

PERUSAL SCRIPT

Different = Amazing



short plays on bullying
by
Matthew Ivan Bennett



Salt Lake City

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DIFFERENT = AMAZING

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Artwork by Rick Pollock for Plan-B Theatre Company

DIFFERENT = AMAZING

CHARACTERS

All roles are played by two actors; one male (1), one female (2).

HELPER	A theatrical go-fer, playing a variety of grade-schoolers. (2)
KIMMY	A mean girl of the fifth grade. (2)
KISSA	A fourth-grade immigrant girl who bullies a friend but then apologizes. (2)
KYLE	A stress case. A tender, hardworking boy of the fifth grade. (1)
MATT	A raconteur recalling how he was bullied in the sixth grade. (1)
PATRICK	A smart boy from an unconventional family; in the fourth grade. (1)
SHEENA	A depressed and traumatized sixth-grade girl. (1)
SKYLIE	A third-grade girl who has spurned a friend. (2)

SETTING

School: a playground, a principal's office, etc.—all suggested through speech. Only two chairs or a bench are necessary.

(*Notes:

The actors might, somehow, announce the title of each piece as they progress through them—or hold up simple white poster boards with the titles written in magic marker.

Also, in the appendix, names have been intentionally left off the source material to protect the students of local schools who submitted these stories to us during the development process at Plan-B Theatre Company.

Serving as inspiration, one document came off the website of the National Bullying Network. Users submit anonymously, with an alias, but in the interest of anonymity I've dropped the alias too.

One piece, "Get Up Again," is autobiographical, and the true story behind the comedic sketch is included in the appendix as well.

One piece, "What You Show To People," is contrived—as both a comic easing in to the subject of bullying, and an attempt to understand bullies.

Words inside of brackets [...] may be changed. Kissa may be changed from a Ugandan immigrant to a type appropriate to the casting or right for your region.)

Matthew Ivan Bennett's DIFFERENT=AMAZING, a collection of five short plays about bullying, received its world premiere at Plan-B Theatre Company February 22-March 14, 2014. Directed by Jerry Rapier with Tyson Baker as Actor 1 and Latoya Rhodes as Actor 2. DIFFERENT=AMAZING was produced as Plan-B's second annual Free Elementary School Tour, playing to 9,000 students at 30 schools as well as five free public performances. (www.planbtheatre.org)

DIFFERENT = AMAZING by *Matthew Ivan Bennett*

(A prologue. Direct address.)

2

1

We are tall, we are short, we are small, we
are big, we are brown and white and black.

Our eyes can be the color of honey, of
rainclouds, of new leaves or river stones.

We also have different words to say
"amazing": *asombroso, incroyable, sugoi.*

And, came up with a word for "amazing."

The difference in the sky when a star falls.
The difference in your mouth when you eat
a cold orange.

Sometimes, when we say "different" we
mean "bad."

Ask yourself: Are they being fair?

Sometimes being fair, being humble, being
courageous or openhearted can be different.

A different that equals amazing. ...Now the
stories you're about to see are dramatized—
some are serious, some aren't—but as you
watch, please remember that each one is
based on the hardships of real people.

We are all different from each other.

We have thousands of languages; different
words to say, "different": *diferente,*
unterschiedlich, kotonaru.

So we're different, but the same. Every
people in the history of the planet came up
with a word for "different," so they could
talk about the variety of life.

Which they did, in part, to talk about about
difference.

The differences among *us*: in our eyes, our
hair, our skin, our voices, our smiles.

But if someone says a difference is bad—

Nothing amazing happens when we're
unfair, when we're full of ourselves, when
we're cowardly or unthinking or closed-off.

But it's the kind of different you want to be.
A different that equals amazing.

1

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"What You Show To People"

(An odd couple of fifth-graders: an over-sensitive boy [1], who's made weepy rather than bold by his anger, and a flinty-eyed girl [2], more bitter than she ought to be at her age. They wait to be punished in the principal's office.)

KIMMY

When the principal gets back, you're gonna get it.

KYLE

You're gonna get it when the principal gets back.

KIMMY

You wish; I didn't do anything.

KYLE

You threw a stapler at my head.

KIMMY

Did you see me throw it?

