

# EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH TOUR EDUCATION PACK

# ZOMBIE THOUGHTS

**BY JENNIFER A. KOKAI  
AND OLIVER KOKAI-MEANS**



**MONTANA  
REPERTORY  
THEATRE**



**SPONSORED BY**

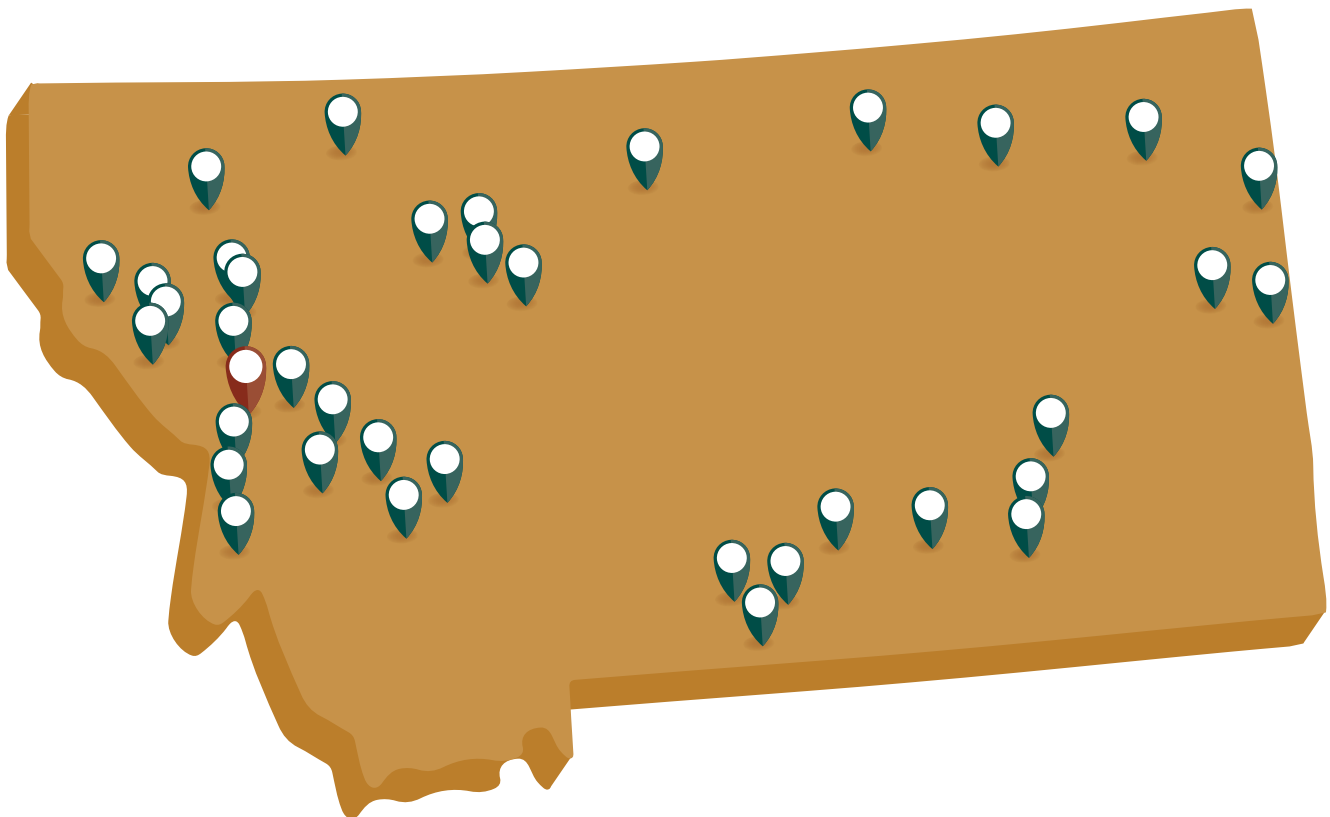
# THE EDUCATIONAL TOUR

Every fall, the Montana Repertory Theatre's Educational Outreach Tour travels across the state of Montana with a short play and accompanying workshops. This year, due to safety concerns surrounding COVID-19, The Rep will instead be offering ZOMBIE THOUGHTS, an online choose-your-own-adventure experience, to every school and student in the state.

