

# BE MORE GHILL

THE BROADWAY MUSICAL



STUDY  
GUIDE



# WELCOME

Teachers are encouraged to use this guide to elicit student discussion before the show, guide them through aspects of the production, and engage them in activities once they return to the classroom. Due to the mature themes of the production, this guide is designed for high school students.

Our goal is to help teachers utilize the production as a catalyst for student education, collaboration, and inspiration, incorporating these essential concepts:

- The struggle to navigate high school social strata
- Defining who you are on your own terms
- The power of true friendship
- Utilizing performance and production techniques for storytelling
- Understanding characters' situations, actions, words, and points of view
- Contemplating characters' journeys in concert with personal experience

***BE MORE CHILL*** chronicles the important journeys young people take to reconcile the varied voices promising guidance in order to find their own. We hope that your students, inspired by the production, can learn from you and from each other through these activities.

Please feel free to copy the materials in this guide to aid you in energizing classroom interest and discussion before and after the performance. These activities may be used separately or together as part of a cross-curricular exploration of the production.

Enjoy the show!

# CONTENTS

## THE PRODUCTION

PRE-SHOW CONSIDERATIONS	3-4
CHARACTERS	5
SYNOPSIS	6-7
CREATING THE PRODUCTION	8-13
INTERVIEWS WITH JOE TRACZ, JOE ICONIS, AND GEORGE SALAZAR	

## CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

PRESSING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	14
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### LANGUAGE ARTS

“THE SMARTPHONE HOUR” • EXAMINING SOCIAL MEDIA SPEAK	15
“THE PLAY” • CHILL SHAKESPEAREAN THEMES	16
“MORE THAN SURVIVE” • PERSONAL NARRATIVE POETRY	17

### SOCIAL STUDIES

“IT’S FROM JAPAN” • JAPANESE CULTURAL CROSSOVER	18
“THE PITIFUL CHILDREN” • HISTORICAL MOB MENTALITY	19

### THEATRE ARTS

“VOICES IN MY HEAD” • USING CHARACTER MANTRA	20
“I LOVE PLAY REHEARSAL” • EXPLORING ACTING TECHNIQUES	21

### VISUAL ARTS

“UPGRADE” • DESIGN AND DRAW YOUR OWN SQUIP	22
“TWO-PLAYER GAME” • PORTRAY A CHARACTER CONNECTION	23

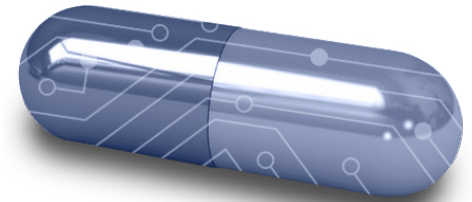
## RESOURCES

CONTENT STANDARDS	24-25
OFFICIAL SITE / SOCIAL MEDIA	

# PRE-SHOW CONSIDERATIONS

## IDEAS FOR STUDENTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW

Use the information in this guide and the web resources as a starting point to get to know **BE MORE CHILL**.



- The production follows the adventures of a nervous high schooler who lets a supercomputer control his mind. What will it take for him to **BE MORE CHILL**? How will he struggle to make up his own mind and decisions?
- Learn what you can about theatre. How does musical theatre tell a story? How do the scenes work together? How do the songs tell the story? How do the technical aspects help?
- Take a peek at the discussion questions in the guide. Give yourself an idea of what issues, ideas, and situations the show deals with. Get a jump start for the class discussion after the show!
- Think about what your expectations of the production are: What will you see on stage? What will the story be like? How will the characters interact with each other? How will it begin and end?

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Going to see a Broadway show is an incredibly exciting and entertaining experience. In order to enhance that experience, here are some things to keep in mind:

**TAKE YOUR SEAT.** Be sure to get to your seat in time to ready yourself for the journey you'll take with this production.

**TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE.** The messages and texts can wait until later - get into the world of the show completely!

**GET READY TO WATCH CAREFULLY.** The great thing about live theatre is that it's happening right in front of you! Be sure to soak it all in.

**LET THE ACTORS DO THE TALKING.** Feel free to laugh at the jokes and be moved by the drama, but save your commentary for the conversation with the class after the show.

**BE YOUR MATURE SELF.** The production deals with young adult issues in an honest and direct way. Be ready to encounter some strong language and issues.

**SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION.** When the show is over, applaud for the actors and wait for the curtain call to be over before leaving your seat. To show them your highest praise, give them a standing ovation.



# PRE-SHOW CONSIDERATIONS

While we sincerely appreciate the tremendous personal connection fans make with the production, members of the cast and company of **BE MORE CHILL** are not qualified to provide emotional, physical or mental advice, diagnoses, or treatment advice. We care about our fans and encourage everyone to seek professional help. If you have an urgent health concern, we hope that you will consult with a licensed healthcare provider immediately.

## In a Crisis?

Call the NAMI HELPLINE  
800-950-6264 or  
Text NAMI to 741741

## Mindfulness

<https://www.headspace.com/>  
<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/>

## Sexual Violence and Consent

<https://www.rainn.org>  
<http://www.loveisrespect.org>

## Eating Disorders

<https://www.edreferral.com/>

## LGBTQ+ Resource

<https://www.glbthotline.org/>

## PFLAG

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>  
<https://www.glbthotline.org/>

## Suicide Prevention

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/#>

## Runaway

<https://www.180orunaway.org/youth-teens/>

## Self Abuse

<https://selfinjury.com/>

## Substance Use/Abuse

<https://www.samhsa.gov/>

**EXPRESS DISCLAIMER:** The producers of **BE MORE CHILL** provide this list solely as a courtesy to fans who have contacted the show with emotional, physical or mental health questions or issues. The foregoing is not a complete list of organizations serving the public in the mental health area. The producers have not independently verified the reliability, expertise or suitability of these organizations. **BE MORE CHILL** loves its audiences, but fans are reminded that it is intended as a piece of theatre only.



# CHARACTERS

**JEREMY HEERE**: awkward high school junior trying to navigate high school, who in desperation turns to the Squip and wrestles with the consequences.



**RICH GORANSKI**: former nerd and current school bully who torments Jeremy but later befriends him after his traumatic experiences grappling with his Squip.



