

# GLAY

Written and performed  
by Matt Sax  
Developed in collaboration with  
and Directed by Eric Rosen

[ Sep 13–Oct 14, 2007  
Kirk Douglas Theatre ]

# How to Use this Discovery Guide

*CLAY* is a one-man play about a young boy's journey into adulthood. Through his struggles with family and self-doubt, he finds his identity, his independence and his voice. Using hip hop, writer and performer Matt Sax draws upon traditional methods of performance and storytelling. This Discovery Guide will help you explore the common roots of spoken word, rap and poetry as well as the deep similarities between many types of storytelling, from myth to Shakespeare and contemporary movies to a one-man hip hop musical. You will then be guided through the first steps of finding your own voice through poetic language, rhythm and character exploration.

Vocabulary words are in **bold** type. Definitions are within each section.

Explore the multicultural roots of rhythmic speech and hip hop music

Reveal the story at the heart of *Clay* and examine its universality

## OBJECTIVES OF THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE

Practice your own storytelling through poetry and rap

Discover ways to transform personal experience into poetic language

Study the structure of classic poetry and rap

DISCOVERY GUIDE CREDITS  
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## Table of Contents

### BEFORE THE PLAY

The Seeds of Rhythmic Speech.....	4
The Roots and Branches of Hip Hop .....	5
Uncovering the Myth.....	8

### AFTER THE PLAY

Stepping into the Flow .....	11
Finding the Form .....	12
Bringing It All Together .....	14

Concluding Remarks .....	15
Resources.....	15
About P.L.A.Y.....	15

" But if you think back awhile with me...  
To the first time, when man looked up  
confused and pointed at the sky...  
watching the darkness infused with  
the shine...how could a word describe...  
that feeling of delight?..."

—SIR JOHN IN *CLAY*

# The Seeds of Rhythmic Speech



**IN CLAY, PERFORMER MATT SAX WEAVES** together different styles of language, physical expression and musicality to tell a story. Matt's sound and style may be recognizable as **rap** or **hip hop**, but it is a sound and style with much more history than we may realize.

Since the beginning of mankind, speech has been necessary to the survival of both the individual and the community. Beyond enabling the individual to express his or her needs through language, the spoken word has the capacity to benefit the community in myriad ways, from inspiring the group to work or fight collectively, to sharing stories and knowledge, to imparting wisdom and redefining how the tribe views itself.

However, it has always been the case that something even more powerful happens when the speaker's words are combined with rhythm or a beat. Whether it is the thump of our own heartbeat, the shaking of thunder during a storm or the clapping of hands, we are all sensitive to vibrations. When the sound of a drum pounds beneath the passionate voice of a speaker, we are moved not only mentally, but also physically. And when we listen in a group — as anyone who has attended a rock concert, a hip hop show or even a service at a large church can attest — the effect is even greater. Like tuning forks, we pick up the vibrations of others, and the experience is amplified. Even ancient civilizations knew this to be true.

## Vocabulary

- Griot:** A storyteller in western Africa who carries on the history of a village or family
- Hip Hop:** The culture surrounding rap music, including the music, dance, styles of dress and attitudes
- Rap:** Rhythmic speaking, usually rhyming, over a steady beat



**THE GRIOTS OF WEST AFRICA**  
Centuries before the United States existed, the **griots**, or folk poets, of West Africa were rhythmically delivering stories over drums and sparse instrumentation. It was their specific role in society to convey the tribal history using the tools of their voice and body. With a heightened delivery somewhere between speech and song, these individuals were able to enter a trance-like state, not unlike many of the great rappers and public speakers of today.



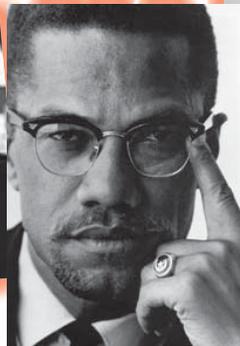
**NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBAL CHANT**  
In traditional Native American cultures, poems or songs were created for occasions such as rites of passage, healings and planting or hunting rituals. The songs were also used to pass on tribal history, standards of ethical conduct and religious beliefs. Usually the songs were rhythmically chanted or sung in a tribal context to drums or musical accompaniment.

