

Creative Arts as an Engaging Tool: “Teen Monologues” Teen Theater Project

Francine Levin

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Teen Pregnancy Prevention Conference

May 2013

Third Annual Teen Pregnancy
Prevention Grantee Conference: Ready,
Set, Sustain: Continuing Our Success
May 20-22, 2013, National Harbor, MD.



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The Health and Prevention Education Department of the Community Action Partnership has been serving youth in San Luis Obispo, CA for over 35 years

Our mission is to provide innovative age-appropriate, culturally-sensitive, and research-supported programs to promote health among San Luis Obispo County youth.



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Youth Empowerment Program

OAH-Tier 1 Project Strategies:

- Replication Programs:
 - *¡Cuídate!*
 - *Be Proud Be Responsible*
- Program Approved Add-ons
 - Youth Advisory Group
 - Teen Theater Project: *Teen Monologues*



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TPP in the digital age:



How do we get their attention??

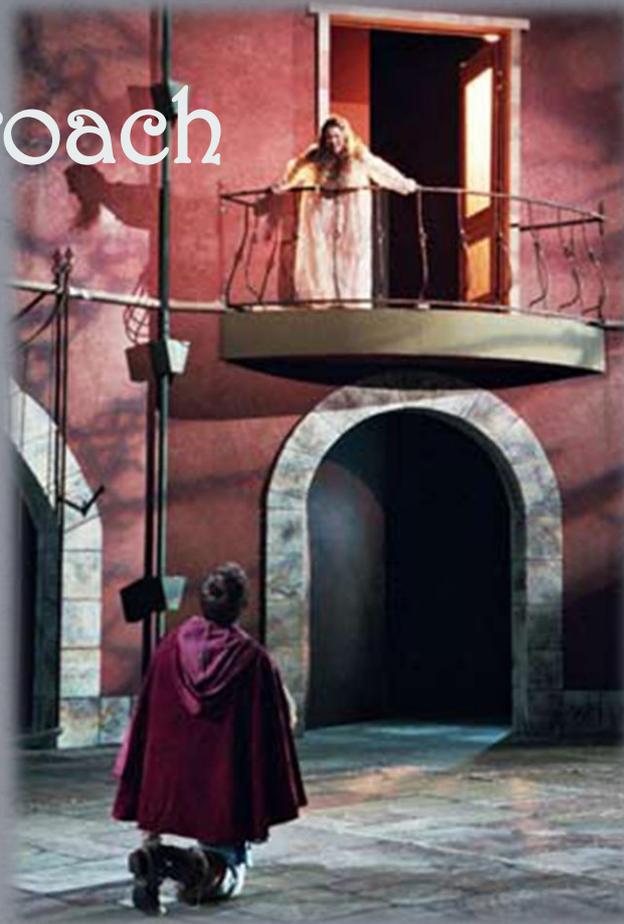


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An old approach



with a new twist!



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The Inspiration:

Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*

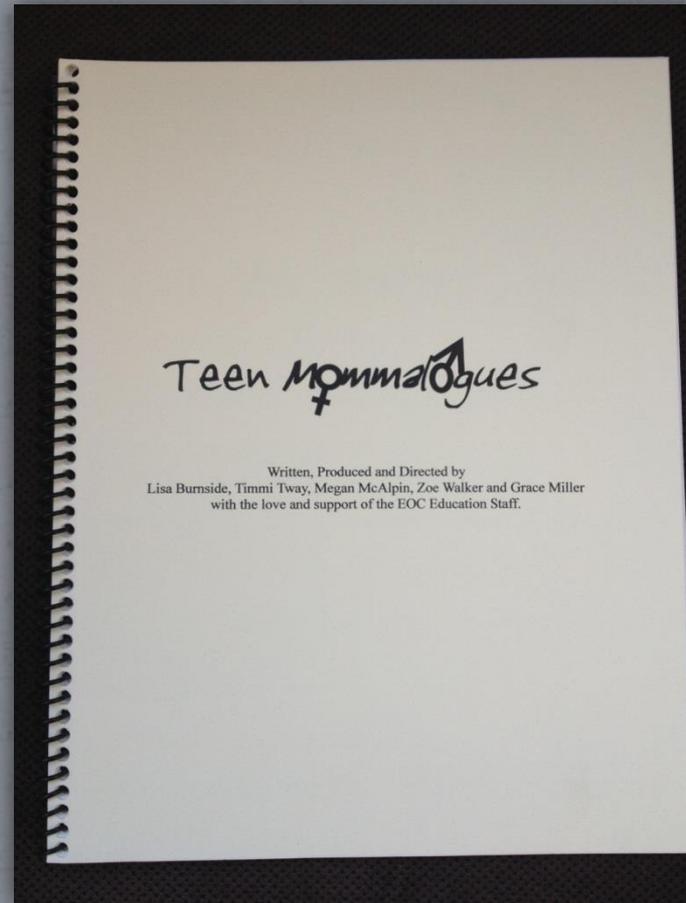


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Teen Monologues was created in 2003 by a group of youth and staff seeking an innovative approach to TPP.



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Making of *Teen Monologues* Video:

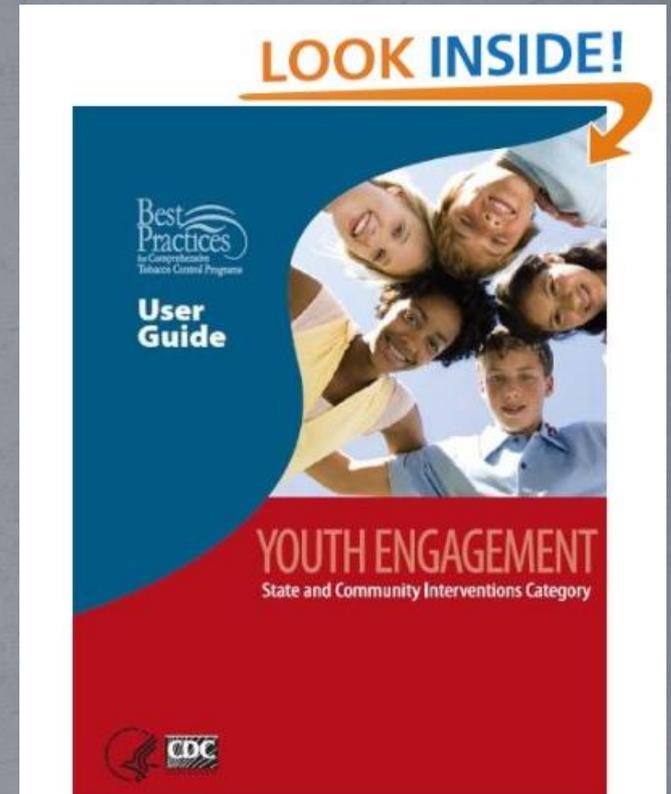


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The *CDC Best Practices User Guide: Youth Engagement* (2010) reports that youth play unique and important roles in mobilizing their peers, invoking creativity and innovation, bringing diverse representation, providing general insight, offering energy and vitality, impacting issues because they have a stake in their own future, and projecting a powerful voice.



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Project Goals:

- teen-driven approach
- fresh and relevant for teen audience
- inform community about TPP issues
- encourage parent-teen communication
- youth development
- peer-to-peer education
- community collaboration



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The Process



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Each year we convene a writing team

- Writers conduct interviews and surveys with teens, parents of teens, and teen parents

