

Sustainable Stages: Learning from South Africa's Green Theater Innovations

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(Photo of the Soweto Theatre)

Introduction/Project Description

As a theater and dance teacher at Boston Green Academy (BGA), a school committed to sustainability and preparing students for green careers, I am determined to deepen my knowledge and understanding of green theater practices and how they intersect with social justice. My goal is to bring these practices into my classroom and productions, teaching students how theater can serve as both an educational tool and a powerful platform for environmental activism.

South Africa stands out as an ideal location to explore green theater because of its rich history of using performance as a vehicle for social change. South African theater companies have long engaged with critical issues such as apartheid, land rights, and environmental justice, and in recent years, many have pioneered sustainable practices that align with global efforts to reduce the environmental impact of the arts.

I aim to engage with organizations such as The Market Theatre, Cape Town Opera, and The Green Theatre Initiative to study their eco-conscious approaches to performance. These organizations have been at the forefront of sustainable theater practices, integrating energy-efficient designs, eco-friendly materials, and waste reduction strategies into their work. By studying their methodologies, I will gain invaluable insights into how these practices can be adapted to my own work at BGA, where I am committed to creating environmentally responsible productions and teaching students to think critically about the impact of their creative choices.

Learning from South African theater makers will allow me to create a comprehensive curriculum and toolkit for students at BGA, ensuring they can actively participate in sustainability efforts

within theater. These insights will help me implement green practices such as reducing waste in set design, utilizing sustainable production materials, and crafting performances that address issues of environmental and social justice. The goal is to not only make our productions greener but to empower students with the knowledge and tools to use theater as a means of advocacy for the environment.

Project Goals

Goal 1: Document and implement green theater practices

During my time in South Africa, I will engage with theater companies like The Market Theatre and Cape Town Opera to observe their sustainable production methods. These practices include everything from using energy-efficient lighting and solar-powered sound systems to sourcing eco-friendly set materials and promoting waste reduction. The information gathered will allow me to create a “Green Checklist for Theater Productions” that outlines sustainable strategies to integrate into our own productions at BGA. The checklist will address key areas such as energy conservation, material sourcing, waste management, and eco-conscious set/costume design.

Goal 2: Develop a sustainability-focused theater curriculum

Building on my observations in South Africa, I will design a curriculum that introduces students to green theater principles and environmental justice. This curriculum will incorporate hands-on projects where students will explore sustainable production practices while creating performances that tell environmental and social justice stories. The curriculum will include lesson plans that teach students to integrate eco-conscious choices into every aspect of a theater production, from conception to performance.

Goal 3: Share knowledge with the broader Boston Public Schools arts community

Upon returning to BGA, I will propose to facilitate a district-wide professional development presentation for the BPS Arts Department, sharing my findings on green theater practices. In addition to presenting my research at local theater conferences, I will host workshops aimed at helping other educators across Boston integrate sustainability into their arts programs. These PD workshops for other theater teachers and producers will be grounded in real-world examples and strategies that can be immediately implemented in their own classrooms and productions.

What I Hope to Bring Back to My School (Outcomes)

I hope to bring back a wealth of practical knowledge that will allow me to implement green theater practices at BGA. This includes:

1. **Green Theater Practices:** Actionable steps for reducing waste, conserving energy, and sourcing sustainable materials for BGA productions including a comprehensive sustainability checklist.
2. **Curriculum Integration:** A comprehensive curriculum that teaches students the intersection of environmental justice and theater, fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability through creative practice.
3. **District-Wide Impact:** The knowledge gained will be shared with the broader BPS arts community through a professional development session, helping other educators across the city create more sustainable productions.

Timeline

February - March 2025: Research & Preparation

- Research South African theater companies and sustainable practices.
- Schedule interviews and workshops with key organizations like The Market Theatre, Cape Town Opera, and The Green Theatre Initiative.
- Begin developing outlines for lesson plans and sustainability checklists for BGA productions that I hope to further develop after the fellowship.

Late June - Early July 2025: Final Preparations

- Finalize interviews and workshop schedules.
- Create interview questions
- Confirm travel arrangements.

July 2025: In-Country Research (10 Days)

- **Days 1-5:** Observe sustainable productions at The Market Theatre and The Green Theatre Initiative in Johannesburg & Pretoria. Meet with key stakeholders in these organizations and conduct interviews, tours of facilities, and attend workshops.
- **Days 6-10:** Meet with Cape Town Opera, attend sustainability workshops, and observe eco-theater practices in Cape Town.

August 2025: Follow-Up & Implementation

- Analyze collected data and develop a curriculum that integrates sustainability into BGA theater classes and productions.
- Create the official “BGA Sustainability Checklist” for our theatrical productions
- Prepare a presentation for the BPS Arts Department professional development session and district-wide workshop.
- Submit a report on findings for the Pat Cooke Fund and present to BGA community.