

theatre

AT THE J

Family Handbook

Winter 2026

theatre AT THE J

WINTER 2026 FAMILY HANDBOOK

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Welcome to Theatre at the J!

Theatre at the J provides an outlet for creative expression and creates a safe space for children to find their place in the arts community. Designed to help each young artist reach their creative and personal potential, Theatre at the J will guide young actors through the development of self-confidence, learning the values of teamwork and collaboration, and strengthening their problem-solving skills. Working together to tell a story, each Theatre at the J Player will gain a deeper appreciation for and understanding of the theatre arts, all while forming lifelong friendships and strong connections in their community.

Thank you for your partnership and trusting me to create art with your children.

Sincerely,

Katie Daniels
Theatre Director



Contact Information

Theatre Director:

513.644.0708
theatre@mayersonjcc.org

Communication Policy:

This includes important reminders and updates. Please note, unsubscribing from any Mayerson JCC emails will unsubscribe you from Theatre at the J communications as well. **We recommend saving theatre@mayersonjcc.org in your email address book to ensure you receive our emails.** Updates shared by email will also be posted in the Remind app for those who use it.

Attendance & Participation

Pick-Up / Drop-Off Policy

Parents must drop off and pick up students in the theatre space. Please escort your child through the building and stay with them until they are with a Theatre at the J staff member.

Notification of Absences

A show is a commitment of time and energy. Make sure you review the rehearsal and performance schedule in advance of the start of session.

Do you anticipate any conflicts with soccer, music lessons, or other activities? If so, please **let the Director know of conflicts by email or phone in advance. All known conflicts must be submitted at the time of auditions.** Conflicts that arise after that date should be communicated to the Director with as much advance notice as possible.

Snow Policy

In the event of a Level 3 snow emergency, the JCC building will be closed and all rehearsals canceled. You will be notified by email if the building is closed, and there will also be a banner on the website. Please check your email regularly if winter weather is expected.

Please use your best judgement when deciding to come to rehearsal if a snow storm is expected. Evening rehearsals in the winter do not end until after dark when road conditions may be hazardous. If a closure is anticipated for the following morning, we may cancel rehearsal on a case-by-case basis. Check your email and the Remind app for updates if winter weather is predicted.

Cancellation Policy

If you make the decision to withdraw your child from the program, please notify the Director as soon as possible. We will stop any future payments, but no refunds will be issued for classes prior to the withdrawal notification. If your child misses three consecutive rehearsal (MINI) or four (JR) without notification, you will be automatically withdrawn and charged a \$50 processing fee. Withdrawals less than three weeks before Opening Night will be expected to pay in full.

Please keep the needs of the community in mind when deciding to withdraw your child. A show is a commitment, and while adjustments can be made easily early in the process, it becomes more difficult the closer we get to the performance. The bulk of the work of a student dropping out falls on the shoulders of other young performers who need to step up and learn a new part or re-learn choreography or blocking that now has a hole in it. Communication is king: if you have questions or concerns or need additional accommodations for your child, reach out to the Director as soon as possible to work out solutions.

Sick Policy

While we encourage full attendance, if possible, please do not send your child to rehearsal if they are sick! Students should be fever and vomit free for 24 hours before returning to rehearsal. Illness can spread quickly through the cast and we would rather do without them than risk infecting others. During flu season, encourage your child to practice good hygiene: washing their hands, covering their mouth when sick, and not sharing food or drink with other children.

Behavior Policy

Theatre and children thrive with structure. We want participants to feel comfortable trying new things and expressing themselves. It is important that all participants treat one another with mutual respect and kindness. Participants will help craft rules as a company that center around the principals of respect, kindness, and creativity.

Theatre at the J strives to cultivate a community based on respect. The three rules students are expected to know and follow are: respect each other, respect ourselves, and respect our space. Students are expected to clean up after themselves and may be held for a few minutes after rehearsal to clean up any mess they have made.

