

# TEXAS THESPIANS MONTHLY



March 2024 Edition

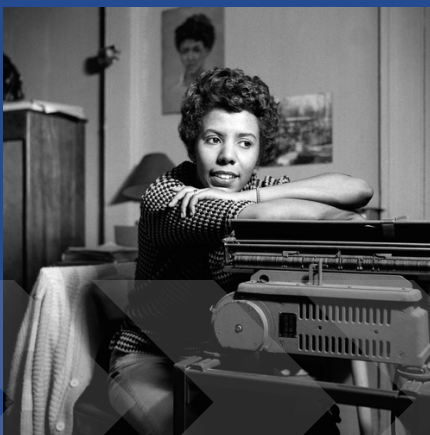
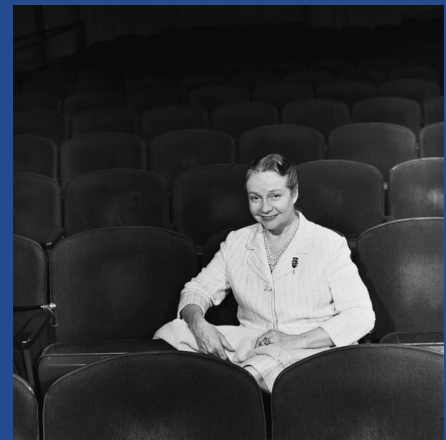
# Female Pioneers in Theatre

The first female director on Broadway was Theresa Helburn. She co-directed the play "Peggy O'Neil" in 1921 alongside Rachel Crothers. This marked a significant moment in Broadway history, as it was relatively uncommon for women to hold directing positions in the theater industry at that time.



The first black actress to appear on Broadway was Juanita Hall. She made her Broadway debut in 1943 in the musical "The Pirate Queen" and gained widespread recognition for her performance as Bloody Mary in the musical "South Pacific" in 1949. Hall's portrayal earned her a Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical, making her the first black performer to win a Tony Award. Her achievements paved the way for other black performers in the theater industry.

The first female stage manager on Broadway was Jean Dalrymple. She made history in 1937 when she became the first woman to hold the position of stage manager for a Broadway production. Dalrymple worked on the play "Having Wonderful Time" by Arthur Kober, which premiered on Broadway in 1937. Her achievement was significant in breaking gender barriers in the theater industry and paved the way for more women to pursue careers in stage management and other technical roles on Broadway and beyond.



Lorraine Hansberry: As the first African American woman to have a play produced on Broadway with "A Raisin in the Sun" (1959), Hansberry tackled issues of race, class, and identity with insight and eloquence, paving the way for future generations of playwrights.

**Celebrating Women's History Month**

# TIOSM '24

## THEATRE IN OUR SCHOOLS MONTH MARCH 2024

### WHAT IS IT?

TIOSM IS A NATIONAL CELEBRATION HELD IN THE MONTH OF MARCH TO PROMOTE AND ADVOCATE FOR THEATRE EDUCATION IN OUR SCHOOLS. IT IS A TIME TO RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS AND THEIR THEATER DEPARTMENTS.

### WHY SHOULD WE CELEBRATE THEATRE ARTS EDUCATION?

THERE ARE SEVERAL BENEFITS TO THEATRE ARTS IN SCHOOLS. CHECK THEM OUT!



#### ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT THEATER PARTICIPATION HELPS **IMPROVE SAT SCORES, READING COMPREHENSION, AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES.** ADDITIONALLY, THE **COGNITIVE SKILLS** THAT STUDENTS OBTAIN FROM THEATRE SET THEM UP FOR SCHOLASTIC SUCCESS!

STUDENTS LEARN HOW TO **COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE** WITH OTHERS. THEY ALSO DEVELOP **EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING**, AS WELL AS THE ABILITY TO **EXPRESS** THEIR EMOTIONS BETTER.

#### SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

THE THEATRE ARTS OFFERS A MULTITUDE OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO FIND THEIR **STRENGTHS AND TALENTS**. WHETHER ITS PERFORMING, BUILDING, DESIGNING, OR WRITING, THEATRE CAN SPARK **LIFELONG PASSIONS** FOR MANY.