ZOMBIE THOUGHTS follows in the Montana Rep's Educational Outreach Tour tradition of bringing staged selections inspired by either subject matter or social-emotional-learning objectives from the Montana Middle and High School curriculum to Montana Middle and High Schools, Community Colleges and local arts organizations. This year's offering deals with a particularly relevant and prevalent social issue: Generalized Anxiety Disorder in young people.

## For More Information Please Contact:

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[www.montanarep.com](http://www.montanarep.com)



**Special Thanks to Plan-B Theatre Company**, Salt Lake, Utah for the use of materials from their ZOMBIE THOUGHTS study guide and photos from their original production.

# ZOMBIE THOUGHTS

**Written by a mother and her son who suffers from anxiety**, this 45 minute video-game inspired play script has been reviewed and endorsed by Licensed Clinical Social Workers and Behavioral Analysts for its depiction of and treatment suggestions for Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

SAM: So I think the zombies aren't actual zombies but ZOMBIE THOUGHTS. And I can tell the ZOMBIE THOUGHTS to just stop. **If I stop and think about whether or not something can actually happen or if it's just my anxiety talking maybe I can win?**

PIG: Well, try it. What's the worst that can happen if you're wrong?

SAM: We get slaughtered and eaten by a hoard of zombies?

PIG: Well, sure, but that could happen either way, right"

In **ZOMBIE THOUGHTS** by Jennifer A. Kokai and Oliver Kokai-Means, Sam and Pig are avatars in the video game ZOMBIE THOUGHTS. Armed with just a book and rubber chicken, and the help of the audience, they try to overcome Sam's anxiety and defeat the monsters the evil Machine throws them.



Photos from the original Plan-B Theatre Company's production and the Building Better People production.

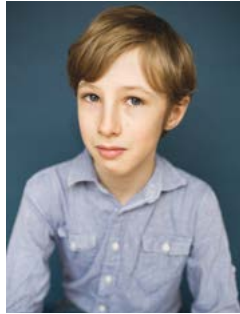
# THE AUTHORS

**Oliver Kokai-Means** is a

playwright and an actor.

ZOMBIE THOUGHTS, his first play has toured with Plan-B throughout Utah, Building Better People through the Washington DC area, is touring Sydney, Australia in the fall of 2020 with

the National Theatre of Parramatta and has been performed by various school groups. Acting credits include Noah in CAROLINE, OR CHANGE with Good Company Theatre, John in Salt Lake Acting Company's production of FUN HOME, and Thomas in the new play DELUGE at Weber State University for which he received a Meritorious Award from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. He is currently co-writing the new play BALLET FOR ALIENS with Jennifer Kokai and Gerard Hernandez which will tour Utah with Plan-B Theatre in 2022. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild. He is currently in the seventh grade.



**"Adults will talk about anxiety and things like that, but they kind of talk around what it is** and they'll use words that make it sound like this cute little thing and not a big issue that you should worry about"

- Oliver Kokai-Means, age 11.

**"Having never written a play for young audiences before, and daunted by the task, I turned to my then nine-year-old and asked if he was interested in writing with me..."** Over two years spanning ages

nine to eleven for him, we developed ZOMBIE THOUGHTS, which is a play about Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Oliver was diagnosed with GAD in kindergarten, and when we were talking about the subject of the play, he decided it was the most crucial thing to explore."

- Jennifer A. Kokai,  
playwright and Oliver's mom.

