



**EDUCATION &  
ENGAGEMENT**  
Learn. Activate. Celebrate.

# Reading Residency Annual Report

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2025/26

# Introduction

The Reading Residency program is one of Milwaukee Rep's cornerstone education programs, bringing professional theater into middle and high school classrooms as a tool for enhancing literacy skills and social emotional learning. Students take on the roles of actors, designers, dramaturgs and audience members. These diverse experiences allow them to learn key concepts through various methods including discussions, research, performance and hands-on assignments.

Over 14-sessions of in-school workshops, Milwaukee Rep Teaching Artists introduce students to the world of the show, facilitate creative engagement with the text and teach them important academic, interpersonal and life skills. Students also learn outside of the classroom by attending a Rep Immersion Day, a student matinee performance which includes demonstrations, discussions and a TalkBack.

A Mini-Residency includes four classroom sessions and a Rep Immersion Day, and the new Reading Residency, Jr. for elementary students includes 14 sessions and an immersive field trip comprised of hands-on demonstrations and a Backstage Tour.



Students learn about costume design during a Rep Immersion Day

# Program Goals

1

Improve Reading Comprehension

2

Improve Social Emotional Learning

3

Improve Theater Understanding

Students working on a lighting design demonstration.

# Data Analysis

Program goals are measured through pre- and post-surveys taken by students on the first and last day of their Reading Residency. In their surveys, students answered text evidence questions about the plays, reflected on their level of social awareness and relationship skills, responded to statements measuring their familiarity with and perception of theater and indicated their feelings on the program itself.

# School Partners

During the 2025/26 Season, we implemented Reading Residencies around our productions of COME FROM AWAY and August Wilson's THE PIANO LESSON. We also conducted a Mini-Residency around FRIDA, and a piloted an elementary school version, called Reading Residency, Jr. Overall, we served 878 students across 15 schools:



- 6 schools
- 15 classrooms
- 366 students



- 7 schools
- 12 classrooms
- 326 students

## School Partners:

- Andrew Douglas Middle School
- Bruce Guadalupe Middle School
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School
- Humboldt Park School
- Manitoba School
- Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts
- NOVA High School
- Pathways High School
- Rogers Street Academy
- Story School
- Tenor High School - Cathedral Square
- Thurston Woods
- Trowbridge School

*"Students who are often difficult in a regular classroom were able to act out scenes effectively." - Classroom Teacher*

## Mini Residency Around FRIDA partner:

- ALBA School (99 students)

## Reading Residency, Jr partner:

- Lincoln Elementary School (87 students)

# Program Outcomes

## COME FROM AWAY

Students showed a significant increase in text-evidence, theater understanding, and social-emotional skills from pre- to post-survey.

- 44% demonstrated increased text comprehension
- 60% increased their understanding of theater
- 44% increased their social-emotional skills

## THE PIANO LESSON

Students showed a significant increase in text-evidence, theater participation, social awareness, and relationship skills from pre- to post-survey.

- 61% demonstrated increased text comprehension
- 51% increased their understanding of theater
- 37% increased their social-emotional skills

## Reading Enjoyment

Students responded very positively to reading enjoyment questions, with students on average indicating they would recommend reading to a friend, they enjoyed expressing opinions about what they read, and they enjoyed doing activities related to what they read. 73% said they enjoyed reading during this program.

*"I absolutely adored the play, it was vibrant and engaging, fun and emotional. The residency was quite engaging as well, the person walking us through was polite and excited to present, the format was also very easy to understand."*



Student with Emerging Professional Resident Adriana Rosebrough during a Rep Immersion Day Demo

# Student Experiences

Highlights of many students' experiences were the teachers they worked with, getting to attend the play and having a post-show workshop with an actor or creative from the production they saw.

Here is what students had to say about the Reading Residency:

"I have gained the skill to share out and be more comfortable with people."

"I enjoyed learning about what the actors had to do to use the right dialect. I never thought about the process of actors having to learn accents before this."

"I have always wanted to act in movies but this makes me want to act even more."

