



The Wrestling season

By Laurie Brooks

Synopsis "You think you know me, but you don't."

Ages 12
and older
only

This is the refrain that rings throughout this powerful representation of how complicated it is to be a teenager in the world today.

Matt and Luke, two close friends on a high school wrestling team, are victimized by rumors about their relationship. These rumors are spread by two of their teammates and rivals, Jolt and Willy, as well as Jolt's girlfriend, the popular cheerleader, Heather. Matt tries to defuse the rumors by dating Melanie, who has a reputation for being "easy," but the strategy backfires when, in a desperate and misguided attempt to prove his heterosexuality, he sexually assaults her. Luke doesn't do anything to dispel the rumors, because he has begun to question his own sexuality. Eventually Luke is beaten up by assailants whose faces he doesn't see. The play does not provide resolutions to these conflicts. The characters are left trying to distinguish truth from lies, trying to find their footing in a world that keeps shifting underneath them. Trying to find out who they really are.

"You think you know me, but you don't.
I don't even know myself."

As a part of each performance there will be an extended audience forum that will take place directly after the show ends, with no break in-between. This will be an opportunity for you and your class to discuss some of the issues raised in the show. There is no set time limit for this experience, it can last 15 minutes or an hour, depending on the participation of the audience.

The Wrestling Season is not a play for all ages. This is a special production just for ages 12 and older.

Resource List

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

The Chocolate War

Robert Cormier

The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts

Arthur Miller

Hard Love

Ellen Wittlinger

Iceman

Chris Lynch

SPOTLIGHT

Speak

Laurie Halse Anderson

Shunned and ridiculed by friends and classmates, freshman Melinda pays a devastating price for calling the police at an end-of-summer party, an act no one asks her to explain. A gripping, raw look at the dynamics of high school relationships.

FOR ADULTS

Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys

Daniel J. Kindlon, Michael Thompson, and Teresa Barker

Real Boys' Voices

William S. Pollack with Todd Shuster

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls

Mary Pipher

SPOTLIGHT

A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence

Patricia Hersch

Hersch's three-year journey into adolescence presents a provocative, honest view of eight, average teenagers' lives. It is a sobering view and a wake-up call for parents.

WEB

<http://www.agi-usa.org/>

The Alan Guttmacher Institute site with information on teenage sexual activity and public health issues.

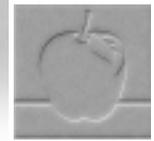
<http://www.iwannaknow.org/>

Answers to your questions about teen sexuality.

King County Sexual Assault Resource Center

PO Box 300, Renton, WA 98057

24-hr. Crisis Line: 1-800-825-7273



Letter to the Teacher:



Thank you for bringing your class to SCT's production of *The Wrestling Season*. This play was developed in workshops at The John F. Kennedy Center, with support from the New York University Education Department. It addresses issues and subject matter that are often difficult or uncomfortable to deal with, but are very real parts of teen life. High school is often a social climate of instant and harsh judgments. Teens get labeled everything: loser, geek, stoner—you name it. And some of these labels can be very painful.

This play looks at that trend of tagging that teens display, and the consequences it can have on those involved.

The Wrestling Season is set in a high school using a wrestling mat as the primary set piece. The play addresses rumors, peer pressure, sexual activity, sexual orientation, and sexual assault. Two characters are accused of being homosexual, and another character is accused of being “easy.” The language used is sometimes tough, though not graphic. For example, a derogatory term for gays is used, as are some other common slang words. There is also some sexual innuendo such as “I got something you can refer to,” or “She’s slept with every jock in school. ‘Cherry Garcia.’” The show contains stylized physical conflict that is shown through wrestling moves so altercations take on the look of a wrestling match.

There are a few technical points to note as well. All of the actors wear wrestling singlets—one-piece wrestling outfits—and wrestling shoes. The characters not directly in the “match” being fought are still on stage, in the background, acting as a kind of *Greek chorus*, or group of people not in the action but rather commenting on it. The referee acts in this capacity as well.

