



## Why I support Early Stages

Board Member  
Mariha Gibbs

My first month on the Board has been quite exciting, as I had the opportunity to attend a production of *Wicked* with

a group of elementary and high school students. The transformational experience afforded by Early Stages was undeniable. Prior to the production, I watched students anxiously huddle together in large groups while eagerly anticipating *Wicked*; following the production, the huddle disbanded and like long-time theater patrons, small groups passionately discussed the show with friends. A fourth grade student whom, earlier, had quietly whispered to me that she was "kind of shy," later boldly proclaimed that her career ambition was to become a great author of fantasy novels. The impact of the Early Stages program was immediate: students appeared more confident and comfortable in their surroundings.

As a long-time patron of, and participant in, arts programs, I joined the Early Stages Board because I know from experience that early exposure to theater and art literacy programs equips children with important life skills. Young patrons sharpen critical thinking abilities, discover coping mechanisms and most importantly, learn to dream without limitation. I look forward to working with the Board and spending more time with staff and students in the program - I am enthusiastic about what the future holds for Early Stages.



Students from PS 189 at *Wicked*

## Storytelling Artist Julia Morris Shares a Tale of Success from the Classroom

When I first met Alwyn his speech was not decipherable and he was unable to sit with his peers for the full length of our storytelling session. At times he would walk away in the midst of our activities and would constantly interrupt with worries and concerns that seemed to have nothing to do with the task at hand. But his imaginative responses were often right-on! I wouldn't think he was engaged or listening but he would surprise me as he recalled dialogue and plot sequences way above his age level.

In addition to Alwyn's attention and language challenges, he could not tolerate being touched by another child or an adult. I would have him sit near me (but not close enough that I would touch him by accident.) In this way, I could easily offer him the chance to go first when turn taking was involved. In these early sessions, he had little control over his impulses so turn taking and controlling his body in a shared space were huge challenges.

At the end of my second year with Alwyn, a bit of magic took place. After I said goodbye to all the children during our final session of the year, Alwyn approached me as I was about to leave the room. He tapped me on the back and when I turned around, he hugged me! The teachers who were present in the room all gasped - a true jaw-dropping moment. "He doesn't do this," they whispered to me; "He doesn't touch people."

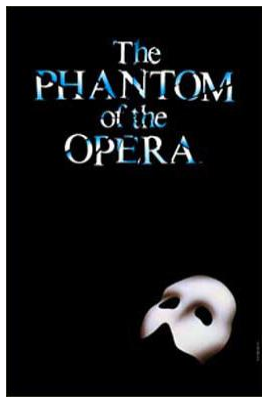
This year, Alwyn had the opportunity to make up many of his own stories as well as to take starring roles in many of our story scenes. When other children were a bit shy to take the stage, Alwyn shot his hand up and began the process. He has become one of my storytelling leaders!

A couple of weeks ago, we finished our fourth year together.. On this occasion, it was I who gave Alwyn a hug, thanking him for all his creative work. Instead of backing away from me, he simply looked up and gave me a radiant and appreciative smile. Now THAT's a smile I'll keep in my story box for years to come!





### Students at Historic Performance of *The Phantom of the Opera*



We brought students from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens to the **9000th performance of *The Phantom of the Opera***.

For most, this was their very first time at the theater!! To read more about this experience visit our Recent Events page at [earlystages.org/news/monthlyhighlights](http://earlystages.org/news/monthlyhighlights)

## Early Stages Student Shares His Story

Anthony, GED + at Stanley Isaacs Center

I was attending the GED program at the Stanley Isaacs Center when I heard of Early Stages. When I was asked about attending a Broadway play for the first time, I thought it was a little above my head, and below my interest. I had never been to a Broadway play before, nor did I know anyone that had been to one. My first play was *Crybaby*, and I really didn't have high expectations for it. Once the lights in the theatre began to dim, and the lights around the stage lit up, my previously mistaken ideas of theatre vanished. It was like I was watching a movie straight out of TV, but live. It was something that I had never experienced before. After that first show, I was hooked.

Over the months after my first show, I have seen almost half a dozen plays, and my thirst for theatre only begins to grow excessively. After having seen Broadway shows, I have begun telling my friends about the awesome experiences that I've had. Some are willing to go, and others are more reluctant. Something that I've learned is that Broadway shows are something everybody should experience, and Early Stages is helping to spread that message, by allowing students to experience something new, that most of us have never considered in our lives.



### Special Thanks Assembly Member Mark Weprin



Thanks to generous funding by Assembly Member Mark Weprin, the Early Stages program has returned to 14 elementary schools in district 26. His continued support has brought the rich traditions of storytelling into over 50 classrooms for extended residencies. We were thrilled that Assembly Member Weprin took the time to visit each of the participating schools to see the program in action.

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