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# GO-FOUNDERS

A world premiere hip-hop musical

By

**Ryan Nicole Austin**

**Beau Lewis**

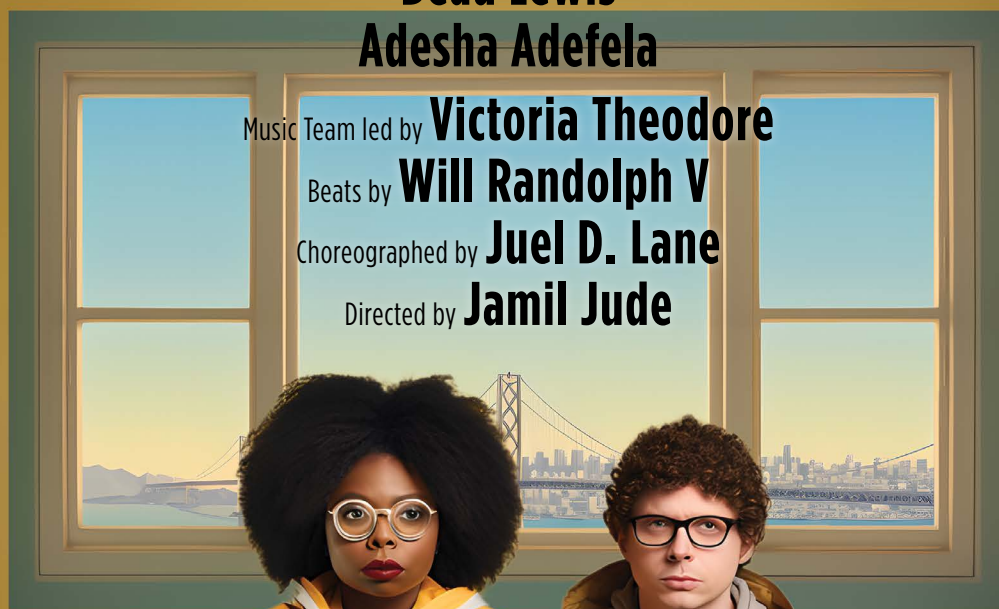
**Adesha Adefela**

Music Team led by **Victoria Theodore**

Beats by **Will Randolph V**

Choreographed by **Juel D. Lane**

Directed by **Jamil Jude**



**RESOURCE & ACTIVITY GUIDE**

## ABOUT CO-FOUNDERS

Witness the launch of the next great hip-hop musical, born in the heart of the Bay!

***Co-Founders*** is a hip-hop musical about innovation, identity, and power in the Bay. It's the story of an underrated young Oakland coder, Esata, who hacks her way into the most competitive startup accelerator in San Francisco. Determined to save her house as an influx of wealth threatens to push her community out, Esata forms an unlikely partnership with a prep-school dropout. In a field where the privileged make a killing while folks across the bridge grind to survive, can Esata win Silicon Valley's game without leaving her community behind?

Created by three extraordinary Bay Area voices, Ryan Nicole Austin, Beau Lewis, and Adesha Adefela, the show features a deliciously catchy score that draws from the Bay's rich hip-hop traditions, as well as soul, gospel, funk, jazz, R&B, and more. Employing visual technology entirely new to theater, ***Co-Founders*** is a sharply funny, deeply felt, exuberant celebration of the Bay and the dreamers, hustlers, and innovators that make it magical.

For more information (and access to this guide with click-able links), visit [www.act-sf.org/co-founders](http://www.act-sf.org/co-founders).

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This flexible, interactive guide is designed to support learners of all ages—students, educators, families, and community members. It includes prompts, activities, key vocabulary, multimedia links, and discussion questions. Use it before or after experiencing the show, or adapt it as a standalone resource for classroom discussions, workshops, or personal exploration.

### ***Co-Founders'* Themes**

<b>Innovation</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>Resilience</b>
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Hip-Hop Culture</b>
<b>Gentrification</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Integrity</b>

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which themes feel familiar to you?
- What personal or community experiences connect to these themes?
- How might these themes connect to your future or the future of your community?