KYLE

I didn't have to, I know it was you.

KIMMY

—And it was a *mini*-stapler, by the way.

KYLE

A *mini*-stapler flicked me in the ear, bounced off the board, 'n I look over, and there's Kimmy Kellenberger, smiling.

KIMMY

So? I like smiling.

KYLE

Well it hasn't helped your face, so maybe you shouldn't.

KIMMY

I have a great face, you're the derp. And you stabbed me with a pencil!

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KYLE

I wrote on you.

KIMMY

You assaulted me.

KYLE

Ooo, big word.

KIMMY

This is serious, Kyle, you're gonna grow up 'n be the grimy old man who stabs women in the park.

KYLE

I am not.

KIMMY

You totally are, so enjoy prison.

KYLE

When the principal comes back in I can prove to her that you, Kimmy, threw the stapler.

(whipping out his smartphone)

I caught it on my iPhone! The Bully Button app. Bam.

KIMMY

... That's not an iPhone.

KYLE

Yes it is, it's an old one.

KIMMY

You're such a poser. And I never "bullied" you.

KYLE

I have video evidence this time, Kimmy.

KIMMY

You have a video of you stabbing me—a girl. You *hit* a girl. Whose side will she be on?

KYLE

I never hit you! You can't say "hit."

KIMMY

I don't have to say it, I can show it, thanks to you. *I* might have accidentally grazed you with a stapler, as I was returning it, but you abused me.

KYLE

Stop saying that.

KIMMY

Stop hitting girls. "You never hit a girl."

KYLE

Sometimes you do. What if she's *possessed by the Devil*?

KIMMY

Then you ask the Devil to leave, like a gentleman.

KYLE

I tried that with you, it didn't work: you went and ruined my volcano anyway!

KIMMY

I didn't "ruin" your volcano, I bumped you.

KYLE

On purpose!

KIMMY

Wa.

KYLE

You did!

KIMMY

I bumped you because I tripped, which I'm sure is on your "iPhone," then *you* went flicking vinegar in my eyes. So go ahead 'n show her how I "bullied" you.

(Beat. He stomps: he's been bested. Stuffs away the smartphone.)

KYLE

Oh man! You always get what you want.

KIMMY

No, I don't.

KYLE

Yes you do. One: when you stole my chicken nuggets on Wednesday and I complained to the monitor you said I gave them to you *with* the barbecue sauce and she sided with you.

KIMMY

It was my understanding they were a gift.

KYLE

You ripped a piece of chicken out of my mouth. Two! A month ago in gym, in front of Mrs. Klein and pretty much everyone, you said my sweater was my grandma's.

KIMMY

You were wearing a sweater in gym.

KYLE

A boy sweater.

KIMMY

With a chorus line of penguins?

KYLE

It's boy clothing; it came from JC Penny's, all right?

KIMMY

I believe that, but *where* inside JC Penny's? What department? That's the mystery.

KYLE

The mystery is how you can get whatever you want. You make all this fun of me, Scot free, 'n all Mrs. Klein says is "Ha Ha, Kimmy."

KIMMY

Ugh, you're such a whiner.

KYLE

The whole fifth grade is calling me the Old Fart.

KIMMY

Well, if you hadn't farted during ping-pong...

KYLE

—I DIDN'T! My shoe squeaked on the floor! Geez! Do you have a nice bone in your body? 'Cause I think really really, underneath—

KIMMY

I think I'm not going to get suspended over a little whiner!

(slaps his head; it hurts)

You wrecked the volcano, you stabbed me, you are going to pay the price for this, OK derp? ... Did you hear me, derp?

KYLE

I'm not who's guilty, Kimmy.

KIMMY

(in his face)

They don't care, derp. They care if you broke a rule, that's it. And they don't believe you when you whine like a wet kitten. So you can't beat me, *all right?*

KYLE

I wasn't trying to fight with you. Why do we have to be in a fight?

KIMMY

Why do countries have fights? Some are cool, some aren't. 'N whether you meant to be, you're in one; it's *all a big fight*. And you're losing, by making a bunch of us hate you.

KYLE

What "bunch of us"? No one else is this mean. You mean you.

