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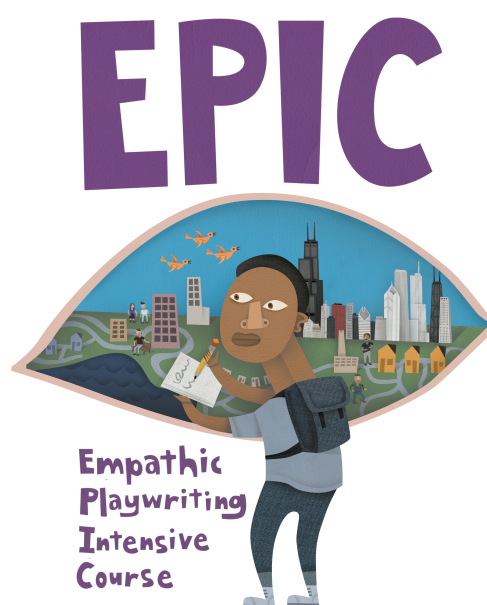


What is EPIC?

EPIC (**E**mpathic **P**laywriting **I**ntensive **C**ourse) is Silk Road Rising's in-class arts education program, designed to extend our mission into the Chicago Public School System.

EPIC employs a hands-on approach to realizing empathy by harnessing the transformative power of playwriting. Students engage with unique experiences and differing perspectives to each write an original, ten-minute play. Through this act of play creation, students expand their understanding of civic engagement, tolerance, and the importance of storytelling. EPIC meets Common Core Standards for reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Working closely with the classroom teacher, teaching artists deliver the program over 16 sessions. EPIC concludes with a live performance of select student plays by professional Chicago-based actors.



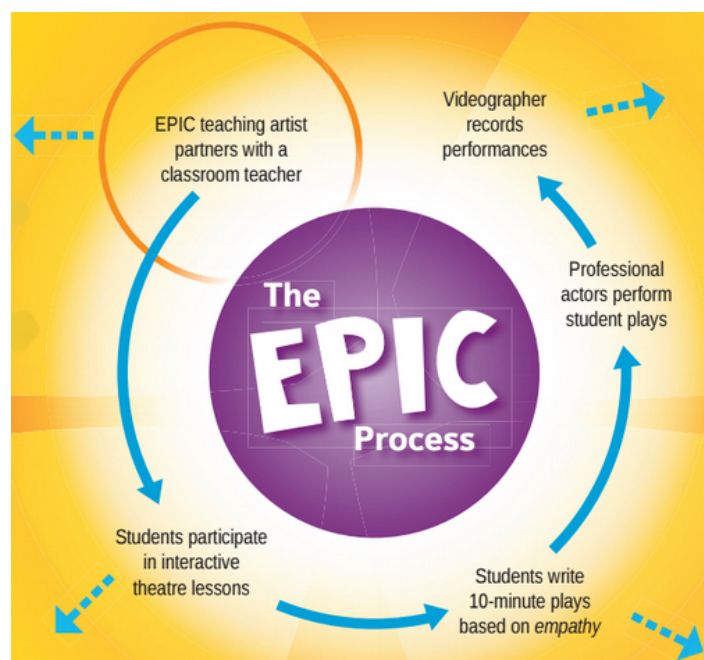
Are you interested in bringing EPIC to your school or getting more information?

Email alice@silkroadrising.org or call 312-857-1234 x204.

Check out our website: <http://www.silkroadrising.org/pages/epic>

Download the EPIC informational brochure in PDF format [HERE >>](#)

Julie's EPIC Journey: A Student Discovers Empathy through Theatre



Julie (a fictitious name to protect the student's identity) is a junior at Lindblom High School, enrolled in a creative writing class, who participated in EPIC during the 2014-2015 school year.

Profile: Julie is a "tell it like it is" type of student. In class she is confident, intelligent, and diligent. Because of this, Julie is never afraid to participate in group discussions—sometimes to the point of overpowering students with differing viewpoints. While Julie is a passionate person with a caring

heart, sometimes her passion can come across as aggressive to those who don't share her fervor for expressing feelings. The classroom teacher warned the EPIC teaching artist of Julie's outspokenness prior to the start of the residency.

