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Introduction

How can we truly understand what it is like to be in the mind of another human being? Can we ever really know what it feels like to be someone else? What if that person speaks another language, or does not speak at all? Do we as a society value each and every human life equally?

These are the questions that fuel the stories in *Uncommon Sense*, a new play about four people on the autism spectrum, produced by Tectonic Theater Project and written by Anushka Paris-Carter and Andy Paris. It is a play that uses the elements of the theater to convey the experience of autism, and that celebrates autism while recognizing its challenges.

Following the lives, loves and struggles of four characters with autism, Dan, Jess, Moose, and Lali, *Uncommon Sense* illustrates the wide range on the “spectrum” of autism. It is said that “if you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism.” *Uncommon Sense* touchingly explores the ways in which we as humans misunderstand each other, no matter how urgent the need to reach over what divides one person from another.

Andy Paris, who directs the play, is a longtime Tectonic Theater Project company member, and was one of the creators of *The Laramie Project*. He has been collaborating with Tectonic’s Artistic Director, Moisés Kaufman for over twenty years. *Uncommon Sense*, created using Tectonic’s method of devising theater, Moment Work, marks the first time that Tectonic is producing a play not directed by Mr. Kaufman. With it, Tectonic continues its commitment to the exploration of theatrical language, and of telling stories about what it means to be human.

Meet the Artists

Andy Paris (*Playwright, Director*)



Andy Paris has made a career of developing new works for the stage and screen, including *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later*, *The Laramie Project* (Emmy Nomination), *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* by Moisés Kaufman, Lucie Tiberghien's *The Quiet Room*, *Innocents* by Rachel Dickstein, *The Talking Band's The Necklace*, Matthew Maguire's *Phaedre* and Deb Margolin's *Indelible Flesh*. As a writer/director: *Going Public*, an original play about our education system presented at Amherst College, *The American Family*, presented at The Edinburgh Fringe Festival, *The Fanmaker's Inquisition*, adapted from the novel by Rikki Ducornet, *Goldstar Ohio*, which premiered at The Cleveland Public Theatre, *Migration* at the Experimental Theatre Wing at NYU, and Faith Pilger's *The Stages of Burning*. For The Women's Project he wrote *The Corporate Carnival*, which was presented in the Winter Garden at the World Financial Center. Andy has performed in countless other plays in New York, regionally, and in Europe, including *Or* by Liz Duffy Adams and directed by Wendy McClellan at The Women's Project. Regionally he has been seen at Denver Center, The Huntington, Playmaker's Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse, Rep. Theatre of St. Louis, Hartford Stage, Theatre Virginia, Berkeley Rep and La Jolla Playhouse. Favorite roles include Keppler in Richard Goodwin's *Two Men of Florence* directed by Edward Hall, and all the men in *A Sleeping Country* by Melanie Marnich and directed by Mark Rucker. Film/TV credits include *The Laramie Project* (HBO) and *Law & Order* (NBC). He has also been the recipient of two AUDIE Awards for his audiobook narrations. Favorite authors he has recorded include Jodi Picoult, Keith Donahue, Stephen Tunney, Nicole Krauss, A.M. Holmes, Ursula La Guinn, James Frey and Arthur Phillips. Andy was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio and is a graduate of NYU. He is a Teaching Company Member for Tectonic.

Anushka Paris-Carter (*Playwright*)



Anushka Paris-Carter started working as an actor on TV at age 11. She studied devising at Australia's National Theater and the Swinburne Institute of Technology. While at Swinburne she was fortunate enough to study with Phillip Gaulier. Other work in Australia includes *St Feets for St Martins*, *Library Stories* at The Malt House, *Hiroshima* for the Melbourne Spoleto Festival and *Janus* for the Australian Broadcasting Commission. NY credits include Carson Krietzler's *Self Defense* and Valerie Shoots' *Andy*, Kirk Bromely's *Icarus* and *Aria*, *Bocca* for Target Margin, Basil Twist's *Symphonie Fantastic*, *Mephisto* for *Reverie*, Lucie Tiberghien's *The Quiet*

Room, *Gwen John* directed by Leigh Fondakowski, *Family Running For Mr. Whippy* directed by Elyse Singer and Marcia Jean Kurtz's *Between Two Worlds*. NY film & TV: Host of *X-Games* for ESPN; Ed Bowe's *Picture Book*. Anushka is a graduate of The Public's Shakespeare Lab and the Naropa Summer Writing Program. Writing Credits: *Fan Makers Inquisition* with Andy Paris.