All of the materials presented in this section of the *ERG* were written directly to your students. Please take a few moments to look over the information provided before you pass it out to your class.

If you or your students have further questions please feel free to contact the School Show Department at (206) 441-9244 or the administrative offices at (206) 443-0807; and, as always, we welcome letters and emails.



FOR THE ENTIRE WRESTLING SEASON UNIT:

ART—reason and problem solve, connect

HEALTH—maintain a healthy life, analyze and evaluate the impact of real-life influences on health



Laurie Brooks

I often feel like the luckiest person in the world because I have discovered what I love to do: playwriting. Whether I'm pounding out a first draft alone at the computer, deep in the process of putting a play on its feet, or watching the magic of a premiere, creating theatre is what I love to do.

From the beginning, creativity played a prominent role in my life. I come from a writing family. My brother is *New York Times* best-selling fantasy author Terry Brooks, who lives right here in Seattle. My dad was a reporter early on in his career, and both my parents loved literature and storytelling, and were prolific readers. I remember vividly the American Heritage books that would arrive monthly, and my father demonstrating how to open the books so the

often. I'm currently Playwright in Residence at New York University's Program in Educational Theatre. I tell students: Try not to be too hard on yourself; write it, even if you think it might not be good enough, not perfect. And outline, outline, outline. That way you have a path to follow through the forest of choices. Try to put yourself on a writing schedule. Write every day. And the most important thing writers can do to feed their creative selves is read. Read everything: essays, poetry, fiction, short stories, plays. I read everything and anything that interests me. Expose yourself to varying styles and genres. It's inspiring and instructive to read good writing.

Activity

- Ask your students to keep a writing journal every day for a week. For at least twenty minutes every night they should write in their journal—be it poetry, essays, a story; anything they want. At the end of the week have them pick one of the things they wrote and rework that for the following week. Again at least twenty minutes of writing each night.

At the end of the second week have your own in-class "open mike" by inviting your students to share their writing with the rest of the class if they wish.

I find it helpful to work on more than one project at a time. That way if I get stuck on one project, I can turn to another. I've learned not to beat myself over the head if I feel insecure or confused during the writing process—to trust and have patience. I know the answer will come if I give it enough room to find its way. I used to get panicky about it, but now I just think, "Aah. It's not there today. Tomorrow it will come." If you're passionate about what you want to say, stay with that.

bindings would not be broken. It's no accident that both Terry and I are writers. I came to writing later than my brother, who started as a teenager. I didn't write my first play until about ten years ago when I went to graduate school at New York University and took a playwriting class with Aurand Harris, the great children's theatre playwright. He took an interest in my work and became my mentor. I was fortunate, indeed, to have his encouragement.

I enjoy the process of writing—devising plot, theme and style, words and language, but what I love best is the chance to say, through the characters, what's meaningful to me. I love bringing characters to life. Sometimes I have to "murder" them if they don't forward the plot, but that doesn't happen too

Of course there are always a million voices telling you how to write your play. In the beginning I used to believe that everybody in the theatre knew more about writing plays than I did. But over a period of time I learned that there are people who know a lot about playwriting, but you have to do your own

work, not someone else's. That doesn't mean you shouldn't listen to other people; some wonderful ideas and improvements come from listening to others and taking their advice. But you must listen to your own unique voice. Let it resonate. Learn to recognize it. Don't be afraid to let it be nice and loud.



wrestling WITH RULES



The Wrestling Season uses the rules of high school wrestling to shed light on social relationships. It shows us that the playground chant, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me,” is a lie. The characters use words as tools and weapons, to hurt and to heal, in a struggle for social status that is as serious as any struggle for survival. On this page are several specific situations from the play and an explanation of the wrestling rules that apply to each situation.



UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT:

Willy: I saw them. In the locker room. They were all over each other.
Jolt: What were they doing?
Willy: What do you think?
(Ref blows whistle, signals, “unsportsmanlike conduct”)
Willy: It was disgusting.

In wrestling, unsportsmanlike conduct covers a wide range of violations. For example, wrestlers are not allowed to act in any way to intentionally injure an opponent.