#### PASSION

THEATRE ARTS FOSTER SMALL AND UNIQUE COMMUNITIES; **SUPPORTIVE AND VIBRANT** COMMUNITIES **UNIFIED BY THEIR LOVE FOR THE ARTS**. THESE SMALL GROUPS ALL COME TOGETHER TO CREATE **ONE GREAT COMMUNITY**. A FINE EXAMPLE OF THIS WOULD BE TEXAS THESPIANS!

#### COMMUNITY

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

#### ADVOCATE!

**ADVOCATE FOR THE FUNDING AND SUPPORT OF THEATRE DEPARTMENTS IN SCHOOLS. SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT YOUR LOCAL TROUPES AND THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS!**

#### SUPPORT!

**GO SEE A PRODUCTION AT YOUR SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY THEATER! IF YOU ARE IN ONE, ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO SEE IT!**

#### EXPRESS YOURSELF!

**KEEP USING THEATRE AS A WAY TO EXPRESS YOUR OWN UNIQUE SELF.**



**LET'S GO**

**S.T.A.R.K!**  
**WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

JARVIS OS  
Ver 1.2.5  
User: Alejandro Montoya

# **SUPPORT**

*SUPPORT FROM WITHIN YOUR COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS IN YOUR PROGRAM, IS ESSENTIAL FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM.*

# **TEACH**

*IT IS THE JOB OF US THESPIANS TO EDUCATE OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND SHOW THEM THE IMPORTANCE OF THEATRE EDUCATION.*

# **ADVOCATE**

*AS THE VOICE OF THEATRE EDUCATION, WE THESPIANS MUST ADVOCATE FOR THE ROLE OF THE DRAMATIC ARTS IN SOCIETY.*

# **RAISE**

*IN A WORLD OF CONSTANT ACTIVITY, WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO UPLIFT THEATRE PROGRAMS IN OUR COMMUNITIES.*

# **KINDLE**

*EDUCATIONAL THEATRE PROGRAMS CAN SPARK AN APPRECIATION FOR THEATRE IN OUR SOCIETY, AS LONG AS WE PUT IN THE RIGHT EFFORT!*



# Ways to increase inclusivity and equity in the theater classroom.



Educators everywhere can agree that it is fundamental to create a classroom environment that fosters inclusivity and equity among students. These environments lead to higher levels of confidence, comfortability, and success. However, some things are easier said than done! Educators must be willing to learn and put in the effort necessary to meet the needs of students of varying backgrounds, abilities, learning styles, and personalities. Luckily, the theater classroom offers a unique dynamic where there is an inherent atmosphere of creativity and a place where diversity is often celebrated.

## Collaboration and Social Skills Building

The theater is naturally a collaborative space, with cast and crew working together to reach a common goal. It is important to facilitate relationship-building activities that encourage students to learn more about each other, find commonalities, and build rapport. Ensuring that students are interacting personally with one another, especially those who come from different backgrounds and are of varying ability levels is crucial. It is one thing to teach inclusivity as a concept, but another thing entirely to model this concept and create safe spaces for students to engage in activities that will enhance the inclusivity of your classroom organically. You build a sense of camaraderie through intentional relationship-building activities. The most powerful way to promote inclusivity and equity is to foster relationships through personal interaction. This will naturally decrease stereotyping and reduce stigmas.

Take your students through this [Identity Web Monologue](#) activity to promote connection between peers.



## Storytelling

Explore characters, narratives, and diverse settings. This ensures your students are introduced to different cultures, lifestyles, perspectives, and nuances that are much more easily understood through human experience and the art of storytelling. This can be done by choosing scripts that reflect diverse experiences, or through creating opportunities for students to share their own stories through original works. Provide multiple ways for students to share their stories, whether through movement, spoken word, pre-recorded or live monologues, music, pictures, etc.



*The most powerful way to promote inclusivity and equity is to foster relationships through personal interaction.*

Dive deeper into these scripts and characters through guided discussions. Through this, you will cultivate empathy and understanding. Allow students to explore the context in which a story is occurring. This helps create a sense of understanding of not only the story being told but of the world around them. Discussions can be done through traditional question-and-answering sessions or organized discussion topics. Or, consider creating a game or activity in which students can think critically and have fun at the same time. For example, have a Q&A as the characters in the story. Implore students to answer questions as their character, breaking free from the script and thinking critically about how their character's situation may affect their answers. While this is a fun activity, it also helps students become more aware of how behaviors and thought patterns are often shaped by circumstance, creating deeper levels of empathy.