Moises Kaufman (*Tectonic Theater Project Artistic Director*)



Moisés Kaufman is the founder and artistic director of Tectonic Theater Project, a Tony- and Emmy-nominated director and playwright, and a 2015 recipient of the National Medal of Arts. Mr.

Kaufman's Broadway directing credits include the revival of *The Heiress* with Jessica Chastain, *33 Variations* (which he also wrote) starring Jane Fonda (5 Tony nominations); Rajiv Joseph's Pulitzer Prize finalist *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* with Robin Williams; and Doug Wright's

Pulitzer and Tony Award-winning play *I Am My Own Wife* with Jefferson Mays.

His play *The Laramie Project* (which he wrote with the Tectonic Theater Project company) is among the most performed plays in America. Other

credits include *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (which he also wrote), *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* (Mark Taper, BAM), *The Nightingale* (La Jolla Playhouse), *The Common Pursuit* (Roundabout), *Macbeth* with Liev Schreiber (Public Theater), *This Is How It Goes* (Donmar Warehouse), *One Arm* by Tennessee Williams (New Group and Steppenwolf Theatre Company), the opera *El Gato con Botas* (Puss in Boots) at the New Victory Theater, and *Master Class* with Rita Moreno (Berkeley Repertory Theatre). Kaufman also co-wrote and directed the HBO film adaptation of *The Laramie Project*, which received two Emmy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Writer. He is an Obie winner and a Guggenheim Fellow in Playwriting.

Tectonic Theater Project



Tectonic Theater Project is dedicated to developing innovative works that explore theatrical language and form, fostering an artistic dialogue with our audiences on the social, political and human issues that affect us all. In service to this goal, Tectonic supports readings, workshops, and full theatrical productions, as well as training for students around the country in our play-making techniques.

Moment Work is Tectonic Theater Project's method for devising new theater works. It is also used to analyze and re-imagine existing plays. Used to create classic works such as *The Laramie Project* and *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, Moment Work utilizes all the elements of the stage on equal footing, instead of starting with the written text. Designers, actors, writers and directors collaborate on creating the narrative, and together they investigate the full potential of the stage.

Production History

Uncommon Sense has been in the making for six years. Anushka and Andy started by doing research and conducting hundreds of interviews on five different continents with members of the autism community. They developed the script through the use of Moment Work and in collaboration with Tectonic Theater Project.

The play had its world premiere at the Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center at the University of Northern Iowa in January of 2017. After sold-out performances there, the play went into further development in preparation for its New York premier.



Interview with the Playwrights

How did you first come up with the idea for writing this play?

ANDY: After being thrust into the autism community through finding autism in our own family, we have been immersed in this world for more than a decade. A diagnosis of autism is supposed to explain something. But for me, it begged more questions than it answered. Many of the challenges that autism presents are language based. So it is inherently very difficult to describe in a few words or a pamphlet or even a book. What is the experience of autism, and is it possible to reflect that experience theatrically? Can we use the tools of the theatre to communicate some of what autism is really all about?

ANUSHKA: We believed the details of our own existence in the autism community were not interesting to the outside world. At times we'd tried to explain what it was like to live in this world to other people, and we'd often been met with uncomprehending stares and awkward silences. When we'd ventured to talk about autism to outsiders, we'd hope to find answers to big question that kept nagging at us both- What is autism? Yes, it's a developmental disorder that affects each individual differently, but what does that mean to us? To everyone?

In how many countries did you go to conduct interviews, and were those done in person or on Skype or both?

ANDY: International interviews were over Skype. We spoke to people from Saudi Arabia, India, Nigeria, and the UK. For me, there was this overwhelming sense that wherever anyone was on the globe, the stories of isolation, of difficulty in getting services, the stigma, the mystery, the familial pressures, the hope, the successes.... so much of it was so similar if not identical.