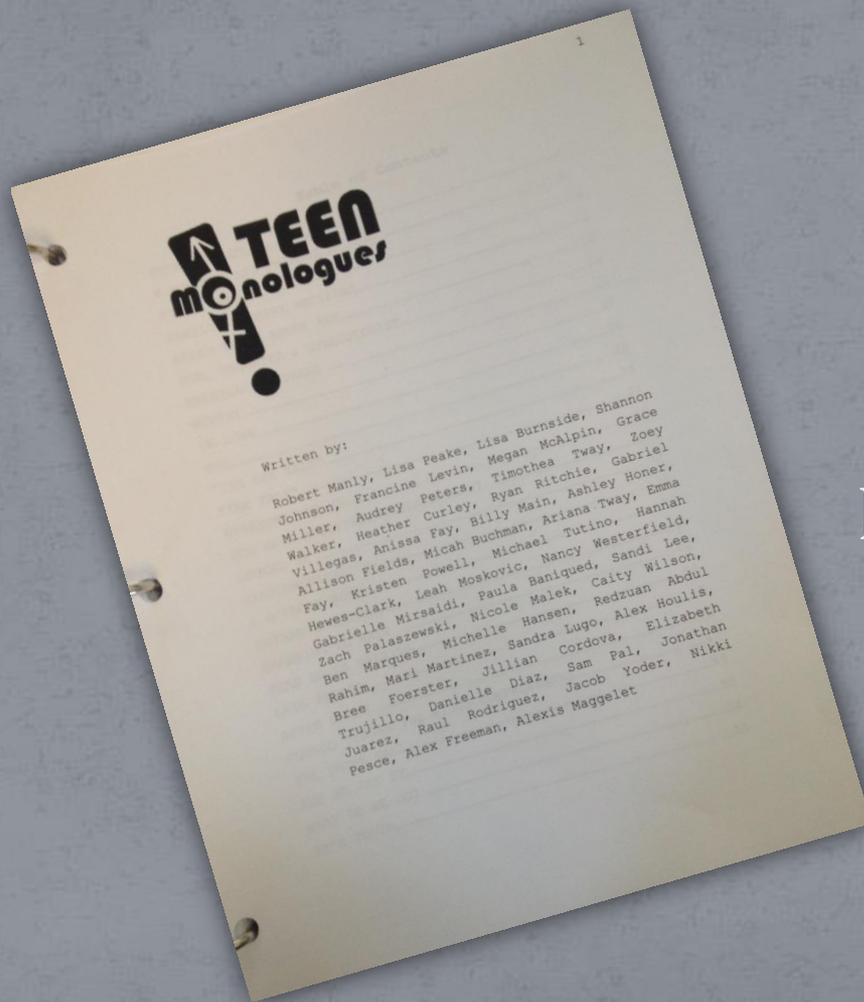


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Eleven Years of Writing Teams!



48 youth and staff
have contributed to
the evolving script



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Keeping the script current...

- The phone call video clip



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This year, we had a writing contest!

Based on real-life stories and interviews, **Teen Monologues** is a teen pregnancy prevention theater project which has been performed locally for the last 10 years. Each year, we make changes to the script and are currently seeking the help of local teens like YOU!

Share your story...
Write a story about being a teen parent. Stories can be made up or inspired by personal experience or the experiences of friends, siblings, parents, etc. Be creative!

EMAIL YOUR STORY TO:
shareyourstory@capslo.org
Be sure to include your name and phone number.
Submission Deadline:
January 25, 2013

Ideas for stories:
teen relationships, deciding whether or not to be sexually active, the pressure to be in a relationship, growing up with a teen parent, the difficulties of being a teen parent, etc.