**Jennifer A. Kokai** is a

playwright and historian

who teaches at Weber State

University. Besides ZOMBIE THOUGHTS, her plays include SINGING TO THE BRINE

SHRIMP produced by Plan-B in Salt Lake in 2020, GIRL OF

GLASS, included in the Lark Play Development

Center's 2014 Playwright's Week and a 2015

O'Neill Semi-Finalist and was produced by Moxie

Theatre in New York City and Theatre Synesthesia

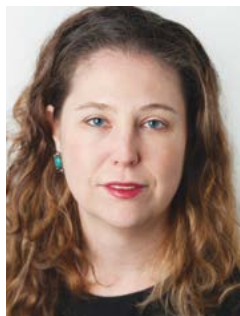
in Austin, Texas, BIRD BRAINS as part of the Rose

Exposed, and LOST LAND produced at the Austin

Fringe Festival. She is also a world recognized

expert on mermaid performance. She is a member

of the Plan-B Writers' Lab and the Dramatists Guild.



ZOMBIE THOUGHTS premiered at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City in October of 2018 and subsequently has played to audiences from Hawaii to Washington DC where it toured with Building Better People Productions.

**"The play's success vastly exceeded my original expectations,** and, despite being written with a young person for young audiences, has been enthusiastically received by audiences of all ages."

- Jennifer A. Kokai



# MONTANA REP'S PRODUCTION

## Annie Cora Sacry — Actress

An actor based in Montana, Annie Cora Sacry cannot wait to visit schools to share in the performance of ZOMBIE THOUGHTS. Sacry graduated from the University of Montana School of Theatre and Dance in 2018 with a BFA, performing in PIPPIN, DRACULA, THE MADWOMAN OF CHAILLOT, and IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY as well as assistant directing the university's production of AS YOU LIKE IT. Sacry has worked for the Brewery Follies of Virginia City, MT for two summer seasons and two off seasons, as well as performing in the Montana Actors' Theatre production of THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW in 2019. When Sacry was a sophomore she had the opportunity to work with high schoolers from Missoula as a stage manager for the production of SLUT: the play which toured Missoula and Helena, MT thanks to the Montana Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. Hopeful for the future of educational theatre, Sacry hopes to work with children of all ages. Sacry enjoys spending time in nature, creating art, and learning about the world and its inhabitants when not performing.



## Hamilton Wallace Clement — Actor

Hamilton Wallace Clement is a Montana-based actor, and incredibly excited to be joining the cast for the Montana Repertory Theatre's Educational Outreach tour of ZOMBIE THOUGHTS. Clement graduated from the University of Montana School of Theatre and Dance in 2018 with a BFA in Acting, where some of his favorite performances were in PETER AND THE STARCATCHER, THE MADWOMAN OF CHAILLOT, and Carol Ann Duffy's adaptation of EVERYMAN. Since graduating, Clement has performed in the 2019 Missoula Community Theatre production of NEWSIES, worked for two seasons as an actor and writer for the Brewery Follies comedy cabaret in Virginia City, MT, and performed in the 2018 and 2019 Montana Actors' Theatre productions of THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW at the Wilma Theatre in Missoula, MT. Clement is enthusiastic to enter the world of educational theatre, as he recalls the incredible impact that touring theatre productions had on him during his adolescent years of schooling. In his free time, Clement enjoys spending time in nature, watching martial arts films, cruising on skateboards, and eating pizza.



# MONTANA REP'S PRODUCTION

## Rosie Ayers — Director

Rosie Ayers has been working in theatre, arts education and activism in Montana for the last 20 years. She earned her BFA and her MA at the University of Montana. In her recent professional life, she's focused on teaching other artists, educators and health care workers about integrated arts education.

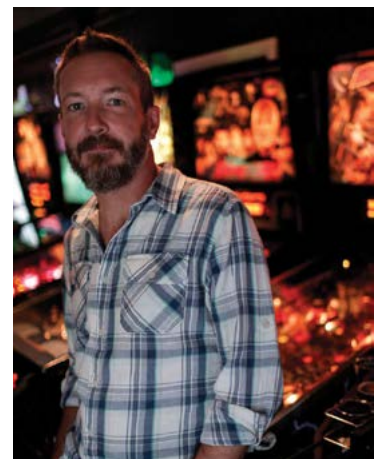
Her passion for enhancing education through art led Rosie to produce and perform the play EVERY BRILLIANT THING through a 50-city tour of Montana this last year. Through this award-winning piece of theatrical activism she was able to bring a message of depth, sincerity and comedy to the issue of suicidality in our state. EVERY BRILLIANT THING had statewide success and helped communities across Montana come together to find new solutions, policies and expand resources.

