Education at Ford’s Theatre

Cultivating the next generation of leaders by developing student voices, infusing the arts into classrooms and strengthening the teaching of history and civic understanding across the country.

This year, as the country found itself in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ford’s Theatre education team was faced with the challenge of re-imagining all in-person programs as virtual, developing new virtual resources, and finding new and expanded ways to answer the needs of the public and the education community. With almost 10 years’ experience providing innovative distance-learning experiences, we were able to serve almost twice as many users as we would have in a typical school year.

On-site Learning*

*This year, students visited the Ford’s Theatre campus September 1, 2019, through March 13, 2020, after which the site was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the entirety of the spring school visit season.

60,600 students visited Ford’s Theatre for a historic site or theatre experience.

2,718 local students received free, staff-guided field trips to the Ford’s Theatre Museum and historic site.

3,239 local students were provided with 94 free buses to transport them to field trips and matinee performances.

1,355 students attended free matinee performances of our theatrical productions.

409 students performed speeches by Abraham Lincoln on the historic Ford’s Theatre stage as participants in the annual Lincoln Oratory Festival, following residencies with Ford’s Theatre Teaching Artists.

Teacher Feedback

My students have taken so much from the Lincoln Oratory Festival and carried it to other parts of their lives. Not only did they learn about history, but they all became more confident and effective speakers too. The biggest change I noticed was, after working with our teaching artist and presenting at the festival, their confidence in school and their ability to collaborate skyrocketed!

- Lincoln Oratory Festival Teacher

Thank you for a fantastic week steeped in academia. It was a great experience to learn from so many gifted presenters. Ford’s has achieved expert level in virtual learning experiences!

- Virtual Summer Teacher Institute Participant, 2020

Professional Development for Teachers

Ford’s Theatre Society worked with teachers in 48 states and the District of Columbia.

39 teacher leaders in 18 states and the District of Columbia were part of the National Oratory Fellows program. Collectively, they provided oratory-integrated instruction for 2,995 students.

69 educators from across the country participated in our Virtual Summer Teacher Institutes. The two week-long experiences supplied them with the understanding and resources to teach about Abraham Lincoln’s leadership, legacy and the Civil War. These educators shared their learning with more than 3,450 students last year.

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This year Ford's Theatre developed and launched our virtual Lincoln's Great Words Challenge to offer inspiration from one of our greatest crisis leaders. This program introduced participants to many of Lincoln's great speeches over a period of six weeks, offering live virtual workshops diving deep into individual speeches and challenging participants to film themselves speaking Lincoln’s words with meaning and sharing them online. Workshops were led by Master Oratory Fellows and Teaching Artists and included special visits from scholars. These virtual workshops and discussions had more than 1,500 live participants, and to date have been viewed more than 89,000 times. Recordings of these workshops and video submissions can be viewed at: www.fords.org/visit/virtual-events-and-special-tours/lincolns-great-words.

6,282 learners participated in our Virtual Distance Learning programs in the 2019-20 school year. These programs expanded to explore a range of topics such as a virtual tour of Ford's Theatre, the people of the Petersen House, reactions to Lincoln’s assassination, exploring Civil War Washington and what happened to Ford's Theatre after 1865. Nearly 25% of these learners classify themselves as the historically curious rather than traditional teachers and students.

228 students from across the country participated in the Lincoln Online Oratory Project. By using the words of President Lincoln, students learned about the historical context of a speech, the power of oratory and the fundamentals of performance and public speaking.

I liked that I could apply what I learned in the workshop to my speech and even learn more about the context of the speech. I learned a lot about Abraham Lincoln and had a fun experience reciting an excerpt of one of his speeches.

– Lincoln's Great Words Workshop Participant

My students loved it! Alex and Jen the Park Ranger … were SO wonderful! I highly recommend it. It was a huge blessing to us in light of us missing our trip to D.C. Thank you so much for offering it!

– Distance-Learning Participant