What was the interview process like? How did you decide which characters to focus on?

ANDY: We knew that if we were going to attempt to theatricalize the spectrum we needed to look outward from our own experience and attempt to glimpse into as many lives of people on the spectrum as possible, whether that be from interviews or other kinds of research. As far as character development, we wanted to layer several lives of people who were in varied positions on the spectrum, in the hopes that the tapestry might reveal the similarities as well as the differences, and give us a fuller picture of the experience of the spectrum.

ANUSHKA: The stories we gathered from most people began to follow a fairly clear trajectory that started with discovery their autism to accepting their autism. The same trajectory appeared to be true for care givers and loved ones of people people on the spectrum.

Did you fictionalize the characters, or are they based on real people?

ANUSHKA: The characters are based on real people, but they are highly fictionalized. Dan is probably the best example of that. Dan did not act like a cat to get Sarah to like him but someone else on the spectrum did. Also, Dan does not eat with his hands. However it is not uncommon to find people on the spectrum who do not like to use knives and forks and it was easy enough to imagine Dan on a date in a restaurant not using a knife and fork.

How was Moment Work used in the creation of the play? And, how do you know when a play is finished?

ANDY: Moment Work provided a structure in which to investigate how we might physically bring the spectrum to life on stage. Moment Work seemed like such a good fit for this particular process. We were searching for a way to reflect the world differently than how we typically experience it. And Moment Work is such a terrific way to surprise yourself. There can be so little planned in the development

of moments, that it allows you to discover what you otherwise might never have been able to plan out ahead of time. And that seemed consistent with autism in a way. Coming at narrative in a different manner; living in the anxiety of the unknown; indulging in a sensory experience, or frightening oneself with it.... These are things that happen by surprise in Moment Work, and that unpredictability seemed to suit a process about autism.

What's it like to collaborate creatively with your spouse?

ANDY: There is such a profound sense of intimacy that permeates the work. There is a set of common experiences to draw from that strengthens the fabric of the work. There is always a trusted person in the room to let you know gently that you're losing the plot.

ANUSHKA: I love working with Andy. Even if he wasn't my husband, I would want to work with him. He's smart in every way I am not. He sees things I miss. And he absolutely loves the theater. The down side is when we disagree it requires a great deal of patience and there is nowhere to run when you get mad at the other person.

What advice would you have for someone who is starting out in the theater, or who wants to write a play? How do you start?

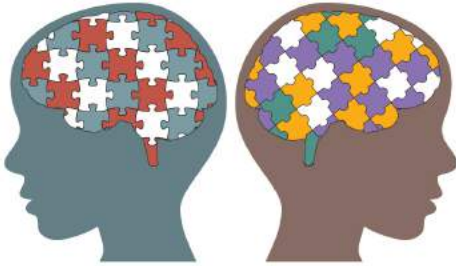
ANDY: Start by defining very clearly what is important about the work you are embarking on. Why do you need work on this project? And what is the need for it to happen now? That will drive you.

ANUSHKA: Perhaps one could pick something that makes them crazy and that they don't have any answers to. Go fishing and see what you can find in the dark.



What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- Autism is characterized by social interaction and communication difficulties.

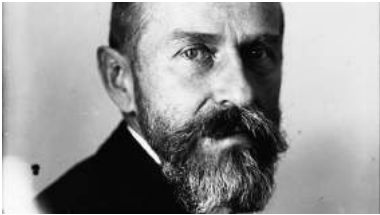


- Common symptoms include a lack of/delay in speech, repetitive movement and behavior, minimal to no eye contact, specifically focused interests, and in some occasions sleep and seizure disorders.
- Autism is a “spectrum condition” that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees
- There is no known single cause of autism
- There is no medical test that can diagnose autism, instead physicians administer behavioral exam.
- Autism can be detected in children as young as 6 months
- Autism is derived from the Greek word “autos” which means “self”
- Autism affects 1/68 children
- In June 2014, [researchers estimated](#) the lifetime cost of caring for a child with autism is as great as \$2.4 million
- People with Autism are more likely to be diagnosed with epilepsy

History of Autism

1911:

Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss psychiatrist, first used the word “autism” to describe an aspect of schizophrenia.



