

Dear Evan Hansen

Book by **Steven Levenson**

Music and Lyrics by **Benj Pasek & Justin Paul**

Directed and Choreographed by **Karen Azenberg**

Musical Direction by **Helen Gregory**

October 24 - November 8, 2025

SPOTLIGHT STUDY GUIDE **For Teachers and Students**



Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts, and Parks Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, and The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund.



**DEAR
EVAN
HANSEN**



CHARACTERS

SYNOPSIS: *Dear Evan Hansen* centers on a teenager, Evan Hansen, who struggles with social anxiety and loneliness. He is an outcast at his high school with only one friend, Jared, and is often bullied. His therapist gives him an assignment to write letters to himself about the good things that will happen each day. In one of these letters, which he writes at school, he mentions Zoe Murphy, the girl he has a crush on. However, Zoe's brother and a bully of Evan's, Connor, gets a hold of the letter. Angry that it mentions his sister, Connor takes the letter from Evan.

Shortly afterward, Connor dies by suicide and is found with Evan's letter, which his parents think Connor wrote. Evan, not wanting to devastate them further, lies and confirms their belief, and pretends that he and Connor were friends. The Murphys take Evan under their wing and start to think of him like a son. Evan doesn't want to reveal the truth because he feels accepted for once. He becomes closer with Zoe, and the Murphys are more attentive to him than his own well-meaning mother, who works often. Soon, he even founds "The Connor Project" in his classmate's honor and unwittingly starts a viral movement for inclusion and acceptance. But he eventually has to figure out how to tell the truth about his relationship — or lack thereof — with Connor that got blown out of proportion.

Evan Hansen (age: 17) Smart, sincere, and cripplingly self-conscious, Evan prefers to be in the background, a supporting player in his own life, too afraid to step forward into the spotlight and risk ridicule or, what might be worse, no one noticing him at all.

Heidi Hansen (age: 40s) Evan's single mother. Overworked and stretched too thin, Heidi loves her son fiercely, but fears they have begun to grow apart. She is prepared to do anything to repair the damage.

Connor Murphy (age: 17) An angry loner, Connor is Evan's classmate who is also an outcast, though he and Evan were never friends. He has been a troubled kid for as long as anyone can remember, and is a source of endless concern to his long-suffering parents and sister.

Zoe Murphy (age: 16) Connor's younger sister and Evan's crush. She plays guitar in jazz band and couldn't care less about the status games of high school. She feels ambivalence about her brother's death, finding it difficult to forgive him for all he did, and forgive the part of herself that finds relief in the fact that he's gone.

Cynthia Murphy (age: 40s) Connor and Zoe's mother. To Evan, she seems to be the perfect mother, nurturing, available, and willing to talk about anything. To her own children, it's a bit more complicated.

Larry Murphy (age: 40s) Connor and Zoe's father who is often busy and distant. Larry shows a different face to the world, representing for Evan the dad he always wished for: strong, confident, and, more than anything, reliable, someone to be counted on.

Jared Kleinman (age: 17) Jared claims to be forced by his parents to hang out with family friend Evan, for whom he has nothing but disdain. Jared covers his own obvious insecurities with a well-practiced sarcasm and a know-it-all arrogance.

Alana Beck (age: 17) A classmate of Evan's, she is a genuine person. Everything she does comes from a place of deep honesty and tremendous feeling. All of the characters in this musical put up masks of sorts. For Alana, it's a façade of cheerfulness. She is always ready with a smile, a note of encouragement. This hides the loneliness underneath.

The Music Men: Benj Pasek & Justin Paul

This Tony Award-winning pair have worked together as a dynamic musical duo since their college days — a partnership that has taken them to Broadway, Hollywood, and beyond.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A COMPOSING TEAM?

Benj Pasek: We both went to the University of Michigan for musical theater. We went there to be actors. For a lot of people who love the theater, when you're young, acting is your way in. But halfway through school we realized maybe we're not cut out to be performers.... After many failed attempts to get good roles in our school shows, we saw the writing on the wall and thought, "Why don't we write our own show, and see what we can make of that?"

Justin Paul: We just started doing it for fun. We were freshmen in college when we began tinkering. It was fun to develop songs thinking from characters' perspectives. We decided to string some of these songs together and make a song cycle our sophomore year. People were receptive. I think before we even knew what was happening we had begun a collaboration.

WHAT ROLE DID MUSIC PLAY IN YOUR CHILDHOOD?

JP: I grew up in a pretty musical household. Neither of my parents are professional musicians, but they're very, very musical. My dad and my mom would sit down and play the piano. I grew up playing a lot of music in church, and singing with my parents. I started taking piano lessons when I was 7. So they were always very encouraging and they knew that I had a love for it and a knack for it. In addition to being a performer, I always wanted to be in the pit orchestra, playing piano or percussion. I always saw myself being involved on the musical side of things in musical theater. I just figured it would be interpreting and teaching and working out other people's music. I hadn't really planned on it being my own music.