**CHRISTINE CANIGULA**: passionate high school theatre girl most comfortable on stage. Jeremy has a huge crush on her but she's still figuring out what she wants.



**CHLOE VALENTINE**: the most popular girl in school, crass and confident, Chloe pursues Jeremy and confronts Christine to gain and keep Jake's attention.



**MICHAEL MELL**: Jeremy's music-obsessed best friend and video game partner who tries to help Jeremy even though he's shunned by him.



**BROOKE LOHST**: the second most popular girl in school who feels insecure next to her best friend Chloe and develops feelings for Jeremy.



**THE SQUIP**: Super Quantum Unit Intel Processor - the supercomputer in Jeremy's head that takes control of his mind and body to make him "more chill" with chilling consequences.



**JENNA ROLAN**: the girl who knows everyone's business and tries to worm her way into others' conversations for gossip and information.



**JAKE DILLINGER**: Chloe's cool, partying, ex-boyfriend who pursues Christine which makes Chloe jealous.



**MR. HEERE**: struggling, recently separated dad who never wears pants and frustrates Jeremy with his inactivity.



**MR. REYES**: embittered actor and high school drama teacher who's directing the school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



# SYNOPSIS

## ACT ONE

As the show opens Jeremy is in his bedroom mulling over the complexities of getting to and wading through high school life ("More Than Survive"). He continues his morning preparations while he implores his constantly pantless dad to change his ways.

At school, Jeremy tries to get to his locker, where he overhears Chloe making fun of him to Brooke. Rich slams into Jeremy and writes a mysterious "BOYF" on his backpack. Jeremy notices a poster for the school play sign-up then swoons over Christine as she appears. He makes a lame attempt to talk to her and bolts. Michael arrives jamming to Bob Marley and asks Jeremy what's wrong. As Jeremy shows the "BOYF" on backpack, Michael reveals a similar marking of "RIENDS" on his backpack, completing Rich's insult. Michael's encouragement is interrupted when Jeremy notices Christine signing up for the play. Jeremy bravely signs his name as well and steels himself to face his day.

At play rehearsal Jeremy finds himself alone with Christine waiting for it to begin. He sheepishly admits his inexperience and Christine effusively explains her affection for drama practice and its impact on her life ("I Love Play Rehearsal"). Mr. Reyes, the drama coach, arrives, and explains they'll be performing his post-apocalyptic, zombie version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Jake flirtatiously compliments Christine on her acting roles and invites her out after practice. Jeremy tries unsuccessfully to flirt with Christine and bemoans his continuing failures.

In the boys' bathroom, Rich bullies Jeremy and, after receiving a strange twitch and "instructions," introduces him to the transformative powers of a Squip ("The Squip Song"). He advises a now interested Jeremy where to get the device.

Jeremy and Michael are in Jeremy's room playing *Apocalypse of the Damned* reveling in their video game companionship ("Two Player Game"). Michael cautions Jeremy about the sketchy plan to buy a Squip and comforts him with tales of their future coolness. Jeremy's dad checks in and Jeremy confronts him again about his lacking wardrobe. As his dad leaves, Jeremy confides to Michael that his dad hasn't moved on since his parents' divorce.

Jeremy and Michael awkwardly negotiate purchasing the Squip with a scary stock boy at a suburban Payless. Jeremy hands over the money and the stock boy delivers the Squip with a warning about the Squip's untested status and instructions to take it with Mountain Dew.

They head to the food court and Michael watches cautiously as Jeremy swallows the Squip. Feeling no immediate effects, Jeremy mourns his bad luck and gullible nature. Christine

arrives with Jake wanting to get to know her and Jeremy tries lamely to connect with her. Suddenly a voice erupts in his head and he seizes up, wracked with pain while the Squip begins its "calibration process" in his mind, freaking Jake and Christine out. A young man appears who looks like Keanu Reeves, introduces himself as the visualization of Jeremy's Squip, and describes Jeremy's imminent metamorphosis ("Be More Chill – Part 1"). The Squip begins Jeremy's transformation with a new wardrobe then guides Jeremy through a connection with Chloe and Brooke over breakups, shocking Jeremy. The Squip urges Jeremy to leave with the girls since they'll suggestively offer him a lift ("Do You Wanna Ride"). Jeremy can't bring himself to accept so he stays behind, stranded, receiving another lecture from the Squip ("Be More Chill – Part 2").

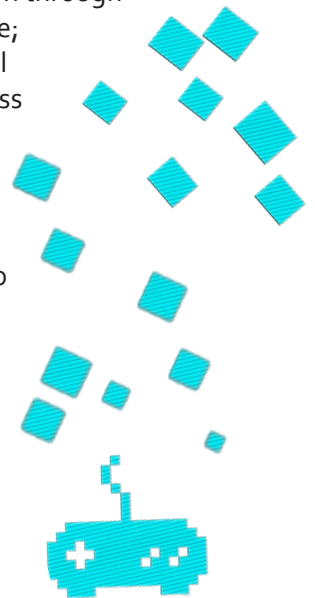
Jeremy wakes up the following morning, wondering if it all was a dream, and tries to initialize the Squip as his father wonders who he's talking to. The Squip guides Jeremy through the school day, using his observational powers to share surprising revelations about Jeremy's peers ("Sync Up"); he even syncs up Jeremy and Rich through their respective Squips.

At the next play rehearsal Chloe and Brooke caution Christine about getting involved with Jake and laugh over his fickle desires for her. Rehearsal begins while Jeremy, prompted by the Squip, bonds with Christine and she shares her feelings with him ("A Guy That I'd Kinda Be Into"), finally stating her love for Jake.

An angry Jeremy confronts the Squip and agrees to take the Squip's course of action to become popular in order to be with Christine. The Squip suggests that Jeremy needs to change his reputation, and guides him through an emotional connection with Brooke; meanwhile, Jake forges an emotional connection with Christine as, all across the school, we hear Jeremy's peers each privately express their own desire for an upgrade. ("Upgrade").

Ecstatic with his rising popularity, Jeremy is confronted by Michael who feels Jeremy has been avoiding him and is concerned and curious about the Squip.

Rejecting Michael and embracing his new-found status, Jeremy proclaims his desire and right to be popular ("Loser Geek Whatever"), ending the act.