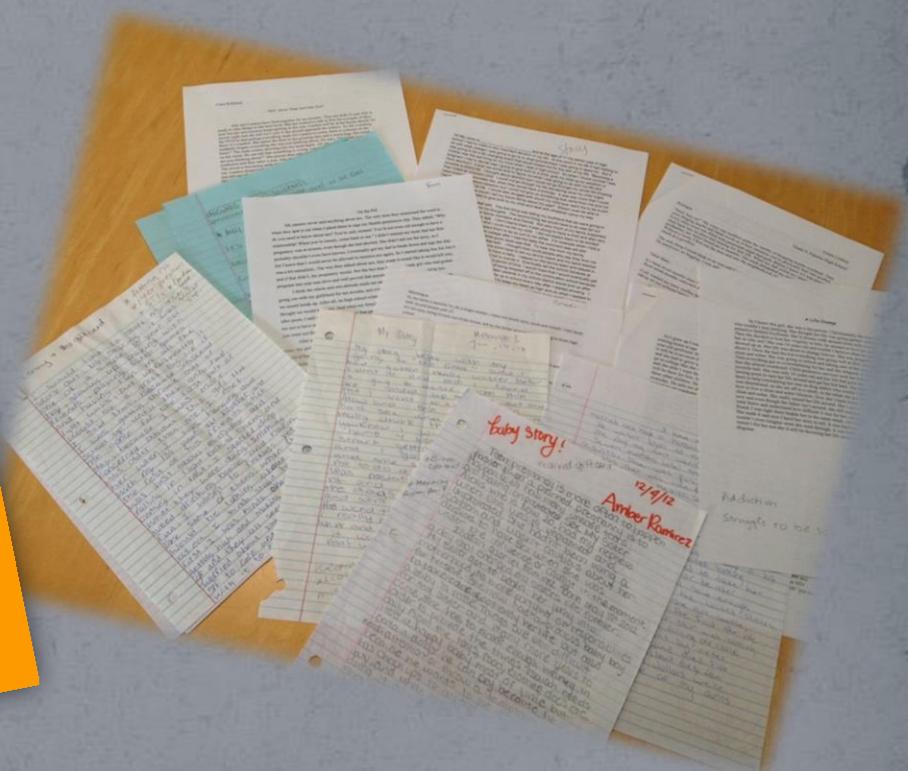
Teen Monologues

needs your story!

- Everyone will receive a \$10 gift card for participating!
- Finalists will receive a \$25 gift card!
- Winner/s will get an iPod Shuffle and their story will be performed at the SLO Little Theatre on May 2nd where they will be honored. -Wow, that is awesome!...Go, get typing!

Fine Print: Submissions selected for the Teen Monologues script may be modified and details may be changed to ensure confidentiality.

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A Division of Community Action Partnership



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Lenny's Story

* S I I S * L
I would like to start my ^{Ear} story out by saying it was ^{sex} one of a simple 10 year old ^E boy, growing up playing with friends, playing video games and having fun in all the light ways, but unfortunately it would be a great big lie if I said that, because instead I was gettin thrown out of school up until they only had me come for the first part of day, because I was more concerned about this girl that was older than me. I met her when I was hanging out with my 13½ year old brother and the rest of his friends which was just about everyday and



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Auditions & Casting

Auditions

Teen Monologues is a play about what it means to be **sexually active**, and how it affects the lives of **teens** and **those around them**. Both **funny** and **dramatic**, actors will portray characters based on **interviews with teens and teen parents**.



Casting:

4 Females and 3 Males

Roles are for a diverse group of teens; one character spotlights a female Latina experience.

*Community performance scheduled for May 2nd, at the SLO Little Theatre
Additional performances will take place at schools around the county.*

When: **Thursday, February 7 at 4—5:00pm**
Friday, February 8 at 4—5:30pm

Where: San Luis Obispo Little Theatre 888 Morro Street
(Corner of Morro and Palm)

Contact: Emma Fay at 748.6063 efay@capslo.org



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Rehearsals



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Promoting & Scheduling Performances

Teen Monologues



Young lives can be changed within minutes. Based on powerful true stories taken from teens who made a choice that determined the course of the rest of their lives.

May 21st at 8:00pm
San Luis Obispo Little Theatre
Ticket Price: \$5.00
For tickets contact Gabriel at 544-2484
A benefit performance for EOC Health Services

 **EOC Health Services**
HEALTH AND EDUCATION FOR ALL AGES

 **The Center**

10TH ANNUAL TEEN monologues

DIRECTED BY JOHN BATTALINO

THURSDAY APRIL 5TH 2012
THE SLO LITTLE THEATRE 888 MORRO STREET
DESSERT RECEPTION 7PM SHOW STARTS 8PM

TO RESERVE TICKETS CALL (805) 544-2484 OR EMAIL TEENMONOLOGUES@CAPSLO.ORG
STUDENT ADMISSION \$5 GENERAL ADULTS \$10

Teen Monologues is a realistic and candid portrayal of the challenges teens face when deciding whether to be sexually active, and the difficulties of being a teen parent. A thought-provoking performance about choices and consequences based on true stories from local teens who made a decision that determined the course of their lives.

Proceeds will benefit CAPSLO Health Services' Youth Prevention Programs



Bringing Media Attention to TPP!



Timmi Tway, right, and Robert Manly rehearse 'Teen Mammalogues' on Wednesday. The production by Morro Bay and San Luis Obispo high schools addresses teen pregnancy.

Local teens talk in 'Mommalogues'

Arts **Stage**

BY CHRIS WHITE-SANBORN

'The More You Know' (the more critics love you)

Why 'It's educational' is a terrible excuse not to see *Teen Monologues*

MORE THAN THE USUAL ANGST Producer Abby Rubin's character (center) has difficulty being both.

