

A Learning Guide



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Written by: Jonathan Dunski

ICKY: A Radio Musical

an original radio show inspired by the COVID19 pandemic
produced by The Children's Hour Inc.

What is *ICKY: A Radio Musical*?

Way back in the days before the end of The Big Sick, students everywhere were forced to stare at computer screens featuring live video feeds of their classmates. This was happening in bedrooms, living rooms, and kitchens across the country and the world. With the help (and the subconscious musings) of a dreamer named Halley, a team of superheroes discover that unity and togetherness can get them through any sick situation.

This original play was written by Sarin West, with music composed by Jules Latimer, and lyrics by Hakim Bellamy. It was directed by Jonathan Dunski, with music direction by Sage Sarason. An additional 10 professional creators collaborated to make this unique work of art which documents a child's perspective of living through a pandemic.

ICKY: A Radio Musical aired nationally the week of May 10-16, 2021, on an episode of radio show. It is available to stream as a podcast at: www.childrenshour.org/icky

The Children's Hour Inc is a New Mexico-based non-profit organization that produces an award-winning children's radio program that is educational, entertaining, and engaging, and includes kids who participate in its creation. The program is internationally syndicated broadcasting on more than 115 public radio stations worldwide. Program themes focus on civics, STEM, culture, and music education, featuring New Mexico children as co-hosts and lead interviewers. Katie Stone has been the executive producer of *The Children's Hour* for 20 years.

For more information, contact: Katie Stone | (505) 850-3751 | katie@childrenshour.org

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How did we write this play?

In November 2020, after a lot of discussion and planning, the playwright, director, and producer interviewed each young actor (who were all members of *The Children's Hour* kids crew), about how they were feeling during these past several weeks of the pandemic. Some of the questions asked of our actors were:

"When we started in '69, we presented this idealistic world. Now, we are helping kids live in the world that exists." — Sonia Manzano, actor and writer for Sesame Street

- Tell us a story about an extraordinary adventure, real or made up. What happened?
- Have you ever experienced something strange or wonderful? What was it?
- Tell us a story about your world, your life. How have things changed? If you like, it can be in the form of a song.
- If you could have one superpower, what would it be? Why?

The responses that the young people gave were seeds of inspiration for the playwright and the songwriters to write the fantasy adventure story that is *ICKY: A Radio Musical*.



How did we rehearse this play?

Actors met with the director and other creative staff for two hours every Sunday afternoon via Zoom. Initially, they did some activities to explore the art of acting. Then on December 13, 2020, the players had their first “workshop” with the script. Over the next few rehearsals, the playwright made changes to the dialogue and action. Then the composer and lyricist added the songs (the score). Rehearsing music online was difficult, because the platform only allowed one voice at a time to be heard – the singers couldn’t hear each other’s voices mixed in real time. The music director made tracks so the actors could learn and practice the music independently, offline. Eventually, the director assigned the roles that the actors would play.

Altogether, the actors completed 24 hours of rehearsal, plus many more hours of individual preparation to get ready to perform this play.



How did we perform this play?

The cast assembled to record the play in a way that was both COVID-safe and innovative. On a mildly chilly day in February, the actors performed from their own parked cars, which acted like individual sound booths.



Each car was rigged with a wireless microphone. Also, each actor was given wireless headphones that picked up a radio signal sent out from the main soundboard, a control center about 50 feet away. This way, the actors could hear each other, the director who sat in his own car, and the rest of creative team (listening via Zoom). It had the dynamic of a live performance (with no audio lags or ducking) and allowed for the capture of high-quality audio. So, they used radio technology to record radio a drama!

And... then what?

Then came the two months of post-production work. A band of musicians was hired to accompany the vocal tracks, but each musician recorded their own track separately from home. Then the tracks were mixed-together. Another musician composed and performed instrumentals that would serve as underscoring – the music that is heard in the background and supports the emotional tone of each scene. In addition, many original sound effects (barks, zaps, whooshes, and drips) were built to illustrate the action and convey the settings. All the various threads of audio landed with the sound designer, who patiently wove together the 21 different voices, 9 different instruments, and dozens of sound effects. After several drafts, the director and producer approved the final record, which was released for broadcast in May 2021.

Find out more about our process:

- [ICKY: A Radio Musical web page](#), including behind the scenes photos and printable coloring book pages
- [Interview with Producer Katie Stone on New Mexico In Focus](#) (NMPBS) on YouTube

Who are the creators?