Students are expected to treat staff, other students, and themselves in a respectful manner. Name-calling, criticism, and physical aggression will not be tolerated. Playfighting is discouraged as it is disruptive and can easily get out of hand. "Joking" is not an acceptable excuse for disrespectful behavior and will be treated the same as intentional maliciousness.

Food Policy

If your child needs to eat before/during rehearsal, they should bring their snack with them. The first ten minutes of class is reserved for check-in, socialization, and snacks. During longer

rehearsals, a designated ten-minute break time will also be given for snacking. No food or drink other than water is permitted in the Studio or on the stage. Students may not eat or drink anything other than water in costume. No food will be permitted backstage during dress rehearsals/performances.

Do not plan on your student getting food from the J Cafe during rehearsal. We may occasionally have staff available to escort students to the Cafe, but this should not be expected at every rehearsal and students will not be permitted to go alone.

Accommodation Policy

Theatre at the J, strives to host an inclusive and accessible program that enables all individuals to fully participate to their ability. We are committed to working with families to support participants' with reasonable accommodations when possible. In order to best support your child, we ask that you share any relevant information regarding behavior, sensory, or medical needs with the Director upon registration. This may include IEPs, 504s, behavior plans, or even information about recent life changes. This type of information ensures we can work together to provide a healthy, consistent framework for redirection and focus for all participants. Students may bring fidgets, books, or other quiet materials to work on off stage, with the understanding that those materials should be set aside quickly when called up on stage.

Disciplinary Action

If, even with reasonable accommodations, participants exhibit behavior that poses a safety risk to themselves or others, or is significantly disruptive to the process, staff will respond with the following discipline measures:

On first offense, the participant will receive a redirection during rehearsal and staff will check in with the caregiver at pick-up to notify them of the behaviors seen at rehearsal. We appreciate caregivers' partnership in addressing behavior at home, between rehearsals.

If the behavior persists at future rehearsals, a meeting with the Director will be scheduled for the caregiver and participant prior to the next rehearsal to work as a team to find a solution.

In the event the behavior continues after these interventions, the participant will be suspended for 1 - 3 rehearsals based on the severity of the offense, with a plan to return to the program ready to cooperate as a team.

In extreme cases, if after all of the above measures have been tried, a participant may be told to leave the company. This option impacts the entire company and will only be taken if the behaviors are extreme and previous attempts at interventions have not resulted in a lasting change.

Examples of extreme behavior include:

- Use of hate speech (intentional or unintentional). Hate speech is defined as any form of expression considered abusive or threatening, expressing prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or similar grounds.
- Physical aggression (intentional or unintentional). Physical aggression is defined as behavior that causes or threatens harm to others.
- Leaving the space without notifying staff.

Devices & Social Media Policy

To ensure a focused and productive theatre environment, we have a no-technology policy during class time. All devices (including phones and tablets) must remain in bags and be turned off or

silenced. We understand that caregivers and children may want or need to be in contact—we ask that this be limited to before or after class.

In case of an emergency, caregivers may call the JCC Welcome Desk at 513.761.7500 and ask that they be put in touch with or that their message is passed along to the Theatre Director.

Thank you for helping us maintain a safe, supportive, and focused environment.

Photo Policy

By participating in Theatre at the J, you give permission to the JCC to use your child's photograph or other likeness in JCC publicity and/or marketing materials. If you choose not to allow the JCC to use such photography, you agree to provide the JCC with written notice of specific exclusions.

Why Theatre?

From the ancient Greeks to Shakespeare, theatre has been a powerful lens for seeing and interacting with the world around us. For students, it is a powerful tool to explore new concepts, ideas, and feelings during a period when they are still deciding who they want to be as people.

Educational theatre supports literacy, offering students the opportunity to perform literary analysis in a more immediate way as they make choices to support their character development. Acting develops student confidence and self-esteem while also providing important public speaking skills.

Perhaps most importantly, theatre is fundamentally teamwork. Student actors must learn to work together to bring a creative project to life, acknowledging their own and others' strengths and weaknesses to create something that is more than the sum of its parts. Theatre kids emerge from a production with life-long friendships and a sense of deep pride in their collective accomplishment.