1943:

Austrian psychiatrist and physician *Leo Kanner*, identified autism as a separate condition from schizophrenia because it appeared in the early infantile stage of life. He labeled it “Early Infantile Autism.”



1944:

Hans Asperger named a similar but separate condition naming it “Asperger’s Syndrome.” People exhibiting Asperger’s had similar symptoms, but more advanced communication and cognitive abilities.

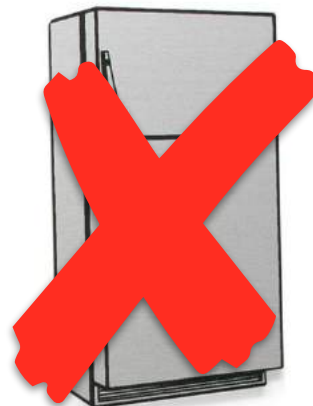


1950's:

Bruno Bettelheim formed a theory that had many medical experts believe that Autism was caused in children by psychological harm from their mother. Mothers with autistic children were labeled as “refrigerator mothers” to describe their coldness and apathy to their children.



How was school, dear?



How was school, dear?

1964:

Bernard Rimland proved that autism was a biologically based disorder, disproving the “refrigerator mother theory”





THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA
TEACCH
Autism Program
Services Across the Lifespan

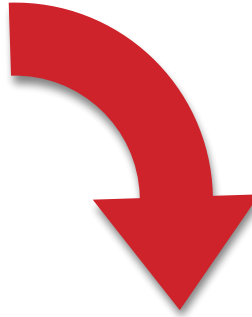


1972:

Eric Schopler created the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) program to provide programs for people on the autism spectrum. Today it is a world-wide model for programs with a similar mission.

1980:

“Infantile Autism” was added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-III), allowing doctors to properly diagnose people on the autism spectrum. This permanently separated Autism and Schizophrenia.



1991:

The federal government declared Autism as a special education category, allowing schools to specially assist students with autism.

2005:

Autism Speaks was founded by Bob and Suzanne Wright to raise awareness and funds for research as well as advocate for members of the autism community.



2013:

The DSM-V diagnosis is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and there are no longer sub diagnoses (such as Asperger Syndrome), although these sub diagnoses are often still used in everyday language.



Glossary

- **Asperger's Syndrome:** was first described in the 1940s by Hans Asperger. Many professionals felt Asperger's syndrome was simply a milder form of autism and used the term "high-functioning autism" to describe these individuals. This term was added to the DSM-IV in 1994 and was replaced by the umbrella term of "Autism Spectrum Disorder" in 2013.
- **Compulsions:** deliberate and repetitive behaviors often pertaining to counting or cleaning
- **Developmental Disorder:** refers to disorders that affect normal development. This may affect one area of development or several areas of development.
- **Echolalia:** a repetition of speech that children on the autism spectrum often exhibit while learning how to speak. The words/phrases repeated often have no meaning to the child saying them.
- **Hypersensitive Hearing:** sound sensitivity to certain frequencies heard at loud levels
- **Neuro-Diversity:** is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation.
- **Neurotypical:** not being affected by a neurological disorder; exhibiting average neurological development.
- **Obsessions:** persistent repetitive thoughts and/or preoccupations with certain objects or actions
- **Operant Conditioning:** modification of behavior through positive/negative reinforcement
- **Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD-NOS):** is a 'subthreshold' condition in which some - but not all - features of autism or another explicitly identified disorder are identified.
- **Respite Care:** short-term care provided to individuals with disabilities. This care can be delivered in home or in a licensed setting for an extended amount of time. Respite care often allows caregivers to take a break and relieve stress and fatigue.
- **Speech-Language Therapy:** Provided with the goal of improving an individual's ability to communicate, including verbal and nonverbal communication.

