

Why We Do Outreach

Before embarking on your outreach adventure, you need to know why it is such an essential part of our project. Outreach is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to touch the lives of some really special kids.

Often times heritage speakers of Spanish feel left out because of language and cultural differences which can create feelings of alienation and worthlessness. It is difficult enough for any child to acclimate to the social and educational setting of a public school without having to learn a new language and adjust to a new society. Since in many public schools only English is allowed by law (in Arizona, for example) a heritage Spanish speaker may be behind, off-task, or simply confused because of the lack of understanding.

As a result of this rift many Spanish-speaking students feel that they cannot succeed and are not accepted in school, and therefore struggle in their classes and begin finding solace in negative forms of socialization. There have been many studies and experiments done in hopes to help Hispanic students be successful in reaching their educational goals, but theater is one field which has not been utilized enough to combat the challenges which often overwhelm Spanish-speaking learners.

It is also extremely valuable to kids who speak no Spanish at all. There is so much to learn and know about Spanish culture, literature, and theater. These things can enrich the student's lives and enlighten their minds.

This is where the BYU Spanish Golden Age Theater program comes in. Not only do the students get to learn about why the Spanish Golden Age and its theater are so cool, but they get to see it in action. The best part is that they get to be a part of it all! Shy students seem to come to life when taking on a persona that is not their own, the socially ignored become the center of attention, and even those who may be "too cool" for such things find themselves enjoying, perhaps reluctantly, the experience of reaching beyond themselves and breaking boundaries which would normally hold them back. Suddenly a new world full of unperceived possibilities is open to them and they are left with a desire and a taste for theater which seems to have been made especially for them.

Besides being a fun, educational experience for the students, it validates their culture and their language. One of the students experiencing outreach last year said, "I thought literature was only written in English." Can you imagine never having read a book or seen a play in your native language? That may be unfathomable for us, but it's a reality for these students. When we perform and include them in our performance, it's a way of telling them that their culture and their language are important. It's our way of telling them that *they* are important.

With this in mind you should know that the BYU students involved in this program go forward with an enormous amount of enthusiasm - determined to make a difference. We all have the exceptional opportunity to touch the lives of terrific young people who need to know how significant and extraordinary they are!