With these lines, Willy begins to spread a rumor about two other wrestlers, Matt and Luke, clearly intending to injure them. He characterizes their behavior as “disgusting,” while dodging a question about what that behavior was. Even if Jolt were inclined to challenge him, the vague, biased way in which Willy speaks would make it difficult.

“No control” in wrestling means that neither wrestler has control over the other. In order to score a two-point takedown, for instance, a wrestler must not only take his opponent down to the mat, but also establish control over her. When a referee signals “no control” after a takedown attempt, he does not award any points. Prior to this scene, Jolt had been pressuring Heather into sexual activity, and she had been using a variety of tactics to divert him. Jolt comes close to getting what he wants, but when Heather’s mom comes home, Jolt backs off and neither he nor Heather control the situation.



A takedown in wrestling

REVERSAL:

Matt: I shouldn’t have been so rough, but I was angry. I made a mistake. I’m sorry.
Melanie: I wish I could believe that.
Matt: Believe it. Don’t press charges. Don’t do that to me. Please, Melanie.
Willy: We’re leaving without you, Mel.
Matt: (to Melanie) What are you going to do?
Melanie: I don’t know.
Matt: Don’t go with him, Melanie. Let’s talk this over. Please. (Matt extends his hand. Melanie hesitates, then takes it, drops it, joins Willy. Matt remains alone on the mat. Ref blows whistle, signals “reversal”)

In wrestling, a referee awards a reversal when a wrestler who has been under the control of his opponent reverses the situation to gain control over his opponent. Prior to this scene, Matt used physical force to dominate Melanie; in this scene she uses social maneuvers to get the upper hand.

TAKEDOWN:

Matt: I’m not judging anybody.
Kori: Yes, you are. You don’t even realize it.
Matt: Look. I don’t care who’s gay and who isn’t.
Kori: As long as it’s not you.
Matt: I don’t want to be hated for something I’m not.
Kori: Imagine what it would be like to be hated for what you are. (Ref blows whistle, signals “two points”)

The referee of a wrestling bout will award two points in several situations—including when a wrestler takes his opponent down to the mat and establishes control over him. In this scene, Kori presents Matt with an argument he can’t answer, taking control of the conversation.

NO CONTROL:

Jolt: Come here. (Heather and Jolt embrace. A door opens and slams. Heather and Jolt break apart, adjusting their clothes and hair. Ref poses as Mom.)
Heather: Hi, Mom.
Jolt: Yeah, Hi Mrs. Huntley. Want a hand with those groceries? (Ref signals “no control”)

Discussion

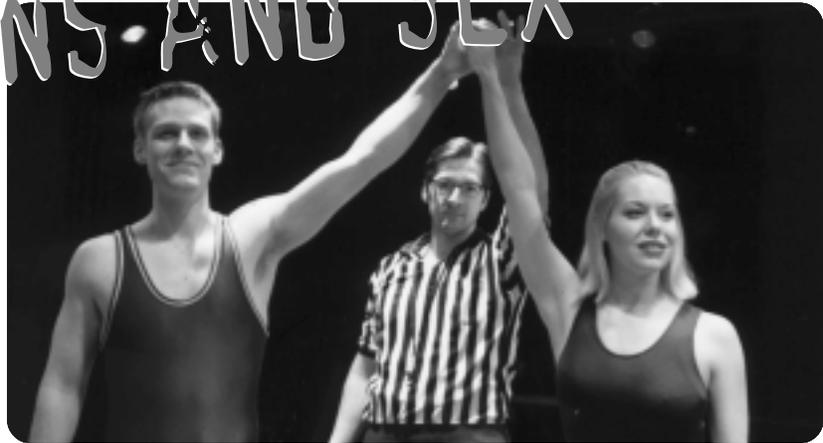
- The situations brought up in the play are similar to things that could happen to anyone in real life. It is important to look at your actions and recognize that they have repercussions, either good or bad. Have you ever said something to a friend, or someone else you cared about, that could have permanently injured the relationship? Have you ever been in a situation where the balance of power between you and someone you know shifted? Have you ever made a point that won an argument?





