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For images, cast bios, and more, please visit the *Candles* press page at
<https://www.phillyyoungplaywrights.org/candlespress.html>

Award-Winning Lower Merion Student Centers Youth Voices in World Premiere Play Responding to the Trauma of School Shootings

Thursday, January 16 - Saturday, Jan 25, 2020

PHILADELPHIA, PA – December 19, 2019 – Inspired by the experience and advocacy of students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School after the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, one local young playwright is asking audiences to pay attention to youth voices and to see past partisan politics. In *Candles*, Angelina DeMonte, [Philadelphia Young Playwrights](#) Resident Playwright and Harriton High School sophomore, shows how deeply youth are affected by these tragedies and highlights the multitude of ways they can – and do – grieve, process, speak out, and advocate for themselves. With at least 100 incidents of gunfire on school grounds in the US in 2019 so far¹, and over 100 reported threats against schools a month in Pennsylvania in the last academic year², this incredibly timely world premiere will be Philadelphia Young Playwrights' first ever Barrymore-eligible production.

Supported by DeMonte's extensive research into the Parkland shooting, *Candles* follows three students in the school newspaper club after their Philadelphia area school high school is attacked by an armed student. The play explores their carefully crafted, individualized responses to trauma, and seamlessly integrates poetry, spoken word, and music as the students realize they can make their voices heard not only through traditional protest, but by using what they know best: writing, reporting, and music.

"DeMonte researched the effects of trauma, and then took the different potential responses to trauma and personalized them, grounded them in the details of these characters' lives to show that there's more than one way we can walk away from a devastating event like this. She has an incredible ability to synthesize information she's passionate about and put it down on the page so that it comes to life as a story rather than just facts," says Mindy Early, Philadelphia Young Playwrights' Director of Education and Program Services, and a trauma-informed teaching artist and trainer.

This production of *Candles* builds on Philadelphia Young Playwrights' efforts in recent years to lift young people's voices into community conversation as legitimate artists. It is the first production of their Resident Playwright Professional Development Project, which offers one student playwright the crucial opportunity for pre-professional development; a full-fledged, professional production; and portfolio-building.

“Philadelphia Young Playwrights is saying, ‘This topic matters. This young person's voice matters. And through this one voice, we’re saying the voice of all young people matter, and should be lifted into community conversation more frequently,’” says Lisa Nelson-Haynes, Executive Director of Philadelphia Young Playwrights.

DeMonte started writing plays in eighth grade through Philadelphia Young Playwrights’ in-school program. Her first play, *Say Who Are You That Mumbles In The Dark*, was selected among over 700 entries for Philadelphia Young Playwrights’ New Voices Festival and was performed at Temple University in October 2018. It was during this production that she first realized she could channel her passion for speaking out against gun violence through her playwriting. She has been in the Resident Playwrights Program, where she developed *Candles*, since 2018. The multidisciplinary play draws on her experience as a poet, actor, spoken word artist, and musician.

“I created characters who are journalists, because as a writer, I understand how writers think – the ability and the drive to pick something apart in order to figure it out, to look deeper into questions that some people may be too scared to ask,” says DeMonte. “The writing and speeches of the Stoneman Douglas students after the 2018 shooting were also inspiring. And I was curious about the idea of speaking out in different ways than what’s usually publicized, and to explore how student journalists might navigate the issue fake news.”

Candles will premiere at the Arden Theatre’s Hamilton Family Arts Center at 62 N 2nd Street on Thursday, January 16 at 7:00pm, with additional performances on January 17th at 7pm, January 18th at 7pm, January 24th at 7pm, and January 25th at 7pm. General admission tickets are \$15 for all shows, and can be purchased at <https://www.phillyyoungplaywrights.org/candles.html>.

Each performance will include a talkback led by a Philadelphia Young Playwrights staff member. The talkback will feature various members of the artistic team, and will give audiences and artists the opportunity to learn from one another, while offering insights into the creative process and the thematic content of the work.

Directed by Bi Jean Ngo, the show will feature stage management by Marisa Gittelman, dramaturgy by Brittany Brewer, scenic and prop design by Noelle McManus, lighting design by Abby Schlackman, sound design by Lucas Fendlay, and performances by Ang Bey, Danielle Coates, Owen Corey, Tyler S. Elliott, and Yannick Haynes.

Runtime: Approximately 90 minutes

Discretion, especially for younger audience members, is advised.

¹Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund <https://everytownresearch.org/gunfire-in-school/#13483>

² Safe2Say 2018-2019 Something Annual Report

<https://www.safe2saypa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/S2SS-Annual-Report-FINAL-28129.pdf>

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About Philadelphia Young Playwrights: Philadelphia Young Playwrights began its first full year of operations in 1987 and quickly established a reputation for its innovative classroom practices, focusing on playwriting as a literacy-learning tool and as an opportunity to engage students in new, creative ways. The mission of Philadelphia Young Playwrights is to tap the potential of youth and inspire learning through playwriting. In 2017-18, the organization will enter its 30th full year of service to this mission. The organization's commitment to new work began the next year in 1988 through readings, workshops, and full-fledged professional productions of student-written plays and monologues that have launched and shaped the careers of dozens of playwrights, writers, business people, and professionals of all stripes including, notably: Quiara Alegria Hudes, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright; Adam F. Goldberg, creator of ABC's *The Goldbergs*; Roger J. Hobbs, the late New York Times bestselling-author; Genne Murphy, recipient of the 2016 Leah Ryan Prize for Emerging Women Writers prize; and Emily Acker, *Orbiter 3* founding playwright and recent Eugene O'Neill New Play Conference Finalist.

Approximately 2,100 students participate in Young Playwrights core classroom program through placements in public, private, and parochial schools throughout the five-county Greater Philadelphia region. We place a special emphasis on the School District of Philadelphia, with whom we have partnered in each year since our founding.

About the Resident Playwright Program: Philadelphia Young Playwrights' Resident Playwright Program, started in 2016, is a yearlong program designed to give students who self-identify as playwrights more opportunities to develop their craft on a regular basis following participation in a Philadelphia Young Playwrights' classroom program. Aimed at creating a community for our young playwrights beyond the classroom as well as a pipeline from classroom programs to professional careers in playwriting and the arts, the Resident Playwright Program offers students professional mentorship throughout their writing process, dedicated space at the Young Playwrights' office to think and write, access to space for rehearsals and readings, a culminating reading of their play open to friends and family, and more.

About the Resident Playwright Professional Development Project: Resident playwrights are invited to submit proposals to Resident Playwright Professional Development Project for consideration for professional production, giving them the opportunity to have their work produced, and to practice industry skills such as developing an artist statement and compiling a proposal. Launched in early 2019 and supported by the Independence Foundation's New Theatre Works Initiative and a partnership with the Arden Theatre Company's Hamilton Family Arts Center, the Resident Playwright Professional Development Project culminates in a full-fledged, professional production, offering selected student playwrights the crucial opportunity for pre-professional development, production, and portfolio-building. Philadelphia Young Playwrights will produce a play written by a Resident Playwright in 2019 and in 2020.

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