NOT MY FAULT Morro Bay's girls make the most of an unsettling monologue.

Actor and CAPSLO Health Education Outreach Coordinator Rezaan Abdi-Rahim was inspired by the performance in a different way. While studying theater at Cal Poly, he was interested in performing for a purpose. Although he felt too old for a teen role, he was, to his surprise, chosen for a role last year. Near the end of that run, Levin suggested he work for the Outreach program. Though surprised at first, Rezaan accepted, and he's now able to help more people than the show alone. He's in the performance again this year, and, like the other actors, doesn't fail to impress. The performances are fantastic, with each talented actor making the most of his or her speech or soliloquy. These performances truly make the show into more than just a pamphlet, and they help *Teen Monologues* shine brightly in a society where other attempts to help inform the masses fall flat on their well-intentioned faces.

Effective edu-tainment
The *Teen Monologues* are on the SLO Little Theatre, 880 Main St., at 8:30, on April 7. A dress rehearsal is at 7 p.m., and the performance itself is at 8 p.m. Students pay \$5; adults pay \$10.

Interacts Chris White-Sanborn has some public service help like in monologues. Rezaan Abdi-Rahim of his place by sending comments to Arts Editor Anna Welton at awelton@northcoast.com.

Kids Summer Guide

BY NATALIE CONNELLY

Talkin' 'bout birds and bees

*EOC Education and Teen Clinic prepare
for pregnancy prevention awareness month*

While the birds and the bees are getting their buzz on and doing their hum thing, young Romeos and Juliets are planting seeds of passion for summertime romance. Yup, now's a good time to tell the story of how you and the wife hooked up to make (insert your teenage child's name here) and pull out the genital warts slide show.

EOC Education and Teen Clinic are rarin' to help parents and teens with sex education. They have a couple of events lined up for May, which is both teen pregnancy awareness month and the last month before schools spill their teams of throbbing, horny youth into the city streets.

"In summer teens have a lot of time on their hands and they're more social," said Francine Levin, EOC education project supervisor. "We definitely want to make sure pregnancy prevention is fresh in their minds."

Five SLO High School students collaborated on a theatrical project to cele-

brate pregnancy-prevention awareness month. They interviewed teen parents and other teens as well as their parents for the subject matter, and then wrote a script that played off "The Vagina Monologues" called the "Teen Mommalogues."

SLO High and Morro Bay High School students will be acting in the premiere showing of "Mommalogues" at the SLO Little Theater May 23 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15.

"Teen Mommalogues" will be performed in schools and at the SLO Little Theater. It will double as a fund-raiser, because the EOC is looking at some big cutbacks next year and the education department might be shut down if it can't come up with the money through grants and donations.

The other teen-pregnancy awareness function will be a teen bowling night May 30 from 7 to 11 p.m. at the Cal Poly University Union. The EOC will rent out the bowling alley, and since it's also an '80s theme party, young males



SEXUAL HEALING SLO and Morro Bay high school students rehearse "Teen Mommalogues." From left, Grace Miller, Lisa Peake, Robert Manly, Meghan Letters, and Timothea Tway.

and females who come in '80s getups—think leg warmers and pegged pants—will get to bowl, shoot pool, and play video games for free. If dressing up isn't your bag, slip the door monitor \$3 and you can join the festivities.

To inform and raise awareness at teen bowl night, the EOC will be manning a sex Jeopardy booth, where they'll quiz kids on sexually transmitted infection (STI) statistics, pregnancy, and birth control questions.

"These are some fun ways to get teens to think about pregnancy and HIV prevention," Levin said. "The reality is, teens don't want to become parents, so we have to help them, whether it's through supporting them in abstinence or to be successful in using contraception."

Levin also wants to get the word out

Photo of newspaper
article on Teen
Monologues

to teens about the EOC Teen Clinic located at 705 Grand Ave. in SLO. It's free to teens who want a reproductive health checkup, need sex advice, or just ran out of condoms.

EOC Education regularly visits the classrooms of every school district in the county. In fifth and sixth grade they inform students of sexual maturation; in seventh and eighth grade they focus on preventing sexual involvement; and in high school they present ways to reduce sexual risks, STI and HIV prevention, birth control, and relationship tips.