WRESTLING WITH A DIFFICULT ISSUE

TEENS AND SEX



David McNamara, Anthony Guest, Beth Guest from the Coterie production. Photo by Jennifer Coleman

In our society today we are flooded by images of sexual activity. From the earliest ages we see sex everywhere, but often the pictures we are shown don't ring true. If you judge teenage sexual activity by movies or music videos, you would think that everyone is having sex all the time without fears, questions, or concerns. It is important for you to have a more honest look at sex—what it is and isn't, who is having it, and what some of the definitions are.

SO, WHAT IS SEX?

Sexual Intercourse = Sexual union between humans involving genital contact, including acts other than vaginal penetration by the penis.

— THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY

That lets us know that sex is *defined* as more than just penetrative activity, but what does your peer group think it is? In a study of teenage sexual behavior conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a non-profit organization that educates the public on issues of health, we see that "two-thirds of the boys said that they had engaged in oral sex, anal sex, or masturbation by a female, but most of these boys said that they did not consider this to be sex, and some even considered it abstinence."

"Most very young teens have not had intercourse: 8 in 10 girls and 7 in 10 boys are sexually inexperienced at age 15. Most young people begin having sex in their mid-to-late teens, about 8 years before they marry; more than half of 17-year-olds have had intercourse."

—GUTTMACHER

Another factor in sexual activity, one that can cause much confusion and pain, is figuring out when your actions cross over from trying to get someone to have sex with you to committing a sexual assault. This issue is murky for many people, especially when you take into account that, according to Guttmacher, "93% of teenage women report that their first intercourse was voluntary [not rape], [however] one-quarter of these young women report that it was unwanted."

SO, WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Assault = a violent physical or verbal attack, or the threat of such an attack.

— MERRIAM WEBSTER DICTIONARY

A sexual assault, then, is an attack, or threat of an attack, of a sexual nature. For example, in the play, when Matt struggles with Melanie, in an attempt to get her to have sex with him against her will, he is sexually assaulting her.

"1 in 4 young women is raped or experiences attempted rape [sexual assault] by a peer."

— I NEVER CALLED IT RAPE

"39% of teen boys and 15% of teen girls believe that it would be ok for a guy to force a girl to have sex if he spent a lot of money on her, if she has had sex with other guys, or if she is drunk or high."

— KCSARC

What do all of these numbers and definitions mean? It means that "sex" can consist of many different sexual activities. And not everyone is sexually active. The decision to become sexually active is personal and complicated. But keep in mind that what is right for you may not be right for your boy/girlfriend, and that if you try to force or coerce them, it would be a sexual assault. Sex has many responsibilities and consequences, so know your mind, know your heart, and know that what you decide can have lasting legal, physical, and emotional effects.

Discussion

- What do you consider "sex?" What do you think is the "right age" or circumstance to engage in sexual activity? Have you ever encountered peer pressure to have sex? Or to not have sex? What did you do?



When Joking Isn't Funny

FROM KING COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT RESOURCE CENTER
24 HR. CRISIS LINE: 1-800-825-7273

Alicia was on her way to class. A classmate came up very close to her, looked right at her chest and said, "Great sweater." This guy commented about Alicia's looks every day, no matter what she wore. Alicia knew her classmate wasn't really complimenting her on her sweater or other clothes. The expression on his face told her he was really making fun of what was under her sweater. Alicia was embarrassed and wanted to hide.

Jamaal was hanging out in the hallway. A group of older kids came up behind him; one of them tugged on Jamaal's pants and pulled them down. The group ran off shouting, "Look at him!" Jamaal yelled, "Stop that!" but everyone turned around and just laughed at him. Jamaal felt like staying home from school the next day. He wanted to avoid everybody who had seen or heard about what happened to him the day before.

We've all seen or been a part of situations similar to these. What we may not have known was that these kinds of situations have a name—harassment.

WHAT IS HARASSMENT?

