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Original Theatre Production for High School Students to Explore Themes of Digital Friendships and Cyberbullying

"Say it to my face, not to my Facebook."

Selfies, an original play for high school students about friendship, sexual identity, social media, and the power of storytelling, will tour local schools in April and May. Sponsored by the Sarah Lawrence College (SLC) Theatre Outreach Program, directed by senior student Joshua Langman, and written by Langman and the ensemble, the story follows four teens as they navigate the pitfalls of digital friendships, cope with cyberbullying, and discover new ways to take ownership of their lives. The production features SLC students Charlotte Cwikowski, Nahome Diribssa, Raquel Loving, and Nikolas Vagenas as they become students of the fictional Whitman High School.

The performances will take place between April 8 and May 13 for middle and high school-age groups from Monroe College, the LOFT, in White Plains (marking the LGBT Day of Silence), Yonkers' Early College High School, Yonkers Middle High School, PS 30, and The Graham School in Hastings-on-Hudson. All performances will be followed by a talkback with the actors.

Director Joshua Langman, who also plays the role of school principal in the play, described the inspiration for *Selfies*, "The material in the play comes from a combination of our own experiences, news stories, and talking to the students whom we work with in our Theatre Outreach community placements. ...some of the most powerful material in the play is true, stemming from things that have happened to us or people we know."

Mary Hoffman, LCSW-R, Social Worker at The Graham School, commented: "*Selfies* is a relevant and realistic portrayal of teens and how they navigate their struggles in today's world. It will appeal to young people who can relate to the characters who wrestle with concerns about identity, parental expectations, friendship, and bullying. *Selfies* should be seen by all who want to understand today's adolescents and how they cope with these timeless issues through the lens of social media."

John Sisk, drama teacher at Yonkers Middle High School, commented on the importance of *Selfies*, "It is vital to teach students to analytically identify and decipher multiple perspectives. Theatre is a great medium to engage this type of thinking. It fosters a dialogue where students can address important issues or explore existential questions: such as who am I and what is the nature of responsible action. *Selfies* is a play that asks students to participate, not just in the watching but also in the valuable social discussion that will occur afterwards as a result of the pertinent themes of bullying and acceptance."

Marwan Sayegh, principal of PS 30 in Yonkers, said of the cast, “[the] "Selfies" troupe did a wonderful job connecting with our students and fostering an open dialogue about relevant life challenges, such as bullying and self-esteem. The troupe guided our students beyond the 'single story' and incorporated workshops that prompted the middle years students to look more deeply into the real-life situations that impact them and the actions of their peers. Our students benefited immensely.”

The Sarah Lawrence College Theatre Outreach Program, under the direction of theatre faculty members Allen Lang and Shirley Kaplan, has been sharing its theatre skills with schools, libraries, museums, hospitals, and community groups throughout Yonkers and Westchester County and beyond for over three decades. SLC Theatre Outreach undergraduate and graduate students use theatre techniques, music, writing, and the visual arts to address social and community issues and develop original material with an emphasis on cross-cultural experiences.

For more information, visit www.slselfies.com.