

# Enacting Communities: Performance and Practice in Community-Based Theatre

Community-based theatre (CBT) is a form of theatre that prioritizes community engagement and empowerment. It aims to create performances that are relevant and meaningful to the specific community it serves, often tackling social and political issues that affect the community's members.



## Communities, Performance and Practice: Enacting Communities by Sara Jane Bailes

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 767 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 183 pages



Enacting communities is a central concept in CBT. It refers to the ways in which performance practices can help to create a sense of community and foster a shared sense of identity among participants. Through performance, communities can explore their own histories, values, and challenges, and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships to one another.

## Performance as a Tool for Community Engagement

Performance can be a powerful tool for community engagement. It can provide a space for people to come together, share their stories, and connect with one another. Through performance, community members can learn about each other's experiences, perspectives, and aspirations. This can lead to increased understanding, empathy, and a sense of belonging.

For example, the Teatro Jornalero project in San Francisco brings together undocumented immigrants to create performances that raise awareness about the challenges they face. Through theatre, the participants are able to share their stories with a wider audience and to advocate for their rights. The performances have helped to build a sense of community among the participants and to raise awareness about the issue of undocumented immigration.

### **Performance as a Means of Cultivating Empathy**

Performance can also be a means of cultivating empathy. By watching performances that tell the stories of others, audience members can develop a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of those who are different from themselves. This can lead to increased compassion and a greater sense of social responsibility.

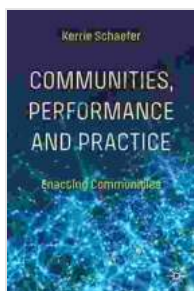
For example, the play "The Laramie Project" tells the story of the murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student. The play has been performed around the world and has helped to educate audiences about the issue of hate crimes. The performances have also helped to create a sense of empathy for the victims of hate crimes and their families.

### **Performance as a Catalyst for Social Change**

In addition to fostering community engagement and cultivating empathy, performance can also be a catalyst for social change. Performances can raise awareness about important social issues, challenge stereotypes, and inspire audiences to take action. Theatre can be a powerful tool for mobilizing communities and advocating for change.

For example, the play "Rent" tells the story of a group of young artists struggling to survive in New York City during the AIDS crisis. The play has been performed around the world and has helped to raise awareness about the issue of AIDS. The performances have also helped to challenge stereotypes about people with AIDS and to inspire audiences to get involved in the fight against the disease.

Enacting communities is a powerful and transformative practice that can be used to foster community engagement, cultivate empathy, and promote social change. Through performance, communities can explore their own histories, values, and challenges, develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships to one another, and create a more just and equitable world.



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