This guide was created in May 2025 by Sierra Gonzalez, edited by Natalie Greene, and designed by Dani Karonis. For questions, feedback, or more information, email [education@act-sf.org](mailto:education@act-sf.org).

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# HISTORY IN ACTION

## TECH & GENTRIFICATION IN THE BAY

Explore the ways tech expansion has affected communities in Oakland and San Francisco. Learn about the patterns of gentrification and innovation that shape daily life in the Bay.

Read these quotes from Mira Stern in *The Bold Italic*:

1. “They wanted what was here, not who was here.”
2. “Like the Spanish colonizers and gold prospectors before them, tech companies moved in, altered the landscape, and forever changed the lives of those of us who call this place home.”
3. “If you were born and raised in the Bay Area, you know how deeply ingrained this sacred place is in our bones and blood.”
4. “Who we are is where we are from, and where we are from is who we are.”
5. “It is not just the gutting of the homes we grew up in and the skyrocketing of cost of living — it’s the literal erasure of our neighbors, communities, and vibrantly unique cultures, repeating ongoing waves of colonial conquest that us white folks have perpetuated for centuries.”

[Read the full article \(optional\)](#)

### ACTIVITY: Quick Take Response

Pick one quote from above and one prompt from below to respond to it. There are no wrong answers — just your voice.

#### One-liner Reaction

Write a short sentence or phrase that responds to the quote. Examples: “That hit too close to home.” / “That’s real.” / “Wait — what does that mean?”

#### Visual Voice

Design a protest sign, meme, or mini-poster inspired by the quote. It can agree, disagree, or remix the message. Be bold.

#### Role Play Rapid Fire (Optional)

In a small group, take on different roles: longtime local, tech worker, teen artist, activist, etc. Each person says one sentence reacting to the quote in character. Afterwards reflect: What did it feel like to act out this scenario and give displaced people a voice; alternately, what did it feel like to be on the other end?

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Pick a quote: what does this quote say about power and space in the Bay Area?
- Who decides what stays and who gets pushed out?
- Who benefits from tech? Who is left out?
- What does gentrification look or feel like in your community?
- How has your city or neighborhood changed over time?

# WHAT IS HIP-HOP THEATER

Hip-hop theater is a style of live performance that blends the elements of hip-hop culture—like rapping (MCing), DJing, dance (breaking), graffiti, and storytelling—into staged productions. It started in the 1990s as artists used hip-hop to speak truth, challenge systems, and reflect real-life experiences onstage.

Shows in this genre often explore big themes like race, power, identity, resilience, and community. They break the rules of traditional theater by using rhyme, rhythm, beats, and movement to tell stories that come from the streets, from resistance, and from joy.

*Co-Founders* is a Bay Area-born hip-hop musical that mixes these elements with soul, gospel, funk, and R&B. It's not just a musical—it's a cultural conversation about belonging, innovation, and fighting for your community. It uses rhythm and poetry to build worlds and challenge who gets to hold power.

## Hip-Hop Theater Timeline (Quick Glimpse):

- 1990s: Early pioneers like Danny Hoch, Rennie Harris, and Will Power began fusing hip-hop and theater.
- 2000s: *In the Heights* by Lin-Manuel Miranda brought bilingual rap to Broadway.
- 2010s–present: *Hamilton*, *FLOW*, and *Co-Founders* continue pushing boundaries—making hip-hop central to storytelling onstage.