Meet the Characters

DAN:

Dan is a man with an unstoppably positive disposition. Diagnosed with Asperger's in his twenties, he loves classical music (Mozart, not Bach!), and has degrees in biology, veterinary medicine, physics, and Japanese. Dan is currently working in a grocery store while studying to be certified in the actuarial sciences. He meets and begins to date Sarah. As their relationship moves quickly toward romance and love, Dan must learn to balance his own coping mechanisms against the needs and feelings of the woman he loves.



MOOSE:

Moose is a young man with severe autism. He does not speak, is easily startled, and cannot care for himself. Completely reliant on his parents, Moose's story centers on them grappling with the question of whether to continue to care for him themselves or place him in a group home. Moose is hyper-aware of some things, such as traffic noises, but he is able to completely filter out other stimuli, such as his mother's voice. He responds with joy to jellyfish, and needs his eggbeater to self-soothe during times of high stress.

LALI:

Lali is Ajalaa's daughter. Like Moose, she is unable to speak, and has always been assumed to have limited cognitive abilities. Lali wears a pink helmet to protect herself from self-harm and soothes her overloaded senses by scooping dry rice with her hands. A surprising and life-changing discovery is made about Lali through the use of an iPad, that throws Ajalaa's and Lali's world into uncharted territory and that offers previously unimagined hope for both of them.



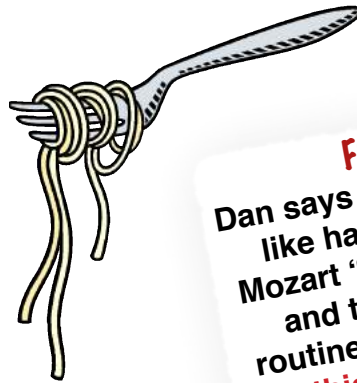
JESS:

Jess is a bright young college student on the autism spectrum, an accomplished video gamer, and a gifted student of math and science. Jess has been bullied and has survived a difficult high school career, so she enters college hopeful that things there will be different. Jess believes that she can cope all on her own, without the support services available to her at other colleges. She is surprised when Alex, a popular, athletic, neuro-typical young man approaches her for help with class work and then begins to fall for her romantically. This relationship, complicated by Jess' vulnerability and difficulty reading social cues, leads to a catharsis and a change of plans for Jess.



EMILY:

Emily is Moose's mom, and has dedicated her life to protecting him from harm and providing him with a loving home. Caring for Moose is so all-consuming that Emily has sacrificed almost everything - her career, her friendships, her religion, and her marriage - in order to care for her son at home rather than place him in respite care. Exhausted by the demands this places on her, she is determined to stay the course until a near-catastrophic accident forces her to a gut-wrenching reexamination of her choices.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Dan says that Bach's music "sounds like hammering nails", whereas Mozart "sounds like he's getting up and telling a stand-up comedy routine." Listen to [this clip](#) of Bach and [this clip](#) of Mozart and see if you agree with Dan. Why or why not? What do you think are the differences between the two composers?

GABRIEL:

Gabriel is Moose's father and Emily's husband. Having a history of autism in his family has not lined up with his life plan. He works extremely hard to

earn the money to support Moose and Emily, and, like Emily, is exhausted by the effort it takes to care for his son at home. The lack of sleep and the constant disagreement with his wife over Moose's care have put Gabriel under tremendous strain, a situation that comes to a head when Moose has a near-fatal accident.

AJALAA:

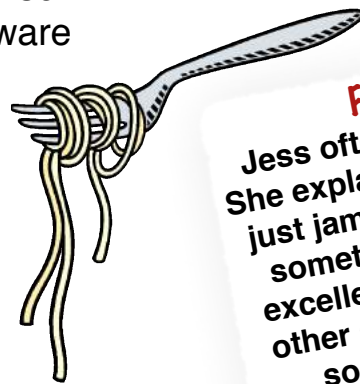
Ajalaa is Lali's mother, a native of India, and a retired university professor. Determined to help her daughter communicate, Ajalaa has been traveling the world to find someone who can help her unlock the mystery of her daughter's mind. Once accused by a doctor of being the cause of Lali's autism, Ajalaa is ceaselessly energetic and loving. She is both elated and anguished when Lali's truth is discovered in a stunning revelation.

