

# Study Guide for Teachers

David Harrell

## ***A Little Potato and Hard to Peel***

presented by  
Young Audiences New Jersey &  
Eastern PA  
(866) 500-9265  
[www.yanjep.org](http://www.yanjep.org)



### **ABOUT THE PROGRAM**

In this inspiring and humorous program, David Harrell shares the highs and lows of growing up without a right hand. Portraying colorful and influential characters from his own family, TV, and film, David shares the importance of not being defined by your limitations.

### **LEARNING GOALS**

- Students will identify positive character traits within themselves and in their classmates.
- Students will discuss the important aspects of telling a story.
- Students will watch a performance of a one-man show.
- Students will reflect on their own stories, highlighting their own positive characteristics or someone they consider a hero to them.
- Students will develop a better understanding of the diversity that surrounds us.

### **RESOURCES**

*Including Samuel*, documentary film by Dan Habib

Jim Abbott and Tim Brown, *Imperfect: An Improbable Life*

Katie Kolberg Memmel, *Five Fingers, Ten Toes: A Mother's Story of Raising a Child with Limb Difference*

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS**

In 1998, while working at The Phoenix Theatre Circle in Columbus, OH, David Harrell was encouraged by the artistic director to take some of the stories of his life and create a one-man show. He thought David's story would be interesting and encouraging to students and young audiences.

Eventually David moved to Raleigh, NC, and created his first solo show called *The Quest*. In 2008, David moved to New York City and began to restructure *The Quest*. Through workshops and classes it developed into a new show called *A Little Potato and Hard to Peel*. In 2009, David Harrell produced *A Little Potato and Hard to Peel* in New York City and was nominated for a New York Innovative Theatre Award for "outstanding solo performance." In 2012, he created a companion piece, *The Boy Who Would Be Captain Hook*, which is about how David was chosen to play Captain Hook on the playground at school when he was a child.

David Harrell performs his shows in theatres, schools, colleges, and conferences around the country. He hopes his work entertains, enlightens, and educates students to not be defined by limitations.

## **BEFORE THE PROGRAM**

### **Recognizing Diversity**

Before the performance have students write five positive characteristics about themselves. This will probably be difficult. Have the students keep these for themselves. Then have them write one positive attribute of each person in the class. Ask the students to not put their names on this assignment. The teacher should collect the lists of attributes. Then have a discussion about how often it is easier for others to see our strengths than for us to see our own, or for others to understand our strengths are admirable. This can lead to a discussion about the diversity of the class and how we can locate positive characteristics within our differences.

### **How do you tell a story?**

Lead the students in a discussion about how to build a story and brainstorm different ways that someone might tell their life story. Guide the discussion into areas that have already studied. Point out that the students will be seeing one example of this when they see the play *A Little Potato and Hard to Peel*.

## **VOCABULARY WORDS**

**Diversity:** The inclusion of different types of people.

**Gesture:** A movement, usually of the body or limbs, that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude.

**Glitch:** A minor problem that causes a temporary setback.

**Inclusion:** The act of including; to take in or comprise as part of a whole or group.

**Perseverance:** Continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.

**Prosthesis:** An artificial device to replace or augment a missing or impaired part of the body.

**Shriner's Hospital for Children:** A network of non-profit hospitals across North America that provide medical services to children under 18.

## **AFTER THE PROGRAM**

### **Students tell their story**

Lead a discussion about the play and what the students learned about storytelling and theatre. In the following days, complete a list of positive attributes for each student in the class.

Have students write a monologue about an event they have experienced or one they hope to experience in which they overcome obstacles. Have the students do a presentation of their work in front of the class. Encourage students to use physical movement, gesture, different sounds, and/or speech to create characters in their monologues.

This program provides an excellent opportunity to discuss bullying. Have students discuss what they thought of how David dealt with the challenges he faced during the play and how they can do a better job accepting and including others who are different.

## **ARTIST INFORMATION**

David Harrell is an actor, speaker and disability advocate. His award-nominated solo plays *A Little Potato and Hard to Peel* and *The Boy Who Would Be Captain Hook* have entertained audiences from New York City to the depths of Southern Georgia, from off Broadway houses to the US Department of the Interior. He uses his hysterical comedic sensibilities, powerful stories, and a crazy cast of characters from his life's journey growing up with a disability to challenge, entertain, and educate audiences to not let circumstances peel away the core of their humanity.

As an actor David has performed at theatres in New York City and across the country and he has appeared in independent films, web series, and *Law and Order: SVU*. As a Disability Advocate he has worked as the Accessibility and Outreach Director for the Raleigh Ensemble Players in Raleigh, NC and currently serves as the Disability and Programming Associate for Inclusion in the Arts in New York City.

David Harrell's unique and powerful life story reminds us that we will all face challenges in our lives. People will place limitations on our abilities and we may place limitations on ourselves, but we do have a choice to not be defined by these limitations. We can choose to live our lives with dignity and courage, so we can all be little potatoes and hard to peel.