## Quotes to Reflect On:

“Hip-hop theater doesn’t just exist to be hip or trendy. It’s a form that emerged to reflect the people—those who didn’t often see themselves onstage.” — Studio Theater

“Hip-hop is a living, breathing thing. When it moves into the theater, it doesn’t become something else—it expands what theater can be.” — *Broadway Direct*

## Explore More:

- [Hip-Hop Theater @ Kennedy Center](#)
- [Studio Theater: Traversing Culture & Commercialization](#)
- [KU News: Hip-Hop’s 50-Year Impact on Musical Theater](#)
- [Broadway Direct: History of Hip-Hop on Broadway](#)

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does hip-hop as a culture change the way stories are told?
- What does hip-hop on stage make you feel, hear, or think differently?
- If you were to write a piece of hip-hop theater, what would it be about?



# BAY AREA HIP-HOP FAMILY TREE

**The Bay Area Hip-Hop Family Tree - FROM THE ROOTS TO THE FRUITS** is a visual representation of the region's hip-hop evolution—from its deep historical roots to its rich and flourishing fruits. Shaped like an oak tree to honor Oakland's legacy, it highlights the growth of diverse styles and movements that have influenced artists locally and beyond.

This rich cultural backdrop inspired the creators of *Co-Founders*—RyanNicole Austin, Beau Lewis, and Adesha Adefela. Their musical blends hip-hop with soul, gospel, funk, jazz, and R&B, reflecting the Bay Area's dynamic soundscape. Supported by local legends like Blackalicious, Mac Mall, and Hieroglyphics, *Co-Founders* celebrates and continues the region's vibrant hip-hop tradition.

## THE NEW GENERATION (2020s - Now)

These are today's voices, fresh, varied, experimental, and globally conscious, but rooted in Bay realness.

- **Larry June** - Chill, health-conscious hustler rap
- **Guapdad 4000** - Stylish, clever, big personality
- **Saweetie** - Mainstream queen with Bay flavor
- **LaRussell** - DIY icon, grassroots concerts
  - **Symba** - Introspective and sharp
  - **Stunnaman02, Lil Kayla** - Local heat
- **Frak** - Battle rap + identity, teacher + tactician

## INDIE WAVE (2010s - The Soulful, Internet Age)

These artists evolved the Bay after Hyphy — **blending emotion, aesthetics, and independence.**

- **Kamaiyah (2016-present)** - G-funk revival + fresh energy
- **Nef the Pharaoh (2015-present)** - Vallejo flair
- **Lil B (2009-present)** - Internet era prophet
- **Rexx Life Raj, Elujay, IAMSU!, P-Lo** - Soulful, introspective, vibey, or upbeat
- **Berner** - Music + cannabis empire

## HYPHY ERA (Early-Mid 2000s - Wild Energy + Movement)

This was the Bay's rebellious renaissance — **cars, dancing, slang, and energy. They made it a movement.**

- **Keak da Sneak (1999-present)** - Coined "hyphy"
- **Mistah F.A.B. (2003-present)** - Voice of Hyphy + battle rap
- **Turf Talk (2003-present)** - Vallejo grit
- **The Federation (2004-2010)** - Anthems like "Hyphy" & "Stunna Glasses"

## TRUNK / CORE (Late '90s - Early 2000s - Establishing Legacy)

These are your pillars — **they rooted deep or reached wide. Many still influence today's sound.**

- **E-40 (1993-present)** - Invented new slang, innovator, business-minded
- **Mac Dre (1992-2004)** - Cult hero, created thizz & sparked Hyphy
- **Hieroglyphics (1993-present)** - Underground lyricism gods
- **The Coup (1991-present)** - Revolution + rhythm
- **Paris (1990-present)** - Politically fearless
- **Quannum** - Blackalicious: Gift of Gab & Chief Xcel, Lateef, Lyrics Born, DJ Shadow

## EARLY GROWTH (1990s - First Expansion)

These rappers grew out of the foundation and defined the Bay's 90s sound — **from mobb music to conscious rap.**

- **Tupac (1991-1996)** - Started in the Bay, deeply political, poetic
- **Spice 1 (1992-present)** - Hardcore realism with lightning flow
- **Rappin' 4-Tay (1991-present)** - Smooth, laid-back West Coast sound