# The Roots and Branches of Hip Hop

**LIKE AN ENORMOUS TREE**, the seeds of rhythmic speech have sprouted countless roots and branches the world over. In the United States, the rhythms, sounds and language of Africa have merged with those of other immigrant and native cultures into an immense forest of musicality. One can trace the same strains of rhythmic speech through the work songs and spirituals of slavery; up through early Blues music from the Mississippi Delta region; in the **syncopations** of jazz music, improvised **scat** singing and the work of the **Beat Poets**; and into the local street games and lingo of young people in urban centers. The same rhythms, rhymes and messages can even be heard in the speeches of African-American preachers and political activists, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson and Muhammad Ali.



Martin Luther King, Jr.



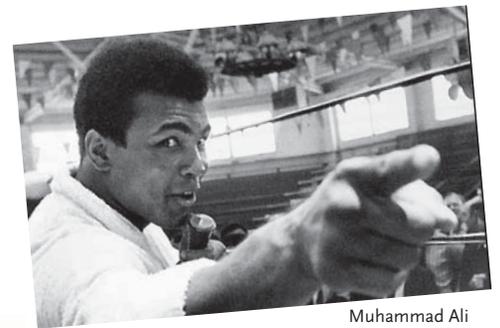
Malcolm X



Jesse Jackson

Much of what we have come to know as modern-day hip hop began to coalesce in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Poets and musicians like Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets began infusing their political messages and music with rhythm and rap-like spoken word. Everything broke wide open in New York in the late 70s when DJs at parties began speaking and rhyming over the instrumental portions, or “breakbeats,” in songs.

**In the early 80s**, performers like Grandmaster Flash flourished amidst a cultural explosion of dance (breakdancing), graffiti art and new styles of dress. Rappers like Run-DMC and LL Cool J then carried the music to more mainstream audiences. These new styles of music, dance and fashion became a meeting point for people of many different racial backgrounds, from Afro-Caribbeans to Latin- and Asian-Americans, to Anglo-Americans and many others. The Beastie Boys, three New York rappers of Jewish heritage, would become one of the most popular groups of the era. Several prominent female artists, such as Queen Latifah, came on the scene, breaking through gender barriers in the industry. While much of the music’s tone focused on partying and dancing, some artists, such as Public Enemy, chose to use the medium to make sociopolitical statements, protesting economic and racial inequality. Different aspects of street life and culture began to surface in the music of various regions in the country, such as Gangsta rap on the West Coast (artists like N.W.A. and Ice-T).



Muhammad Ali

## Vocabulary

**Beat Poets:** A group of American writers and artists, popular in the 1950s and 1960s, who rejected traditional social values and artistic forms; many, including Jack Kerouac and poet Allen Ginsberg, incorporated Eastern philosophy and rhythms of jazz music

**Flow:** A rapper’s delivery; his/her particular cadence, rhyming ability and vocal style

**Scat:** A style of jazz singing in which the vocalist uses improvised nonsensical syllables, allowing his/her voice to imitate an instrumental solo

**Syncopation:** A musical technique of changing the accented beat to one usually left unstressed, often giving a rhythmic bounce to the music and inspiring movement or dance in the listener



Beastie Boys



Queen Latifah

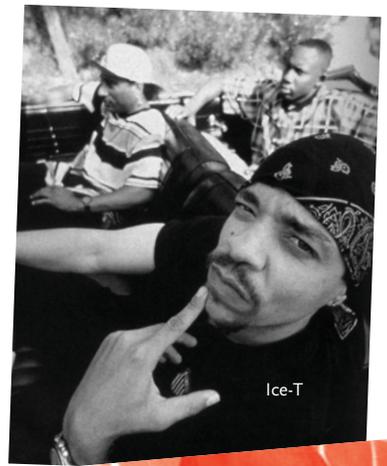
# The Roots and Branches...cont'd



Tupac Shakur

**In the gos**, as rap became more aware of itself as a media entity, many new artists began to play with their public images, painting different pictures of themselves, not unlike characters in movies. Artists rapping about their own superstardom, about making money and about rivalries in the media became commonplace. Nowhere did life imitate art more than with the meteoric rise and tragic deaths of highly talented rappers Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G.