When not onstage, in a community meeting, or teaching, Rosie's passion has been directing regional theatre and performing comedy regularly with her hilarious mentor Teresa Waldorf. Ayers recently accepted a position with United Way of Missoula County as their suicide prevention coordinator for Project Tomorrow Montana.



## Michael Legg — Artistic Director

Michael Legg is in his second season as Artistic Director of Montana Repertory Theatre. Prior to coming to Missoula, he was the Director of the Professional Training Company at Actors Theatre of Louisville, where he produced over 100 new works and directed world premieres of plays by A. Rey Pamatmat, Laura Jacqmin, Dan Dietz, Kyle John Schmidt, Marco Ramirez, Eric Dufault, Jennifer Haley, and Allison Moore, among others. Legg has served as a guest artist at several universities, including the University of Idaho, Ohio University, University of Utah, and Texas Tech University. He has taught for and worked extensively with the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. For the past five summers, he's served as the Artistic Director of WildWind Performance Lab, where he's developed new plays by Brian Quijada, Hilary Bettis, Martyna Majok, Basil Kreimendahl, Emily Feldman, Steve Yockey, and Matthew Paul Olmos, among others. Legg holds an M.F.A in acting from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is a proud member of Actor's Equity.



# WHY ZOMBIE THOUGHTS?

This year's MRT Educational Outreach Tour, ZOMBIE THOUGHTS by Jennifer A. Kokai and her 11-year-old son Oliver Kokai-Means, is inspired by Oliver's experience living with General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Constructed like a video game, the play is interactive, inviting students to make choices throughout the play to help Sam (who has anxiety) and Pig (who is punny) progress through the game-within-the-play. The only path to victory is if students make a series of choices that help Sam and Pig learn empathy for each other. Oh...and it's really, really funny.

In Montana, about 8,000 adolescents aged 12–17 (more than 10%) experience a major depressive episode (MDE) per year. Unfortunately, only about 2,000 of these adolescents aged 12–17 with MDE received treatment for their depression. This includes generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and other anxiety disorders, which the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2018) estimates affects 1 in 8 children in the United States. Our recent cultural climate has only exacerbated the problem for our teenagers and we are in need of more statewide resources that are solution oriented. By dispelling misunderstandings surrounding anxiety for the students and teachers experiencing ZOMBIE THOUGHTS, our hope is to help your school become an even safer place for each of its students.

Recent Harvard research shows that social and emotional learning (SEL) is comprised of three skills areas (Jones et al., 2017):



(CASEL, 2017)

## Cognitive

- managing and shifting attention
- controlling impulses
- planning and goal setting
- critical thinking

## Emotional

- recognizing and expressing emotions
- regulating emotions and behavior
- empathy

## Social

- understanding social cues
- prosocial behavior
- conflict resolution
- problem solving

SEL skills, essential for student success, work in tandem with beliefs, character, values and personality. They are malleable and sensitive to outside stimuli from infancy through adolescence. When we only focus on cognitive issues without attention to the other components of SEL, major aspects of students' social-emotional development go unsupported. Thus it is crucial to incorporate SEL into classroom activities.



# IMPACT OF ZOMBIE THOUGHTS



PHOTO BY ARTHUR KRIJGSMAN FROM PEXELS

## Will ZOMBIE THOUGHTS make a difference?

SEL interventions impact both social-emotional skills and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). They have short and a long-term effects on a student's academic progress, behavioral adjustment and emotional health and well-being.

ZOMBIE THOUGHTS addresses the topic of childhood anxiety and depression, two internalizing behaviors that often go unrecognized in schools. While externalizing behaviors are more noticeable because they are more likely to lead to school and classroom disruptions, internalizing behaviors are just as serious and are easily overlooked if educators aren't primed to look for, recognize and intervene.

A school environment where SEL learning is a focus both formally (in the relationships between adults and young people) and informally (in the overall climate and culture of the building) will better equip our students for dealing with life's stressors.

