

The Face of America: Plays for Young People

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Peter Brosius, Editor

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Ten-year-old Sasha, whose Russian immigrant mother cleans offices, routinely comes home from school to an empty, triple-locked apartment. On the day before her project about the Brooklyn Bridge is due, Sasha discovers she doesn't have anything to write with. Despite her mother's stern rules, Sasha ventures to other apartments in her Manhattan building in search of a pen. For the first time, she encounters her neighbors, many of whom are also from different places around the world. By the end of the play, *Brooklyn Bridge*, Sasha has found a pen and finished her paper, and, more importantly, has forged connections and created a community within her building.

Editors Elissa Adams and Peter Brosius are directors with the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis. In this anthology, they present four plays to capture the reality of young people's lives today. Each of the four playwrights speaks to young people in a theatrical language that is fresh, surprising, and endlessly inventive.

"We did not consciously set out to create a body of work about the immigrant experience," says Adams, "but that it happened is not surprising. Immigration is one of the defining narratives of the contemporary American experience."

In *Esperanza Rising*, Lynne Alvarez presents the story of the privileged life of twelve-year-old Esperanza, born into a rich ranching family in northern Mexico in the 1930s. After her father is killed by revolutionaries, the girl is sent to California with the family's servants for her safety. They settle in a camp for migrant farm workers, where Esperanza must try to adjust to a totally different lifestyle and culture.

A reality TV show follows two very different families, in *Average Family* by Larissa Fasthorse, as they live together for three months as a 1840s frontier family on the Minnesota prairie. The Roubidoux, an urban family of Native American descent, and the Monroes, a hard-core, back-to-nature rural tribe, are challenged to survive the different times and their separate cultures, all in the public eye.

In *Snapshot Silhouette*, by Kia Corthron, Najma, a recent refugee from war-torn Somalia, lives with an American mother and daughter while she waits for her own mother to join her. She struggles with school, language, culture, and the tensions with Tay C, the same-age girl with whom she's staying.

This collection of plays powerfully tells the stories of the world of young people who struggle mightily yet make great strides to find their ways in an increasingly complex, global world. Each play is worth the read and will no doubt provide great material for drama coaches and their students.

PENNY HASTINGS (September / October 2011)

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