A multitude of rappers and hip hop artists have since emerged, with no two styles exactly the same. However, the artists who have stood out over time are the ones who in some way, like Clay, have spoken their truth.



Ice-T



Chuck D & Flavor Flav of Public Enemy

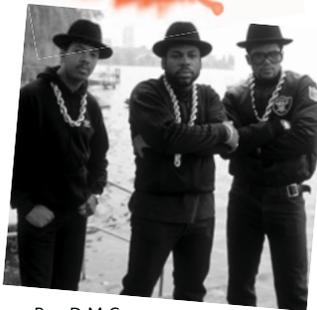


L.L. Cool J.

## Exercise

Your teacher will play a selection of song excerpts for you. Listen carefully and respond below.

**FIRST LISTEN:** As you listen to each song excerpt for the first time, use this space to write words as they come to mind. There is no need for grammar, complete sentences or even logic. ANYTHING IS VALID: specific words that stand out, images that the speaker is painting with their **flow**, etc.



Run D.M.C.



## Exercise

**SECOND LISTEN:** As you listen the second time, answer the following questions for each selection:

1. What is the speaker communicating? Is he or she delivering a message? Telling a story? Stating or demonstrating something about him- or herself? (Strength, power, style, etc.)  
Confessing something personal?
2. What invented words, code words or slang do you hear the speaker using?
3. What sounds do you hear the speaker using in place of words? What feeling do the sounds convey?
4. How does the rhythm of the song contribute to what the speaker is trying to express?

Song Title: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Message: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Invented Words/Slang: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Sounds: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Rhythm: \_\_\_\_\_

Song Title: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Message: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Invented Words/Slang: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Sounds: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Rhythm: \_\_\_\_\_

Song Title: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Message: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Invented Words/Slang: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Sounds: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Rhythm: \_\_\_\_\_

# Uncovering the Myth

**CARL JUNG (1875–1961):** Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist. Widely considered the “father” of analytical psychology, Jung theorized that all people share similar patterns of unconscious thinking, which he termed the “collective unconscious.” Symbols that appeared frequently in the collective unconscious he called “archetypes.”

**JOSEPH CAMPBELL (1904–1987):** American researcher and author of many major works on comparative mythology. Highly influenced by the work of Carl Jung, Campbell explored the common functions of myths in human cultures, examining archetypes in folklore and literature from around the world.

**THERE ARE COUNTLESS VARIETIES OF TREES**, but all trees have similar parts (roots, branches, leaves, etc); such is the case with stories. All stories have common elements. In fact, one type of story – myth – exists in every culture. Myths are traditional stories that explain basic aspects of human nature, society or the natural world. These tales frequently explore man’s struggles with family, community and the greater forces of nature. Even when the outcome is tragic, the journey of the characters teaches us something about ourselves. Myths tend to be so universal that everyone can relate to them, no matter who you are or where you are from. They seem to get to the heart of what we all feel and experience.

One of the most universal themes is that of the young person’s arduous path to becoming an individual, or realizing his/her true nature. Ancient tribal cultures frequently had songs or tales of a young man’s journey through an unknown and treacherous wilderness, and his resultant transformation into manhood. Even in the most modern versions of this story, the young person has to battle opposing forces and overcome obstacles in order to find his or her way. Sometimes, however, the internal conflicts end up being greater than the external ones.

In *Clay*, for instance, performer Matt Sax uses hip hop to tell the story of a young man named Clifford. Much of his struggle with his father is really Clifford’s own struggle to come to terms with himself and his identity. In Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet finds out that his uncle has just killed his father, then swiftly married his mother. But most of Hamlet’s struggle is in trying to figure out what to do about it, not in the actual doing. American writer and researcher Joseph Campbell called this common story the Hero’s Journey.