KIMMY

Actually, no, I don't, 'cause I don't care enough about you to hate you.

KYLE

If you don't "care enough," then why'd you huck a mini stapler at my head?

KIMMY

(another head slap)

Because it's fun. That's why. It's fun.

(Beat: his head is bowed...and yet, he's had enough.)

KYLE

I don't believe you. You're full of it. Fun? Was it *fun* ripping up my Valentine's card?

KIMMY

Sorry what?

KYLE

Don't pretend. On Valentine's last year I gave you a valentine? I spent a lot of time on it; I used three hot glue sticks and a bag of Red Hots, which were *not* on sale, and I drew a maze on the back, the card said "You're a-maze-ing," I know you remember.

KIMMY

Well, I don't, I get a lot of valentines.

KYLE

But this one you smashed, with your snow boots, then you spit on it, then you flung it in the garbage. Was that *fun*?

KIMMY

I can't even picture what you're whining about.

KYLE

Really. 'Cause you started smashing it in front of my desk, so everyone knew, but then!, a couple minutes after bell I saw you digging it out of the garbage can.

KIMMY

What?! Gross. No you didn't.

KYLE

Well, I saw you, and you didn't see me, and you can't make-believe anymore, Kimmy. I saw you! And since then I've been wondering: Does she really really hate me, or is she afraid to say she doesn't 'cause I'm not "cool"? So I keep on being nice to you, thinking you'll be different, and you keep on being mean, but I know.

KIMMY

You don't know crap.

KYLE

I know you aren't what you show to people! I know your dad forgot to pick you up yesterday and you were bawling.

KIMMY

Shut up.

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KYLE

I saw, Kimmy. And I've seen more.

KIMMY

(grabbing him; making a fist)

Well there's a lot more you don't see.

KYLE

—I've seen your blog, where you said "If I got one wish, I'd get a different dad."

KIMMY

Why are you reading my blog?!

KYLE

Anyone can read it.

KIMMY

Well it's not for you.

KYLE

Who's it for then?

KIMMY

Not for derps like you.

KYLE

A derp who takes the time to talk to you about it? When you're pretty much a jerk?!

KIMMY

You don't know half my problems, Kyle! And if you did...! ...If you did then you wouldn't want to be my Valentine, OK?

(weakly)

So shut up.

KYLE

... It can't be that bad. What is it?

KIMMY

It's that bad. Divorce.

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KYLE

Oh. Man. ... But hey, when someone really really cares about you nothing can make 'em stop, right?

KIMMY

In a perfect world maybe.

KYLE

Well I don't think so in this world.

KIMMY

Great. Whatever.

KYLE

Not whatever. You don't get to choose if a person cares about you. Like, say, with us—

KIMMY

Got it. Thanks. Thank you. I still don't like you. I do like your art.

KYLE

You do?

KIMMY

Yes, *ugh*, but that's it. You draw good. Don't get ideas. I mean, thanks for caring, but don't expect me to care that you care because you're too different. Nothing is happening here. We're just sitting, 'til the principal comes, at which point...! *Ugh!* At which point, I'll tell her the truth.

KYLE

You will?

KIMMY

I threw the mini-stapler and you stabbed me.

KYLE

Deal.

KIMMY

And if you feel like I "bullied" you, then I'm sorry that you're so sensitive that you have those feelings.

KYLE

...If that's an apology then I accept.

KIMMY

OK. But just so we're clear: I don't like you. At all. I only like your mazes. OK? 'N you can draw me more—if you start standing up for yourself.

KYLE

I will if you show your real self more.

KIMMY

Fine. I show more, you show less.

KYLE

No, that's not the promise!

KIMMY

—I'm kidding, geez, chill. Adult humor.

KYLE

Oh, right, I knew that.

(A forced chuckle.)

KIMMY

—*Shh*, I think the principal's coming.

(They listen, afraid. High heels click in the tiled hallway. They whisper; their last moments on Earth.)

KYLE

Oh this is gonna be bad. Even her walk sounds angry. Can you hear that? I'm in deep.

KIMMY

No. We're both in deep. We're in deep together. Right?

KYLE

...Right.

(They listen, and wait, their hearts speeding up as a door opens.)