SARAH:

Sarah is a music educator in her mid to late 20's. She is quirky and intellectually curious, open to all of life's ups and downs, including a romance with Dan with whom she shares many interests. As their relationship progresses, Sarah finds she must adjust her expectations in order to be more inclusive of Dan's need for order and routine.

ALEX:

Alex is a college Lacrosse player who needs to keep up his grades in order to stay on the team. He seeks out Jess, the smartest girl in his neurology class, hoping to find a tutor, and becomes attracted to her direct no-nonsense approach to life. Alex, though aware of Jess' differences, makes demands of her that she is ill-equipped to deal with, and they fall into a complicated and somewhat treacherous relationship.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Jess often realizes her limitations. She explains them such as "My brain just jams, and I just freeze. Or I say something wrong." Yet, she is an excellent student of neurology and other academic subjects. What are some of your limitations and strengths? Do you think it is important to understand your limitations and strengths? Why or why not?

Themes and Topics for Discussion

Note: These questions can also be used as writing prompts.

- Think of one moment from the show that you will always remember. Why did it impact you? What made that moment stand out?
- What was it like seeing the world from the point of view of a person with autism? What was particularly surprising to you about the lives of autistic people?
- Dan was extremely nervous to meet Sarah. Why do you think this was? Have you ever felt nervous meeting a new person? How did you handle it?
- Think of the challenges that the characters face in the play. Pick one in particular and discuss how the characters handled themselves in that situation. What makes this challenge unique to that particular person? What makes it similar to other challenges faced by other characters in the play?
- By the end of the play, Jess thinks that she and Alex moved too fast in their relationship. How do you think Jess could have been made to feel more comfortable?
- What do you think the projections added to the performance, if anything?
- Why do you think Moose loves the aquarium so much? Do you have a happy place? Moose also finds comfort in his egg beater, just like Lali finds comfort in rice and Jess loves video games. Do you find comfort in an object or activity? Why or why not?
- What was your favorite technical element of the performance (i.e. set, lights, costume, sound, etc.)? How was this element used to bring you into the world of autism?

Activities

- **Sensory Experience Activity (discussion/writing)**

To experience the world in the shoes of an autistic person, click [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). Discuss what it felt like to watch the videos. Did it help you to understand the characters in *Uncommon Sense*? Do you relate to these experiences, and if so, in what way?

- **Inner Voice (creative writing)**

Imagine that you are **Lali** and everyone thinks that you have limited cognitive abilities, but really you just have trouble communicating your thoughts. Through an iPad, you now have the ability to talk to your mother for the first time in your life. If you were Lali, writing a letter to your mother on your iPad, what would you say?



- **Jellyfish (theatrical design)**

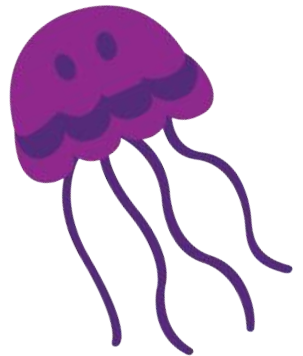
The following excerpt in italics is taken from Act 2:

“Giant jellyfish begin to fill the space.

The whole room pulses with jellyfish descending and falling.

LALI begins to swing as if she is swimming through the space.

MOOSE plays with the jellyfish.”



Design this scene yourself, using paper and pencil (colored pencils are useful but not necessary).

1. Draw a set for this scene. What does the stage look like? Where are the walls and the furniture? What does the audience see?
2. Draw the jellyfish in the scene. How would you create them “swimming through space?”

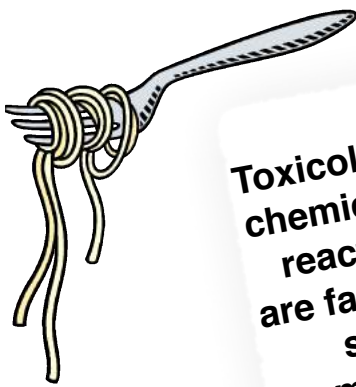
3. Using words and pictures, draw the lighting for the scene. Is it bright or dark; with one spotlight, or many different lights? Where are the lights and what are they illuminating?
4. Put all of these sketches together in a complete rendering of the design of the scene.