# SYNOPSIS

## ACT TWO

Preparations for Jake Dillinger's Halloween party are in full swing ("Halloween"). Jeremy follows the Squip's advice to be distant with Brooke while Christine struggles to feel connected with Jake and the party begins.

Chloe latches on to Jeremy and leads him through Jake's house to his parent's bedroom where she proceeds to seduce him hoping to make Jake jealous ("Do You Wanna Hang?"). An uncomfortable Jeremy tries to extricate himself from the situation but the Squip has immobilized him. Chloe admits her insecurities and gets Jeremy to drink with her which causes the Squip to malfunction. Jake pounds at the door suspicious at what's going on inside so Chloe fuels his growing anger with suggestive noises and comments prompting Jake to eventually break down the door. Jeremy bumps into an upset Brooke as he flees the room pursued by Jake.

Jeremy has escaped to a bathroom where he is surprised by a disguised Michael. Michael confronts Jeremy over his isolation and warns him of the dangers he's discovered concerning the Squip, which Jeremy sharply rejects. Jeremy dismisses Michael as a "loser" and leaves him contemplating his lonely circumstances ("Michael in the Bathroom").

Rich begins a strange and desperate search for Mountain Dew Red while Jeremy finds Christine on the couch alone. Christine and Jeremy commiserate about the strange popular kids and connect over their insecurities at what to say.

Rich's pleas for Mountain Dew Red become more dire and threatening. Jeremy's Squip reappears and cautions Jeremy to leave the party immediately. Rich picks up an ominously flickering jack-o'-lantern and tells his own Squip that, if he can't get it out, he'll "burn it out."

Jenna Rolan gushes over her gossip concerning Rich setting a fire and begins the social media firestorm with a call to Chloe. Chloe spreads the news quickly to Brooke and the rest of the teens as they propagate and celebrate the gossip ("The Smartphone Hour (Rich Set a Fire)").

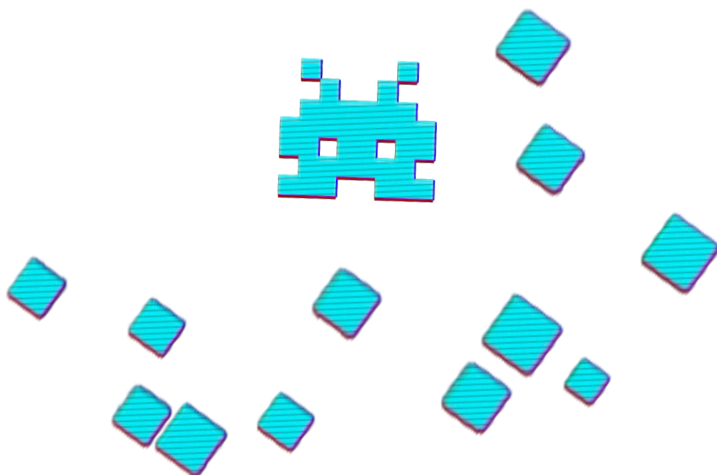
Jeremy is accosted by his father when he returns home from the chaos and counters by harshly ridiculing his dad's lack of parenting and authority. Jeremy's father recoils from the shock by pondering what needs to be done to help himself and his son with Michael's assistance ("The Pants Song").

Back at school Jeremy is confronted by Brooke and Christine over his actions at the party and mocking Rich. Seizing on Christine's need for help, the Squip proposes Jeremy help him provide the whole school with Squips ("The Pitiful Children"). Jeremy is enthusiastic and helps Jenna Rolan become the next student converted.

Mr. Reyes introduces the school production of "A Midsummer Nightmare About Zombies" and the performance begins. Backstage, Jeremy tries to convince Christine to connect with a Squip and transform her life which she forcefully rejects, leaving Jeremy despondent. Realizing his error, Jeremy confronts the Squip over his plan as the Squip continues to convert the whole cast, including Mr. Reyes. Jeremy's confrontation with the Squip becomes intense and physical—he battles his own body for control while devising a plan to deactivate it with Mountain Dew Red. Michael appears just in time with the beverage, looking to rescue Jeremy and get an apology. Jeremy is forced to fight Michael while still under the Squip's control. As Michael gains the upper hand and readies to get Jeremy the drink with Jake's help, the Squip launches his control of Jake, Chloe and Brooke. Jeremy and Michael use their video game strategies to get Jeremy the bottle of Red Mountain Dew. Yet, as he is about to drink, Christine shockingly appears under Squip control. Jeremy bravely gives Christine the drink to release her, and his heroic act of self-sacrifice causes all the linked Squips to malfunction—thus freeing the teens.

In the hospital, Jeremy wakes to Rich explaining his relief from control and his plans for a new persona. Michael and Jeremy's dad arrive to check in and offer advice about pursuing Christine as Jeremy considers his condition ("Voices In My Head").

Jeremy returns to school with encouragement from his now-friendly peers and has the courage to ask Christine out, putting to rest the other voices in his head and saying simply what's on his mind.



# CREATING THE PRODUCTION

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JOE TRACZ



### ***What was your interest in creating a musical from the novel *Be More Chill*?***

I knew the work of Ned Vizzini, the author of the original novel, from being a fan of young adult fiction in general. His work has an inner voice that really felt special. It stood out for being so raw and funny and heartfelt and honest in a way that often young adult literature, especially at that time, wasn't allowed to be. So I knew that his work connected with people in a really special way.

Joe Iconis and I share an agent who said he had this book he really loved called *Be More Chill* and thought we'd love it too. He wondered if there could be a musical in it. Joe and I both read it. I had read Ned's other work but I hadn't read this one.

We both fell in love with it; how singular the voice felt. At that time, there weren't other musicals about teenagers on Broadway or even Off-Broadway, this was a pre-*Evan Hansen*, pre-*Mean Girls* world. We both love writing about young people because it's a stage in your life where emotions are so heightened because you're often discovering things for the first time. The shock of discovering yourself, of falling in love—those things feel as big as they can possibly feel so we felt that adapting the book into a musical could tap into that.