## Where does ZOMBIE THOUGHTS fit in my Core?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2018) lists self-management, which includes stress management, as one of the core competencies. Below are some of the Core Standards addressed by the Montana Health Enhancement Standards as listed with the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

### 6th Grade - High School Standard:

Standard 2: Analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.

Standard 3: Demonstrate the ability to access valid information, products and services to enhance health.

Standard 7: Demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.



# MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CLASSROOM

## Do's and Don'ts

- **Do** understand there is a difference between feeling stressed and/or anxious and an anxiety disorder.
- **Do** understand these students want to fit in, have friends and meet classroom expectations but their disorder may prevent them from doing so.
- **Do** see a student with an anxiety disorder as more than their disability or mistakes.
- **Do** understand that anxious students want you to like them; they become paralyzed by fear that you won't.
- **Do** take a moment to see and recognize strengths, not just weaknesses.
- **Do** provide accommodations that will help a student with an anxiety disorder succeed: give them a safe place to go or a cue to remember to breathe when they start to become irritable, frustrated, or upset.
- **Do** understand that a student with an anxiety disorder is a student without the executive function to overcome or cure their disorder.
- **Do** understand that a student with an anxiety disorder is not trying to challenge your authority out of spite.
- **Do** understand that if a student is anxious and you get upset or anxious in response, they will mirror your emotions and melt down.
- **Don't** tell anxious students their fears are stupid or irrational. Their brain tells them otherwise.



PHOTO BY LISA FOTIOS FROM PEXELS

## Terms to use. Terms to avoid.

- **Don't use:** "Mental illness" as an aggregate term. Instead, use: "Mental illnesses" or "A mental illness"
- **Don't use:** "Afflicted by mental illness", "suffers from mental illness" or "is a victim of mental illness." Instead, use: "Living with a mental illness"
- **Don't use:** "Mentally ill person" or "Person who is mentally ill." Instead, use: "Person with a mental illness" or "Person living with a mental health issue"
- **Don't use:** "Schizophrenic; psychotic/ disturbed/ crazy." Instead, use: "Person living with schizophrenia"; "Person experiencing psychosis, disorientation or hallucination"
- **Don't use:** "Normal behavior." Instead, use: "Usual behavior" or "typical behavior"
- **Don't use:** "Substance abuse." Instead, use: "Substance use disorder"
- **Don't use:** "Committed suicide." Instead, use: "Died by suicide" or "lost by suicide"

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



PHOTO BY SUZY HAZELWOOD FROM PEXELS

## Vocabulary

Define anxiety. List synonyms and antonyms for anxiety. Create a concept web with anxiety in the center. Repeat the process with the word stress.

## Drawing

Have students draw a picture or make a collage of something that makes them anxious, then share those drawings in partnerships and possibly the entire class.

## Writing

Write about a time you felt anxious. What did you do? How did it feel?

Extension: Have students interview someone (a classmate, a friend, a community or family member) about an anxious experience or event and record it in writing. SEL work is strengthened through out-of-school partnerships such as family engagement.

## Discussion and Role Play

Pose a scenario and ask students to think about how they would react to the stressor. Then invite them to discuss or act out a response with a partner. Finally, invite them to share their ideas or perform their role play for the class. Suggested scenarios:

- You forgot to do a homework assignment and it is due today.
- You have the end-of-year test coming up and your stomach hurts every time you think about it.
- Your brother or sister keeps getting into your things. You are nervous about leaving your room unattended because you are afraid things will be missing or misplaced.
- You wake up with an anxious, worried feeling nearly every day and feel like you don't want to go to school.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



PHOTO BY FAUXELS FROM PEXELS

## Post-Show Discussion

Following the play, have a discussion about what happens to Sam and Pig and how this relates to students in the class:

- What were some of Sam's characteristics? What were some of Pig's characteristics? How were they similar? How were they different?
- What are some of your characteristics? How are you like Sam or Pig?
- How did Sam deal with their anxiety? What did they learn from going through all of the game's levels?
- Is there something that worked for Sam, that they learned, that you could also use to help when you feel anxious?
- What are zombie thoughts? Connect this to the topic of metaphors: zombie thoughts are irrational thoughts and worries that are scary, but (like zombies) not real.

