

## Ten acts of youthful creativity

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The cast of 'Ice Joey,' written by two Schuyler students, rehearses in a Manhattan studio.

First-time author Taiwo Ellis says coming up with the idea for his short play "Ice Joey" was a snap. It's about a New York City kid who moves to the suburbs in Arizona and pretends to be a famous rapper to impress the girls.

Okay, then what? "I got writer's block three scenes into the story," says Taiwo, a seventh-grader. That's when he collaborated with eighth-grader Yadira Ramos, a fellow student at Philipa Schuyler Middle School for the Gifted and Talented in Brooklyn.

Together, they completed the comedy with a message (Be who you are) about a fish out of water, a fib that spins out of control and fans so fevered that one girl ends up passed out on the ground. "Working on the play together really helped," says Taiwo.

Collaboration is, in fact, what this play, and others like it, are all about.

"Ice Joey" is one of ten 10-minute plays being presented for invited audiences through tomorrow at New World Stages.

Each production grew out of a seven-month program for middle-school and high-school students called Fidelity FutureStage, a partnership of Fidelity Investments; the Viertel/Frankel/Baruch/Routh Group, the Broadway producing team; and the arts nonprofit LEAP.

FutureStage is designed to teach kids about playwriting, from idea to writing to performance. The 10 participating schools are in Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn.

The plays, which have diverse themes and tones, include the comedies "Let's Eat," set around a family dinner table, and "I Didn't See That One Coming," about a bank robbery that leads to romance, and the absurdist "Road Trip," about a family lost in the desert.

## **DRAMATIC DEBUTS**

The dramas include "Stuck," built around a love triangle, "In My Shoes," about homophobia, and "Gigolo's Spots," which follows a criminal trying to reform. "My Loves," about a sports-obsessed husband, and "The World of Fashion," about catty rival designers, blend elements of comedy and drama.

On Saturday, Dwayne Matthew and Melodi Conze, seniors at Brooklyn's High School for Enterprise, Business and Technology, rehearsed "Two of Akin," the mystery they co-wrote that is set in a Williamsburg police station and tells the story of twins, separated at birth, who are accused of murder.

"We wanted to do something serious, something with a real impact," says Matthew, who plays one of the suspects and had a tendency to look at the stage floor when he spoke during rehearsals.

"Deliver your lines out," said LEAP teaching artist Carmen Rivera, who was helping to direct the production. "Look out just over the heads of people in the audience to an exit sign in the back of the theater. That will actually help you in this particular scene, since all you want is to get out of the interrogation room." The smart, insider-y tip worked for the rest of the run-through.

Besides traditional theater classes, FutureStage students got a chance to learn from and be inspired by stage biggies - writers, actors, designers and directors - who visited their schools as guest lecturers.

Taiwo was impressed that Jerry Zaks, a Tony-winning director, mentioned that theater careers don't always follow one path. "He was an actor before he became a director," says Taiwo, who is unsure if he wants to act or to write but who knows what he's going to do with "Ice Joey."

"I'm going to copyright it," he says. "Then I'm going to send it to Disney."