Helping students pursue a passion in arts like theatre is an investment in our future as we create empowered, confident citizens who respect themselves and each other.

Elements of Theatre

Theatre is made up of many different aspects, and there are many different ways to be involved in theatre. Each role is equally important, and they all exist to tell stories.

In addition, the process of presenting a play offers young people the opportunity to develop social skills and learn valuable life lessons. Some examples follow:

- **Everyone's contributions are important.**
- Everyone must **work together**, encouraging **collaboration** and **community**.
- Children learn the importance of **listening** to each other speak and **waiting one's turn**. They take **positive risks** and conquer fears while **building self-confidence**.
- But the best part? **A show is a lot of fun for everyone involved**, no matter what part you have in the cast or crew.

The Process of a Show

- Meet and Build Community
- Ensemble Activities
- Audition Preparation
- Auditions
- Rehearsals (see full calendar)
Regular Classes: Music, Choreography, Blocking, Technical Rehearsal, Dress Rehearsals
- Performances
 - May 13 at 6:30pm** (Call Time: 4:30 - 5pm)
 - May 14 at 6:30pm** (Call Time: 4:30 - 5pm)
 - May 17 at 2pm** (Call Time: 12pm)
- Strike (breaking down the set after the show and cleaning up the space)
- Cast Party

Audition Announcement & Preparations

Auditions will be held for JRs on the second day of class: January 11. If your student is unable to attend, notify the Director immediately so alternate arrangements can be made. Students who do not attend auditions without prior notification will be placed in an ensemble role.

Auditions will include preparing an acting side (small section of the script) by selecting 1 - 2 characters to read for. Materials and information will be provided in advance of the audition with time to practice at home. For musicals, students should prepare to sing a 1-minute selection of a song of their choice.

Auditions are presented in front of a panel of qualified members of the production team. Theatre is a collaborative effort, and it's important to remember the Director's role to see the big picture and guide every aspect of the production. Casting is always a giant puzzle of figuring out who fits into which role, as well as how they fit with their co-stars. Not getting the part you want does not mean you weren't good enough; it means you were better at something else. All parts are equally important as the show needs everyone to succeed. The goal is for our young actors to grow and learn no matter their role.

So, you're in the ensemble...

Prepare to own the show! Every role is essential to the story we are telling, and the ensemble is no exception. The ensemble numbers in any show bring the power and enthusiasm to the performance and can often make the biggest impression on the audience (and the cast!).

If your young actor is in the ensemble, please avoid saying anything that might diminish their confidence and pride in this important role (e.g. "just the ensemble" or "only the ensemble").

Costume Guidelines

With few exceptions, costumes will be provided by Theatre at the J. We will have costume fittings and take show photos at the beginning of Tech Week.

For the safety of our students, all actors will be expected to wear a base costume. We do not have private changing rooms, so all actors should arrive to dress rehearsals and performances

Unless otherwise noted, all actors should wear comfortable, black shoes. If your child doesn't have black shoes, we have a supply of dance shoes that we can provide. Please provide your child's shoe size during the audition process.

Children can often be very picky about their clothes. Sometimes it happens that an actor dislikes the costume they've been given. While we encourage children to be inquisitive and provide ideas and opinions, costume choices are at the sole discretion of the Director. If it is a sensory or accommodation issue, please reach out to the Director and we will do our best to resolve the issue. If they simply hate how it looks, talk to them about the character they play, and remind them that the costume is for the character, not the actor. Remember that costume choices are made based on the show as a complete picture, not the individual.

Supporting Your Star

Theatre kids often require extra support and encouragement at home in order to succeed on stage! Here are a few things to look out for in your star.

Memorization

Memorization is easiest when actors have a partner to work with. You take the script, and read any lines that belong to other characters. If the actor forgets, they should say, "Line!" and you read the first three or four words to give them a hint. Discourage negative behaviors such as repeatedly apologizing when they forget. This pulls the actor out of the scene and undermines their confidence. Just "Line!" and then continue with the scene when they remember.