Watch this video about [Connecting With Your Script](#) to learn more about the art of storytelling. Or, play Character Charades with the characters in your story.

## Accessibility

The difference between equity and equality is often overlooked. Equality refers to each individual being provided the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each individual has a unique set of circumstances, whether that is ability level, socioeconomic status, etc., and allocates resources in a way that allows each individual to receive what they need to succeed.

Some simple ways that you, as an educator, can create an equitable environment are as follows:

- Physical accommodations for students with varying abilities. This could include providing ADA-compliant physical structures (ramp, etc.), or an ASL interpreter to

[To download a copy of the Equity Inventory, click here!](#)

**Use this inventory to determine if you're creating an equitable environment for your students.**



Check out these Choice Boards you can use in your classroom to assist students who may be nonverbal or require additional assistance when choice-making:

- [Body Choice Board](#)
- [Emotions Choice Board](#)
- [Simon Says Activity with Movement Choice Board](#)

Accommodate students with different learning styles and ability levels. If giving a presentation or sharing work with the class, allow for a multimedia approach. Some students enjoy performing in front of the class. Others may prefer to pre-record their performance and share it that way. Others yet may prefer to create a presentation/monologue/ work of art and allow another student to present the work for them. Instead of becoming caught up in having students show their learning in one specific way, focus on the objective and create space for a unique presentation that honors different strengths.



## Choice Making

Allowing performers to make their own choices communicates dignity and promotes autonomy. You can provide both large and small opportunities for your performers to practice decision-making, but it's extremely important to incorporate this strategy into your teaching. Though performers may not be able to make every decision on their own, you should proactively prioritize discovering even small ways in which each performer can assert their independence through choice-making.

As it relates to promoting inclusivity and equity: society commonly views people with intellectual differences as “those to be helped.” While it is true that some individuals may require additional support, this perspective perpetuates an attitude of helplessness that eventually affects the amount of dignity and respect shown to someone with varied abilities. This can also be present in individuals as “learned helplessness”, which occurs when someone becomes less motivated to make decisions or make a change due to feeling as if they cannot control the outcome of any situation.

Play [Gift Giving](#) or [Not A Ribbon](#) to engage your students in choice-making!



*Program Director, Consultant, Instructor  
Dr. Victoria You is a Doctor of  
Occupational Therapy. She specializes in  
pediatrics and sensory integration, primarily  
providing therapeutic services to patients  
with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).*

*For more information on  
People Like Us,  
go to <https://peoplelikeusdoc.com>*

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



**Hey, Texas Thespians!**

**To celebrate Theatre In Our Schools month, we interviewed three Texas Thespians Alumni who have gone on to be successful in different fields.**

**Diesch:** Paulet, you served as the State Thespians Officer Secretary for Texas Thespians from 2022 to 2023. Could you tell us a little about your experience in this organization?

**Del Castillo:** Yeah, of course! So, I originally was my troupe's vice president my junior year. That was a really cool experience and that's when I ran for STO. That process honestly just helped me learn a lot about being myself in a competitive environment, and for that was I'm really thankful to Texas Thespians. I think a lot of times it can be easy to present myself in one way so that they choose me. Being yourself is the version that you want to be taken. If they don't want that, then that's okay. There is a place that wants you for you and so that was a really great lesson from them. Then, I got the position and, as you mentioned, I was the secretary. Honestly, I still use those note-taking skills to this day.

**Diesch:** So after graduating last year, what have you been up to? Can you share a little bit about what your experience at Harvard has been like?

**Del Castillo:** I'm a first year here. It's been really good. Right now, I'm involved in the Institute of Politics, the John F. Kennedy Junior Forum Committee, and the Fellows and Study Groups Committee. I also participate in citizenship tutoring, and civics. Those are just some of the amazing programs that I'm a part of! I also am doing a musical here at Harvard. I'm in Little Shop of Horrors, and that'll be a lot of fun. I also participate in affinity groups, like Latinas Unidas. I'm the finance chair of that group, and everything has been a lot of fun.

