



**“We are the story!”**  
– Kindergarten Student



Georgia Wolf Trap/Alliance Theatre  
Early Learning Through the Arts

Partners:  
Alliance Theatre  
Fulton County Schools  
Georgia State University  
Wolf Trap Education  
The Woodruff Arts Center

For more information:  
Alliance Theatre Education  
Robert W. Woodruff Arts Center  
1280 Peachtree St. NE  
Atlanta, GA 30309

[www.alliancetheatre.org](http://www.alliancetheatre.org)  
**(404) 733-4708**

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Georgia Wolf Trap/Alliance Theatre  
Early Learning Through the Arts

## **Building Early Literacy Through Drama**

## The Alliance Theatre Institute for Educators and Teaching Artists

### GEORGIA WOLF TRAP

Georgia Wolf Trap is the kindergarten component of the Alliance Theatre Institute for Educators and teaching artists and is an affiliate of the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, an education program of the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts.

The Alliance Theatre/Georgia Wolf Trap research project was funded through a United States Department of Education Arts Education Model Development and Dissemination Grant, (AEMDD). This three-year grant allowed the Alliance Theatre to work with Fulton County Schools and Georgia State University to create curriculum that supported the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) in Language Arts through the use of drama strategies to benefit students from high poverty populations.

The Georgia Wolf Trap program placed professional theatre artists in 27 kindergarten classroom residencies (ages 5-6). These teaching artists worked with the teachers and children to provide drama experiences, including storytelling with objects, teacher-in-role, and story dramatization. The aim was to model and teach strategies for educators that use drama in meaningful and comprehensive ways to increase student learning and enhance classroom teaching.

Lessons were designed using the Georgia Performance Standards to provide learning experiences in drama during which students built their skills in language, oral and non-verbal communication, movement, problem-solving, and social/emotional literacy. Drama provided powerful teaching approaches that help children learn skills which serve as part of the foundation for all future learning. The research project served 27 teachers and 1200 students over three years.

#### Fulton County Schools participating in the research study included the following:

- Brookview Elementary School • Gullat Elementary School • Hamilton Homes Elementary School • Harriet Tubman Elementary School • Seaborn Lee Elementary School • SL Lewis Elementary School

### PROGRAM MODEL

#### Professional Learning for Teachers

Participating teachers attend a five-day Wolf Trap Summer Seminar each year. Professional Learning Units are awarded for the activities.

### PROJECT MODEL

#### Classroom Residencies

The centerpiece of the program is the classroom residency in which a Georgia Wolf Trap teaching artist and the classroom teacher work together. Together they translate instructional goals into drama activities designed to meet the objectives of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and the needs of the teacher and students. The teacher gains the knowledge, experience and confidence needed to integrate dramatic art into the curriculum by participating in the teaching artist's lessons with the children. Teachers then create their own drama activities – first with the teaching artist and then alone. The classroom work is further enriched by linking it to the play the students experience on their field trip to an Alliance Theatre performance.

#### Georgia Wolf Trap Components:

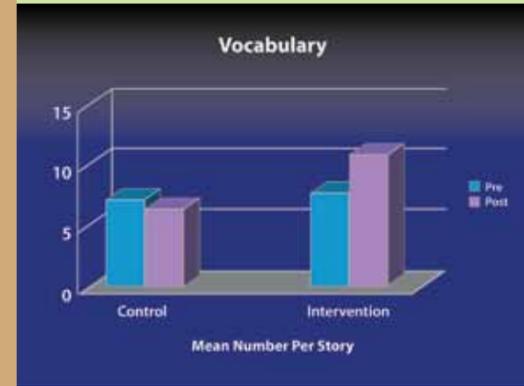
- Three- Day Wolf Trap Summer Seminar (3 PLUs)
- Classroom observation by an Alliance Wolf Trap artist
- Thirteen forty-five minute classroom sessions in which the artist models arts strategies with teachers and students twice weekly
- Field trip to a play at the Alliance Theatre
- Five shared planning sessions in which the artist and teacher evaluate completed lessons and plan future lessons
- Family Sharing event in which the students' caregivers participate in a Wolf Trap workshop
- Program evaluations by teachers and artists
- Video and photo documentation
- Lesson Plan Resource book for each teacher

## Drama Enhances Communication and Academic Achievement in Low-Income Kindergartners

### Ann Cale Kruger, PhD.

Georgia State University

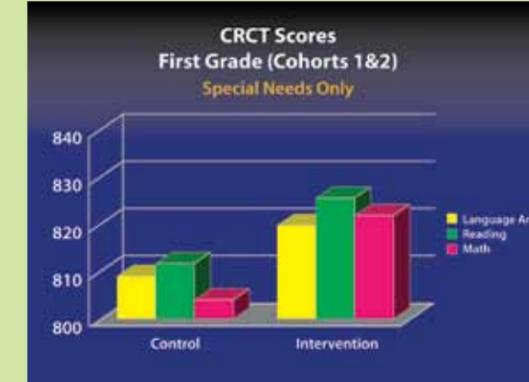
The "achievement gap" begins before the child's first day of school. Students from low-income backgrounds begin Kindergarten with less than half the vocabulary size of high-income students, and language development is a strong predictor of later literacy and general school performance. Enriched social and communicative experiences that support the development of language should be a priority.



**Students who participated in the Wolf Trap program significantly increased the number of words they used in their story writing**

Integrating the arts at the earliest levels of education holds the promise of engaging

children's emotions and intellect in a way that transcends social class and offers one of the best chances for creating readiness and competence for all students. Although recent studies link arts-based learning activities to literacy and language development, their direct effect on learning has been difficult to demonstrate scientifically. We report here the findings of the Georgia Wolf Trap Project, a three-year, federally funded (AEMDD) education intervention conducted by the Alliance Theatre, Fulton County Schools, and Georgia State University. The purpose of the project was to support language development by infusing drama into 13 language arts lessons each year in low-income Kindergarten classrooms. Over the three years there were almost 70 residencies reaching over 1200 students, and providing approximately 16,000 contact hours of instruction.



**For students with special needs, participation in the Wolf Trap program resulted in significantly higher scores on standardized achievement tests one year later.**

Classroom drama allows students and teachers to share their understanding of events and emotion. Their enactment of stories together, using voice, feelings, and movement, "unpacks" or makes accessible the unfamiliar language and culture of school. Through drama children create and express meaning in this new context, improving their adaptation to school and enhancing their linguistic and academic performance over time. The long-lasting benefit of the intervention to the academic achievement of the students is especially noteworthy because the intervention was brief and comparatively inexpensive. Early and developmentally appropriate interventions such as the Georgia Wolf Trap Project can generate lasting changes that support the transition to school and enhance opportunities for success.



**Students who participated in the Wolf Trap program were more likely to show improvement in the quality of their story writing.**