- **Imagining the Characters (writing/ acting improvisation)**

Imagine that you are walking home from school. It is a beautiful day and you are taking in the fresh air. You're almost home when all of the sudden, a soccer ball hits you in the leg. A girl around your age runs up to you and says "Oh sorry, that's my ball, we're playing soccer across the street. Do you want to join?"



1. Respond to the girl in your own voice. How would **you** respond to the girl?
2. Respond to the girl in the voice of one of the other characters in the play? How might **Dan/Jess/Lali/Moose** respond to her?



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Toxicology is the study of poisonous chemicals and how living organisms react to them. Both Jess and Dan are fascinated by toxicology. What is something that you share in common with your close friends or loved ones that links you together?

- **Moment Work Exercise (acting/directing/playwriting)**

Moment work is Tectonic's method of devising theatre (see page__ for further description).

Moment work, in its simplest form, is when a person says "I begin", and creates a theatrical moment alone. The moment ends when the person says "I end."

1. Try creating a moment by entering the "stage" or room, saying "I begin," and then doing something, anything, as long as it is not forced. See what happens. You might stare at the floor, or scratch your cheek, or try to scratch a hard-to-reach itch on your back. Or you might suddenly run out of the room, or lie down and stare at the ceiling. Then say "I end."
2. Take turns getting up and making moments this way, always beginning and ending with "I begin," and "I end."
3. Have a discussion about what happened on stage. What did people see? Was there a particular feeling or story that might be developed? What was interesting about watching people make tiny moments of theater? How could you build upon those moments to make a bigger story?
4. Take the moments a step further, by incorporate other elements of the stage such as sound or costume. Add a bit of song, a loud stamp of the foot, or a piece of recorded music to a moment to see what happens. Add costume by introducing a scarf, a sock, or a long coat into a moment.
5. Discuss how the moments change with the added element? Does a story begin to emerge?

- **Theater Action Project (interview/playwriting)**

Note: This is an advanced exercise that requires out of class work.



1. Over the course of 1 or 2 weeks, students interview members of their communities about experiences and/or knowledge about autism. Be sure to make up your own questions too, but here are a few sample questions:
 - Are they on the autism spectrum or do they know any family/friends who are?
 - What do they know about autism, and what would they like to learn?
 - Are there any stories they can share about their experiences with the autism spectrum?

Try to record your interviews, and if you cannot, take rigorous notes!

2. After interviews have been collected, form groups of 3-4 people and create a theatrical scene based on the interviews. Decide who is playing which character, and who is directing. If possible, have someone take notes on the process.
3. Share your scenes with the class. Discuss the scenes. Were the characters clear? Was the dialogue (if any) interesting? Did the story make you want to learn more about the characters?

Want to know more? Resources, books and links.

Literature

- *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* By Mark Haddon
- *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity* By Stephen Silberman
- *The Reason I Jump* By Naoki Higashida and KA Yoshida
- *Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism* By Barry M. Prizant
- *Thinking in Pictures* By Temple Grandin
- *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's* By John Elder Robison
- *Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism* By Ron Suskind

Helpful websites

- autismspeaks.org
- <http://projectautism.org>
- wrongplanet.net

The Theatre Development Fund (TDF) and ATI

On October 2, 2011, TDF launched the Autism Theatre Initiative (ATI) with Disney's landmark musical *The Lion King*, the first ever autism-friendly performance of a Broadway show. This performance which made theatre accessible to children and adults on the autism spectrum as well as their families was so successful that the Autism Theatre Initiative has continued to present many autism-friendly performances on Broadway since then including *Mary Poppins*, *Spider-Man*, *Wicked*, *Matilda*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Aladdin*, and more. TDF's ATI performance of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was the first autism-friendly performance of a non-musical in Broadway history. TDF's Autism Theatre Initiative also consults with theatres across the country as part of its [National Advisory Partnerships](#).

What makes a performance Autism friendly?

- House lights remain on throughout the performance
- Sounds are lowered and any strobe lights are eliminated
- Audience members are free to leave the performance at any time
- There are quiet activity areas staffed with autism specialists in the lobby