

THE UMBRELLASM
ARTS CENTER

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

PREPARED BY MEMBERS OF THE UMBRELLA EDUCATION STAFF



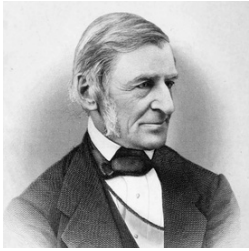
THE COUNTER SEP 26 - NOV 9, 2025

PHOTO BY JIM SABITUS. FEAT. MARGARET CLARK AS KATIE AND "RANNEY"* AS PAUL | *INDICATES A MEMBER OF ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION

THE COUNTER

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

EDUCATION NOTE:



"The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, not the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with a friendship." - **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

THE COUNTER is a heartwarming new play by Meghan Kennedy that explores the unlikely friendship between a waitress and a small town fireman. The play, at its core, is really about taking time to connect with those around us, even when they seem to be completely different.

Through cups of coffee, daily conversations and shared secrets, the characters begin to connect more deeply to one another. They help each other to uncover what holds them back, encourage the other to take charge and pursue the lives they want to live. While this play also delves into darker topics, the nature of the show encourages exemplification of compassion, kindness and empathy for our neighbors regardless of our differences.

Conversations can change the trajectory of our lives and inspire us in infinite ways. Walking out of this show, we hope you feel uplifted and inspired to connect more deeply with those around you.

These resources were designed to spark conversation and invite connection. Please share them with a friend!

As you continue to read please take time to check in with yourself as some of the themes in this play may be poignant for some viewers.



ESSENTIAL THEMES AND QUESTIONS

We suggest you discuss these before seeing the show!

- When does an **ordinary** moment become life changing?
- How does sharing **secrets** affect us?
- What makes something a meaningful **friendship** as opposed to a simple connection?
- How are you taking **control** of your life?



SPOILER ALERT

From here onward in the Education Guide, the content may quote the characters, reveal plot points, and more. If you like spoilers, carry on, but if you want to be surprised by the show, save the rest for after you've experienced THE COUNTER live onstage.



THE COUNTER

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

ESSENTIAL THEMES: FRIENDSHIP

"What if we decide to become friends. Real friends." – Paul, *The Counter* by Meghan Kennedy

Throughout this play we see how one connection can turn into a friendship that changes our lives for the better. Katie and Paul's connection allows them to turn away from the loneliness of their everyday lives and towards a life affirming friendship. There have been many studies about how friendships can affect our mental and physical health. The Counter exemplifies how, through connection and friendship with others, we live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

"Good books, like good friends, are few and chosen; the more select, the more enjoyable." - **Louisa May Alcott**

"The longer I live, the more deeply I learn that love — whether we call it friendship or family or romance — is the work of mirroring and magnifying each other's light." - **James Baldwin**

"A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow." – **William Shakespeare**

SUGGESTED READING

The Friendship Cure by Kate Leaver

The Psychology of Friendship from The British Psychological Society





ESSENTIAL THEMES: SECRETS

"Like we tell each other secrets. And we help each other sort through things. And give each other tough talk. What if we tried that? Wouldn't it make things a little different but good?" - Paul, *The Counter* by Meghan Kennedy

In *The Counter* both Katie and Paul are harboring secrets that allow them to remain isolated from others. As a part of their budding friendship they begin to share things with each other that may have otherwise remained hidden.

This experience allows them to grow closer to each other in their daily interactions, but also shows them they do not have to be or feel alone in this world. Through sharing their secrets with each other they begin to heal old wounds that may be holding them back from truly living.

"Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets." - Paul Tournier

"Man is not what he thinks he is, he is what he hides."
- André Malraux

SUGGESTED READING

"The New Psychology of Secrecy."

Michael Slepian

Sage Journals (March 21, 2024).



THE COUNTER

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

ESSENTIAL THEMES: RIGHT TO DIE

"I'm not suicidal – I just want to go on my own terms." – Paul, *The Counter* by Meghan Kennedy

This show explores some themes of self harm and suicide through the character of Paul. However, his main goal is to take charge and control over his own life. Paul's chosen method for this is to have control over how he is going to die. If you would like to know more about conversations such as these please see the resources below.