"It's Not Safe To Feel"/*>

(2, as SHEENA, an eleven-year-old girl facing a therapist.)

SHEENA

I don't feel anything. Just annoyed. And I don't think I need a therapist over that, what's there to say? I expect to be hurt. If we meet in the halls, then I'll be tripped, or shoved, or flicked; they'll scratch my arm, stomp on my foot, spit gum in my hair; pants me. So what? I don't *like* it, so I lay there, 'til my mom yells Getta move on, and I have the melt downs in the bathroom, but that's what the medicine's for, right? You can't change the way you are, so what's there to work on? They all say, You look like a dummy, 'cause my ears are so big—but I can't change 'em. Unless I cut 'em off. So *yes*, I get tired, or freak out—except on weekends, 'cause I like Saturday morning cartoons, and church's OK—but why even try? They don't give a crap if I shower or comb my hair right. I feel their eyes on me no matter what—in the hallways, or when we're lining up for lunch, and I'm a rabbit, and they're dogs, following me, sniffing; they say I stink so they sniff me, watch me, wait for teachers to turn the other way, and my heart goes, but I never run. Why run? If I run, or get mad, 'cause they slap my books away or steal my stuff or hit me in the privates—which they did!—then just they say my face looks like [mud]. So I stopped feeling mad. ... I'm still scared, sometimes. Of Rosa; I pretty much hate her guts and wouldn't care if anything bad happened to her, but I won't show her how I feel because she laughs harder. Kicks my ankles, my shins, and she laughs—and she plays soccer, so she wears cleats and it scrapes my skin, I bleed in my socks, but I've already said it to teachers and nothing. My dad sees me throwing socks in the garbage and all he does is teach me "how to punch," which, if I did, would only get me in trouble; says, Be like your brother. Wants me to join the army when I'm older, 'cause that'll be amazing. So I wear two pairs of socks as padding, 'n it doesn't help—'n my mom tells me not to wear two pairs anyway—so I *expect to be hurt*, because I'm different. Even though it's not very much. But why *talk*? When it stays the same? When my mom drops me off and I hustle 'cause the bell's about to ring and the grass is wet, and my shoes're soaked, and Rosa *bulldozes* me as hard as she can? And I don't even see her 'til I'm rolling on the grass and my leggings rip on a sprinkler and scrapes me and I hear her laugh? When my mom *sees*, and flies out of the car, and tears Rosa a new one and we rush up to the principal's office and the principal doesn't even believe that a girl would do that? *After we talked* about everything? When she calls up my mom during dinner time and it's "Well, it's her word against yours, and hers against your daughter's and Rosa's such a good student while your daughter..."? Which is bull, 'cause four people saw her hurt me 'n my grades are better. But so what? They won't say anything; I asked Pam and Rachel Reynolds but they said Rosa would hurt them back. And the other two? Rosa's friends. So I don't feel anything, except when I melt down, 'cause it all stays the same, and they'll turn anything you feel into a joke. It's not safe to feel. I don't have any feelings to talk about. Can I go now?

(*She stares down the therapist...rises, leaves.*)

12 more pages to the end

/*> See Appendix A for the source material.

Appendix A

How I Was Bullied In Elementary School

"When I was in elementary school some of the kids picked on me. They were mean to me. Sometimes they would shove me in the hall when the teacher wasn't looking. Sometimes they would take my coat or backpack and hide it on a hook in front of a different classroom way down the hall from where my classroom was. Sometimes in PE they would throw a ball at my head, or trip me in a game and the rest of the kids would laugh; especially [R.]. [R.] was the meanest kid of all. [R.]s own friends were afraid of him. He would get them to do things that they wouldn't have done if he wasn't around. [R.] didn't like me and I didn't like him.

One day I missed the bus and my mom had to drive me to school. She dropped me off and watched me run to where my class was lining up. [R.] saw me coming. As I was running to get in line, [R.] shoved me as hard as he could. I hadn't even said anything to him. He just shoved me and I flew to the ground. My mom saw it too. She went in and told the principal about it. The principal interviewed [R.] and he told her he didn't do it. She then called my mom and told her it was her word against [R.]s, and since there weren't any other witnesses to it, they couldn't do anything about it. But there WERE other witnesses. They were just too afraid to tell on him. Everyone was afraid of him.