### ***What were some of the changes you made in adapting the novel?***

I do a lot of adaptation. Before this I did *The Lightning Thief* musical from the Percy Jackson series and I worked for Netflix on the *Lemony Snicket* series which is another young adult adaptation. Being an avid reader, I love taking books I love and trying to adapt them. You're putting yourself in the head of the author to figure out why they made the choices they make and then getting inside your own head as a writer to figure out how you keep that spirit alive.

Sometimes that means making big story changes that keep the essence and sometimes that means translating something directly.

With *Be More Chill* we got to speak to Ned early on in our process and he was very upfront with the fact that he was drawing very heavily from his own high school experiences. In fact, it was written not too long after those experiences. He was pretty young when he wrote it, so those memories were fresh and raw. He was very encouraging to us to bring our own selves and our own high school memories to the table.

We're taking these characters that he created so lovingly and so realistically and infusing them with our own—every character in the show has a piece of my own self and my own high school experience in them. I think Joe Iconis would say the same. We've all been Michael in the bathroom at a party. We've been Christine who's devoted so passionately to something that most people might not understand. We've been Jeremy overanalyzing every single decision we make during the day. We've been Chloe who wants to present an image to the world because she doesn't want people to know her insecurities or Jake who's trying lots of activities because that's easier than committing to one thing. All of those characters have some piece of my own feelings of being in high school, and honestly, my feelings of being in my thirties now, because as you grow up, you realize those feelings don't ever go away, you just get better at hiding them.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH JOE TRACZ

### *How do you decide what gets dramatized?*

When you're adapting for drama you're thinking in terms of scenes. In scenes you're thinking in terms of what a character wants for a scene or sequence and how they try to get that. In every scene I try to figure out what its story function is for being in this play. In a book, you have hundreds of pages to have moments large and small. In a show, you have two to two and a half hours, where scenes tend to be anywhere from three to ten minutes. Most scenes in a musical are structured around a song, so it's identifying what is at the heart of a scene, what is its reason for being in the story, and how it incorporates the song.

At the beginning of the process, Joe Iconis and I created an outline and took it from there. The version of the show that is on Broadway now is still very reflective of that early outline. Characters may be given more depth, songs may have been cut and added, but that early outline we made created the bones of the show and identified the beats and the journeys. We determined moments where characters would have to make this kind of decision and suffer these consequences and where their objectives changed.

Sometimes I'd write a scene and say, "song here." Sometimes I'd write a scene as if it was a play and Joe would take that scene and use a piece of it as the impetus to craft a song. It was a pretty organic process so there wasn't simply one way that it happened. In a musical the book writer and the composer/lyricist are working together to identify what is the heart of a scene. So much of musical theatre writing is structure—deciding what is the reason for this scene to be here and how is a song going to help us tell that better.

### *Are there specific ways in which you write the book to lead into a song?*

I come from playwrighting so the key for me is to treat it like a scene and not think about the division where they'll stop talking and where they're going to start singing. You just write it. Sometimes it will be super clear

where the emotion will spill over into a song or where the music wants to take over. There are times where, once a song is written, you go back and fuss with that transition to make it feel as smooth as possible. The great thing about working with Joe is that it felt very seamless in terms of ideas coming from the dialogue or conversations we were having. We worked best by talking things out. It always feels a bit like you're pulling off a magic trick in that you get the audience to believe that this moment is heightened in this musical theater way.

### *Interestingly, Joe Iconis said that he often looks for places where characters are unsure of what to say as moments for a song...*

One of the interesting things about writing for young characters is that they often don't have the tools to fully express themselves, so when they talk, they're trying to figure out how they're feeling in the moment. I think that is definitely very true. "Michael in the Bathroom" doesn't start as a big, emotionally epic song. It starts in a small moment of private shame with a character who is trying to joke through and poke through his layers of defense mechanisms that have just been punctured by his best friend after an argument. He's trying to humorously shrug it off, but in doing so is actually facing the huge emotions this exchange has brought up.

### *What would you like students to come away with from Be More Chill?*

That everyone feels the same way. High school is so much about labels and feeling that you're the only person who feels the way you do. One of the reasons why I really connected to the story was the sense that, if you could get inside the heads of your peers and classmates, you would see that everyone, no matter how they seem on the outside, is struggling in their own way. I think if I had known that in high school when I felt most alone, it's something that would've been reassuring and helpful to hear.

# CREATING THE PRODUCTION

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JOE ICONIS

### *What inspired you to turn the book into a musical theatre piece?*

I wasn't familiar with the book on my own. The book was handed to me by my agent at the time, Scott Chaloff. He said, "This reminds me of you—you should read it. See if it's inspiring to you." I read *Be More Chill* and I was so taken with the characters of the story—with their complexity.

Pre-*Be More Chill*, I had written a few things that dealt with high school kids. I always love writing about characters that age. That said, because I'd done it a bit already, I wasn't necessarily looking to write another show set in high school. But what was so appealing to me about *Be More Chill* was that Ned Vizzini was writing what seemed like archetypes on the surface—you'd look at the characters and think, "that's the nerd, that's the jock, that's the mean girl," but the more you got into them, the more you'd see that the characters were actually really complex.

They're not as simple as the labels society is so quick to place on people. You can't just say that Michael is the "stoner best friend" or Jeremy is the "nerd." They're so much more. They're messier than that. I loved the idea of these characters who on the surface are characters you think you know, that feel like stock characters from a teen story, but then surprise you by actually behaving the way that human beings behave as they do things that don't always jive with their character descriptions. To me that was really exciting.

I also really loved how the novel went into sci-fi territory. I'm a huge genre fan and I love using genre to talk about really serious issues—using the lens of something like sci-fi or horror to explore the human experience. *Be More Chill* provided such a great opportunity to do something that really went to an unexpected sci-fi place. The genre felt like such a cool way to talk about issues facing young people. It was such fertile ground in addition to being really fun and kind of effortlessly cool.



### *How do you decide where in the narrative the story needs a song?*

It's a gut level thing. I'm very much schooled in classical musical theatre. I'm a huge musical theatre fan so I'm very aware of the canon and the "rules" of musical theatre writing.

People always say that characters sing when words are not enough—when the emotion is so great that they burst into song. I think that's true sometimes, but I'm always really excited about musicalizing moments when characters are not able to articulate what they want to say.

