My name is Megan Cramer, and I am the Associate Artistic Director of The 52nd Street Project. The Project was established in 1981 as a means to "over-serve" the traditionally under-served population of kids between the ages of nine and eighteen from Hell's Kitchen. We pair children up with professional, volunteer theater artists to create original theater. The Lotos Foundation funds our Playmaking program, in which 10-year old kids learn how to write their own 2-character plays, which are then performed by professional actors. I thought it appropriate that today I share with you what the kids’ experience is like: through their own words.

On the first day of Playmaking class, I asked the group of ten 10-year olds a few questions. Their responses were surprising and illuminating, and it always amazes me how much they already know before the class even starts.

First I always ask “Why Write a Play?” They responded:

* To be Interesting
* To entertain
* to be funny
* share a secret
* to show problems and solutions
* show a different point of view
* express emotions
* make a mystery and solve it
* see stuff
* show what’s inside of you
* make people laugh, cry,
* Make people want to do something.
* Inspire

Then I asked, “What Do We Need to Write a Play?” (And the answers start to resemble the plot of “The Wizard of Oz”…)

* Brain
* Heart
* Soul
* Imagination
* Bravery
* Something from the inside
* Actions “they can’t just stand there”
* ***And my personal favorite answer:* Awesomeness**

In their search for awesomeness, the kids created a wide range of characters. The boys’ plays got dark: a grim reaper trying to reincarnate himself, a brother-and-sister ninja fighting team, an 8-year old boy who lived in a Bronx shelter who longed to live in a big house. The girls’ plays also got a bit dark: a monkey who did not want to reveal her secret obsession for chameleons, a sea monster who must eat a special shell in order to live forever, or even just friends who fought and came to the hard realization that they could not be friends anymore. These were all stories of separation, with characters on a journey to find connection. They were full of longing for friendship & recognition and the desire to be something more/different/bigger than you are.

Finally, at the end of the process, I asked them “How was it to see your play acted out?”

One 12-year old said “It was like nothing I had ever imagined. I wrote it, and never thought it’d be this good.” Another girl admitted that “Some of it was creepy and the makeup was scary.” Another disagreed. “I liked the makeup!” But the most consistent answer was “It was awesome.” It always came back to that ingredient that they knew we would need: Awesomeness; which, luckily, they had in spades, and bravely brought it to their writing process. I think we could all use a little more “Awesomeness” in our work, and for me, the Playmaking program always helps me to find it in the most unexpected of places. Thank you again to the Lotos Foundation for helping us on our search.