No matter in what time period we “come of age” there are social and cultural issues we contend with. It is an important rite of passage for each culture of youth to become aware and gain an understanding of the forces that impact and change the world around them. As I observe today’s youth culture, I feel as though this time may be the most difficult for our current young generation to process and negotiate. They are barraged with the constant onslaught of the nation’s and the world’s issues in this digital media age. I see them searching for ways to cope, to deal, to try to understand why the world is as it is.

Through art, we process the “noise” of the world. 

American Idiot is a glimpse into how the 20-something generation of the ‘00s responded to their changing world: a time of burgeoning, almost inescapable, assault of media and information. Green Day’s conceptual and musical vision of a young culture struggling to understand their place in society may be an insight for us into how the current generation responds to issues like drug use, sexuality and thoughts of what their future may bring. The characters ponder what will their world be like in 20, 30 or 40 years, and each take different paths to discover that outcome. One character falls into depression, neglecting his life and his family; another places his bet on patriotism and is faced with the horrors of war; the third falls back on drug abuse, sex, crime, music, art, and ultimately journeys through his own mind to find the answers to his destiny. Through these young characters, we see a reflection of American society during this time.

Through art, we express ourselves and learn about who we are.

Consider American Idiot as a tool for self-reflection and societal investigation. Through punk music, an art form spawned from a culture of anti-establishment, these stories are woven together. This piece allows students, teachers, parents, performers, families, to collectively experience and examine the questions of our current society through someone else’s eyes and someone else’s art.

While some of the language or situations in American Idiot may be difficult for us to experience, I think we are wise to take a look at a culture that may be foreign to us. Language is a reflection of intention, of circumstance, of environment, and in this show, it is a reflection of the culture of the time and of punk itself. You may not enjoy Green Day, or the style of music, but the story and the point of view is important. Through this examination, this collective learning, American Idiot provides audience and artists alike with a vision of a society in turmoil; at the very least, it gives us a better language by which to explore a world that is in our face whether we like it or not.

Through art, we change our world.

Dave Clemmons
Director of Education
In our everyday lives, our words are wrapped around every thought, movement, emotion, whether we realize it or not. Many will say we are defined by that which we speak. As we know, in the world of theatre, language is purposeful; the author most likely had good reason for the specific language and words chosen. Words are chosen with care; the meaning behind those words is the key to understanding what a character is truly trying to say.

When training young actors, the conversation often revolves around the idea of intention---why we say and do what we say and do. It is important, therefore, when creating a piece such as *American Idiot*, that everyone involved in the production understands the why behind each and every word.

In your classroom, challenge your students to focus on both intention and subtext in their communication. The activity below can be a guide to better understanding these theatrical tools. How can focusing on intention and subtext help to guide them in their own paths? How does discussion of language affect how we communicate? How can you use language to express who you are?

Words are not easy, but if you know the path from which they came, you can better know the individual who speaks them.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fuck</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shit (hole/bag/head, etc)</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shit</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bitch</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Damn</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hell</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bastard</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faggot/Fag</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jerked-off</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother fucker/ing</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cock sucker</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retarded</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is INTENTION: Why a character says or does something.

What is SUBTEXT? The underlying meaning.

Process:

• Pair students off, issuing each of them only one line. Allow them to practice using their lines with each other. They can say the lines as many times as they want.

Here are some examples:

  o “Help me!” and “I can’t.”
  o “Stop it” and “Make me.”
  o “What are you doing?” and “What does it look like?”

• Give one partner an intention to try in their scene. Make your own to suit your students.

  o You want food.
  o You want a hug.
  o You want to convince the other person of something specific.

• Students will act out a scene using only the phrase you have provided as dialogue. The subtext of their line will naturally adjust as they focus on their intention.

• After each scene, discuss what took place and what subtext was being used.

  o How did one person changing their intention adjust the story?
  o How does changing the intention change the way you viewed the character?
  o How did changing the intention of one line affect the other person’s intention?