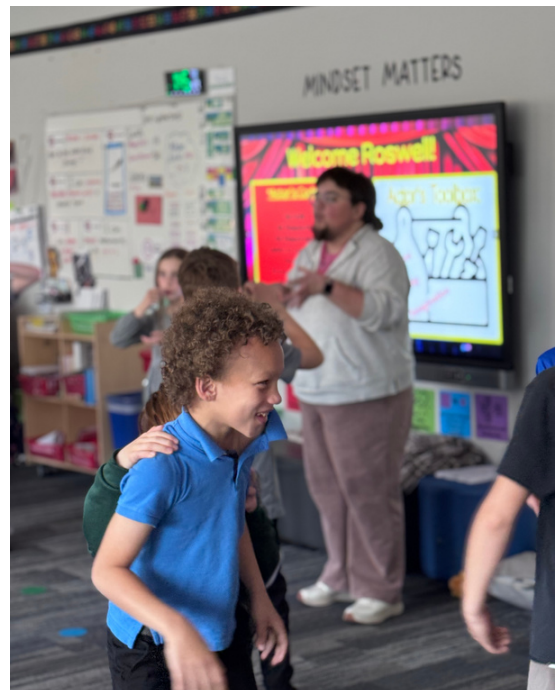
"Sometimes, the least important things can turn out to be very important — and there will be people who disagree with your opinion."

"This program has helped me with understanding how other people feel about things, and it helps people come together and talk without judging."

"Some shows or movies are called mirrors and windows. A mirror is when you look at the play and see someone that represents yourself. A window is when you see someone's perspective, even if it is different from yours"

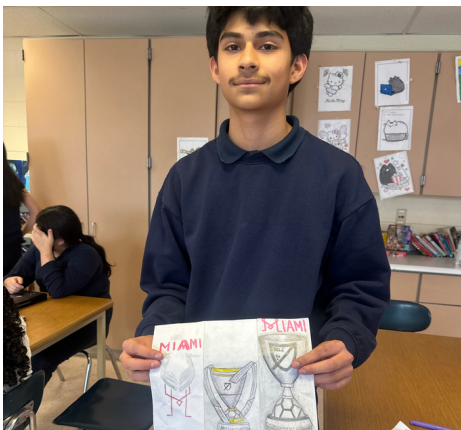
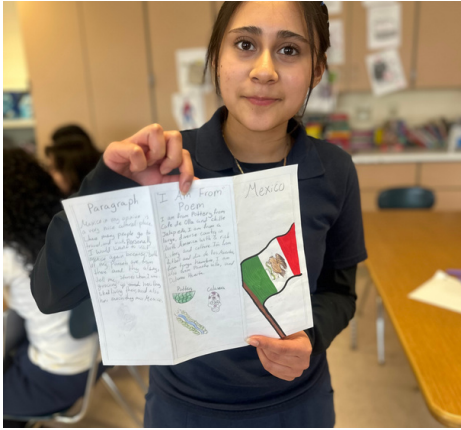
"I always thought plays were stupid but I actually ended up liking it and would watch more."

"I learned about how in a play, everyone has a job and works together to bring it to life."

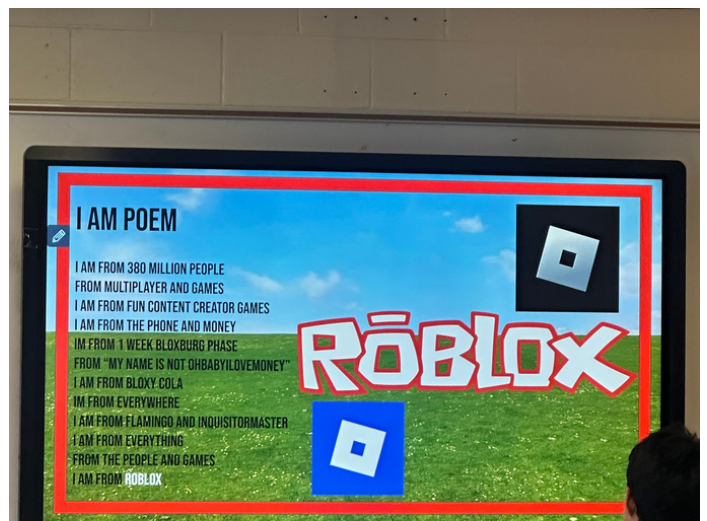
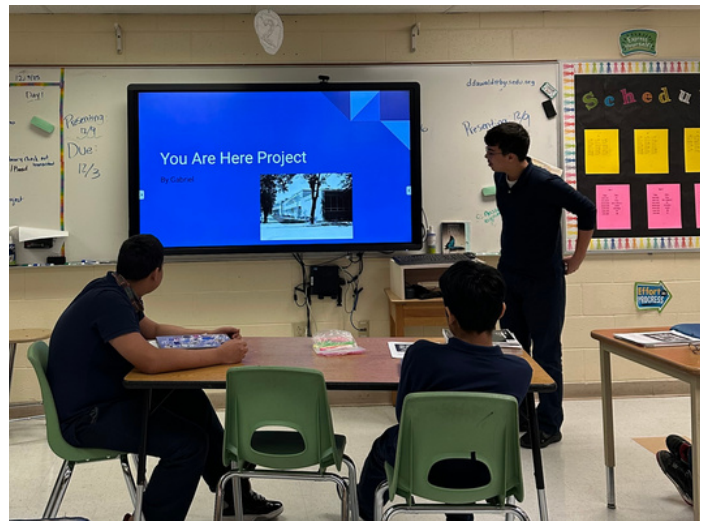