In my writing, and in *Be More Chill* in particular, I use music and lyrics in moments where characters need to work through something. In *Be More Chill* there are so many moments like that where the characters don't have the vocabulary to stand center stage and say: "This is exactly what I'm feeling and this is exactly what I want!" The delivery mechanism becomes just as important as the content.

With so many songs in this show, these characters are feeling something, but they don't know how to talk about it, so they need to pretend like they're not feeling it before we actually see inside. I love looking for moments where I can really have the music tell the audience that something huge is going on here, even if the lyric is... "I am hanging in the bathroom." That's what's exciting to me.

# CREATING THE PRODUCTION

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JOE ICONIS

### *How has the show developed over time and are there new plans for the Broadway production?*

When we first did the show at Two River, it was the world premiere and the first time we ever mounted the musical. The process of making a new musical, especially if you're not funded by a major corporation, is pretty fast and furious, all hands on deck, scrappy and all that. When we did that initial production, we did the best we could. Even when we froze the show for the Two River run, we didn't feel like it was completely finished. We were all excited to come back to it once we had some perspective, for whatever the next step of *Be More Chill* was. For a while it seemed like that next step was never going to happen. Miraculously, we ended up with this production off-Broadway.

Three years later, we got to pick up where we left off in our process back in New Jersey. We did a ton of work before we started our run at the Signature—we added "Loser Geek Whatever," we did a lot of little rewrites throughout, and we did some larger musical rewrites. And now, heading to Broadway feels great because we were able to see the show so many times with an audience that was clearly loving it, and that taught us so much about the show. It feels like it prepared us perfectly to make this final version of *Be More Chill* that's going to Broadway.

We have a ton of little writing changes throughout the show that we're implementing. The main thing we want to do is really deepen the relationships between the main characters and deepen the stories of what in another musical would probably be called "secondary characters" like Brooke and Chloe and Jake—all of the characters who exist in our world in the periphery. We're feeling like we've established Jeremy, Michael and Christine and now we want to be able to let those other characters' voices be heard and bloom a little bit. That's something that came out of seeing the love for these other characters. The traditional musical theatre idea is to focus on your main characters and not worry about the secondary characters. When we saw people loving these secondary characters so much, it gave us

permission to spend a little more time with them and use that to intensify the themes of the show and to deepen everyone's story. That's what we're trying to do in the book and in the music.

### *Do you feel there are certain kinds of stories or tales that you're drawn to?*

One hundred percent. I am continually drawn to tales of people who feel "other;" people who feel like outsiders or misfits and are trying to create a family for themselves. I think *Be More Chill* at its heart is a celebration of people who feel like misfits. With anything I've ever done you can boil it down to that.

Something I'm so proud of is that our cast for *Be More Chill* (a lot of them are people I've been working with for years and years) is a cast of people who do not look like the typical Broadway version of high school kids or people. It's a cast that feels representative of the world we live in and a cast that feels like a celebration of misfits in and among themselves. So many young people have said to me, "it's so cool to see this person play this type of role." It's so important to have young people see themselves reflected, especially in parts where the world tells them: "You need to look like this to be the leading lady or the leading man." That is something I'm so proud of.

### *What advice would you have for aspiring composers or lyricists?*

My advice is to consume as much art as you possibly can. I think it is so important to know the rules before you decide if you want to break them or not. Something that allowed me to be the writer that I am is that I was a fan of musical theatre growing up and I was obsessed with it. I spent most of my childhood and high school years obsessively listening to cast albums and reading plays and seeing so much theatre. All of that stuff really informed the writer I became. I didn't really write all that much when I was younger, but I feel that I was preparing to put pen to paper once I got to college—which is sort of what happened. I think it's part of the job of an artist to consume art and to be a fan.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE SALAZAR

### *How did you get involved in the initial production?*

Back in 2013 Joe and I were talking, and he said there was a new musical he was writing called, *Be More Chill* and he felt that there was a role that was perfect for me. Sure enough, in 2013 we did the very first workshop of *Be More Chill* directed by Scott Ellis—Taylor Trensch was Jeremy and Lauren Marcus was Christine. That was the first time we all sat down and learned the music and tackled the story.

### *Has your characterization of Michael changed as the show has gone through multiple productions?*

Like all roles, I think it grew with each stage of development. That very first workshop was so frenzied. We had a week to learn the music and present it. So, between that and our second workshop (which took place in 2015) a lot had changed because I had time to think. You spend a week working on something and then three weeks later you think, “Oh – I should’ve done that!” That break was so helpful because I had truly spent so much time thinking about how much I loved *Be More Chill*. When we picked back up right before rehearsals in New Jersey at Two River Theater, I settled on this idea that Michael (my hope for him at least) would be the image of the best friend that we wish we had and that we wish we could be for other people—someone who would always have his friend’s back, constantly loyal and forgiving. He would be the bigger person through all of the twists and turns and dramas of high school friendship. That’s where most of the growth happened—in the morals of Michael Mell and how he chooses to go about living his life.

### *Is there anything that you’re changing with Michael for the move to Broadway?*

We took a couple of days to look at some changes that would be made. The general consensus that I got from both the writing team and the creative team, and also

from the fans, is that, of all of the characters in *Be More Chill*, Michael seemed to be the one who had everything together. So, going forward, I think the big question is: “Do you have to change anything?” Michael has become this character in the show that is so easily relatable. What I think we’re planning on is making sure the dialogue for Michael is a little more defined in moments that help clarify the story. But in terms of character work, I feel pretty confident in the Michael we’ve settled on between Two River and the following production at Signature. I feel pretty good about who he is and the role he plays in Jeremy’s story.



# CREATING THE PRODUCTION

## AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE SALAZAR

### *What do you think might be the similarities and differences between you and your character?*

I pulled a lot from my own high school experience. I'm someone, personally, with a lot of love to give and I love my friends deeply. So, I definitely pulled the personality traits that I exhibited in high school when creating Michael. It's funny, when Joe [Iconis] said, "I think there's a role that's perfect for you"—I really feel that, of all the roles I've played in my 10 years being in New York, Michael is the most similar to me on paper without me coloring in or shading in anything else about the character. Just what is written on paper is so similar to me. I am someone who loves my friends. There is a confidence to me that comes from work on myself to figure out how to be happy with who I am, what I look like, and to be proud of what I have to offer to the world. But then behind closed doors, there is a vulnerability and anxiety from time to time that I deal with, especially in social settings. The love of vintage music and all things retro is a very "me" thing as well. There is a lot of me in Michael that was presented in the writing, but I got to add a little more to him.