I was bullied so much that I had to go to professional counseling. I cried all the time and I would have melt downs. I just felt so angry inside. My mom and I told my counselor about what [R.] did on the morning I missed the bus. The counselor was angry that the principal didn't do anything about the incident, so she wrote a letter to the school and told the principal that she was appalled by the stories she was hearing about how the school was looking the other way. Things got a LOT better after that. Every time there was a problem, they seemed a lot more willing to listen to me.

At the end of my 6th grade year, my mom did not want me to go to junior high with [R.]. She wanted me to get a fresh start with kids who didn't know me. She put me in [a charter school] even though it was far away. She had to drive me to school every day. I liked it there. They have theater classes and I like theater. I like going on stage and pretending to be a different character. On the first day of school I went to my beginning theater class. My teacher said, "You are very talented." After the first week she called my Mom and asked if they could switch me to the advanced theater class. That meant I got to be in the big school play. I was the only 7th grader who had ever been invited to advance to the higher class. I made lots of friends there; friends who didn't know my story of bullies and crying and meltdowns. Later that year I got the part of Winthrop in *The Music Man*. It was so much fun.

When it was time for 8th grade my mom asked me what I thought about going to the junior high in my own neighborhood, [Public] Jr. High. I was a bit nervous about the idea but I also felt a lot better about myself and I didn't cry nearly as often. My mom told me that we could walk around the school and see if it felt right being there. So one day after school hours while the school was still open we walked up and down the halls. I saw that they had a theater classroom, so I told her I felt fine about attending there the next year. My mom signed me up

for classes.

The only problem was that [R.] went to that school. I was worried about having him in my classes. On the first day as I entered each class I looked around for him. He wasn't there. It took me about three days before I finally spotted him in the hall. I turned and walked the other way. I decided to avoid him as much as I could. Later I realized something. He had looked right at me several times and didn't seem to recognize me. I guess I had changed a lot in the year since I had last seen him. I was so happy.

Then it happened. It took all the way to November, but it finally happened. The day I was dreading had arrived. [R.] and I came face to face in the lunchroom and he had finally figured out who I was. He said to me, "Hey, aren't you that [...] kid?" I don't know where my reaction came from, but as quickly as he asked the question I replied, "Umm, sorry... Do I know you?" [R.] was SO shocked by my answer that he just turned and walked away. I didn't show fear, I didn't show weakness, I didn't cry. [R.] has not bothered me since.

I am now finishing up my 9th grade year at [Public] Jr. High. Last week was closing night of our school play *Guys and Dolls*, in which I played the role of Nathan Detroit. I just auditioned for the Productions Company at [Public] High, and I made it in as an incoming sophomore. I'm looking forward to my high school days and all the fun I'll have in theater. I still have a fear of being bullied but I also know I have friends who watch out for me."

Appendix B

The True Story of "Get Up Again"

I did, in fact, wear a pink sweatshirt to school in the sixth grade, leading to the worst fistfight I'd ever been in. I remember playing by myself, on the south end of the playground, where a long chain-link fence was, with a wire we all shook for fun. The wire ran along the top of the fence, but had come loose, so we shook it and the thing would make funny weird *pings* and wobbling vibratory noises as it bounced around. I'd been walking along the fence line, alone, shaking the wire, and doing fake karate kicks when I drew the attention of two "cool" kids. I remember "Sean" asking me (1) if my martial arts would work in a real fight, and (2) why I was dressed like a girl. I stood up for myself, saying nothing was wrong with pink. I took attacks on my young masculinity very seriously because I was a late-bloomer and smaller than many boys (and girls). I'm certain that *I* was the one who said "Let's fight then," and I remember the other boy, "Vic," being somewhat surprised. Both boys thought that I was a pipsqueak. "Sean" wasn't worried when he agreed to fight me; he knew he'd win. Me... I'm an eternal optimist. I was the kind of kid who irrationally believed I might be able to train for a big fight in a single afternoon recess. I even "practiced" throughout the day.

