

Award-winning playwright shares her scriptwriting process with ASU students

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News

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Actions speak louder than words.

That's why award-winning playwright Y York is workshopping her latest play, "Becoming Awesome," with actors at Arizona State University this week.

"I want to make every bit of the play as active as I can," said York, from Seattle, who writes plays for children and adults. "Sometimes I get into over-explaining and don't want that. The actors bring so much to the process, and sometimes by the mere turn of the head, they can say more than what is on the page..."

The five-day process will end with [performances](#) at 7 p.m., March 28–29, at Second Stage West on ASU's West Valley campus. York is also teaching a scriptwriting class to students in the [School of Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Studies](#) this week.

On Monday night, the playwright, director and producer began working with the actors, who were seeing the script for the first time. Part of the process of workshopping was making changes throughout the reading. As they sat around a table speaking their lines, the actors made the story come alive.

"What I am doing with the class is modeling the exploration process and taking them through the experience of bringing a story to stage," York said.

It is the third time she has workshopped a play at ASU.

“They have provided me with such joyous actors making the process so productive,” York said. “The response to the work has always been very good. ASU is renowned in children’s theater for being a great home for playwrights working in this field. I have felt very at home here.”

Visiting guest director Mark Lutwak reviewed changes already made in the script with actors and said that historically, playwrights worked out the kinks in their plays on the road — “a very expensive process.”

“Your blood, sweat and tears are an important part of the process,” he told the actors.

Jazlynn Damasco, an accomplished actress who performs regularly in the Valley, is playing Sophia, the 9-year-old girl in the play. Acting is a side interest for Damasco, a fourth-year business administration student at ASU.

“I love getting to be a part of the foundational aspect of storytelling,” she said. “Nothing is set in stone, so there is a lot of room to make the character your own.”

Hahnna Christianson is playing Dolly, Sophia’s mother in the play. Christianson graduated with a bachelor’s degree in musical theater performance from ASU’s [Music Theater and Opera program](#) and a master’s degree in organizational leadership. She works at ASU’s [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#).

“I love new works,” Christianson said. “I love new plays. I love sharing a unique story that has not been heard before.”

“Becoming Awesome” is an intergenerational comedy about three people: a mother, her daughter and a dedicated loner, whose lives intersect in a way that forces them to look at loneliness and the life-giving power of connection.

“At its heart, it is about sharing,” York said.

York, who started out as an actress in New York City, is critically acclaimed for her plays that combine wit with relevance. Her adaptation of Janet Taylor Lisle’s “Afternoon of the Elves” has been performed throughout the U.S, as well as in Canada and Australia. York is a five-time recipient of the AATE Distinguished Play Award, which honors nationally known writers of outstanding plays for children.

“I don’t know anyone better at teaching playwriting than Y,” said Associate Professor Jeffery Kennedy, who has taught in the [Interdisciplinary Arts and Performance](#) program for 25 years and also works as a professional in theater and music.

“When we talk about giving truly professional experiences to our students, in this case, in the arts, it says that we care very much to bring in the best in their fields to work with and engage our students. These are the types of opportunities that fuel students to be true professionals and to be mentored in their goals.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Visiting guest director Mark Lutwak (back, left) and playwright Y York (back, right) listen to producer and ASU Associate Professor Jeff Kennedy at the beginning of the first reading of York’s “Becoming Awesome” on Monday, March 24, at Second Stage West on the West Valley campus. Local actors and ASU students are participating in a four-night rehearsal process and present a public reading of the play March 28-29. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



From left: Community members Jackie Hammond and Noelle Hammond and ASU fourth-year student Jazlynn Damasco read through their scripts during a rehearsal for award-winning playwright Y York's "Becoming Awesome" on Monday, March 24, at Second Stage West on the West Valley campus. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News