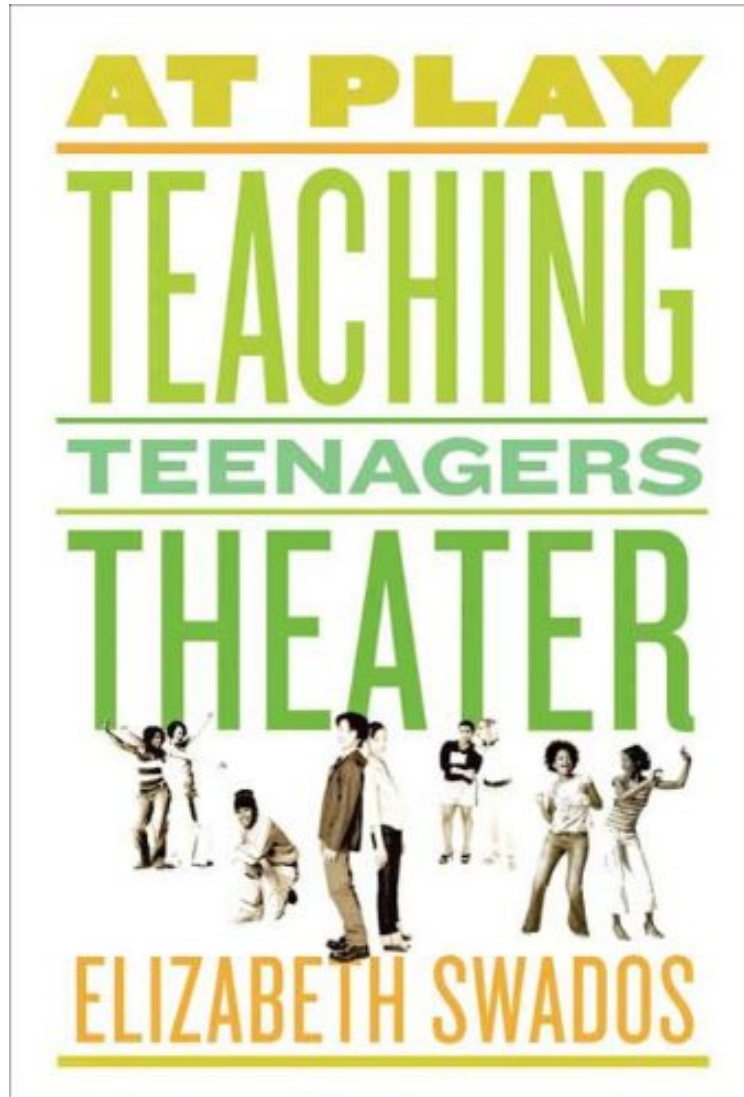


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## At Play: Teaching Teenagers Theater

*Elizabeth Swados*

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**Elizabeth Swados : At Play: Teaching Teenagers Theater** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised At Play: Teaching Teenagers Theater:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Useful resource for teachers. By Joshua Patton Swados suggests that all young people have a natural inclination to create and that they have a vast reservoir of imagination that can be tapped if they can learn to let go and embrace their own abilities. She presents an informal step-by-step guide, based on her personal experience, that takes readers through the process with her. She suggests several different exercises at each step from skill building to production logistics. She proposes that improvisation is the skill that most easily taps in to the imaginative powers of young people, and teaches other theatre skills along her step-by-step process such as

voice and movement. Her process culminates in the staging of a play. Personally, I think she presents a good arc to her process. She could be more clear at times, but this is a good resource for visualizing an entire arc of exercises. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Extraordinary, useful book By Bing This is easily one of the best books I've found on teaching acting exercises. It has so many useful engaging exercises, all very efficient at teaching key skills and reducing teenagers self-critical nature. What a relief to see a book taught by a teacher who is also a professional and knows which skills are most helpful to young actors! She also includes many excellent reminders for how to run the classroom or rehearsal. Also, the book is far more than a collection of fun exercises. Every exercise has a clear purpose that inextricably links personal growth and acting skills. The book gives a natural framework for teaching and adding in the exercises you already teach. If you love your own teaching method, there is still much to gain from this book. The later part of the book shows in practical detail how to create a play or musical. This comes as a natural outgrowth of previous chapters on voice, movement, character, etc. If you're teaching skills rather than creating a play, most of the book is still extraordinarily useful and inspiring. If you can find a better book on how to teach acting exercises since Spolin's, I'd love to know! 24 of 27 people found the following review helpful. Very Disappointing By Tonya Schulte I purchased this book to gain some new ideas for a drama class that I teach. While some of the exercises are new and interesting, mostly there is far too much of an emphasis in the book on racial tensions, bigotry, social justice, etc. and not enough emphasis on the art of acting. Also, there are several points in the book at which Ms. Swados contradicts herself when she makes statements on how she believes children should be taught. For instance, in one chapter she begins by explaining how she taught a student to play the part of a llama by encouraging him to find his own way into the character. She describes a very decent method for helping kids discover who they want to find in their character. Then, only one or two pages later she states emphatically that she never, ever puts children into a play written about adults as she feels they wouldn't know how to create an adult character. I find the argument to be ludicrous. They should be allowed to explore the character of a llama, but not the character of an adult person. This makes no sense to me. Children are always and quite naturally imitating adults, often with very positive results. My final analysis is that there are a few new exercises in the book that I can use in my class, but the majority of them I cannot use due to their overwhelming emphasis on negative differences in society. Also, most of the extra information regarding Ms. Swados philosophy on working with young folks is contradictory and nonsensical, so it is also of no use. I should have just bought a book of improv games or acting exercises and not spent the money for this book.

Young people and improvisational theater should be a natural combination—so why do we so rarely find this combo in today's classrooms? According to Elizabeth Swados—playwright, director, composer, poet, author of children's books and of an acclaimed family memoir—improvisational theater is the perfect creative outlet for junior-high and high-school students . . . if only they can be given the tools and the guidance to make the most of this natural yet rigorous art form. Drawing on her own experience teaching inner-city children in the groundbreaking musical *Runaways* and in teaching the techniques of improv theater in schools around the country, as well as on her own background in experimental theater, Swados provides a step-by-step guide to bringing out the natural creativity and enthusiasm key to young people creating—and enjoying—improvisational theater. Covering the basics—from freeing the imagination to learning about how to work with an ensemble, from how to master different forms of movement and sound to how to create different kinds of characters—this is the book for teachers and students eager to learn how to express fully the creative talent that all children are born with.

"Liz Swados has changed the lives of countless young people, and has changed the way all of us in the field think about making theater. Liz makes theater that matters; her fierce optimism that the world can be changed, by kids and by art, infuses this book as it does all her work. We are lucky to have her among us."