For more info about the EOC call 544-2478, and for tickets to "Teen Mommalogues" call 544-2498. Δ

Staff Writer Natalie Connelly can be reached at nconnelly@newtimeslo.com

fyi

In California,
53,000 teen
pregnancies
occur every
year.



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'TEEN MOMMALOGUES'

SEX EDUCATION FROM THE ADOLESCENT PERSPECTIVE



Janet Allenspach, left, and Katie Weeks rehearse their scene for the 'Teen Mommalogues' at the San Luis Obispo Little Theatre on Tuesday.

TRIBUNE PHOTO BY JOE JOHNSTON

The public performances are directed at one goal — curtailing teen pregnancy

By SARAH LINN
slinn@theribunenews.com

For many parents, talking to their sons or daughters about sex can be an uncomfortable, even painful ordeal. It's none too fun for the kids, either.

As embarrassing as "the talk" can be, however, Francine Levin wants to make sure that every family in San Luis Obispo County has that crucial conversation.

"We want to take every opportunity to prevent teen pregnancy," said Levin, education projects supervisor at the Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County Inc.

She's also the producer of "Teen Mommalogues," an annual theater project that addresses sex, pregnancy and parenthood from a teenager's perspective. Public performances take place Friday and Sunday in San Luis Obispo and May 19 in Paso Robles.

Now in its eighth year, "Teen Mommalogues" is based on conversations with real-life local teens.

Levin originally modeled the thought-provoking play after Eve Ensler's

See TEEN, B2

Arts

BY ANNA WELTNER

They think they're in love

Teen Monologues puts faces on statistics

Teen Monologues opens with a cacophony of statistics. They rain so hard I can't even get them down: facts spewing in every direction, tumbling from mouths, colliding with each other, flooding the stage. Seven in 10 teens say they ... something. One in four teens has had ... I missed that one, too. Twenty percent of teens say they drank or did drugs the last time they ... what? I didn't catch that.

And then someone yells "Stop!" It's the perfect metaphor for the deluge of well-intentioned information — of the sort found in nurse's office brochures and classes with names like "Teen Skills" — that so often pours onto the heads of young people entering adulthood. But while there are ever so many numbers available about sex, and teen pregnancy, and drugs, there's often very little honest personal communication between teens of the opposite sex, or between teens and their parents. That reticence seems almost built into American culture: many of our parents were uncomfortable talking about sex with their parents, so they shied away from having the Talk with us — assuming, as Bob Peterson's dad-character does, that "I figured it out and they will too."

These are the observations made by Teen Monologues, a play produced by CAPSLO Health Services and directed by John Battalino. Francine Levin, CAPSLO's prevention and health education supervisor, created the show in 2003 after attending Eve Ensler's *Vagina*

a more relaxed attitude toward his son's relationship, waxing nostalgic toward the end of their conversation about first times.

A similar scene contrasts Megan's chat with a girlfriend (a bossy Bree Foerster) with Eric's talk with a guy friend (Jacob Yoder, as the ultimate dude). The topic of choice is the Big Night, when Megan and Eric — each one pretending to be staying over at a friend's — will spend the night together. Megan is advised to be extra flirty, while Eric is instructed to act coolly aloof. When they finally meet up, each one acts awkwardly, grossly out of character, with Megan practically throwing herself at Eric while he all but ignores her.



TEEN SKILLS Teen Monologues actors Jacob Yoder (left) and Danielle Diaz (right) are pictured with stage manager/assistant director Michael Tutino (center).

Monologues, and the production roughly follows that show's format. The stories of real teens who've dealt with unwanted pregnancy or struggled with difficult questions about sex and relationships are recorded and converted into moving — though occasionally quite funny — monologues and short scenes.

While each actor in this cast of six teenagers and three grownups takes on multiple roles, the show is stitched together by the story of young couple Megan and Eric, played by Sophia Longas and Nate Davis. We witness the couple's private moments together, and these scenes, though sometimes sweet, are often fraught with mutual misunderstanding. As an audience, we pick up on the lack of communication, perhaps because we've seen each of these characters interact with friends and parents.