My best friend then was Brent H. He was much taller than me, but feather-light. I asked him if he'd jump in, because I was afraid that "Vic" would join the fight, that they'd gang up on me. Bless his heart, he said yes, even though he knew there was no chance.

When the time came, at the back fence, I tried to stop the fight. I said, "We can be men about this, and talk it out," but "Sean" called me a chicken, saying he knew it, he knew it, I'd never face him. I shouted him down and put up my fists. I was fast. I hit him in the cheek a couple times, but was humbled when nothing happened. He didn't even flinch. And when he hit me back, he didn't aim for a cheek, but for my nose.

My clearest memory is being on the grass, then against the chain-link, with "Sean" kneeing me again and again in the face. My muscles felt like water. I had actually imagined beating him, but the reality was so shocking, so painful, so embarrassing, that I nearly gave up.

But I realized even though I was physically weak, I was mentally strong. At the very least, I could accept the pain and just keep getting up. "Sean," I could tell, hated me for this. He yelled at me to stay down and bystanders even told me to stop, that I'd lost already, and should submit. My nose was gushing and I was openly bawling. I could barely see to stand up. Though I did. And, yes, I did blow my bloody snot on him, as my only means of defiance. He called me a psycho. And so did several girls. Even Brent was worried about me. On the way home, Brent did not really think that I'd won, but I did. I mean, I knew that I'd lost physically, but I saw "Sean's" eyes...he knew that he hadn't made me ashamed. He wanted me to be ashamed, but I refused.

Appendix C

Bullying

"I've seen bullie before. There was this girl that was fat. They bullied her because she was fat. There was a group bullying her. She always yelled for help. But now one would help her. She always went home dirty. Then the bullies starting calling her pig. Then she had a break from school. When they had to go to school she faked, that she was sick for 2 days. Then her mom took her to the doctor. The doctor said that she was not sick. The next day she went to school. The bullies said "Why didn't you come to school." They said that they had a surprise for her. After school they had buckets full of mud. They put the mud on the girl was crying. Then she went home, her mom asked what happened to you. The girl said the truth. The mom went to talk to the princible. The princible said "Do you have prove." The girl said yes, she took out her computer and said these are messeges I got from them. The kid that where the bullies were expeled."

Appendix D

Various Untitled

"I was out side plaing tag when I got tierd and sat on a bench some girls called me [E...a] because I was on the bench." ~ by E.

"I've seen girls say names to [E.] the him [E...a] they had been calling hathat sees 3rd grade."

"I have herd some girls call [E.], [E...a]. It all started when me and [E.] were playing soccer and [E.] got tierd."

I Can Not Breathe
(www.pacer.org/)

"They call me fat, giantess, a black girl, and all because I was a little darker than everyone in the class. ... I'm tired of crying into my pillow every day.

...One day, when all the lessons I have ended, as always went down to the locker room, they were all there, they were holding balloons with paint and water, I do not know where they got them, and that's when I went, they began to throw balls and then poured paint on me, then at my coat and shoes. They were laughing. I still remember that day."

Untitled



REVIEWS of the original PLAN-B Theatre Company production:

Plan-B Theatre teaches young audience 'Different=Amazing'

Nancy Van Valkenburg, Standard-Examiner staff

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OGDEN -- Different does not have to mean weird or bad. In a great many cases, "Different=Amazing."

The original Plan-B Theatre Company show by that name last weekend took a break from its school tour for a couple free performances in Ogden. Crowds of children and their adults made their way to Ogden's Good Company Theatre, an intimate performance space on Historic 25th Street.

Actors Latoya Rhodes, a Kaysville native, and Tyson Baker, who studied in Weber State's Performing Arts program, took the stage for a series of short monologues and vignettes about bullying, how it feels to be the victim, and how to talk about it with friends. At least one of the brief stories was based on an episode suffered by playwright Matthew Ivan Bennett.

Jerry Rapiere, of Plan-B Theatre, directed the show, which plays for the public one more time, March 12 at the City Library in Salt Lake City. For information, visit <http://planbtheatre.org/amazing.htm>.

So, what did Ogden audiences think of the high energetic, mostly upbeat show? We asked a few junior theater critics we found in the audience.