**Diesch:** Oh, that's really cool! And wow, you're in a lot of organizations. So in high school, like you said, you were the president of Troupe 7551. How would you say this experience in theatre affects your experience in high school? And would you say this experience has benefited you since graduating?

**Del Castillo:** Yeah, of course. In high school, I just remember one of the biggest things for me was going to school for something else that wasn't just academic. I love academics, but my passion was theatre and it is still theatre, I'd like to say. So honestly, it was cool to balance both of those. When it came to being president, it gave me the opportunity to do some very cool leadership things, which integrated a lot of the stuff that I was learning academically as well.

**Diesch:** So it's easy to say you've had an extensive career in theatre, both on-screen in *Mixed-ish* as Micaela, and on stage in roles such as Roxie Hart in *Chicago*. What advice do you wish someone would have given you back in high school?

**Del Castillo:** Ooh. That's a good one. I definitely would say to just slow down and embrace the small things. I think it's those things that you realize you'll miss the most. You don't necessarily have to, you know, take every moment and super analyze it and overthink it. But really, truly, just embrace the things. Things like going to get a milkshake after rehearsal that are so minute. But you get to college and you realize that you're not sad that that period's over because you're in a new, cool period. And there's a lot of growth in that.

**Diesch:** Well, thank you so much for joining us this Theater in Our Schools month! I think that everyone who reads your interview is really going to benefit from it. Thank you so much for giving us some of your time!

**Del Castillo:** Thank you!

## Paulet Del Castillo

Paulet served as a Texas Thespians STO and as the president for Rockwall HS Troupe #7551.

While in high school, she excelled in both arts and academics. Today, she is a freshman studying history at Harvard University!

PAULET DEL CASTILLO



Feature article  
by Ambassador Ava Diesch



# #TXTIOS

by Meagan McMillin,  
Texas Thespians Ambassador

*Meagan interviewed Broadway star Jay Armstrong Johnson, Class of 2005, Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts, Troupe 6391*

**McMillin:** Jay, tell me a little about your experiences in Thespians.

**Johnson:** So, I believe that when we first started Thespians at FWAFA [Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts], I was the very first president. So we started FWAFA's chapter of the Thespian Society my senior year, so probably 2004-2005. I remember wanting very much to be the president. You know, I was the lead in the musical and I was choreographing the musical and I was so committed to theatre, I knew wanted to have a lot more to do theatre wise. I remember feeling really special being the very first president of the FWAFA chapter and doing the ceremony, we lit candles and it was just really exciting to be like the beginning of a generation of what has probably become something great.

...  
We really, we wanted to be a part of a larger theatre community, and it was Mrs. Darla Jones actually that helped us make that happen. It was nice to finally be a part of something that I had known about and that I had wanted to be a part of for so long. It was cool and it felt special and it felt important.

**McMillin:** That is super cool to hear about, being in Thespians myself and being an officer and all of that, I'm very thankful for you guys to have started this.

...  
**McMillin:** How do you think being in theater and being a Thespian affected your high school experience and has benefited you since graduating?

**Johnson:** Theater in general has always been a thing that I've loved and mostly because I found community. I found like minded people. That kind of uplifted me for who I was and what I was good at. Growing up in Texas in the 90s and early 2000s queerness was not as cool as it is these days.

## Jay A. Johnson

Served the Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts Thespian Troupe 6391. As founding troupe president, Jay Armstrong Johnson went on to star on Broadway in *Phantom of the Opera*, *On The Town*, and *Parade*, to name a few.

**Johnson (cont.) :**

So when I found theater, I kind of found those misfit toys that are artistic, you know, not necessarily football or machismo-centric, but artsy and soft and vulnerable. Theater in general became a safe space for me. So I maintained more leadership roles within my artistic communities. To help me to kind of stretch myself really to grow as not only an artist but also as a leader.

....  
Through the entire process, not just artistically, but spiritually, emotionally, foundationally, Thespians gave me that ability to be that at an early stage, which set me up for success in my career.

**McMillin:** What is a piece of advice you would want to give to someone who is still in high school and in Thespians right now?

**Johnson:** Even if theater is not something that you think you want to make your career the act of doing theater is the act of being the act of collaboration. It's the act of communication. And so the skills that you learn in the theater, the skills that you learn in the theater, anywhere from speech and diction to the overall objective of making something from nothing will always serve you in whatever you do choose to do. So, my advice would be to go full hard into what it means to be a part of the creative process of making theatre because it really will only serve you in whatever you choose to do whether it is theatre or not.