Students engaging in Reading Residency, Jr.

## Sample Student Projects & Demonstrations



Each Reading Residency features various ways for students to create and collaborate with their classmates, and it culminates in a final project. Students creatively apply the skills they have gained throughout the residency to generate an unique piece that demonstrates their learning. For example, COME FROM AWAY students did a project on where they come from.



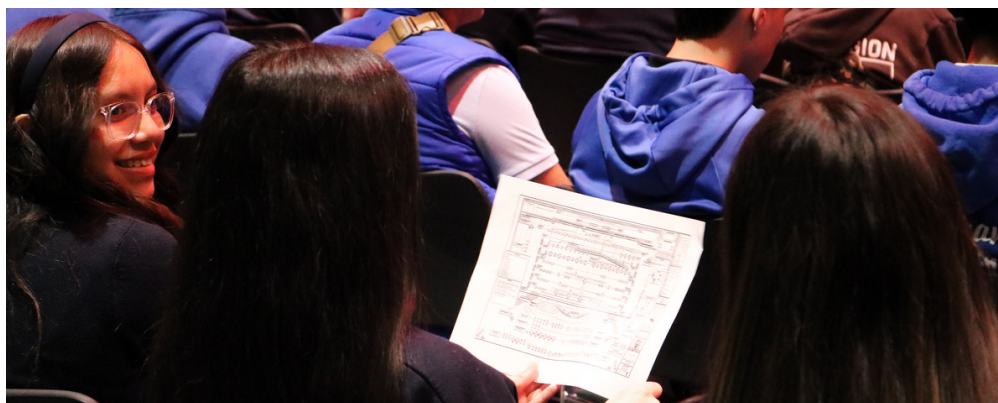
*"The final project was a great way to incorporate ELA & reading skills."*  
 - Classroom Teacher

# Summary

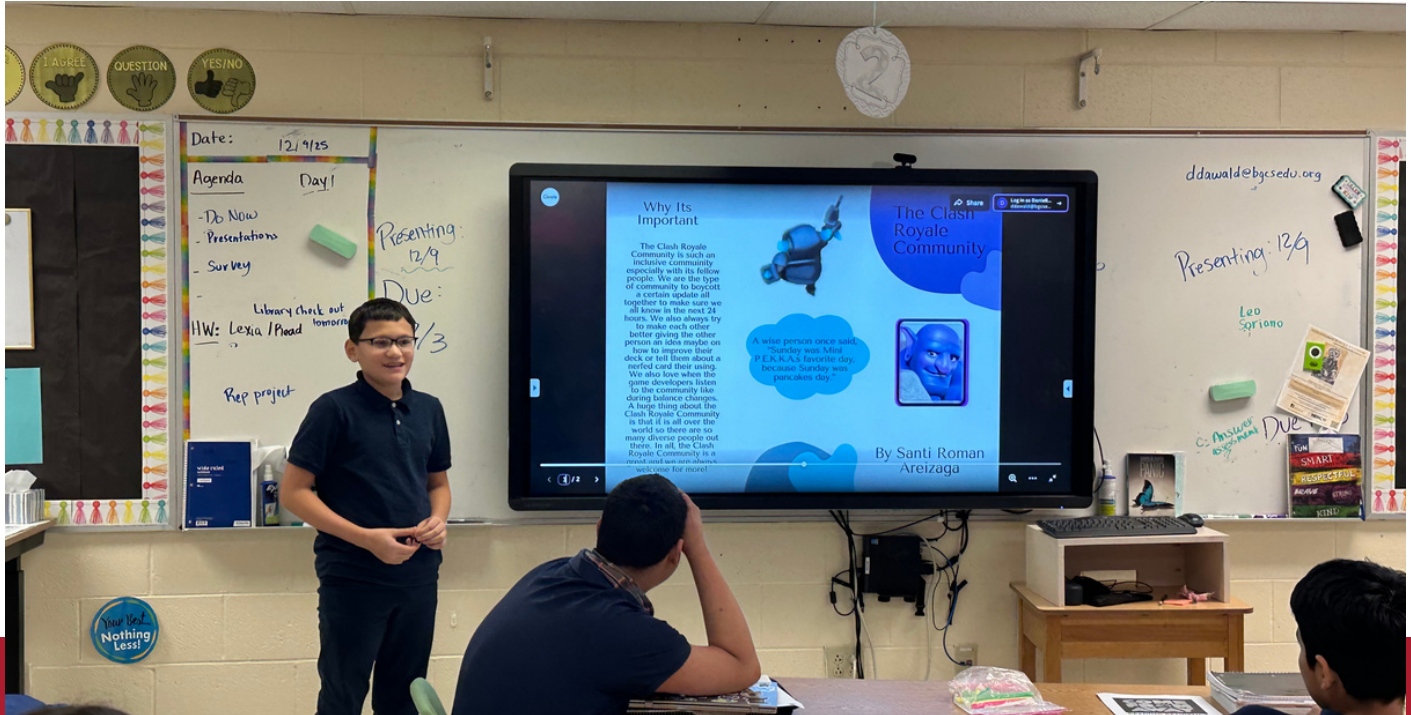
This year's Reading Residency has been one of considerable success across the board, reflected both in the survey data and in anecdotal evidence gathered from the classroom. The two productions anchoring the program — COME FROM AWAY and THE PIANO LESSON — proved to be resonant choices for students, each in distinct and meaningful ways.