THE COUNTER contains references to suicide. If you are having thoughts of suicide, call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or go to [SpeakingofSuicide.com/resources](https://www.speakingofsuicide.com/resources) for a list of additional resources.

SUGGESTED READING & RESOURCES

Euthanasia and Consensual Harm: Evaluating the Moral and Legal Asymmetry of Self- and Other-Regarding Acts by A.L. Peters from Inquires Journal

Podcast: Better off Dead by Andrew Denton

FENWAY HEALTH

A Boston-based center offering comprehensive LGBTQ+ health services, including gender-affirming and mental health care.

THE BOSTON ALLIANCE OF GLBTQ+ YOUTH (BAGLY)

Providing support and community for LGBTQ+ youth in Massachusetts.

SAMARITANS, INC.

A Massachusetts organization offering emotional support and crisis helplines.





ESSENTIAL THEMES: WOMEN'S HEALTH

"Most male doctors [dismissed] the pain I was experiencing...as 'in my head.'" – Katie, *The Counter* by Meghan Kennedy

Katie talks in-depth about her struggle with endometriosis (a condition that affects around 1 in 10 women) and how the healthcare system treated her. She moved to the small-town setting in **THE COUNTER** as a way of taking care of herself after extensive surgery. The healthcare system not believing or belittling women's health issues has been widely talked about and brought to light recently by celebrities like Bindi Irwin and Lupita Nyong'o. If you would like to learn more about these issues please see the resources below.

"There is a long-standing idea that because we endure childbirth, we are meant to endure pain" - Elizabeth Comen, Oncologist and author of *All In Her Head*

"I felt utterly ashamed as a teenager and young adult being told that my pain was just part of being a woman. I felt lesser. I felt hurt. I felt weak. That is not okay." - Bindi Irwin, television personality and daughter of Steve Irwin

"I was so stunned by how little my doctor could tell me about this condition [uterine fibroids], I felt so helpless. And I'm not a scientist. So there was no way for me to really feel like I could do something about it myself. So I would say that I have felt alone. I felt very isolated in my condition." - Lupita Nyong'o, Emmy award winning actress

RESOURCES & SUGGESTED READING

[How Gender Bias in Medicine Has Shaped Women's Health](#) from Harvard Medicine

[Endometriosis Overview](#) from Mayo Clinic



THE COUNTER

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

TAKE 5 WITH ALEX LONATI

DIRECTOR OF THE COUNTER



Alex Lonati is making her Umbrella directorial debut with this fall's season opener, the award-winning play *THE COUNTER* by Meghan Kennedy. After a first read-through that resulted in both laughter and misty eyes, Alex "took five" with us to preview this fresh play that follows an unexpected, life-changing (and ultimately life-affirming) friendship.

What's appealing to you about the narrative and emotional life of *THE COUNTER*?

I think this play is, at its core, about taking control of your own life. While the characters in the piece come from very different backgrounds, they're both running away from something. And they connect over their shared longing (conscious or not) of taking active charge and making their life what they

want it to be. I find that enormously relatable, because at the end of the day, we all just have this one life and it's up to us to live it the way we want to live it.

What is it about this play that makes it something audiences will appreciate seeing now?

There is something so tender and so gentle about this play, and quite frankly that's what I think a lot of us need right now. It's a play about unexpected friendship - about recognizing a kindred spirit in someone and building a relationship when you really need it, whether you recognize it or not. And while there is a lot of depth and complexity to this show, it's also full of compassion and kindness and love. It feels like a hot cup of coffee and a big hug.

What can you tell us about how space and design will help tell this story and/or shape the audience experience?

This place takes place entirely in a small local diner, so the intimacy of this black box theater is perfect for the storytelling. The audience will feel like they're customers in the café, there with the characters, watching the drama unfold. I hope this will add to the truth and realism of the piece!



TAKE 5 WITH ALEX LONATI

DIRECTOR OF THE COUNTER

What most surprised or delighted you about the recent rehearsals for THE COUNTER?