JAY A. JOHNSON





TEXAS  
THESPIANS™

## MATT COX

Playwright Matt Cox is renowned for *Puffs*. He started in Texas, joining his theatre department senior year and later moved to New York. *Puffs* debuted off-Broadway in 2015, becoming a global hit. Cox continues writing for stage, including his upcoming production *Witches! In Salem?!*

### Feature article by Ambassador Annabelle Nugent

**Nugent:** Tell me about your experience in Texas Thespians

**Cox:** My time was short but it wildly altered the path my life has taken since! I only worked up the courage to audition for a play my senior year of high school (Sachse High School, in Sachse Texas), and primarily only because there were auditions for the school's improv team on the same day. In that one year, I met so many wonderful friends, gained so much confidence, performed in four shows (including the UIL one-act competition) and figured out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

**Nugent:** What have you been up to since graduating?

**Cox:** After high school, I continued my education at Tarleton State University - whose theatre program really teaches you everything about working in this industry. I moved to New York City in 2011 to attend the Stella Adler Studio of Acting and stayed here, with hopes of working as an actor. After several years of performing I, by way of a bit of an accident, fell into playwriting. Previously, I had been the head sketch writer for the improv team at Tarleton - and in New York, I found myself in a company of actors called The Bats, who put on a series of late-night shows called #Serials. Here I found a way to blend my love of genre storytelling with my sketch comedy background and eventually wrote a play called *Kapow-i GoGo* (a send-up of Saturday Morning Cartoons, Anime, RPGs, Star Wars, a bit of everything.) This show would go on to run in NYC for eight months off and on. I followed this up with another play called *Puffs; Or Seven Increasingly Eventful Years at a Certain School of Magic & Magic* which would transfer Off-Broadway for a successful run lasting over three years. The play has since found a home in many local theaters and high schools, with over 600 productions in 2023 alone. My new play *Witches!? In Salem?!* opens this March - and I have two musicals on the way.

**Nugent:** What advice would you wish someone would have given you back when you were still in high school/Thespians?

**Cox:** The two biggest pieces of advice I think I wish I had back then are 1) if you have a want to try for something, try it. Don't let worries and anxieties hold you back. I wanted to write for the longest time, but generally assumed I didn't have anything to say, or really that I didn't know enough big fancy words worthy of something someone might read, let alone perform. I missed a lot of practice time by not giving this life a go sooner - you never know how it might work out! And if it doesn't, that's fine too! Our lives will veer off in many directions we don't expect, and you might just be happy with where you end up. And 2) Within this industry, having a close knit group of fellow artists you trust is key to finding success. I wouldn't have found the success I've had if it weren't for a group of people willing to show up to a tiny theatre at a random time to read something just so I can hear it. If you have something you want to work on, work on it, and then assemble that group of friends ASAP to start reading it out loud. Do that enough times, and eventually magic might happen. Use the time when you are in school, while you are surrounded by people you like in the same place in life as you, to make stuff.

MATT COX



#TXTIOS

# Lighting C-Clamp Safety

By Mel Edwards, Mighty with All Trades



Ensuring the safety of stage lighting fixture installations is paramount in any performance venue. Hanging fixtures requires a combination of experience and adhering to safety protocols. There are potential risks involved and measures that must be taken to mitigate them. The c-clamp is often the least maintenance part of the light but is the most important regarding safety.

**Main Body** - The part of the c-clamp that hangs and comes into contact with the batten or pipe. The main body must be seated properly against the pipe before tightening the pipe bolt.

**Pipe Bolt** - The bolt is positioned at an angle to the main body. Once the main body is hooked onto the pipe, this bolt is tightened until it touches the pipe. It secures the light fixture from moving and becoming an overhead hazard.

**Pan Bolt** - This tiny bolt is located at the base of the main body. When loosened it allows the fixture to pan LEFT AND RIGHT by the spindle. When the fixture is in its desired position, the pan bolt should be re-tightened.

**Spindle** - The spindle is located directly underneath the main body. It is a hollow, threaded tube that allows the yoke to be attached to the main body of the clamp. When the pan bolt is loosened, the spindle and fixture will spin until the pan bolt is tightened.