### *The show looks like a fun ensemble piece. What is that experience like?*

Stephen Brackett and Chase Brock and Joe Tracz and Joe Iconis are so good at casting a show. They've assembled a group of actors who—if you give us an inch we'll take a mile. I find in those ensemble moments, we've all created, without being asked to, really fully fleshed out humans that are really fun to play. For me, one of my favorite moments happens to be in "The Smartphone Hour," because right before is "Michael in the Bathroom." I walk offstage and my hands are shaking and I'm sweating because I've just sung this panic attack set to music, and the first thing I do as soon as I go offstage is take the Michael costume off and put a fake bra on, and shark slippers and a giant sweater and then, eventually, a wig. There is no better way to

get out of the mind frame of "Michael in the Bathroom" than getting into drag and looking at myself in the mirror thinking, "Wow! I'm a really ugly woman!" Those moments are a lot of fun because I'm also the type of actor who loves to play multiple characters in a show. For example, when the Squip enters I play an older man who owns a store who wears lip gloss and carries a fan and has sparkly shoes. So, it's an opportunity to go in a completely opposite direction. I find in shows where I and other people get to do that, by the end of the show, you as the actor feel really fulfilled because you've covered all of your bases. It's a lot of fun to do that.

### *What would you want students to take away from *Be More Chill*?*

I do teaching on the side and the one thing I tell students at the end of our sessions is that the four years spent in high school and then in college feel so important and they are. You have to study, and do well, and pass your tests and develop a strong G.P.A. so that you're setting yourself up for the next stage of your life. But the social cliques and the social worlds of high school and college are so unimportant in the grand scheme of things. So, I encourage young people who listen to this album and who love this show to really own their individuality, to be themselves and to be proud of who they are. Trust that if you have a strong sense of self as a high schooler or college student, your years as an adult will be so much easier. If you learn to accept and love who you are early on, the stumbling that some people go through as adults will be a little lighter because you've accepted yourself and chosen not to change who you are to fit someone else's idea of what you should be.

That's something that I experienced growing up that I know, now looking back as an adult, was so helpful. That happens in "Voices in my Head," the final song of the show: "the loudest voice is mine." I think the biggest thing to take home for students seeing the show is this sense that you don't need to be someone else. You are so enough and you are wonderful in your weirdness and your quirkiness. Those differences that you have, that other people don't, that's the stuff that sets you apart and makes you special.



# PRESSING QUESTIONS

**1.** Which of the struggles that Jeremy is dealing with daily could you relate to? Why?

**2.** What do you think are the qualities that make Michael such a good friend?

**3.** Christine loves play rehearsal because it's where she feels comfortable and accomplished. What after-school activity makes you feel this way?

**4.** What about Rich's prior experiences made him search out a Squip? How did it change him?

**5.** Jeremy and Michael talk about "navigating" high school via friendship in "Two-Player Game." What positive ways do you navigate high school?

**6.** If you could replace the Squip and offer Jeremy advice, what would it be?

**7.** Chloe states that Rich's fire starting is "just so awful that I'll talk about it a lot." How might this describe some teens' behaviors on social media?

**8.** How would you have handled Jeremy's complicated relationship with his father?

**9.** Which character could you relate to the most and why?

**10.** How does the Squip intend to save "The Pitiful Children"? What is wrong with his solution?

**11.** Explain the discoveries Jeremy makes about himself after defeating the Squip.

**12.** Jeremy learns to tune out the "voices all around" and makes up his own mind. What can we all learn from this?



# LANGUAGE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** In the song “The Smartphone Hour” Jenna Rolan and the rest of the teens discuss and disseminate Rich’s antics utilizing their various social media sources. Our increasing use of technology to communicate has had a profound impact on the way we express ourselves. Investigate the unique styles created by social media “speak” below.

As the song begins, Jenna exclaims, “OMG!” We use many abbreviations when using social media. Define the abbreviations below and describe a few you’re familiar with:

**LOL** \_\_\_\_\_

**BFF** \_\_\_\_\_

**AMA** \_\_\_\_\_

**FOMO** \_\_\_\_\_

Explain some of your own abbreviations:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

As the song continues, Chloe reaches out to Brooke and finishes her apology with a flourish using a few emojis: 😊 🖍️ 🐾

We can express many things using emojis. You can even tell a full story using emojis. Below is the classic novel *Lord of the Flies* told through emojis:



Use the back of this paper, or your phone if your teacher will allow, to experiment with emoji story telling. What would the story of *BE MORE CHILL* look like? Share your stories!

Brooke and the other teens warn of being “aware of auto-correct.” What are some of the humorous experiences you’ve had or heard about with this feature? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# LANGUAGE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** Mr. Reyes is adapting Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the school. Shakespeare's work contains many universal themes that make it adaptable to new visions. Examine the themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* presented below and describe how those universal themes are present in **BE MORE CHILL**.

**BEING TRUE TO ONESELF:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE:**

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**CHALLENGING FRIENDSHIPS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Charles A. Buchel • [Folger Shakespeare Library Digital Collection](#)

CCSS Utilized [Grades 9-12 • Reading: 1, 2, 3 • Writing: 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10 • Speaking & Listening 1, 4]

# LANGUAGE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** As the show opens, Jeremy sings about his daily struggles in “More Than Survive.” The style of the song is similar to the personal narrative style of poetry in which poets share personal issues, experiences, and insights. Explore the selection of the song excerpted below and use the elements to create your own poem about how you “survive.”