With COME FROM AWAY, the story of the community that formed in the wake of 9/11 resonated deeply, which was evident in the survey results that demonstrate strong increases in social emotional skills. For many, learning that this remarkable true story could be told through musical theater was itself a revelation. THE PIANO LESSON showed especially strong gains in text comprehension. August Wilson's language and the complexity of the Charles family's story gave students genuine material to grapple with, and the data suggests they rose to meet it. It was particularly meaningful for students to engage with a canonical American drama that centers Black family history, memory, and the question of what we owe to the past — themes that many students connected to their own lives and families. We were also able to conduct a mini-Reading Residency in four classrooms around FRIDA and pilot the Reading Residency, Jr. with three elementary school classrooms, based on age-appropriate texts rather than a production from our season. These efforts are building our capacity to grow this program and create more access to arts education experiences for more students throughout the Milwaukee area.

The experience of seeing the live production at Milwaukee Rep was a highlight, with students frequently citing the performance itself as transformative in their open-ended responses.



Students learning about a lighting plot during FRIDA Rep Immersion Day



Final project presentation for COME FROM AWAY

# Goals

We made significant progress towards our goals from last year including implementing the mini-residency in four classrooms, redesigning the structure of the Rep Immersion Day to accommodate school schedules through pre and post-show options utilizing our new Herzfeld Foundation Education & Engagement Center, and had consistent growth across all program outcomes between the various residencies.

## 2026/27 Goals

- Increase our reach to 35 classrooms across the Milwaukee area with the full Reading Residency Program
- Expand the pilot Reading Residency, Jr. partnering with elementary classrooms to build more arts integration residencies.
- Design residency curriculum for three productions: FOOTLOOSE, JOHN PROCTOR IS THE VILLAIN, and SOMEWHERE.

*"I got the chance to learn many different things about theater — understanding the actors' feelings on stage. This program made me feel more confident about myself and made me think about becoming an actor one day. I also got the chance to attend a theater for the first time." - Student*

# Thank You

Thank you to our generous sponsors for their support:

- Bader Philanthropies
- Einhorn Family Foundation
- GMAR Youth Foundation
- Ralph Evinrude Foundation
- Jane Bradley Pettit Foundation
- Johnson Controls

Without their contributions, this program would not be possible.

## Education & Engagement Staff:

- Jenny Toutant, Chief Education & Engagement Officer
- Zach Woods, Associate Director of Education
- James Carrington, Associate Director of Education
- Britney Walker-Meritte, Manager of Career Pathways
- Roswell Kaybee, Education Coordinator
- Suze Falk, Engagement Coordinator
- Claire Vock, Education & Engagement Office Administrator



Suze Falk leading a movement demonstration at a Rep Immersion Day

For more information on the Reading Residency:



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