Make sure your actor knows their cue as well as their lines! The cue is whatever is said or done immediately before their line that lets them know it's their turn.

Reading is not memorization! The brain needs to forget in order to remember. If your actor is reading off their script, they should read the line once, then put the script down and repeat it out loud without looking at the words on the paper. If the brain thinks that the words will always be there to read, it won't bother to remember them once the show goes "off-book."

Singing/Choreography

The best way to memorize music is to learn the entire song, rather than just the individual parts. Do you drive your child to school in the morning? Get used to hearing the entire musical soundtrack on repeat!

Choreography is tied to music. We will teach your child how to count so they know when their steps take place. Lyrics are often a good cue, and it can be helpful to sing while dancing. Singing without the soundtrack is a good practice if they need to slow down. Encourage your child to practice their dance at home if they are struggling in rehearsal.

Stage Fright

Stage fright is a natural thing for young actors to experience, even if they've been on stage before! Plenty of professional performers still get a case of nerves before going in front of an audience, even if they've been doing it for years. Here are a few tips to help your actor if they are nervous.

Positive thinking. Have them say a few affirmations before the rehearsal or show. "This production is going to be amazing." "I have all my lines memorized, and I am ready to perform."

Believing things will go well, often helps them to go well!

Confident body language. We naturally huddle up and cross our arms in front of each other when we get scared. The opposite also works! If you stand in a confident pose, your mind will think that you are actually confident! Studies show that standing in a "Superman pose," feet in a steady stance, hands on hips, chest forward, chin up, tricks the body into relaxing and feeling more sure.

Box breathing. Breathe in for the count of four, hold it for the count of four, breathe out for the count of four, hold for the count of four, and repeat until you feel better. Box breathing regulates the nervous system, and it's hard to worry about your performance if you're busy counting!

Food and rest. Well fed, well rested actors perform better than tired and hungry ones! Make sure your child eats before rehearsals and shows for the best results!

Your support. Nothing is going to help your child be successful like knowing their favorite person in the world believes in them. Hype them up before and after the show! In the event that your child is upset before a performance, we may come find you in the audience to comfort your little one and reassure them before going on.

Avoid Negative Thinking

Memorization is hard! Singing in front of an audience is scary! There may be moments when your child thinks that they're not good enough and won't do a good job. Encourage patience over perfection. There is no such thing as a perfect show. Redirect negative thoughts about not being good enough or not having a big enough role by reminding them that everyone is essential to the show and we're here to have fun! Students should never apologize for making a mistake in rehearsal. Forgetting is a natural part of the rehearsal process and apologies should be reserved for intentional wrong doing such as talking down to another actor or not studying at home.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

Aside from the support and guidance you will offer your child, any extra time you have to volunteer on the production is welcome. Please let us know your particular skills or interests.

Volunteer Background Checks

Background checks are REQUIRED for all parent volunteers working directly with children. To ensure the safety and well-being of our students, all parent volunteers must undergo a background check before being approved for volunteer opportunities at the J.

Background checks will be coordinated by HR at the JCC at no cost to you and scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. All background check information will be kept confidential.

We thank you for your cooperation and partnership.

Set Building/Painting

We have two dates on the rehearsal calendar for construction opportunities! The first is the set build planning meeting. If you are handy with power tools or painting large backdrops, please come to that meeting and figure out how you can help bring the stage to life!

A spreadsheet will be available with a list of costumes and props that need to be created. These are projects that can easily be done at home. Just bring the finished piece to rehearsal when it is completed!

There will be a paint day close to the end of rehearsal when the set build is finished. All are invited! Bring paint clothes and all finished props and costumes so we can be ready to go into tech week with a completed stage.

Check your email for more information about building and painting opportunities!