"It was funny," said Bridget Barkema, 9, of Ogden. "I liked that they were really dramatic, and I liked that they could do different voices."

Bridget said she thinks seeing the anti-bullying message on stage was much more fun than it would have been getting the message through a book or lecture.

"It's fun to come to the theater," she said.

Brynn Smith, 8, Ogden, liked the useful information provided.

"I thought it was really awesome that it taught you what to do if someone was bullying you, and how you can stand up for yourself," she said.

Brynn didn't have a favorite part, she said.

"I liked all of it."

Gavin Smith, 10, of Ogden, said he enjoyed the vignettes. Some were serious, others were playful.

"I thought it was very good and it showed how to react to people being unkind to you," he said. "It was a very good play."

Gavin said he has experience at being targeted by bullies.

"Oh, plenty," he said, a faint smile on his face. "The play pretty much reviewed what I already knew, and it taught me a few new things to try."

Gavin said "Different=Amazing" offered one more message that will help him a lot.

"Now I feel I am not alone in this," he said. "Very many people get bullied. I feel much less alone in this."

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DIFFERENT=AMAZING uses children's voices to address bullying

Utah Theatre Bloggers

February 26, 2014 by Julia Shumway |

SALT LAKE CITY — Plan-B Theatre Company's new play, *Different=Amazing*, is designed to provide students with realistic tools for coping with and addressing bullying. In just 40 minutes, two actors portray several true bullying stories of elementary students from Salt Lake and Davis Counties. Each short piece shows a different dimension of bullying to help students understand the painful effects of bullying and the role they can play in addressing bullying behavior.

Latoya Rhodes and Tyson Baker in *Different = Amazing*. Tour ends March 14, 2014.

Tyson Baker and Latoya Rhodes gave highly energetic performances as every actor in every story. Whether presenting a monologue or a two-person vignette, both of them proved themselves to be highly versatile and convincing actors. Each story had a first-person narrator to guide the audience through the story, and the other actor would fill in as side-characters as needed.

Between each story, the two would lift a bench (the play's one prop), and announce the title of the next piece. They would then rearrange themselves and the bench to their starting positions and shoot full-speed into the action of the next story. The dialogue in playwright Matthew Ivan Bennett's script draws heavily from the actual accounts of elementary school students, and using the voices of real children works well for the piece. Baker and Rhodes delivered their childlike lines with a natural cadence that made the script feel natural and believable. The narrator in each story was written as an individual with a unique voice, and Rhodes and Baker's performances gave life to each character in a way that made them memorable and distinct from any of the other characters they portrayed.

Directed by Jerry Rapier, *Different=Amazing* did what it set out to do. The humor in each story worked. Even though the actors were adults, they made each character feel like a real child the audience (which included many children when I attended) could relate to. While being funny and enjoyable, each story provided different perspectives on bullying that will help children and viewers of all ages understand and take action to address and prevent bullying.

(<http://utahtheatrebloggers.com/17942/differentamazing-uses-childrens-voices-to-address-bullying>)

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT -- MATTHEW IVAN BENNETT

MATTHEW IVAN BENNETT has been Plan-B's resident playwright since 2007, where his radio plays **LAVENDER EXILE**, **FRANKENSTEIN**, **ALICE** and **SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE BLUE CARBUNCLE**, his short plays **WHAT YOU GET** and **THIS IS NOW**, and his full length plays **BLOCK 8**, **DI ESPERIENZA**, **MESA VERDE** and **ERIC(A)**, which also toured to Good Company Theatre in Ogden, United Solo Theatre Festival in New York and Theatre Out in California, have been produced. He's a veteran of Plan-B's **SLAM** and he's had short plays produced by Rising Sun Performance Company (New York), Theatre Out (Santa Ana), Hunger Artists Theatre Ensemble (LA), Monkeyman Productions (Toronto), Source Festival (D.C.), and Circle Theatre (Chicago). His comedy, **A NIGHT WITH THE FAMILY**, recently played Pygmalion Theatre Company (Salt Lake City) and Omaha Community Playhouse. Matthew's poetry has been published by Western Humanities Review and Sugar House Review and his short story **WHEN** won a honorable mention from Writers of the Future. Matthew is a member of the Dramatist's Guild.