Making a radio play – just like making live Theatre – is a collaborative art. In other words, it takes several artists working together to make the show go on. Sometimes, the art gets made when all the artists are in the room together, and sometimes it happens in sequence, one person at a time, with each artist taking turns doing their part. On this page are job descriptions of some of the creators involved in *ICKY: A Radio Musical*. Match each job description to the correct photo/name of the person on page 6.

- 1** I listened to all the young actors, and from what I learned, I wrote the play. I decided how the story would go (action), who the characters are and what words they say (dialogue). I also collaborated with the composer and lyricist to incorporate songs into the story. I made changes along the way.
- 2** I put together a band and recorded the musical arrangements. Along with my good friends, Josh English on drums (Squash Blossom Boys), Paul Hulton on bass (Silver String Band & Dust City Opera), Shaun Hettinger on keyboard (Memoryy), and myself on guitar, we took the scratch tracks and turned them into the music you hear in the final radio musical. First and foremost, I am Maya Malone's dad — she plays the Super Twin, Joy.
- 3** I'm the one who came up with the idea for the show. I'm the person who brought the creative team together, found the actors to audition, and presented the show to the audiences all over the world. I raised money for the show and was responsible for paying all the bills. It all starts and ends with me.
- 4** Support is the focus of my role. Wherever a hand is needed, I go! From technical support to creative collaboration, I get to dip my toes in all areas of the production. Directing a show is hard, and it's even harder to do it alone! I like to think of my role as an extra set of arms, eyes & ears for the director. I try to tap into their brain and work as if we are one collaborative superhero tackling the glorious monster that is in front of us.
- 5** I work with sound, usually at the end stage of a project like *ICKY*; this is part of a major process called postproduction. After everyone has performed their parts, I take all of those performances (dialogue and music) and I mix them with sound effects and ambient sounds to create the sonic landscape of the play. Mixing audio is a lot like cooking, except my raw ingredients are the recordings. I put them all together and develop the flavors of the show using lots of fun audio tools. I follow the recipe of the artistic goals, and I serve up a delightful dish — the finished radio play. My work is very special to me!

6 You may have seen one of my murals on walls around Albuquerque. But in radio there are no walls to paint. Instead, there are only the airwaves that connect and unite us. For this project, I read the script, listened to rehearsals, and then created the poster that serves as the marquee for this play. I also made the line drawings for the coloring pages.

7 Once the songs were written, it was my job to teach the players how to sing them. So, I recorded myself singing and playing keyboard, to make rehearsal tracks for each song. Every week I would rehearse vocals with the players (via Zoom) and guide them in their singing. I made certain the notes as well as the words were strong and meaningful. Also, I had a say in who would play what roles (casting).

8 While the other members of the creative team make the art, what I make are decisions. At first, I decide what our process will be to get to our final product. That's called planning. Then along the way I make lots of other decisions. I decide what we do at each rehearsal. I decide who will perform the roles. I decide who sings the solos. I decide on what sound effects are used. I coordinate. I ask. I listen. I suggest. I encourage. I praise. I allow for mistakes, and I celebrate the successes. Hopefully, I inspire everyone to do their best work.

9 What are the moments in the story that are the full of emotion? Where are the heartbeats? That's where a song should go. And once I decided on that, I had to go with the mood of the moment and write a melody to reflect it. Sometimes the melody is happy even though the words are sad. That's cool, because life is both up and down at the same time.

10 Words, words, words... my art is expressed in words. I'm a poet, and I had the pleasure of writing the words for all of the songs. To hear these young voices sing my words brings me to new heights of pride and joy. I'm also pleased to say that my son Kaylem is an actor/singer playing Damian & Super Stretch in this play.



Katie Stone, Producer



Jonathan Dunski, Director



Sarin Monae West, Playwright



Sage Sarason, Music Director



Jules Latimer, Composer



Kyle Malone, Band Leader



Hakim Bellamy, Lyricist



Nicholas Main, Assistant Director



Noé Barnett, Graphic Artist



Jen Kraus, Audio Mixer / Sound Designer



Who is your favorite character?