Run Crew and Wardrobe Volunteers

Managing dozens of children takes a lot of adult bodies! We are always looking for additional hands to help with costume changes and supervising little ones back stage. Volunteer for one performance and receive a free ticket to a second performance of your choice! Run crew volunteers must attend two dress rehearsals of their choice.

To ensure the safety and well-being of our students, all backstage parent volunteers are REQUIRED to have a background check. This includes makeup artists and wardrobe assistants.

Hair and Makeup

Hair and makeup are the essential finishing touches for theatre performances! Especially for musicals, your makeup skills help give the actors their final look and get into character for the performances.

Hair and makeup artists should be available from the earliest call time to the door time. For some shows we may need makeup or hair changes during the performance. If you are backstage during the performance, you will receive a free ticket to another performance of your choice!

Makeup trials will be scheduled for the first dress rehearsal of tech week. Full hair and makeup will also be used during the final two dress rehearsals for the show. Hair and makeup artists must have a current background check.

Let the Director know if you're willing to share your skills!

Additional Opportunities

Every parent/guardian is encouraged to help with the production. No experience is necessary! This is a great chance to learn about theatre and create a strong community. (**NOTE: For any activities that do not involve direct contact with children, background checks are not required.**)

- **Playbill Ad Sales:** We sell ads in our playbill to help offset the cost of the high-quality programming we offer. We are looking for parents to reach out to businesses, organizations, and individuals to purchase ad space in the playbill. Low cost and high visibility!
- **Cast Party:** Help us plan and throw a cast party at the end of the season!
- **Prop and Costume Creation:** Do you have sewing skills? Do you love hunting for good bargains? Help us source our list of props and costumes!

Please email theatre@mayeronjcc.org with your interest, availability, and skills! Thank you for partnering with us and trusting us with your children.

We look forward to an amazing season with you.

Glossary of Theatre Terms

- **Blocking:** movement on the stage. Common blocking terms include upstage, down stage, stage right, and stage left.
- **Body Language:** using posture and movement to convey a character's feelings.
- **Characterization:** moving, acting, and speaking as your character would, rather than yourself.
- **Cheat-out:** turning your body to be more open to the audience.
- **Choreography:** literally "dance-writing." Choreography is the movement of dance steps in a musical.
- **Cue:** the thing that happens right before. A cue may be a line, a lighting effect, or a blocking instruction.
- **Dress Rehearsal:** usually two weeks before the show when full costumes and props are used in rehearsal.
- **Enunciation:** speaking clearly and making sure the audience understands the dialogue, especially by focusing on pronouncing all the consonants in a word.
- **Lines:** the words a character speaks in a script.
- **Notes:** usually given after rehearsal, or before a rehearsal break. Notes are instructions for changes or suggestions, comments on things that were done well and pointing out things that need improvement. Notes can be given to cast or crew, and will be given by the Director, Stage Manager, Assistant Director or Choreographer as needed. Listen carefully to your notes, and write down anything you need to remember later.
- **Off-book:** Book is the technical term for an acting script. Off-book means you no longer have the script in your hand during rehearsals.
- **Projection:** literally "to throw your voice." Projection is speaking loudly without raising your pitch to a shout or scream.
- **Quick-change:** a costume change that takes place in only a couple of minutes, usually in the wings and with the help of an assistant dresser.
- **Stage Directions:** part of the script that is not spoken. May be italicized or (parenthetical).
- **Tech Week:** last week of dress rehearsals when full lights and sound are incorporated into the show.
- **Understudy:** someone who is designated to take over a lead role in the event that the lead is absent or quits the show. Understudies do not need to have the lead part memorized and should not expect to play the lead unless otherwise informed by the Director.
- **Upstaging:** moving in front of an actor, either intentionally or unintentionally to block the view from the audience. It can also be used metaphorically to steal a moment from an actor or try to attract attention to yourself when it should be focused on someone else. Do not do this!
- **Vocal Expression:** varying your voice to be higher or lower, faster or slower, to convey emotion.
- **Wings:** the space to the right and left of the stage where actors wait for their cue to enter.

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of Cincinnati

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