BP: My mom created a bunch of kids' albums where she would document whatever we were doing growing up and she would turn those moments into songs. She had a children's music group in our local area of Philadelphia. So I grew up just witnessing my mom, who's a psychologist — not a professional musician — turning life moments into song. That's essentially what we do every day, when we try to create theater. Watching her interpret things that were happening in the world, or in my world as a kid, and setting them to music — I think that really sparked an interest in writing and creating and interpreting life moments into song lyrics.

FACEBOOK AND YOUTUBE WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN CIRCULATING YOUR EARLY MUSIC. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THE ROLE THE INTERNET PLAYED IN LAUNCHING YOUR CAREER?

JP: For us, in terms of songwriting, having our stuff out online was a huge way to be able to connect with people, and musical theater fans all over the country and all over the world, in a way that couldn't have happened 20 years ago. People knew our songs and knew our music before we ever had a show in New York City.

BP: In terms of our careers, I think we were in the right place at the right time, and started writing songs at the right time. We were in college in 2005 and that was a year after Facebook began. And the year that YouTube began. And I think that really changed the way that people had access to new material.

BP: Before that, shows needed to exist in New York — you needed at least an Off-Off-Broadway production to spread the word. What was so revolutionary about Facebook and YouTube was this democratization of who could have access to putting stuff online, and being able to see it right away. So, you could be in Iowa or Singapore and you could see your content immediately without having to go to New York. And as writers, we didn't have to go through any traditional means of getting it out there [through agents or producers] — we just put it online.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT HOW THE IDEA FOR DEAR EVAN HANSEN ORIGINATED. I UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAS BORN OUT OF YOUR OWN HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE.

BP: There was a student who was sort of anonymous. He died of a drug overdose, and it was sort of unclear whether it was intentional or not. After he passed away the student body became very, close to him. Everybody sort of claimed him as their



Benj Pasek and Justin Paul

FUN FACT: Pasek & Paul are the Emmy, Tony, Grammy, and Oscar winning team behind the music in the film, *The Greatest Showman* starring Hugh Jackman, *La La Land*, and the television show, *Only Murders in the Building*.

The Music Men: Benj Pasek & Justin Paul (cont.)

best friend after he died, and began to write their college essays about him, and began to talk about how amazing he was and how important he was in their lives. When Justin and I met in college, and we began to write musicals, this moment from my high school days continued to be fascinating. We talked about exploring it in a musical. Since then, we've brought up a lot of other themes that we wanted to talk about — there's sort of a need to connect, the need to be part of a community, the need to be a part of something larger than yourself, especially in the digital, isolated age that we now find ourselves in. We began to explore how we could take those themes and turn them into a musical. And that's when the amazing Steven Levenson came into the picture and helped us to churn our ideas into an actual plot.

JP: We noticed certain things about our culture ... some things that were fascinating about the modern response to tragedy and loss. We became very interested in the world's response to loss. And how people grieve and also communicate in the era of social media. It made us think about our desire to connect, and our desire to be a part of something larger than ourselves. Despite our great connectedness through Facebook and Twitter and all of these social media platforms, despite being as connected as we've ever been as a society ...

BP: We're more isolated than ever. All of us, teenagers and adults alike.

JP: And so we wanted to use that as the backdrop of our story, but we're telling it through the specific story of a family. This family is looking for that kind of

connection, and in losing someone they love, they try to fill that void.

CAN YOU TALK A BIT ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF EVAN HANSEN? HE IS A RISKY, UNUSUAL PROTAGONIST.

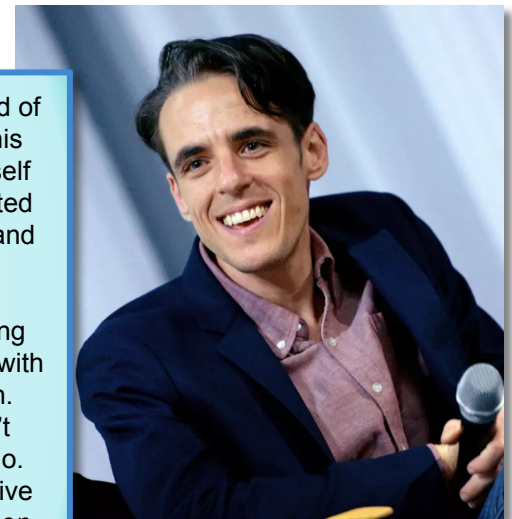
JP: It's definitely an unusual one in that he's riddled with issues and anxieties, and with lots of self-esteem issues and a lot of other things. But I think that's what makes him very accessible and identifiable and relatable. Hopefully everyone can go and see the show and see a little bit of Evan in themselves, and feel like they can connect with him, or at least connect with the situations that he finds himself in — he doesn't know the right thing to say to people, or how to fit into a conversation, or how to be himself and not try to create or embellish a story about himself that is better than what he thinks his real life is. It's a different sort of character and maybe not your typical musical theater leading man, but that's definitely what we were hoping to write — a contemporary and relevant and accessible character.

