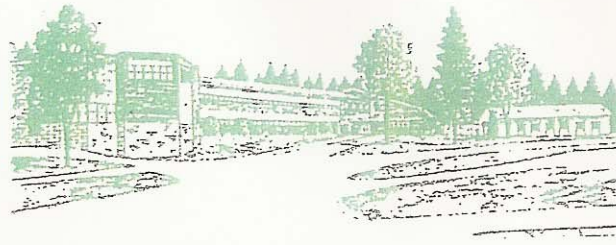


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To Whom It May Concern:

The Black Jew Dialogues! On a Saturday evening in early May 2008, I drove 1 ½ hours to the Blue Hill Town Hall in rural coastal Maine to see Ron Jones and Larry Jay Tish perform their startling, breathtaking dialogues between two very different human beings on a journey of self discovery and shared stories. I wanted to determine for myself whether or not the show would be appropriate for the Diversity Day that Old Town High School's Civil Rights Team sponsors for the student body each year.

Through the use of modern computer technology, humor and conversations which alternate between real time discussions and historical reenactments, Ron and Larry bring racially and culturally sensitive topics to the front of the stage and challenge the members of the audience to think, feel and examine these issues with honesty and compassion. I found myself alternating between startled laughter, tear-filled eyes and awe as the show took me through the history of Jewish and African American experience in the United States. More than just a history lesson, the dialogues bring to life the struggle we have as human beings to come to terms with injustice and find ways to see each person as an individual, not just a member of a group with common characteristics like the color of their skin or their theology.

I believe it is their honesty and their willingness to say out loud what others may have heard but repressed, that makes this show so effective. I can imagine my students laughing out loud at the parts of the show in which Ron and Larry don costumes and create characters that are obviously funny, yet subtle, while inviting them to come to a new awareness of how stereotypes damage one's ability to form relationships which are real and able to withstand the challenges of daily living. I wonder how often, if ever, the students in my high school have the opportunity to witness adults talking intelligently and frankly about the effects of prejudice over time or about their reactions to situations which challenge them to grow beyond their immediate reactions to perceived differences. When the only Jewish student in my school is called, "Jew boy," and the African American students come to school everyday knowing that other 95% of students see them as different, as being "from away" even though they were born in the same town, it is crucial that we learn how to talk about what really matters if we are to live together and form a viable learning community. The Black Jew Dialogues open the door and model a way in which these discussions can begin.



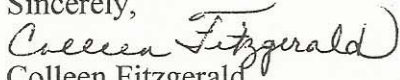
NEW ENGLAND
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AND COLLEGES
ACCREDITED MEMBER

One of the most powerful segments of the evening is the discussion that follows the actual performance. Coming out of character, Ron and Larry invite the audience to ask questions, give their reactions to what they have just experienced, and ponder out loud the results of living immersed in stereotypes based on fear and misinformation. My students base many of their perceptions of others upon what the media shows them. I would love them to have an opportunity to experience a performance which demands that they become emotionally involved in the topic of human rights. I believe that they could not remain aloof or unchanged.

As I work on the plans for our High School's Diversity Day, I am convinced of the value of Ron and Larry's experience in performance and improvisation. Asking students to step out of their comfort zones and actively engage in these topics in the safety of expertly crafted workshops, adds the powerful dimension of action-based learning., an integration of intellect and emotion. Students spend too much time passively listening to teachers talk, I-pods blare, and televisions hypnotize. We, as educators, need to provide them with opportunities to get up, move around, and participate in the creation of solutions to the problems they face on a daily basis.

Humor. Intelligence. Passion. Honesty. These can form the foundations for discussions across the curriculum that will continue long after the stage has been cleared and the workshops ended. I urge you to give your students the gift of opportunity and then sit back and watch as they meet the challenges of participating in dialogues that are relevant, meaningful and critical to the lives that they are creating.

Sincerely,



Colleen Fitzgerald

Guidance Counselor

Old Town High School