Julie's Attitude Toward EPIC: Although Julie insists that she is "not a theatre person" and feels reserved when "acting silly" in group warm-ups, she lights up when it comes to group discussions about social justice. Unfortunately, her excitement and strong opinions often lead her to accidentally shut down other students.

help students share their voices in a way that others can't help but respect. Since engaging in these activities, Julie starts to show more consideration for classmates, forming stronger relationships, and participating more readily in games and warm-ups.

Introduction to Empathy: In the EPIC curriculum, students first delve deeply into the concept of empathy through a discussion of protagonists and antagonists. Students are asked to identify and journal about antagonists in their own lives—someone who has gotten in their way or someone they can't understand.

Students are then asked to consider a time when they may have been someone else's antagonist—perhaps recalling a fight they have started or person they have wronged. Students reflect on their journal entries with partners. While considering times they may have deserved forgiveness for their actions, they rethink if their antagonists deserve forgiveness too. They then write a monologue from the antagonist's perspective that seeks to explain his or her offensive actions.

For this exercise, Julie chose to write about a staunchly anti-gay preacher associated with her church. Her first monologue was a scathing critique of his stance. In the partner discussion, Julie insisted that there was nothing empathetic or redeeming about this preacher for maintaining such an "old school" point of view. However, things changed when one of Julie's partners offered up the thought that, for some people, changing their religious views is like disowning a part of their history.

Julie had never considered this before. She found in this concept a parallel to her own struggles outlined in her second journal entry: the difficult choice between one's morals and one's family. So when Julie sat down to write her antagonist's monologue, she felt inspired to tell this preacher's story from an understanding perspective. The resulting piece was sincere, touching, and honestly sympathetic to the preacher's commitment to his values—even though his views were the opposite of Julie's.

Developing Julie's Play: Julie had initially chosen "transgender and sexuality rights" as her ten-minute play topic, and planned to write a play about two high schoolers partnered together on a school project—one transgender, the other homophobic. However, upon achieving this newfound empathy for people whose value systems do not align with hers, she decided to shift her focus toward a scenario in which one student was secretly transgender while the other was obviously homophobic. She decided this new set-up was more true to life. "People spout anti-gay sentiments without even thinking about what they're saying or how it makes others feel," Julie said. "That's what I want to change, in an empathetic way."

Since Julie identified as both female and straight, she was not writing from her own perspective. So to help her better understand this perspective, she was placed into a workshop group with a transgender student who offered peer feedback, explaining the vocabulary and terminology used by the transgender community, and weighing in on her own experiences dealing with prejudice. Julie received this feedback very seriously and gracefully.

As a result of the investment and effort she put into her play and peer feedback, Julie ended up becoming de facto captain of her group. By this point in the semester, she had undergone a remarkable transformation. Now she was totally comfortable—not only in her interactions with other students, but even when participating in the "dreaded" improv activities!

Julie's Final Play: Julie's finished play was a remarkable success. She implemented humor, realistic dialogue, metaphor, symbolic setting, and just about every other basic element of drama learned in class—including, of course, empathy. Here is a notable excerpt:

JOHN: You can't just change people's mindset overnight. I'm sure there is someone who will love you for you, but finding them will be a needle in a haystack.

TYLER: Okay, but even if people's mindsets aren't changed, they should still try to respect me. People may not understand, but they can respect the fact that I'm living my life.

Julie's play was chosen as one of those to be performed by professional actors on the final day of class. She beamed throughout the entire reading and readily shared her playwriting process during the post-show Q&A.

contributing to society, while discovering a newfound appreciation for theatre along the way. She has proudly shared the video of the performance with her family, thereby taking the play out of the classroom and into the community.

In Her Own Words: When the class was asked to share their strongest takeaways regarding empathy, Julie responded: “Everyone has a reason for being who they are. You don’t have to agree, but you have to try to understand. Hating them won’t help the situation. If you’re judgemental, you might tire yourself out instead of actually changing the situation.” Then, in her final journal entry, she wrote: “I also learned that I need to have empathy for myself. I should be as understanding with myself as I am to anybody else.”

After finishing EPIC, Julie informed the teaching artist that she has been thinking of enrolling in a theatre class next year, and that she plans to submit her play to a young playwright competition—and all this from a student who is “not a theatre person.”

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