A scene in which Megan and Eric tell their respective parents about one another is particularly enlightening. Megan's mom, played by Michele Brooks, is immediately mistrustful and prying, and their terse exchange escalates into a door-slaming fight. Meanwhile, Eric's dad, played by Bob Peterson, has

It's these scenes that make me remember what 15 felt like, because until *Teen Monologues*, I'd kind of forgotten about being a teen. I'd forgotten how every utterance from one's crush could carry such significance, how an exchange like this could make you feel floaty for hours: BOY: Maybe I'll see you there. GIRL: Cool.

I'd also forgotten about being incapacitatingly self-conscious; about being unforgivably, inexplicably moody; about small setbacks spelling the end of the world. But the cast of *Monologues* brought it all back. I understood, for example, why Eric hung up the phone after Megan told him she was pregnant, blurted, "I can't deal with this right now."

Perhaps because of the age-appropriate cast, most of the portrayals felt raw and honest. Only in a couple places, during longer monologues, did I notice the acting starting to fall flat, beginning to sound less like a constant flow of spontaneous thoughts and more like a speech committed dutifully to memory. But hey,

that's what makes monologues so hard. The show's vignettes are interspersed occasionally with a dry recital of facts and survey answers to questions like, why do teens have sex anyway?

Again, the cacophony of answers pours forth: "To fit in." "Curiosity." "To see how it feels." "It makes them feel older." "They think they're in love."

Every year, Levin and a group of youth writers and CAPSLO staff members have updated and revised the show, tossing out lines (or even whole scenes) that have become outdated, and replacing them with fresher, more timely material. This year's production makes an effort to highlight the Latino experience through Danielle Diaz's character Sandra, in an effort to reach out to a demographic that had been conspicuously absent in years prior.

While the show mostly centers on the experiences of young people, there are monologues from parents' perspectives as well. Maureen McGee, in one particularly effective piece, describes her utter squeamishness at explaining to her son where babies come from. (He'd heard from

the kids at school that babies happen when men and women "bump uglies," she recalls, a disturbed look on her face.)

But the emotional crux of the evening arrives with a powerful monologue given by Alison Warren, describing an unhealthy relationship in which her character is pressured into having sex, becomes pregnant, and is left by her immature, self-centered boyfriend to raise her daughter on her own. Her character's difficultly reconciling her bitterness with her former boyfriend with her love for her child draws a startling range of emotional reactions in her audience, making that piece easily the most riveting, hitting home harder than the scariest statistic. A

Arts Editor Anna Weltner wants to know where babies come from. Give her the Talk at aweltner@westmesslo.com.

Dramarama!

See *Teen Monologues* at the SLO Little Theatre on Friday, April 5, at 8 p.m. Dessert starts at 7. For tickets, call 544-2484 or e-mail teenmonologues@capslo.org.



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Community & School Performances

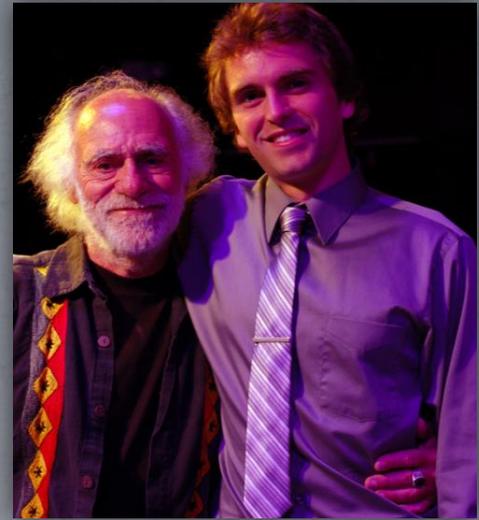


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Building Relationships



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Evolution of the project and incorporation of new themes

- Teen dating violence
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (Beginnings Collaborative)
- A Latina's perspective
- Bilingual performance (youth leadership program participants)
- Teen-parent communication (adult actors)
- Incarcerated youth perspective (Lenny & Alexis' stories)
- Gay youth perspective



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Incorporating a Latina's Perspective

- YEP Clip



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Over the last 10 years Teen Monologues has...

- engaged over 125 youth, adults, and staff in the writing and acting process
- been replicated in five California counties
- been performed at the California Office of Family Planning's annual conference
- reached over 7,000 youth and community members