- name-calling
- making disrespectful signs with arms or hands
- touching or grabbing a person on the private parts of the body
- disrespectful comments
- offensive writing or graffiti
- ...or many other behaviors that interfere with living and learning

Any word, phrase, look, gesture, or touch which makes your identity as a sexual being more important than your identity as a person, student, or friend is inappropriate and should be considered sexual harassment.

HARASSMENT OFTEN MAKES PEOPLE FEEL—

- Fearful
- Angry
- Confused
- Embarrassed
- Alone
- Sad

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF IT HAPPENS TO YOU?

- **Tell the harasser to stop, if you can.**
You have the right to live and learn in an environment that feels positive and safe.
- **Tell someone you trust.**



Emotional support is helpful. It's normal to experience many different feelings, like anger, fear, confusion, or frustration.

- **Treat the harassment as a serious incident.** Others may minimize what happened, calling it joking or teasing. What is important is how you felt about what happened.
- **Tell someone you believe can help, like a teacher, principal, parent, or school counselor.** Keep telling until someone takes action.
- **Keep a written record.** It's important to write

down what happened, when and where it happened, whom you told, and the names of any witnesses there might have been. This information can be used to help stop the harassment.

There is nothing funny about these feelings. A joke should make everybody feel like laughing. Harassment is not joking. Harassment is not okay.

Activity

- With your class, brainstorm some situations, like the ones above. Decide which you think contain harassment and which, if any, do not. Is someone made to feel intimidated, annoyed, or alarmed? Is there any unwanted sexual advance made, or a request for sexual favors? Have you been in any situations where you have been harassed? Now that you know more about harassment, do you think you've ever harassed someone?



JUMPING OFF THE RUMOR MILL

Rumors are powerful. They can cause pain and confusion. In *The Wrestling Season* some of the characters become victims of the rumor mill. Two wrestlers are accused of being gay. Although the truth about their sexual orientation is never revealed and is strictly a rumor, one of them is physically assaulted, and they are both harassed by fellow students. In another instance, one of the girls is rumored to be “easy,” which leads to her being sexually assaulted. Faced with these possible outcomes, knowing that there is a rumor being spread about you can be intimidating.

HOW SHOULD YOU HANDLE A RUMOR WHEN IT'S ABOUT YOU?

According to Julie Dreiling, teen suicide prevention coordinator at the Mental Health

Sometimes it is hard to set yourself apart and not listen to rumors or gossip.

*From the Coterie's production left to right: Beth Guest, Amanda Rafuse, Alicia Jenkins-Ewing, Anthony Guest.
Photo by Marianne Kilroy*

Association for Kansas City, you should go directly to the source or talk to a mutual friend and find out why he/she is spreading rumors about you. Chances are the source is angry with you for some reason. Denial of the rumor or “revenge rumors” only puts you on his/her playing field. Confronting the underlying problem—anger, jealousy, misunderstanding—and keeping your dignity can defuse the rumor. Remember that people who gossip may just be bored and want some excitement; they may feel bad about themselves and want to feel superior or more powerful.

HOW CAN YOU STOP A RUMOR?

You can help stop a rumor in its tracks by choosing to not listen, finding other things to talk about, or saying that someone else's private life and personal choices—habits, values, sexual orientation, etc.—are “none of anyone else's business.”

DO YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH NOT TO GOSSIP?

Simply *listening* to rumors can be as bad as actively passing one along. Peer pressure can make it hard to remove yourself from the gossip cycle. Doing so can leave you feeling alone, and at risk of becoming the next target of gossip. Peer Mediation or Natural Helpers,

school programs that train students to deal with these situations, can be a strong support network. If your school doesn't have these programs you may want to look into starting one.



Activity

- Identify and trace the rumors of *The Wrestling Season*. How do words hurt the various characters? What are the results or consequences of the rumors? Discuss events in history that fed on rumor, such as the Salem Witch Trials or the Jon Benet Ramsey case, etc. Has there been a rumor at your school that you were in a position to stop? What did you do?