Just as there are myths common to every culture, there are common characters within them that tend to pop up over and over. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung called these basic characters **archetypes**. In the hero myth, common characters are the **Hero**, the **Mentor** (or Wise One), the **Goddess** and the **Oracle**. Both Jung and Campbell felt that the myth and the characters are consistent because the story really represents what all of us experience. We all require these symbolic people and the challenges they encounter to help us realize our true nature and power.

## Vocabulary

**Archetype:** A symbol, theme or character type that represents an essential element of universal human experience

**Goddess:** A queen-like or maternal character who, when united with the Hero, provides the Hero with deeper strength and wholeness; when the Hero is female, this figure will often be male

**Hero:** The main character, who embarks on a major quest and must conquer both internal and external obstacles in order to find his true purpose

**Mentor:** The character who guides or trains the Hero; frequently, the “wise old man or woman”

**Oracle:** The character or characters who deliver prophesies of what is to come in the lives of the characters or in the world of the story





## Exercise

**LET'S TAKE A LOOK** at some more modern stories and see how Clifford's journey might be similar:

ARCHETYPE	STAR WARS	THE MATRIX	CLAY
The Hero	Luke Skywalker	Neo	Clifford
The Mentor	Obi-Wan Kenobi	Morpheus	
The Oracle	Yoda	The Oracle	
The Goddess	Princess Leah	Trinity	
Training of the young initiate	Light saber and other Jedi skills	Martial arts, sparring, bending laws of gravity, etc.	
Advice of the Mentor	"Use the Force"	"Free Your Mind"	
Temptation away from the true path	Luke is tempted by the Dark Side	Neo is distracted by the woman in the red dress	
Hero finds his true power	Luke becomes a Jedi	Neo becomes The One	





## Exercise

**MATT SAX USED MYTH** and archetypes to develop Clifford and the many characters in Clifford's life. In learning how to speak in the voice of another character, it is important to first understand that character and his or her point of view.

Break up into pairs. Take a few minutes to interview your partner. Find out the answers to the following questions:

- What skills or power does your partner possess?

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- Who has served as a mentor, teacher or guide for your partner? (There may be more than one.)

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- What skills did those mentors teach him/her?

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- What obstacles has your partner encountered in life?

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(There are no wrong answers: struggles with parents, friends, school, gangs, money; feelings of isolation or loneliness; insecurities about your body or food; invasion of your physical or emotional boundaries. All of these situations touch everyone's life in some way, and we each have our own experiences of them.)

- Who would your partner like to meet one day? (Examples might be: athletes, musical artists, political leaders, actors, etc.)

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- What does your partner hope to learn from him/her?

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- **OPEN QUESTION:** Ask your partner something else that you would like to know about him or her. Write down something that you find surprising or unexpected.

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Now envision your partner in the future. Imagine him or her as a real life master (or Jedi) with a set of extraordinary skills. These skills can be 'realistic' or 'fantastical,' but must come from the core of who that person is. He or she may be an incredible artist, athlete, communicator or super hero; anything is valid. Use your imagination. Describe his or her skills and power.

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## Finding the Form



**LUKE**  
Light Saber Skills

**NEO**  
Martial Arts Techniques

**CLIFFORD**  
Lyrical Skills

**JUST AS LUKE SKYWALKER** honed his light saber skills and Neo developed his martial arts techniques, Clifford is able to sharpen his lyrical skills through practice. While his life experiences and passion to communicate provide the raw fuel, it is his careful choice of words and increasing mental dexterity that make him stronger as an artist and as a person.

Ultimately, there is no wrong way to express yourself with words. Throughout history, countless poets and rappers alike have chosen to communicate in different ways. However, just like any athlete in their given sport or any artist in their medium, a wordsmith's ability to master the form greatly increases his or her power. In many ways, careful word choices and poetic form are like the rapper's light saber.



