and movement work. Participants can also build more advanced acting skills and can be introduced to theatrical design in longer versions of these programs where a play can be devised and produced.

In our K-12 in-school and out-of-school programming students use the tools of the actor (voice, body,

imagination, concentration and cooperation) to explore the content of the residency or workshop. Through this process participants practice their actor tools as well as learning character development and beginning scene creation.

We assess the artistic skills gained by our participants through the sharing at the end of the program and progress made throughout the program. We also rely on student, parent and teacher feedback through debrief discussions and surveys.

Educational Content of Programming

In GirlSpeak/YouthSpeak and the Ancestor's Project LFL teaching artists bring our devising (collaborative playwriting) structure and process and the participants provide the content based on the topic they choose for the play or the ancestors they choose to explore. In these programs students learn beginning devising skills. Because the specific content is dependent on the group, students can participate in the program multiple times, each time having a different experience and exploring different content, while continuing to build their devising skills and other theater skills such as acting and design. These programs also provide many opportunities to learn and practice social emotional skills such as collaboration, naming emotions, expressing needs, empathy and perspective taking.

Our K-12 residencies are built around various educational content including dealing with fear and anxiety, discovering what being a community means through the lens of the 1937 flood and exploring perspectives in looking at the encounter between Columbus and Native Americans. These programs also provide opportunities for students to practice social emotional skills and basic drama skills.

Our afterschool and summer programs focus on building theatrical skills and particularly the actor tools of voice, body, imagination, concentration and cooperation. They also build social emotional skills and provide opportunities to practice literacy skills.

Process for hiring, training, and evaluating performance/effectiveness.

Our teaching artists are made of LFL company members who have teaching experience. We also hire outside contract artists when needed. In this case artists submit resumes and are interviewed.

New teaching artists or LFL company members new to a given program meet with one of the artistic directors to review and learn lesson plans. Further training sessions and rehearsals are held for more complex programs. New artists are paired with more experienced artists for classes and residencies to provide opportunities for modeling, skill-building and mentoring.

LFL provides 2-3 teaching artist PDs throughout the year. Teaching artists are observed by more experienced artists and given feedback for improvement.

How are participants of all backgrounds and abilities included in programming?

Looking for Lilith is committed to inclusivity, diversity and accessibility. Our mission is to lift up underheard stories. We are always looking for ways to include various perspectives across our programming. Inclusivity is embedded in all our teaching artist professional development and program development.

Programs like GirlSpeak/YouthSpeak and the Ancestors Project allow for participants to include the stories that are important to them. The content of plays and scenes created is totally driven by the participants.

Our Even Puppets have Problems and Monsters Under the Bed Residency shine a light on mental health and offer opportunities for students with depression, anxiety and who have been bullied to feel seen and find solutions.

LFL teaching artists come from our diverse ensemble and are skilled in working with students who are differently abled. We strive to work from a trauma informed lens and work to include training around trauma informed teaching into our teaching artist professional development opportunities. We are part of the Metro United Way Youth Development Network and attend the various training opportunities that network provides.

How do we engage teachers and community center staff before, during, and after programming?

Collaboration is at the core of all that we do in LFL. Many of our programs can be adapted or expanded to meet the needs of a school or community center. When we begin working with the partner we often meet to discuss their goals and how our programs can help them meet their goals. We ensure we know all the essential logistics and understand the goals of the program. During the program, we check in to see if any adjustments need to be made and to address any challenges that may arise. After the program we like to hold a debrief session with the partner. We are always working to improve our programs and partner feedback is essential.

How do we engage participants in the creative and learning process?

We cultivate an environment based on group agreements to provide a place where the participants feel safe to move throughout the creative process (ie, storytelling, theatre games, etc). Engagement occurs within the act of doing, playing, and exploring content both physical and mentally.

All of our programs are in a workshop format in which participants are actively involved in the creative process. We use theater games, playbuilding activities, storytelling, story drama and physical movement in our programs.

