

## A Spanish Language Theater Company is Born to Empower Cultural Belonging

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**Teatro Yerbabruja** through its theater program has designed and implemented sustainable changes in the structures of the educational system in the Brentwood school district. The Theater in Education Project for Latin American Immigrant Students offers the opportunity for such student to study theater as literature and to participate in theater productions in Spanish, expanding their knowledge of their own language. Spanish-speaking students, a rapidly growing number in Long Island schools, cannot participate in their schools' theater and other arts programs because they are only offered in English.

**Teatro Yerbabruja** in collaboration with the Brentwood School District have created the first Spanish-language theater company for young people on Long Island. This program meets after school and is open to all students who wish to participate. The program consists of an artistic residence of the **Teatro Yerbabruja** team at the school. The program meets 3 times a week and together with several Spanish language teachers we collaborate to produce a play at the end of the semester.

The theater company is a safe place where our language and our Latin American culture is celebrated while learning theater. Students learn teamwork through their jobs as actors, designers, and assistant directors. The theater is a place to imagine, to create new stories and to create bonds of solidarity and a support system between the school, the families and the community.

Students also learn about the importance of commitment and the discipline that is required when creating a theater production. The combination of these elements makes us a great family that includes artists, students, teachers, administrators, and the community.



Our immigrant community is dehumanized by stereotypical anti-immigrant political narratives on Long Island. The Teatro de los Sueños Company dignifies our community through the celebration of our language, our identity, and our culture. There is nothing that makes you feel more at home than speaking your language and enjoying art that celebrates one's culture. Theatrical performances uplift, dignify, and magnify this sister community voices.

While sharing their culture through the rich literary treasures of Latin America and Spain, participants are challenging regional mass media stereotypes. These productions empower students by dignifying their roots and origins, rather than criminalizing them.

*Daisy, a student of Salvadoran origin who participated as an actress, told us that for the first time she felt important at school.*

*Joselyn dared to do theater for the first time, and she tells us that although it was an experience that required a lot of effort, especially with memorization and discipline of rehearsals, she dared to stand on stage and perform for her friends and family.*

The play was presented on December 12, 2022 in the Brentwood school auditorium. The production featured short scenes by classic writers such as Cervantes, Shakespeare, Garcia Lorca and contemporary writer, Sandra Cisneros. This is a pilot project on Long Island and a new theater company will soon be starting at Westbury High School.



For more information about Teatro Yerbabruja visit

[www.teatroyerbabruja.org](http://www.teatroyerbabruja.org)

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