## Problem Box

Set up a problem box to collect class problems for future discussion. Tie some of the problems to ZOMBIE THOUGHTS and discuss how we can manage our thinking about certain situations to reduce the associated anxiety.

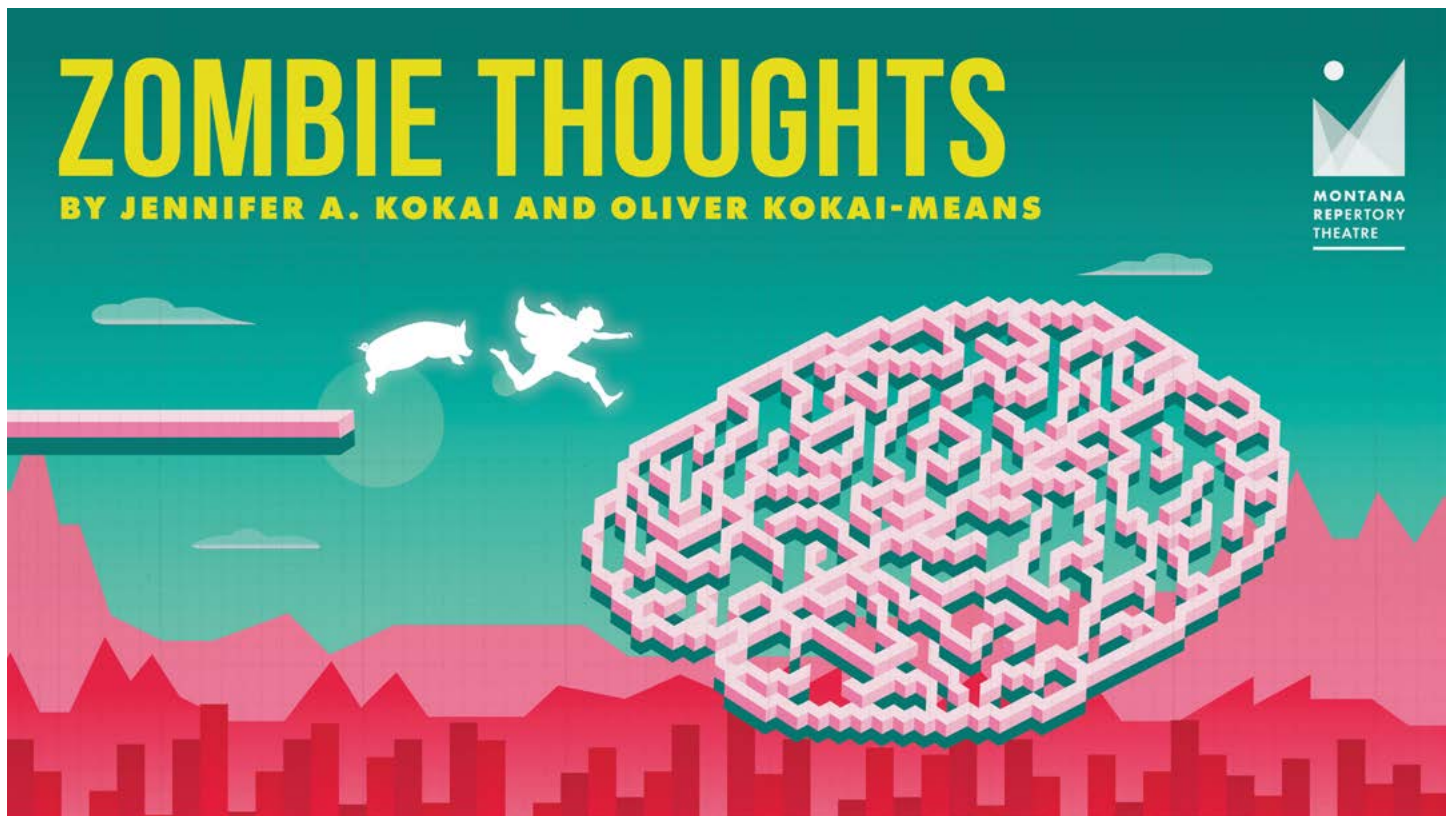
## Breathing Exercises

Sam uses breathing to help them deal with the effects of anxiety. Try one of the following breathing exercises with your class (see Online Resources: Mindful Schools):