## ROOTS (1980s - The Foundations)

These artists planted the seed — **they defined the sound, independence, and early culture of Bay Area rap.**

- **Too \$hort (1983-present)** - Sold tapes out his trunk; godfather of Bay independence
- **MC Hammer (1986-1995)** - Took flashy rap mainstream; global stage presence
- **Digital Underground (1989-2008)** - Funkadelic, playful sound; introduced Tupac

# FROM THE ROOTS TO THE FRUITS

## THE NEW GENERATION

(2020s - Now)

Saweetie

LaRussell

Symba

## INDIE WAVE

(2010s - The Soulful, Internet Age)

Kamaiyah

Lil B

Berner

## HYPHY ERA

(Early-Mid 2000s - Wild Energy + Movement)

Keak da Sneak

Mistah F.A.B.

The Federation

## TRUNK / CORE

(Late '90s-Early 2000s - Establishing Legacy)

E-40

Mac Dre

The Coup

## EARLY GROWTH

(1990s - First Expansion)

Tupac

Spice 1

Rappin' 4-Tay

## ROOTS

(1980s - The Foundations)

Too \$hort

MC Hammer

Digital Underground

# ACTIVITY: WRITE YOUR 4-8 BAR RAP

## STEP 1: PICK OR CREATE YOUR TOPIC

Choose one:

- Where you're from
- Something you care about
- A part of your story that matters
- A message you want people to hear

## STEP 2: FEEL THE BEAT

Choose your own beat, or use [this free, safe & simple beat](#).

Let the rhythm guide your flow.

## STEP 3: WRITE YOUR 4 BARS

Each bar = one line. Try to rhyme the ends, but don't stress.

Example:

*I come from the block where the roots run deep  
My story's in the cracks of the concrete street  
Not made for a box, I'm breakin' the mold  
Every verse that I spit got a truth to hold*

## STEP 4: PERFORM (OPTIONAL)

Spit it over the beat or speak it a cappella. You can read it out loud, perform it in a circle, or record a voice memo.

## CHALLENGE:

Make your rap about a real theme from the show or your life.

Try one of these themes:

- Gentrification or changes in your neighborhood
- What it means to be from the Bay Area
- Your identity or community
- The app or startup idea you created from Page 12

If you need more inspiration on how to write a rap, check out one of the videos from A.C.T.'s Take 10 Series, **"How to (write a) Rap"** featuring A.C.T. Arts Educator in Residence, Sierra Gonzalez.

[Take 10 Episode 10: Intro to Rap and finding your Rhythm with Sierra Gonzalez](#)

[Take 10 Episode 12: How to Rap - PART 2](#)





# SEE CO-FOUNDERS IN ACTION

## EXPLORE MORE:



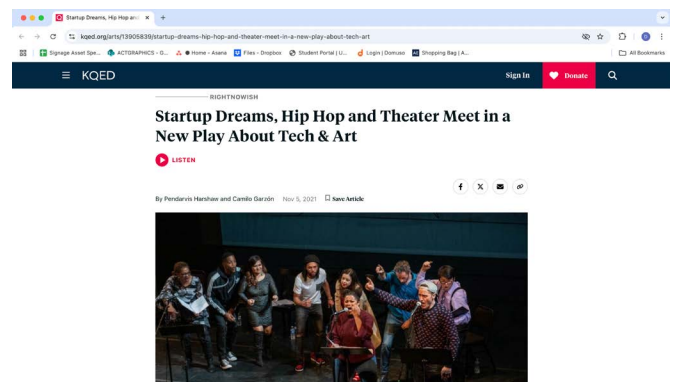
**Official Website:** Dive into the world of *Co-Founders* and learn more about the musical. [cofoundersthemusical.com](http://cofoundersthemusical.com)



**Trailer:** Get a sneak peek of the musical by watching the official trailer. [Watch on Vimeo](#)



**Music Videos:** Experience the musical's anthem "Valley to Vallejo" featuring E-40. [Watch on Instagram](#)[YouTube](#)+[1TikTok](#)+[1](#)