I couldn't say more positive things about this room of artists if I tried. This team is small but mighty, and everyone seems so happy to be together, telling a story that has so much heart. We've been doing so much storytelling, so much laughing, so much connecting – I am sure the audience will feel the truth in the relationships they see on stage, because we've had such unbridled joy in the room!

This is your first time directing an Umbrella main stage! What can audiences expect from your directorial style? What passion or practices are a hallmark of your craft?

I think the main element of my directorial style that I'm bringing this project (and that I hope to bring to every project) is a people-first mentality. As artists, we are asked to bring ourselves to every piece, and I believe we can only do our best, most meaningful work if our humanity and lived experiences are celebrated and prioritized. For me, that means finding the joy, the laughter, and the connection in the work every day. I hope that audiences love this show and that it sparks conversations afterwards – but I also hope everyone onstage and off can feel the joy that went into experiencing and creating it.

Learn more about Alex at www.alexlonati.com



IN REHEARSAL FOR THE COUNTER. PHOTO BY JIM SABITUS. MARGARET CLARK AS KATIE AND "RANNEY"* AS PAUL. *INDICATES A MEMBER OF THE ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION



THE COUNTER

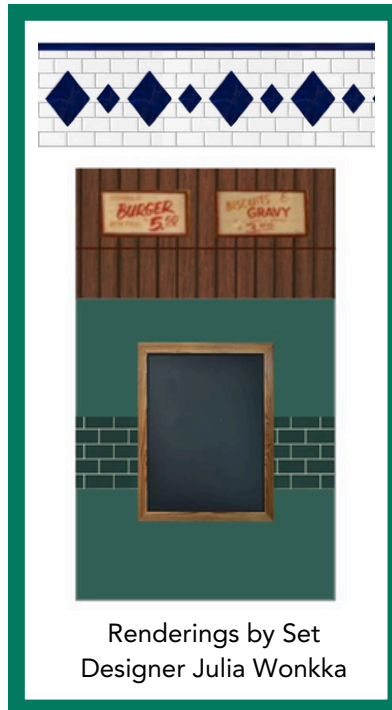
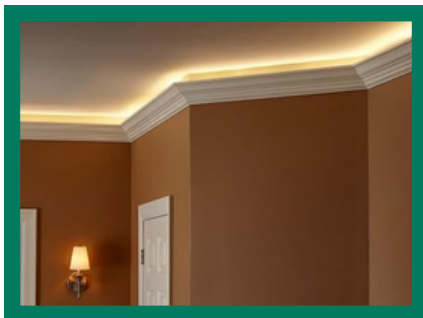
EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

SET DESIGN

"Well my escape fantasy was to disappear to a small town, be a waitress at a friendly cafe, have a front porch. I accomplished all of those things. and I feel pretty good about it." – Katie, *THE COUNTER* by Meghan Kennedy

The play takes place entirely in a local small town diner and the set design amplifies the intimacy of this setting. The set immerses you into a diner setting, making you feel like you are not simply watching a show but a part of the conversation. The warm lighting and immersive atmosphere makes the play feel like a warm cup of coffee and a hug. Helping the audience feel comforted and welcome in the space.

INSPIRATION → DESIGN → BUILD





KIDCARE ACTIVITY

The Umbrella's KidCare Show Program gives parents an opportunity to attend select performances while their child(ren) ages 5-12 engage in art activities inspired by the film or show in one of The Umbrella's classrooms with an experienced teacher. If you'd like to better understand or complete the activity at home, here is your guide!

THE GET-TO-KNOW-ME SANDWICH

Create a sandwich with answers to questions about you. As you do so get to know the people around you. By the end you will know the other people in the room better while also gathering things about yourself.

- What is your favorite memory?
- Who is your favorite cartoon character and why?
- If you could be any animal which one would you be and why?
- If you could live in any fictional world which would you chose?
- What's the first thing you would do if you could become invisible for a day?
- When you wake up in the morning, what are you most thankful for?