- Close your eyes and take three breaths. Feel your feet on the floor.
- Feel the anchor of your breath. Now open your eyes and scan the room without speaking. What did you notice after doing this? How did your body react? How did things look after you re-opened your eyes?
- Have students use their hands as an object of focus. Each student should stretch out their hand and then trace each outstretched finger with the index finger of the other hand, breathing as they do so. This is great for a transition during class time.
- Sphere breathing allows student to pretend they are holding a balloon in their hands. As they breathe in, their fingers slowly move apart to indicate the blowing up of a balloon. As they exhale, the fingers gradually and slowly come back together.



# FOR THE PARENTS/CAREGIVERS



## Dear Parents/Caregivers,

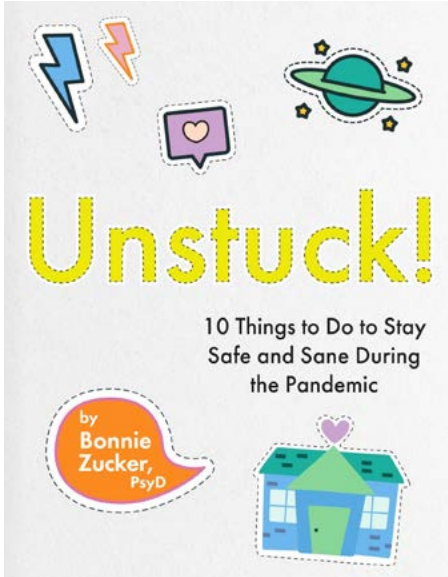
Today your child watched a performance of the Montana Repertory Theater's ZOMBIE THOUGHTS with their class! We hope they enjoyed the performance as much as we enjoyed making it.

Montana Repertory Theatre stands at the cross-section of educational and professional theatre, producing work that celebrates, engages and challenges the people of Missoula and the state of Montana. To learn more about what we do, visit [montanarep.com](http://montanarep.com).

## Questions to ask your child about the show

- What was your favorite part of the performance you saw today?
- Sam suffers from anxiety and talks a lot about how that feels. Do you every feel that way?
- Tell me about those times and how it feels.
- The audience got to make choices along the way to shape the way the play proceeded. How did that work? Did you participate in helping make those decisions? How did that make you feel?
- Are you feeling anxiety or other feelings you would like to talk with me or someone else about?
- Are you aware of anyone you can turn to at your school or in our community to get information or help with anxiety?

# SUGGESTED READING



## Unstuck!

### 10 Things to Do to Stay Safe and Sane During the Pandemic

By Bonnie Zucker

Magination Press, American Psychological Association

[www.apa.org/pubs/magination/unstuck-ebook.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/unstuck-ebook.pdf)

In this stressful time, there are losses, uncertainties, and changes, all which can create a lot of feelings. Feelings are never right or wrong, they just are, and expressing your feelings can help.

This activity book includes journal prompts and activities to help tweens and teens manage stress and anxiety, express emotions, and cultivate creativity and gratitude.

### Starving the Anxiety Gremlin: A Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Workbook on Anxiety for Young People

by Kate Collins-Donnelly

### Harry Potter Therapy: An Unauthorized Self-Help Book from the Restricted Section

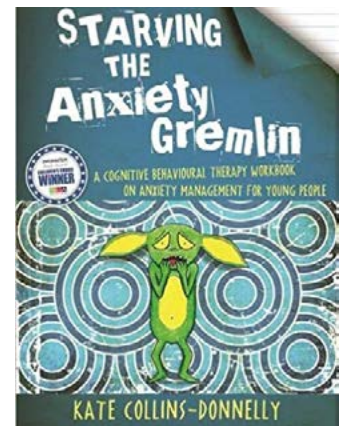
by Janina Scarlet, Ph. D.