**KQED Interview:** Learn more about the inspiration behind *Co-Founders* in this interview. [Read on KQED](#)[NPR](#)+[6"Co-Founders" the musical](#)+[6TechCrunch](#)+[6](#)



**Instagram:** Follow *Co-Founders* for behind-the-scenes content, updates, and more. [@cofoundersthemusical](#)



**Mixtape:** Listen to the "Out the Trunk" mixtape, featuring songs from the musical. [Stream on UnitedMasters](#)

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What stands out to you about the show so far?
- Which song from the "Out the Trunk" mixtape is your favorite, and why?
- What are you most excited about seeing in the show?
- How does *Co-Founders* blend the worlds of hip-hop and tech?

# ACTIVITY: LANGUAGE, SLANG & BELONGING

Explore how language—especially tech lingo, Bay Area slang, and cultural code-switching—shapes identity, access, and power. In *Co-Founders*, characters move between slang, pitch-speak, and programming terms to navigate different worlds. This activity challenges students to decode that language.

## LANGUAGE CHALLENGE: DECODE THE BAY + TECH TALK

Match each term from the show to its correct meaning using the key below. Use the code letter to match.

### WORDS FROM THE SHOW:

1. Yadadamean
2. Hooptie
3. Pitch
4. Demo Day
5. API
6. Startup Founder Kit
7. Come Up Time
8. Scraper
9. Redwood Capital
10. Racism Insurance

### DEFINITIONS:

- A. A busted or beat-up car
- B. A joke startup idea to highlight performative DEI
- C. Slang for “you know what I mean”
- D. A term for when a startup presents its product to investors
- E. A Bay car mod culture term (old school, raised ride)
- F. A San Francisco-based VC firm with elite status
- G. A technical tool that lets apps talk to each other
- H. Slang for someone’s chance to level up or succeed
- I. A real or fictional list of items tech bros stereotypically carry
- J. A short presentation of a business idea to investors or mentors

## CHALLENGE:

Pick two terms and write your own sentence using them

Bonus: Add one slang term from your life and write a definition and example

*See the last page in the Guide for the answer key*

# ACTIVITY: DESIGN YOUR AVATAR

## Objective:

A major element of the show is the “Dadvatar” software that Esata creates. In this section students will design an “avatar” version of themselves to reflect their strengths, values, and identity.

## STEP 1: Create Your Avatar

Answer these questions to start shaping your avatar’s story. Keep it real, keep it creative:

- **What’s your avatar’s name or handle?** (Can be serious, silly, or symbolic)
- **Where are they from, and what shaped them?**
- **What are three strengths your avatar carries?** (These can be talents, values, or vibes.)
- **What’s their “kryptonite”?** (Something that trips them up or gets in their way)
- **What’s a line they live by?** (A quote, lyric, motto, or something you say to yourself)
- **What do they always carry or wear?** (Could be a hoodie, a playlist, a notebook, a memory. . .)

## STEP 2: Make It Visual

Now that you know who your avatar is - show us.

Choose one:

- **Draw** them (stick figures welcome!)
- **Collage** them with magazine cutouts or online tools
- **Design** a “profile” like a player card, character sheet, or social bio

Make it bold, weird, personal, or funny — whatever feels like you.

## STEP 3: Reflect & Share

You can journal this or talk with a partner:

- What’s something your avatar has that you already have in real life?
- What does your avatar stand for?
- How can you show up more like your avatar this week?
- What makes your avatar uniquely *you*?
- What does your avatar fight for?



# ***Co-Founders'* character inspiration from the Costume Designer; Jasmine Milan Williams**





# ACTIVITY: BUILD YOUR STARTUP & PITCH

## YOUR POWER - PART 1

**Objective:** Create a startup or app that solves a real problem—in your life, school, or community. Just like the characters in *Co-Founders*, you'll need to think big, stay rooted, and pitch with purpose. Make it count—there may even be a chance for standout student pitches to be featured in or inspire moments during the show!