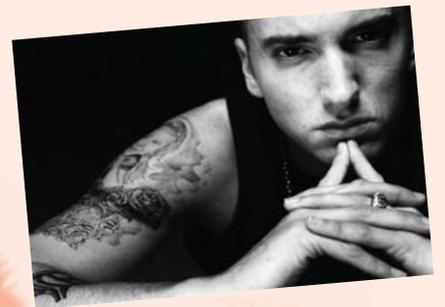
## SHAKESPEARE | EMINEM

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this and all is mended:  
That you have but slumbr'ed here,  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream,  
Gentles do not reprehend:  
If you pardon, we will mend.  
And, as I am an honest Puck,  
If we have unearned luck  
Now to scape the serpent's tongue,  
We will make amends ere long:  
Else the Puck a liar call:  
So good night unto you all.  
Give me your hands, if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.

—Puck, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Soon as a verse starts I eat at an MC's heart  
What is he thinking? How not to go against me? Smart.  
And it's absurd how people hang on every word.  
I'll probably never get the props I feel I ever deserve  
But I'll never be served my spot is forever reserved  
If I ever leave earth that would be the death of me first.  
Cause in my heart of hearts I know nothing could ever be worse.  
That's why I'm clever when I put together every verse

—“Til I Collapse,” *The Eminem Show*





**LET'S TAKE A LOOK** at some basic elements common to both rap and poetry:

**Assonance:** Repetition of a particular vowel sound  
“Smooth since days of Underoos, never lose,  
never choose to bruise crews who...”  
—“Hypnotize,” Notorious B.I.G.

**Consonance:** Repetition of a particular consonant sound  
“And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each  
purple curtain”  
—“The Raven,” Edgar Allen Poe

**End Rhyme:** Rhyming the last word from two or more lines  
“Ladies with an attitude/  
Fellows that were in the mood”  
—“Vogue,” Madonna

**Internal Rhyme:** Rhyming words within a line  
“Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak  
December,”  
—“The Raven,” Edgar Allen Poe

**Simile:** A direct comparison of two unlike things using “like”  
or “as”  
“Let it flow like a mudslide”  
—“No Sleep Til Brooklyn,” Beastie Boys

**Metaphor:** An indirect comparison using a word or phrase that  
ordinarily designates one thing to describe something else  
“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and  
women merely players”  
—*As You Like It*, William Shakespeare

**Exercise**

1. **CIRCLE** and label the uses of assonance, consonance, end rhyme, internal rhyme, simile and metaphor in the Shakespeare and Eminem samples at left.
2. What are the differences between the two samples?

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3. Pair up with your partner again. Take turns reading aloud your “Free Association” pieces. See if you can identify any uses of simile and metaphor or perhaps any rhyming sounds in each other’s pieces. Write any examples you find below.

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# Bringing It All Together

**NOW THAT YOU HAVE EXAMINED** the elements of poetic language, take what you learned about your partner and imagine him or her as a character in a story. Describe in a poem, rap or flow of words an experience in which your partner had to struggle or overcome a difficult obstacle. Write in the voice of your partner, as if you are the character. You are free to use any or all of the figures of speech discussed (rhyme, assonance, metaphor, etc.).

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**NOW WRITE A POEM, RAP OR WORD** flow using the description you wrote of your partner in the future. Describe his or her incredible abilities, skills or powers. Again, feel free to let your choices be realistic or fantasy. Write in the voice of your partner, as if you are the character. The style of poetry, rap or word flow is up to you. You may write *about* your partner or from his/her point of view.

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## The Rhythm

**YOUR CLASS** is now going to assemble as a group. Whether you are standing, sitting in chairs or sitting on the ground, the important thing is for the group to be in a circle. It's up to you, as a group, to decide how your rhythm is going to be created. If a drum is accessible, have someone start a basic beat on the drum. Tapping out a rhythm on a desk or countertop is a great idea as well. If someone in your group knows how to beat-box, give that a try. If you have access to any other musical instruments or recordings of beats, feel free to use them. Just keep in mind that all you really need is a basic beat.