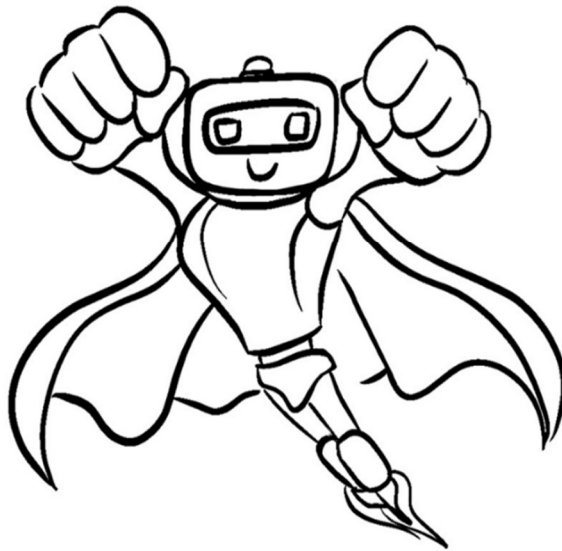
There are a lot of characters in this story. It was a challenge for the director and the actors to make each character distinct.

Characters (in order of appearance)

Narrator
Student, Halley, a daydreamer
Mom
Teacher, Ms. Michaels
Student, Trent
Student, Damian
Student, Michaela
Student, Austin
Student, Sam
Student, Christina
Sand Dollar
Wind
Wild
Invisibility
Super Bot (also plays Trent)
Super Sound (also plays Austin)
Sam the Science Kid (also plays Sam)
Super Stretch (also plays Damian)
Bright Light (also plays Christina)
Super Twin Joy
Super Twin Giggle
Sicky Icky
Sicky Minis

Character Activity

1. Pick your favorite character(s) and see them in your mind's eye. What do they look like? Draw the character, as if you were illustrating a story book or a comic strip.
2. Character Work: In preparation to perform their characters, each actor had to consider the questions below. Pick a character and work through the questions:
 - What is the character wearing?
 - What does the character want?
 - How is the character feeling emotionally?
 - What about the character's situation (place, time, action/reaction) affects the way that they speak?
 - How does the character change throughout the story?



What is an “I want” song?

In Musical Theatre, there is usually a song that launches the journey of the play, allowing the audience to get an inside look at what a character’s is feeling and motivating them to act. This is called the “I want” song. In this song, the character expresses a dissatisfaction with the present, or a dream for the future, or both. You might already know some “I want” songs from Broadway shows, like “My Shot” from *Hamilton*, “I Just Can’t Wait to Be King” from *The Lion King*, or “The Wizard and I” from *Wicked*. [More songs like this can be heard on Playbill.com.](https://www.playbill.com/)

In ICKY: A Radio Musical, you might say that “Hero Anthem” is an “I want” song:

HERO ANTHEM (Scene 3)

Verse 1

Everybody wants a hero
But they think I’m small.
Everyone wants the answer
But they won’t listen at all.
And I keep praying for something
That will cushion the fall.
And all that we really needed to see
was with our glasses off.
And all that we really needed to be
was with our glasses on.

Verse 2

Will anybody come and save us
from who we are?
I don’t wanna be different
But it’s written in the stars.
And there’s no cape or gamma ray,
no Bat or Super man,
That can save you from yourself if you
can’t...

Chorus

Who me? Don’t you see (that) a
Superhero’s not inside of me?
Who me? Can’t you see I don’t want that
responsibility
Who me? Won’t you see that a Superhero’s
not inside of me... no
Ooooo oooooooo ooooo

Section C

Go where I want
Nobody knows
Can’t find me?
Right under your nose.
I’m not a hero
I much rather go
In the opposite direction
When it comes to blows
Keeping to myself
Is better for my health
Staying out of trouble
Has served me well
Learned how to hide,
But not how to show up.
Why life as a hero
gotta be so rough?

With Twins

We can tell your hiding,
But you don’t have to hide.
It’s just us
We want to play!
You’re free to be who you want to be!
You’re free to be who you want to be!
You can’t see me and I’m invisible
The planet’s burning and I don’t want to
play!
You can’t see me and I’m invisible
The planet’s burning and there’s nothing to
say!

HERO ANTHEM: Reprise (Scene 6)

Chorus

Who me? Don't you see that a Superhero lives inside of me?
Who me? Can't you see the Superhero living inside of me?
Who me? Won't you see that a Superhero lives inside of me oh... Oooo ooooo ooooo

Section C

Show Up! for my people when you need me, call.
A phonebooth is for Super Friends after all.
All heroes don't wear capes, but some wear masks just to keep us safe.
Learned how to make the best of a bad situation by making people laugh.
Learned how to love when times get tough, everyday superheroes look just like us.