Name of your startup/app:

Tagline or slogan:

What does it do?

Who is it for?

Why does it matter?

*Optional: Sketch a logo or an app screen*

### Pitch Practice:

- What makes a pitch strong? What makes one weak?
- Present your idea to the class (can vote on most creative, most impactful, etc.)

# ACTIVITY: BUILD YOUR STARTUP & PITCH

## YOUR POWER - PART 2

### GOOD PITCHES VS. BAD PITCHES

**Objective:** Learn the difference between a strong, clear pitch and a weak or confusing one — and practice building both.

**What Makes a Good Pitch?** A strong pitch is:

- Clear – You understand what the product or idea actually does
- Specific – It includes real details about who it's for and how it helps
- Exciting – It's shared with energy or emotion that makes you want to learn more
- Memorable – It includes a great name, slogan, or visual image



**What Makes a Bad Pitch?** A weak pitch might be:

- Confusing – You're not sure what it actually is
- Too vague – No real audience, impact, or details
- Boring – Delivered with low energy or too many filler words
- Off-topic – Doesn't really address a real issue
- Irrelevant – Does not meet the demand or desires of consumers



### PART 1: Spot the Differences

Watch these two videos of good and bad pitches from Shark Tank - a reality TV show where people pitch their businesses to big time business investors for a chance to receive investment capital.

[GOOD Pitch Example \(7:07\)](#)

[BAD Pitch Example \(4:08\)](#)

### PART 2: Build Both

In pairs or groups, create:

- One **BAD** pitch — try to be funny, vague, or off-topic on purpose
- One **GOOD** pitch — clear, creative, and powerful

### PART 3: The Showdown

Present both to the class. The class votes: Which was the good one? What gave it away?

### Pitch Tips!

- Speak with energy!
- Make the idea easy to understand
- Explain why it matters
- Be specific, not generic

Scan here to see your idea  
featured in the show



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which pitch made you *want to know more*? Why?
- What was confusing, absurd or forgettable in the other pitch?

# AFTER THE SHOW

**After you've seen *Co-Founders*, revisit parts of this guide that you didn't use before, including activities and discussion prompts.**

## **DISCUSSION PROMPTS:**

- What moment in the show stuck with you most? Why?
- What questions are you still thinking about?
- What parts of your own life did you see reflected?
- How did music and rhythm shape the storytelling?
- What emotions did the show stir up?

## **CREATIVE RESPONSE OPTIONS:**

- Write a poem or rap
- Design a poster
- Record a response video
- Create a character monologue
- Choreograph a movement response
- Pitch a new app or startup

## **/Share Your Work!**

We'd love to see what you create! Send your responses to [education@act-sf.org](mailto:education@act-sf.org), and we'll share them with the *Co-Founders* creative team. Your voice matters, and the artists behind the show are excited to hear from you!





# THANK YOU & CREDITS

Special thanks to the *Co-Founders* creative team, the A.C.T. Education & Community Programs Department, and all of the educators and students who engage with this work.

## Alignment with National Core Arts Standards

This guide supports the following National Core Arts Standards:

- Creating: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- Performing/Presenting/Producing: Realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation.
- Responding: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.



**A.C.T. Education & Community Programs support provided by** Amazon, Bank of America, The Bernard Osher Foundation, Bill Graham Memorial Foundation, California Arts Council, Walter & Elise Haas Fund, Hearst Foundations, Laird Norton Family Foundation, The Kimball Foundation, Koret Foundation, Rawley T. Farnsworth Fellowship Fund, San Francisco Department of Children, Youth & Their Families, The Sato Foundation, The San Francisco Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, Martin Tannenbaum/Gerald B. Rosenstein Estate, and U.S. Bank.



## Key to the DECODE THE BAY + TECH TALK Activity

A - 2 B - 10 C - 1 D - 4 E - 8 F - 9 G - 5 H - 7 I - 6 J - 3