

DREAMWRIGHTS YOUTH AND FAMILY THEATRE PRESS RELEASE

Playwright John Dilworth Newman will visit DreamWrights Youth and Family Theatre in York, PA for the opening weekend of his play The Secret School. A playwright's reception will be held immediately following the 2:30 PM performance on Sunday March 2. Audience, cast, and crew are invited to attend.

In addition to writing, Mr. Newman has been teaching theatre and math at Highland High School in Salt Lake City, Utah for the past 17 years. He is a native of Utah who earned his BFA and teaching certificate at the University of Utah with a major in theatre and minors in math and French. He has holds a M.Ed. from the University of Utah, an M.A. from the University of Texas at Austin, and a Ph.D. in educational theatre from New York University.

The Secret School was adapted by Mr. Newman from the popular pre-teen book by the same name, first published in 2001 by Avi. The book, set in the 1920's, features a group of students who turn to a 14 year old female classmate to teach them after their regular teacher is suddenly called away. Interestingly, Mr. Newman's great aunt, Mary Jane Dilworth, was the first school teacher in Utah, and the first in what became the Salt Lake City School District in which he currently teaches. Mary Jane Dilworth started teaching at the age of 14, and there is an elementary school in Salt Lake City named in her honor. A plaque at her school quotes the line she always used to begin her classes: "Come, children, come, we will begin." A variation of that line is woven into the script of The Secret School, which he dedicated to her memory.

When asked about his numerous degrees, Mr. Newman admits, "Learning is what I do for fun, after I complete my teaching. Therefore, I sometimes find it difficult when I work with students who don't love learning the way I do. Compulsory education is the greatest virtue and greatest challenge of American education. We teach a lot students who don't want to be there but who will need that education in the future. When I first read Avi's The Secret School, I considered it a teacher's pipe dream: to have students so eager about completing their education that they'd keep the school going themselves when their teacher left."

In his play, Mr. Newman compares and contrasts two very different eras. He uses a group of students from the 1970's to explore and recreate the circumstances of the 1920's students. After Avi granted him the rights to adapt the book, the resultant play was developed and first produced at Highland High School with Mr. Newman's students in 2005. To be published, a play must be produced three times. This DreamWrights production is the third and final test-drive of the script before the play goes to full publication.

This is not the only play developed at Highland High School. The Highland theatre program has become something of a model for developing new plays in a secondary setting. This kind of work often occurs at colleges and universities but is somewhat rare for a high school. In 2002, Highland received a grant from the Salt Lake Olympic Committee to develop and produce the world premiere of a new play by Sandra Fenichel Asher, the futuristic Joan of Ark 5. Asher, currently a resident of Lancaster, PA, visited Highland in December of that year for a reading and workshop of the script and returned six months later to attend the full production in their 50-seat Trapezoid Theatre. Highland's theater program worked with Asher to develop and produce three more of her new works over the next three years: one of which, In the Garden of the Selfish Giant, went on to win the 2005 Distinguished Play Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education.

In addition to the playwright's visit, the winners of DreamWrights' Secret School Essay Contest will also be

honored at the March 2nd performance. Essays are being accepted until February 22. Rules are available at www.dreamwrights.org.

The Secret School performances take place February 28 through March 9 at 6:30 PM on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays and 2:30 PM on Saturdays and Sundays, 2008. General admission seating is available for \$8 and limited reserved seating is available for \$12. For tickets and additional information please contact or visit DreamWrights Youth and Family Theatre, 100 Carlisle Avenue in York, 717-848-8623, www.dreamwrights.org . Tickets are also available on-line from www.mycommunitytickets.com.

DreamWrights Youth & Family Theatre is a nonprofit organization providing an environment that fosters and inspires growth, responsibility, and creativity in people of all ages and cultures through a broad theatre arts program.