Chorus

Who me? Don't you see that a Superhero lives inside of me?
Who me? Can't you see the Superhero living inside of me?
Who me? Won't you see that a Superhero lives inside of me oh... Ooooo oooooooo ooooo

Song Lyrics Analysis

Study the lyrics of "Hero Anthem" and its "Reprise". Using the following focus questions, analyze the lyrics:

1. **Speaker/Character:** From whose point of view is the song being sung? What does the character want?
2. **Setting:** Where does the song take place? When (if applicable)? What causes the character to express this song?
3. **Mood:** What is the mood of the song? How does it make you feel? Does the mood change?
4. **Musicality:** Does the music match the mood? Explain how. What style of song is it? If you could pick any professional singer to release a record of this song, who would it be?
5. **Conflict:** What's the problem/issue in your song? Can you relate to the problem in your own life?
6. **Symbols/Metaphors:** Are there any symbols or metaphors in your song? What do they represent?
7. **Theme:** What would you say is the theme of this song? What do you think this song is saying about life and taking a stand for your beliefs? Is there something to be learned?
8. **Plot:** What happens during this song? Does it advance the action of the story? Or is it more like a pause that allows us to understand the present situation?
9. **Reprise:** When we hear the song again, later in the play, the lyrics are different. Why do we hear the song again? What has changed since the first time we heard it? Did the character get what they wanted?

How would you describe a sound effect?

A sound effect is part of a sound other than speech or music designed and built for use in a play, movie, or other broadcast production. Think about the sound effects in *ICKY: A Radio Musical*.

1. Listen to the radio play (again). Make a list of all the sound effects (SFX) you hear. How many SFX are there?
2. How did you describe the SFX in writing? Did you use words like boom, boing, clap, fizz, splat, poof, or zap? If so, you used **onomatopoeia** — words that sound like the action they are describing. Onomatopoeia includes all sorts of wonderful words. *Written Sound* has published an online [Onomatopoeia Dictionary](#) where you can learn many more words that are used to describe sounds.
3. Pick three of your favorite SFX in the story. How do those sounds communicate what is happening, even though we can't see it? How do they add to the emotions/humor/content of the scene? How would the scene be different without them?
4. Give an example of **ambient sound** — the sound of an environment where the action is happening.
5. Give an example of an **action sound effect** — a sound that's made by what a character is doing.
6. Take one of those sound effects and turn into a drawing. Sketch the moment that sound happens.
7. Take one of those sound effects and using your voice and body, act it out.



How did this radio play affect you?

The creators of this radio play would like to know a few things about your experience:

1. How old are you?
2. Was this your first time listening to a radio play?
3. Have you ever attended a play that was performed live on stage?
4. Have you ever seen a Broadway musical?
5. Was *ICKY: A Radio Musical* less fun or more fun compared to other things you do for fun, like playing video games or watching TV?

☐ Less fun ☐ More fun

6. How did the show make you feel? Answer with just one word. You can answer up to three times.

The show made me feel _____.

The show made me feel _____.

The show made me feel _____.

7. Would you listen to this radio play again if you could?
8. Will you find other radio plays to listen to?

Tell whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

9. This radio play made me think about my life or people I know.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree

10. I learned about people that are different from me.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree

11. I have never experienced something like this radio play before.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree

12. Listening to this radio play made me want to learn how to perform and make plays like this.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree

13. Of everything you heard in the radio play, what will you remember most about the show?

If you would like to tell the creators of this radio play something in your own voice, you can send a voice message to *The Children's Hour* here:

<https://www.childrenshour.org>. Look for the orange button and click to record.

Send a voice message
to The Children's Hour

Is your microphone ready?