**Yoke Bolt** - This bolt is located at the base of the spindle and is used to attach the fixture's yoke to the clamp. When inspecting fixtures for general maintenance, this bolt should always be tight and firmly seated against the yoke and spindle. IT SHOULD NEVER BE LOOSENED OR USED AS A FORM OF PANNING. Should this bolt fail the fixture poses an overhead hazard and can fall, ultimately causing injury.

**Yoke Locking Knob** - This knob is located on the side of the fixture itself. When loosened it allows the fixture to tilt UP AND DOWN. It must be re-tightened for the fixture to maintain its focused position.

**Safety Cable** - A special cable made from steel, aircraft cable that has a clip on one end and a thimble on the other. Safety cables are used as a precautionary method when hanging fixtures overhead. In the event of a yoke bolt failing, the safety cable will catch the fixture, preventing it from crashing to the ground. Safety cables are attached through the yoke opening and wrapped directly around the pipe, then clipped to itself via the thimble.



# Alternates: The unsung heroes of OAP

It's March and it's competition time! Probably the most stressful time within the UIL OAP season. Whether your district/zone competition is easy or not, it's time to make it or break it and finally leave everything out on the stage and hope for the best. But we often forget what makes our OAP season a lot less stressful than usual: Alternates!

Alternates are one of, if not the, most important part of a One Act company. They do so many things such as costume making, set building, being an understudy, and a rehearsal secretary. They are, quite literally, the backbone of almost every company and yet, they are still sometimes not well recognized for their work. This can be accredited to the fact that alternates cannot be on stage during the competition setup, run, or strike as it is against the guidelines.



According to a survey conducted by The Broadway League, the national trade association for the Broadway industry, about one-third of all Broadway performances include at least one understudy or standby performer. This statistic indicates the important role that understudies play in the success of Broadway productions.

During rehearsal, you will most likely never see an alternate sitting down and doing nothing, they are actively working to the best of their ability to make the show as smooth and entertaining as possible. This could be from organizing and laundering costumes to writing down every single person's blocking, to even planning setup, strike, load in, and load out.

The amount of work that an alternate does is sometimes not worth the limited amount of praise they get and because of this, they are the unsung heroes of UIL OAP. Once again, break a leg on your shows, and good luck on advancing!

-STO Blane Wheelless, Troupe 3376 Midland High School



TEXAS  
THESPIANS™

**TEACHERS**

**OF THE MONTH**

**MARCH 2024**



# TEACHER OF THE MONTH

March 2024



## JOAN-LEAH ALEXANDER Troupe 7598



**KAREN WAGNER  
HIGH SCHOOL  
SAN ANTONIO, TX**

"Ms. Alexander started Wagner Theatre's Storybook Troupe. The Storybook Troupe travels to nearby elementary schools and performs small scenes from children's media. We have fun and share our love for theatre with younger kids! She also took us on a field trip to Magic Theatre. We learned how the process of a show for kids differs from more mature theatre. We experienced theatre in a more professional setting! It was really exciting, and it inspired me! "

**-FROM A STUDENT**

# TEACHER OF THE MONTH

March 2024



## LAUREN D'AURIA

Troupe 1245

"D'auria has on multiple occasions cared for me and others in ways no teacher could. She tells us that we are amazing and NEVER puts us down. During scene work, D'auria makes sure that we are mentally okay and we feel safe to speak up when things are uncomfortable. From my Freshman to Senior year, D'auria has saved me in many ways and she deserves to be recognized."

-FROM A STUDENT

**LAKE WORTH  
HIGH SCHOOL  
LAKE WORTH, TX**





TEXAS  
THESPIANS™

**THESPIAN**

**OF THE MONTH**

**MARCH 2024**





# THESPIAN OF THE MONTH

March 2024



## KELE NWANJU

Troupe 2969



"Everyday is a positive experience with Kele. She's the kindest person ever and she is so welcoming. When I first joined theatre, I didn't know anyone, but I got to know Kele. She was the sweetest person. She's always on top of her work and keeps everything organized. Kele is very helpful in anyway possible. She comforts people whenever they need it. She has always been a person to see if you're okay and make sure you are included."

-FROM A PEER

**CEDAR HILL  
HIGH SCHOOL  
CEDAR HILL, TX**