### An Unquiet Mind

by Kay Redfield Jameson

### 11 Fictional Anxiety Books for Teens and Tweens

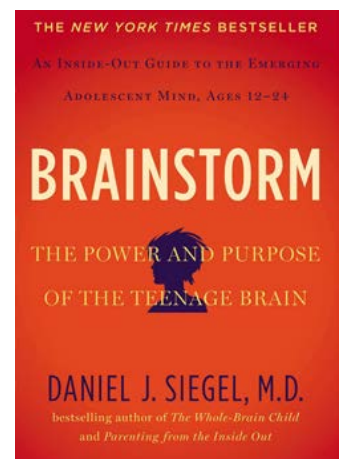
[goodbyeanxietyhellojoy.com/anxiety-books-for-teens](http://goodbyeanxietyhellojoy.com/anxiety-books-for-teens)



## And for teachers

### Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain

by Daniel Siegel



# ONLINE RESOURCES

## **Anxiety and Depression Association of America** — [adaa.org](https://adaa.org)

An international nonprofit membership organization and leader in education, training, and research for anxiety, depression and related disorders.

- Understanding the difference between anxiety and an anxiety disorder  
<https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/faqs/generalized-anxiety-disorder-same-general-anxiety>
- A booklet on anxiety disorders and treatment options for children  
<https://planbtheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Anxiety-Disorders-in-Children.pdf>

## **Child Mind Institute** — [childmind.org](https://childmind.org)

An independent, national nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families living with mental health and learning disorders.

- “Anxiety in the Classroom: What It Looks Like, And Why It’s Often Mistaken for Something Else”  
<https://childmind.org/article/classroom-anxiety-in-children/>
- “Tips for Beating Test Anxiety”  
<https://childmind.org/article/tips-for-beating-test-anxiety/>
- “How to Help Kids Who Are Too Hard on Themselves”  
<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-help-kids-who-are-too-hard-on-themselves/>

## **Empower MT** — [empowermt.org](https://empowermt.org)

Creating a more just and inclusive society by developing youth and adult leaders who work to end mistreatment, correct systemic inequalities and strengthen communities across Montana.

## **Tamarack Grief Resource Center** — [tamarackgriefresourcecenter.org](https://tamarackgriefresourcecenter.org)

Montana’s most comprehensive grief center. Located in Missoula, MT.

## **The Calm Schools Initiative** — [calm.com/schools](https://calm.com/schools)

Offering educators free subscriptions to guided meditations and mindfulness exercises.

## **Mindful Schools** — [mindfulschools.org](https://mindfulschools.org)

Courses and curricula designed for under-resourced public schools facing high turnover rates and toxic stress; offering educators practical skills for self-care, facilitation, and connecting with youth, providing simple, effective mindfulness practices easily integrated into the school day and adaptable for diverse environments. (requires paid subscription)

## **SAMHSA** — [samhsa.gov](https://samhsa.gov)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



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**Plan B Theatre Company**

[planbtheatre.org](http://planbtheatre.org)

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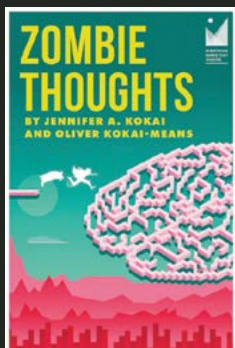
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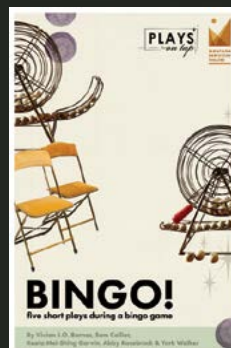
## 2020-2021 SEASON



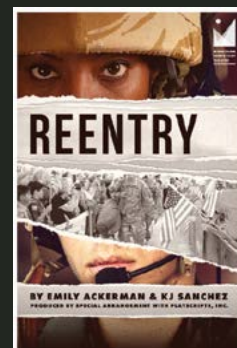
Aug. 28-29 and Sept. 6, 2020



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