Take turns around the circle reading aloud your "Free Association" exercise on page 11.

Now, with the beat beneath you, take turns reading:

1. Your first poem, rap or word flow from this page.
2. Your second poem, rap or word flow from this page.





## Concluding Remarks

**ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF MUSIC,** performance and storytelling, all of them stem from similar origins. We hope this Discovery Guide has helped you to explore these commonalities and encourages you to continue discovering ways to find your own unique voice. The ability to express yourself creatively through language empowers not only you but the world around you as well. We invite you to write to us with comments about how the production of *Clay* affected you and how it may have inspired you to create your own work.

## Resources

### WEBSITES

[www.timsheppard.co.uk/story/dir/traditions/africa.html](http://www.timsheppard.co.uk/story/dir/traditions/africa.html)

The history of storytelling around the world

[www.members.cox.net/academia/songs.html](http://www.members.cox.net/academia/songs.html)

Native American oral poetry

[www.thenext.org.nz/the\\_resource/history\\_of\\_hiphop.php](http://www.thenext.org.nz/the_resource/history_of_hiphop.php)

The history of hip hop

[www.iloveulove.com/psychology/jung/jungarchetypes.htm](http://www.iloveulove.com/psychology/jung/jungarchetypes.htm)

Carl Jung's archetypes

[shakespeare.mit.edu/works.html](http://shakespeare.mit.edu/works.html)

The complete works of William Shakespeare on the web

### BOOKS

*The Vibe History of Hip Hop* edited by Alan Light (Three Rivers Press, 1999) Complete history of the roots and development of hip hop

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (Princeton University Press, 1972) Campbell's examination of archetypes and myth

### FILM & TELEVISION

*Star Wars* directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1977)

*The Matrix* directed by Andy Wachowski & Larry Wachowski (Warner Brothers, 1999)

*Wild Style* directed by Charlie Ahearn (Rhino Home Video, 1982) Classic docudrama set in New York during the birth of hip hop

All photos of Matt Sax by Michael Brosilow.

## P.L.A.Y.

**NOW IN ITS 37th YEAR,** Performing for Los Angeles Youth (P.L.A.Y.) is Center Theatre Group's award-winning youth theatre and theatre education program. P.L.A.Y. serves 25,000–35,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residencies, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson and Kirk Douglas Theatres for low or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to artistic excellence and innovation in its theatrical productions and to the development of young people's skills and creativity through the exploration of theatre, its literature, art and imagination.

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# P.L.A.Y.

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH



Photo by Steve Cohn.

## Target Family Performances

Spend a weekend afternoon with your whole family. See a play and you will have something new to talk about, something new to laugh about, new songs to sing together. These special performances are followed by a post-show discussion in the theatre. Get the most from the experience by brushing up before the show: check out the free Discovery Guides on our website.

AGES 6+

### *My Fair Lady*

April 12, 2008, 2pm

Ahmanson Theatre

The classic musical about Eliza Doolittle's transformation from flower-seller to lady.

### *The Drowsy Chaperone*

July 12, 2008, 2pm

Ahmanson Theatre

The madcap musical comedy returns after a run on Broadway.

### *A Waitress in Yellowstone*

May 31, 2008, 2pm

Kirk Douglas Theatre

A contemporary musical fable about the hazards of doing the right thing.

AGES 11+

### *En un Sol Amarillo*

November 3, 2007, 2pm

Kirk Douglas Theatre

A highly theatrical presentation of a story about the survivors of an earthquake; performed in Spanish with English supertitles.

### *No Child...*

March 15, 2008, 2pm

Kirk Douglas Theatre

Thirty characters, one actress: a solo performance about the struggle to put on a middle school class play.

**HAVE QUESTIONS?** Call Audience Services at 213.628.2772 or check out the parent guide on our website, [CenterTheatreGroup.org/education](http://CenterTheatreGroup.org/education).

Special  
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