**JEREMY:**

NOW SHOULD I TAKE THE BUS OR WALK INSTEAD?  
I FEEL MY STOMACH FILLING UP WITH DREAD

WHEN I GET NERVOUS MY WHOLE FACE GOES RED  
DUDE, WEIGH THE OPTIONS CALMLY AND BE STILL

A JUNIOR ON THE BUS IS KILLER WEAK  
BUT IF I WALK WHEN I ARRIVE I’M GONNA STRAIGHT-UP REEK  
AND MY BOXERS WILL BE BUNCHY AND MY PITS WILL LEAK  
OH, GAH, I WISH I HAD THE SKILL  
TO JUST BE FINE AND COOL AND CHILL

I DON’T WANT TO BE A HERO  
JUST WANNA STAY IN THE LINE  
I’LL NEVER BE A ROB DENIRO  
FOR ME, JOE PESCI IS FINE  
AND SO I FOLLOW MY OWN RULES  
AND I USE THEM AS MY TOOLS  
TO STAY ALIVE

I DON’T WANT TO BE SPECIAL, NO NO  
I JUST WANNA SURVIVE

What are some of the concerns Jeremy has each day? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why do you think Jeremy doesn’t “want to be special” and just wants to “survive”? \_\_\_\_\_

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What are the things that concern you daily? What do you do to survive? \_\_\_\_\_

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**EXTENSION:** Use the back of this sheet or your notebook to create a poem narrating a day in your life including the ups and downs you encounter and how you use positive strategies to get through the day. Share your work!

CCSS Utilized [Grades 9-12 • Reading: 2, 3 • Writing: 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 • Speaking & Listening 1, 4]



# SOCIAL STUDIES

**YOUR TASK:** Rich emphasizes that the Squip is “from Japan” and we hear the Squip speak Japanese during a malfunction at the party. Japan has many fascinating and interesting cultural, technological, and entertainment items that have been incorporated into our own culture. Investigate the items below that are also “from Japan.”

## ANIME (アニメ)

Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

Important details and significance: \_\_\_\_\_

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Source: [Wikimedia](#)



## EMOJIS (絵文字)

Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

Important details and significance: \_\_\_\_\_

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Source: [Wikimedia](#)

## KARAOKE (カラオケ)

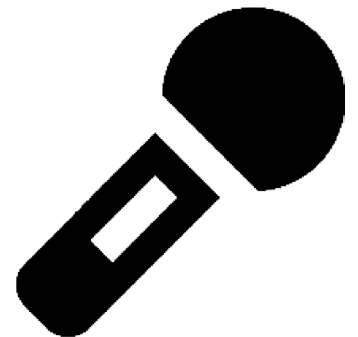
Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

Important details and significance: \_\_\_\_\_

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## KARATE (空手)

Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

Important details and significance: \_\_\_\_\_

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Source: [Wikimedia](#)

CCSS Utilized [*Literacy in History/Social Studies • Writing 9-12: 1, 2, 4, 7, 9*]

# SOCIAL STUDIES

**YOUR TASK:** In the song "The Pitiful Children" the Squip schemes to give the entire school population a Squip and control the group via a hive mind. These groups would not have a mind of their own. Sometimes groups of people can lose their individual mindset and do things they would never consider doing alone. This "mob mentality" has been responsible for tragic acts throughout history. Look into the how the mob mentality was involved in the events below.

## REIGN OF TERROR • FRANCE

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## KRISTALLNACHT • GERMANY

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## RED SCARE • UNITED STATES

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## THE INTERNET • WORLD WIDE

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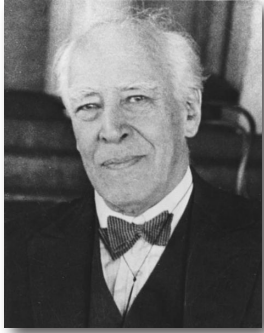
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**EXTENSION:** <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/158/mob-mentality>

CCSS Utilized [*Literacy in History/Social Studies • Writing 9-12: 1, 4, 7, 9*]

# THEATRE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** Christine is in love with play rehearsal because she's "equipped with directions and text." There are many acting teachers who have developed a variety of techniques that help actors examine text and create physical moves to create characters. Research the acting teachers below and explore the possibilities their techniques offer for rehearsing a play.



Source: [Wikimedia](#)

## CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

MAIN ASPECTS OF ACTING TECHNIQUE: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

HOW YOU COULD UTILIZE IN REHEARSAL: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Source: [Wikimedia](#)

## SANFORD MEISNER

MAIN ASPECTS OF ACTING TECHNIQUE: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

HOW YOU COULD UTILIZE IN REHEARSAL: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Source: [violaspolin.org](#)

## VIOLA SPOLIN

MAIN ASPECTS OF ACTING TECHNIQUE: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

HOW YOU COULD UTILIZE IN REHEARSAL: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**EXTENSION:** Research the many other acting teachers and techniques available. Which one fits you?

# THEATRE ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** Jeremy has the Squip in his head to tell him what to do and clarify the steps to get what he wants. Actors need to determine what characters desire. Often a character's main motivation to achieve an objective can be stated in the form of a direct short expression or "mantra" of their desires beginning with "I want..." Consider the characters below and create a clear "mantra" for their wants in a specific scene from the production.

## JEREMY HEERE

DESCRIBE THE SCENE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

STATE HIS MANTRA: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHRISTINE CANIGULA

DESCRIBE THE SCENE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

STATE HER MANTRA: \_\_\_\_\_

## MICHAEL MELL

DESCRIBE THE SCENE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

STATE HIS MANTRA: \_\_\_\_\_

## THE SQUIP

DESCRIBE THE SCENE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

STATE HIS MANTRA: \_\_\_\_\_

## JENNA ROLAN

DESCRIBE THE SCENE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

STATE HER MANTRA: \_\_\_\_\_

**EXTENSION:** Choose a character and work out what his/her mantra might be for the entire show. Share your mantras with your classmates.



# VISUAL ARTS

**YOUR TASK:** When the Squip appears to Jeremy it takes a particular visual form it believes he'll respond to. Squips can take many visual forms: from Princess Leia to anime characters to Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Answer the questions below about Squip images and what figure you might relate to — then draw an image of your own Squip. Share them with your classmates.

Why do you think the Squips took the forms of Keanu Reeves for Jeremy and Ruth Bader Ginsburg for Christine? What does it say about them?

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What figures would you relate/ react to as your Squip? Why?