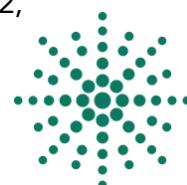
What is your superpower?

BOOK KIDCARE: SUN, OCT 5

To book KidCare to accompany your tickets to see THE COUNTER, simply visit TheUmbrellaArts.org/class/kidcare-performances and add the experience to your cart for the appropriate number of young people ages 5-12. Please note that enrollment space is limited and is reserved as first come, first served.

For the upcoming productions in our 2025/26 season, KidCare is available Nov 2, Mar 15, and May 3.

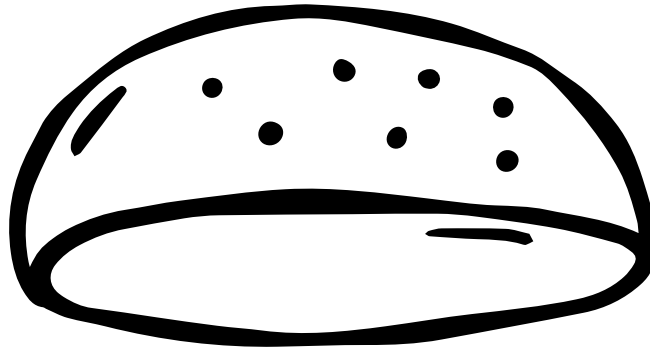
THE UMBRELLA ARTS CENTER



THE COUNTER

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KIDCARE ACTIVITY

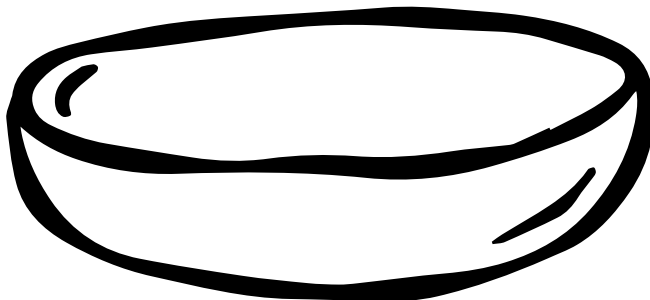


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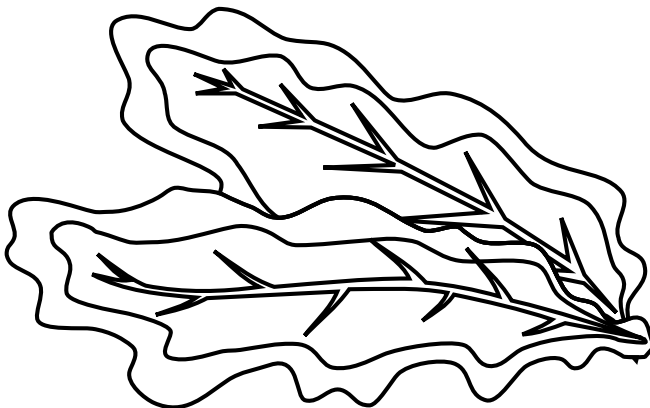
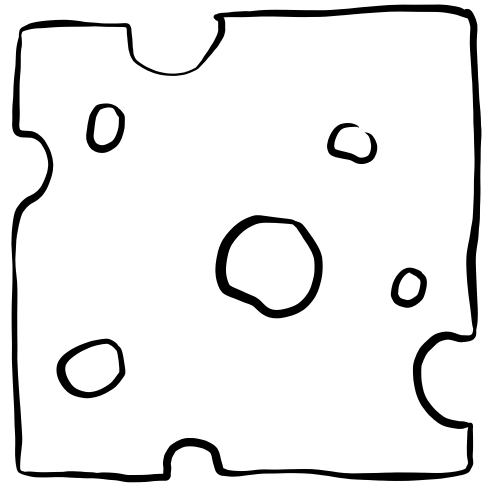
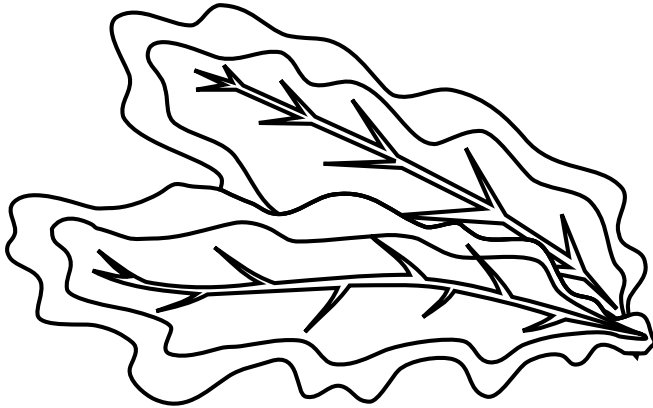
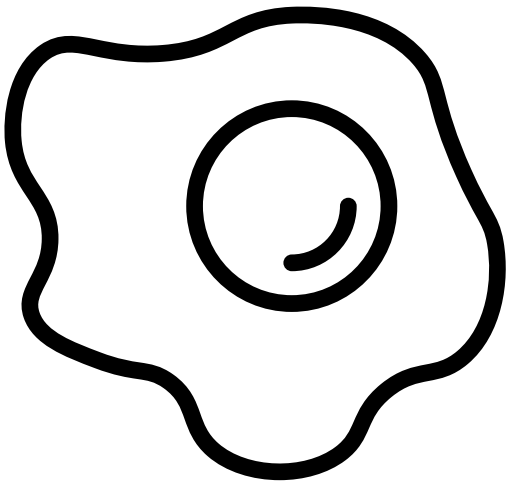
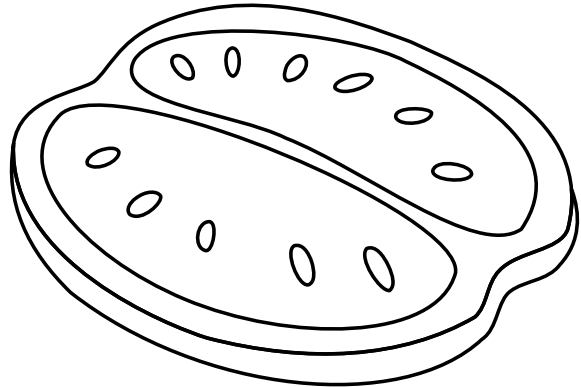
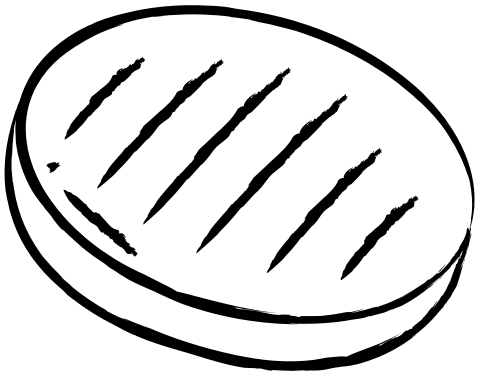
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KIDCARE ACTIVITY





THE UMBRELLASM
ARTS CENTER

FREE FILMMAKING COURSES

FOR TEENS & FAMILIES

HANDS ON MOVIE MAKING II

Saturdays, 9 AM - 4 PM
OCT 25 - NOV 15

FAMILY FILMMAKING

Fri - Sun
OCT 17 - 19

REEL ADVENTURES

Fri - Sun
DEC 12 - 14



With Artist-in-Residence TOM FLINT

Umbrella Arts Center Artist-in-Residence Tom Flint is a moving image educator and maker whose interests meet at the crossroads of film, education, and cultural exchange. Flint graduated with a BA in Film + Media Arts from Temple U. and an MA in Art + Design Education from the Rhode Island School of Design with a focus on alternative approaches to film education.



This program is provided FREE of charge as part of the Arts Elevate: Artist-in-Residence for Youth Wellness in Greater Lowell Program, which was developed by Greater Lowell Community Foundation with lead funding from the Barr Foundation through its Creative Commonwealth Initiative.



Elevating the power of arts and culture in Greater Lowell

www.glcfoundation.org/arts-elevate