



THE VOICES PROJECT (2005)

Synopsis of the Play:

The show is a mural, made up of these characters, their stories and their struggles. It follows them and a few of their classmates (the ensemble) through some of the more tumultuous moments of teenagehood: academic pressure; friction with peers, teachers, and parents; fear of the future; nostalgia for the past; friendship; first love.

As the play opens, we find the characters searching for their identities in the turbulent world of high school. With childhood not far behind them, they struggle to define who they are and who they want to be amidst pressures from their peers, adults, and the media. Vita would love to audition as a dancer in the school play, but worries that her classmates will make fun of her size. Ethan wants some time off from farm chores to be able to go to his poetry class, even if it means working longer hours on the weekend. Rachel begins to think that maybe being pregnant isn't such a bad thing; Jesse thinks maybe he should join the Marines. Meanwhile, some kids bristle and others light up when Naomi starts digging for answers for a documentary video she's working on for class. She wonders, do young people want to be listened to or do they want to be left alone?

The characters reflect on the relative safety and comfort of their childhoods and wonder how that safety disappeared so suddenly, leaving them to navigate difficult choices on their own. The freedom and unselfconsciousness of those years seems like a distant memory, especially when they're walking through the hallway, feeling the scrutiny of their peers. Zac and Danny marvel at the lengths kids will go to in order to fit in. Zac even eats his lunch in the boys' bathroom to avoid the "popularity chart" of the cafeteria, while Danny and others fight to find a place to sit. Daria deals with backhanded compliments from her white classmates, while Lindsey struggles to explain what it's like to have her father headed off to war.

Colby and others share their experiences with drugs and peer pressure.

Paradoxically, this sense of isolation is sometimes what brings people together, and as they discover this common experience the kids go on to celebrate their loves, friendships, and infatuations. They reach out to each other and to their parents for a sense of direction and safety in the face of the individual challenges they face, and find deep and meaningful connections. But still, the kids feel that they're feeling their way. Where do they turn for guidance on how to have a relationship? How to feel? How to deal?

As they are overwhelmed by messages about what teen love, romance, fun, and coolness are "supposed to" look like, the characters struggle increasingly with a sense of confusion, invisibility, and powerlessness. Their fledgling voices are drowned out by the media and by their own insecurities. A battle ensues between the characters and their demons. Vita accepts an offer from a local radio station to talk about body image and self-esteem. Ethan must decide whether to accept a scholarship to UMASS or stay on the farm and help his dad. Tom and Colby have an awkward moment



where Colby thinks Tom is coming onto him, but actually Tom just wants to be friends. Colby learns something here. Rachel puts Jesse against the wall about having the baby, and Jesse bails out. Sarah longs to feel something and considers cutting herself. . The street kids live in their own world on the bridge and come to the rescue at the last moment to save a teen. Danny retreats into a dark on-line world, where he connects with macabre strangers and where neither Zac nor his parents seem able to reach him. He retreats further and further until he commits suicide and disappears.

When the dust settles, the kids find Danny gone. They help each other heal and come forward to express gratitude for their gifts, strengths, and families, and hopes for their futures. The play ends with the kids coming down stage and participating in a town meeting where they voice their opinion and ideas for what teens need in their lives and in their communities.

The show ends with a rousing finale song and then snow falling to symbolize a fresh and clean start for the hopes and dreams of all teenagers