 Start recording

1 Record - 2 Listen - 3 Send



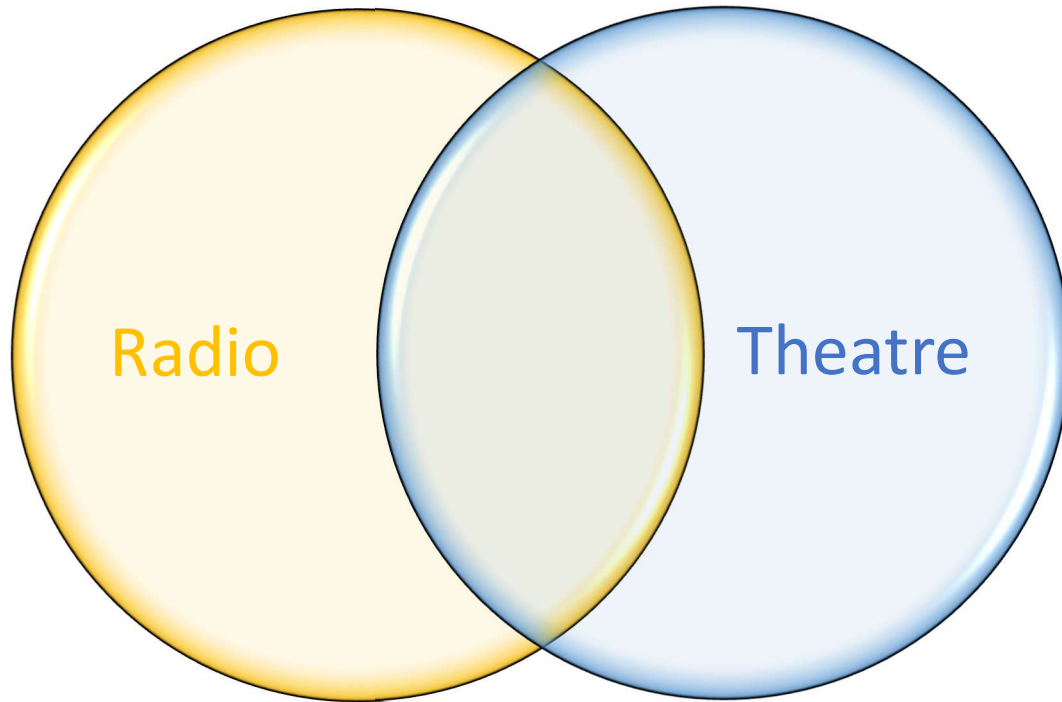
How is this radio musical like live Theatre? How is it different?

We set out to create a musical for an audience of radio/podcast listeners. The process of creating and performing it has a lot in common with a live show, like those produced on Broadway stages and at community and school theaters. However, there are some ways that a radio play is different from live Theatre.

Think about each item below, and decide if it belongs in the Radio bubble, in the Theatre bubble, or in both bubbles:

- Actors and musicians perform separately
- Actors bow afterwards
- Actors must memorize lines
- Actors rehearse together
- Actors use microphones
- Audience can experience it at any time of day
- Audience sits altogether in the same public place
- Audience sits in their own private places
- Box office (ticket sales)
- Costumes
- Each performance is slightly different
- Intermission
- Lighting
- Musicians
- Performed live each day
- Poster
- Sets and props
- Sound effects
- Specific showtimes
- Ushers
- Website

"I was escaping into putting in those earbuds and turning on something that took me far away. Felt human. Felt immediate. But also engaged my imagination. I mean, that is the beauty of audio. And I think that that's the synergy with theater."
— Mandy Greenfield, Artistic Director of Williamstown Theatre



What are some other similarities and differences that you can think of?

How long have artists been making plays for the radio?

Did you know that radio plays have been around for almost 100 years?

Radio drama (or audio drama, audio theatre, radio play, radio theatre) is a dramatized, purely acoustic performance that is broadcast on radio or published on audio media. With no visual component, radio drama depends on dialogue, music, and sound effects to help the audience imagine the characters, settings, and action. Audio dramas, whether newly produced or classics, can be found on CDs, cassette tapes, podcasts, webcasts, and conventional broadcast radio.

The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) began radio transmission in the UK in October 1922. The transmissions went daily on November 14, 1922. The BBC website says that Music and Drama were part of the transmissions from the very start.

Radio drama achieved widespread popularity within a decade of its initial development in the 1920s. By the 1940s, it was a leading international popular entertainment. When television came around in the 1950s, radio drama lost popularity.

Today in the USA, radio drama is only a small part of terrestrial radio. However, other countries have thriving traditions of radio drama. In the UK, for example, the BBC produces and broadcasts hundreds of new radio plays each year. Drama is aired daily in the form of afternoon plays, a Friday evening play, short dramas included in the daily Woman's Hour program, Saturday plays, and Sunday classic serials. There is even a slot reserved for experimental drama.

How many radio plays have you listened to? What were they?

Where could you go to find more plays to listen to?

Where can I find out more about the making of radio plays and musicals?

- "I believe that we form our own lives, that we create our own reality, and that everything works out for the best." — Jim Henson, creator of The Muppets*