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*Use the space provided to sketch out the visual form your squip would take and then create a more detailed drawing in your sketchbook.*

SKETCH YOUR SQUIP IMAGE BELOW:

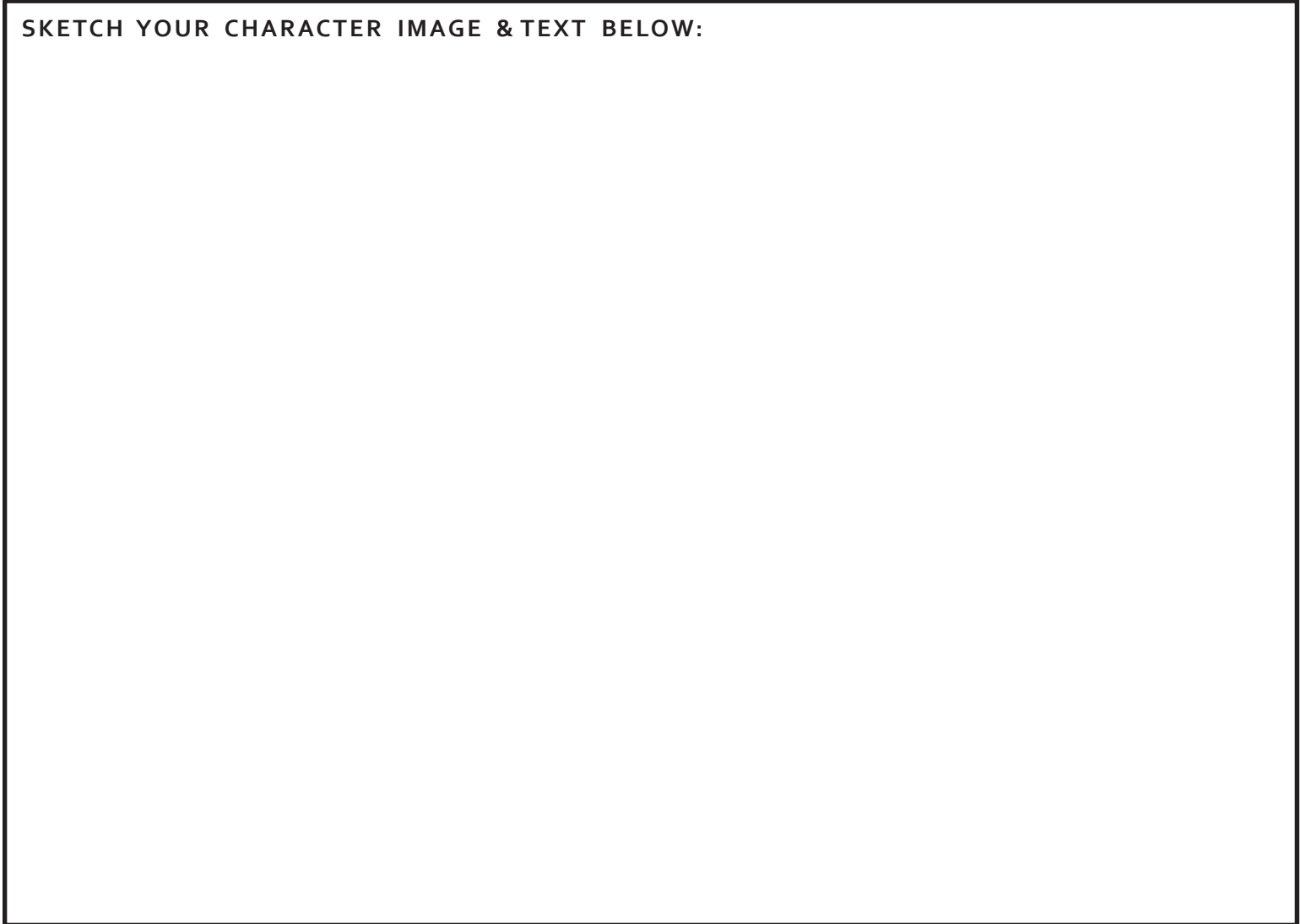
# VISUAL ARTS

**YOUR TASK: BE MORE CHILL** fans have created amazing art based on their favorite characters and their favorite associated lines or phrases from those characters. Think about which characters you connected with and how you might create a character portrait of them utilizing some of their notable dialogue. Share your work with your classmates and with the production via Instagram - bemorechillmusical.

Which character inspires you to create a portrait? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

What text from the character would you add to the image? What does it say about the character? \_\_\_\_\_

SKETCH YOUR CHARACTER IMAGE & TEXT BELOW:



# CONTENT STANDARDS

THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE THE ACTIVITIES WERE DEVELOPED UTILIZING THE FOLLOWING NATIONAL STANDARDS:

## NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

### THEATRE

#### CREATING

- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Refine new work through play, drama processes and theatre experiences using critical analysis and experimentation.
- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

#### PERFORMING

- Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

#### RESPONDING

- Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

#### CONNECTING

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

SOURCE: <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

### VISUAL ARTS

#### CREATING

- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Refine and complete artistic work.
- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

#### PRESENTING

- Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

#### RESPONDING

- Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

#### CONNECTING

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.



Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History, Social Studies, Science & Technical Subjects

#### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ANCHOR STANDARDS

##### CCSS WRITING 6-12

- Text Types & Purposes
- Production and Distribution of Writing
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge
- Range of Writing

##### CCSS SPEAKING & LISTENING 6-12

- Comprehension & Collaboration
- Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas

##### CCSS LANGUAGE 6-12

- Conventions of Standard English
- Knowledge of Language
- Vocabulary Acquisition & Use

#### LITERACY IN HISTORY, SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE & TECHNICAL SUBJECTS ANCHOR STANDARDS

##### CCSS READING 6-12

- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
- Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

##### CCSS WRITING 6-12

- Text Types & Purposes
- Production and Distribution of Writing
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge
- Range of Writing

SOURCE: <http://www.corestandards.org/>

# RESOURCES

## THE PRODUCTION

### WEB

OFFICIAL BROADWAY SITE: <https://www.bemorechillmusical.com/>

JOE ICONIS SITE: <https://mrjoeiconis.com/>

### SOCIAL MEDIA

TWITTER: [@BeMoreChill](https://twitter.com/BeMoreChill)

INSTAGRAM: [bemorechillmusical](https://www.instagram.com/bemorechillmusical)

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/BeMoreChillMusical/>

YOUTUBE: <https://tinyurl.com/youtube-bemorechill>