Discussion:

• How does intention relate to subtext?

• How does intention affect language? Did you want to adjust your line when your intention changed?

• How could intention affect a character’s choice of words? How does this relate to more adult language?
Below are some general discussion questions that will get students thinking about the production they've just seen!

1) Non-Conformity. Disruption. Freedom. Green Day’s American Idiot, both the album and the musical, is spawned out of thirty years of punk rock, rebellion, and art. Prior to seeing American Idiot, ask students to define the words above and give examples from their lives and from our society. After the show, ask them to connect those definitions back to the story and characters. What examples of Non-conformity, Disruption, and Freedom did you witness in those stories? How do those words connect with your life?

2) Theatre is a collaborative art form. All elements, from scenic, costumes, musical direction, choreography, and direction have to come together to tell the story. As a class, discuss the threads woven into American Idiot and how each theatrical element contributed to the storytelling.

3) Don’t want to be an American Idiot. What do you think an American Idiot is? How does the title relate back to the characters, stories, environment and culture of the show?

4) The themes from American Idiot can be challenging. As a class, list the themes you saw, challenging and otherwise. Which of these are the most relevant to you, to Houston, and to our society?
The Following Selected Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills are addressed by seeing the show and discussing the questions provided:

113.41 U.S. History, Grade 11

25- Culture. The student understands the relationship between the arts and the times during which they were created. The student is expected to:
   A. Describe how the characteristics and issues in U.S. history have been reflected in various genres of art, music, film, and literature;

29- Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to
   B. Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations, making predictions, drawing inferences, and drawing conclusions;
   F. Identify bias in written, oral, and visual material.

117.315 Theatre, Level 1

4- Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates theatre to history, society, and culture. The student is expected to:
   A. Portray theatre as a reflection of life in particular times, places, and cultures;
   B. Relate historical and cultural influences on theatre;

5- Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances. The student is expected to:
   A. Analyze and apply appropriate behavior at various types of live performances
   D. Evaluate live theatre in written and oral form with precise and specific observations using appropriate evaluative theatre vocabulary such as intent, structure, effectiveness, and value;

117.316 Theatre Level 2

1- Foundations: inquiry and understanding. The student develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment using elements of drama and conventions of theatre. The student is expected to:
   F. Relate the interdependence of all theatrical elements

4- Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates theatre to history, society, and culture. The student is expected to:
   A. Analyze historical and cultural influences on theatre

5- Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical
performances. The student is expected to

A. Evaluate and apply appropriate audience etiquette at various types of performances
B. Analyze theatre as an art form and evaluate self as a creative being
D. Evaluate the treatment of artistic elements such as theme, character, setting, and action in
   theatre, musical theatre, dance, art, music, or other media and integrate more than one art
   form in informal presentations

117.317 Theatre Level 3

4– Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates theatre to history, society, and culture. The student is
   expected to:
   A. Evaluate historical and cultural influences on theatre

5– Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical
   performances. The student is expected to:
   A. Compare behavior at various types of performances and practice appropriate audience
      etiquette
   B. Recognize theatre as an art form and evaluate self as a creative being
   C. Apply the concepts of evaluation to performances and evaluate theatre, film, television, and
      other media with depth and complexity using appropriate vocabulary
   D. Compare communication methods of theatre with those of art, music, dance, and other
      media

117.318 Theatre Level 4

1– Foundations: inquiry and understanding. The student develops concepts about self, human relationships,
and the environment using elements of drama and conventions of theatre. The student is expected to:
   E. Evaluate the interdependence of all theatrical elements

4– Historical and cultural relevance. The student relates theatre to history, society, and culture. The student is
   expected to:
   A. Evaluate historical and cultural influences on theatre

5– Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical
   performances. The student is expected to:
   A. Evaluate and practice appropriate audience behavior at various types of performances;
   D. Compare and contrast the elements and communication methods of theatre, film, music,
      art, dance, or other media in a specific culture or historical period;