BP: Traditionally, in Musical Theater 101, you learn to try to write a protagonist who people like and root for on their journey. In *Dear Evan Hansen*, we have a protagonist who does things that are really morally questionable. It's our jobs as writers to try to get the audience to identify with him and to support why he does what he does. We wanted to try to create a character who was more complex — and more nuanced — than maybe more traditional musical theater characters.

"What happened was Benj Pasek, one of the composers, had an experience in high school where one of his classmates died of a drug overdose and, in the wake of his death, there was an outpouring from other students. Everybody wanted a piece of this tragedy, which is pretty common. As the years went by, it stuck with Benj because he found that public clamoring to put oneself into a tragedy only seemed to grow. Benj and Justin had talked about that and felt like there was something in that they wanted to explore, but felt like they needed a playwright to help them turn that into a piece of theater. They read a bunch of writers, and liked my plays, so they got in touch with me and told me about the idea.

What we all found interesting was taking that phenomenon [of people attaching themselves to tragedies] and instead of talking about it in a really easy way, talking about the human impulse beneath the phenomenon. We felt like it had something to do with people's need for connection and that, in spite of the fact that the internet has connected us, there is a real sense of isolation. When we started to talk about that, we were thinking about a character who's not capable of connecting, someone who didn't understand how to connect with other people. So, I wrote the first act like a play and left room where I thought songs could go. Then I gave that back to Benj and Justin and they came back to me with thoughts, and we did that back and forth for about five more years."

-Playwright, Steven Levenson



Steven Levenson

Playwright, Steven Levenson

Call it beginner's luck. Steven Levenson had never written a musical until *Dear Evan Hansen*. Of course, he wasn't entirely a newcomer, having written extensively for the stage as well as for TV shows.

ON WRITING PLAYS VERSUS MUSICALS

Steven Levenson: It's so different in so many ways. The big obvious difference is that it's collaborative from the start — and that your vision is not the only vision. It's about finding a shared vision with your collaborators. You want to be a little bit hidden in the background at times — you want the music to be the star and the music to do the heavy lifting. So it's a lot of cutting the things you love the most, and allowing the ideas that you have or the dialogue that you've written to become a song. It's actually really amazing, though, because it feels like something that you just had in your head becomes three dimensional in a way that you could never imagine.

ON THE ROLE OF A BOOK WRITER

SL: In the case of the musical, as a book writer, your job in a lot of cases is to support the score and to make sure the most important moments emotionally are happening in song. So, it's a lot of figuring out when to step out of the way, and to make sure that you've laid the ground enough — and not too much — so that those characters can make the leap into song.

ON CREATING A NEW MUSICAL

SL: In a way, there's a great freedom about [creating an original work]. We are not beholden to any preexisting vision, but with that freedom comes a lot of anxiety — because we can do anything we want. That can be both freeing and terrifying.

ON COLLABORATING WITH BENJ PASEK AND JUSTIN PAUL

SL: I think the role of the book writer can be very different things. In this case, since there was no source material, it was really the three of us coming up with this idea together. We started with this idea of "connection" — people's desire and thirst and need for connection. My instinct was to create a story about someone who could not connect in a world

Dear Evan Hansen, which premiered in Washington, D.C. in 2015, opened Off Broadway in 2016, and opened on Broadway later that year to rave reviews. The Broadway production was nominated for nine Tony Awards, including Best Book of a Musical.

The musical won six Tony Awards including Best Musical, Best Score, and Best Book.



Playwright Steven Levenson with composing duo Benj Pasek and Justin Paul at Toronto's Opening Night, 2019 (Photo: Tom Sandler)

that is all about connection and interconnectedness. What does it mean to have a protagonist who is somehow unable to connect? So slowly, Evan began to take shape.

It seemed like the best idea was for me to just write the story like it was a play, because we didn't have anything else to go on. So I started writing the first act. Where we had talked about possibly placing songs, I would leave space in the script. I would either have nothing or I would have a long monologue — a soliloquy, really — with a character diving into his thoughts to suggest what was happening emotionally. That's how it all started, with this first draft.

From there, Benj and Justin started writing songs, but there was a lot of back and forth and rewriting. It was an endless dialogue — two steps forward and one step back — because you are building this thing together. It's a little bit chicken and the egg. You have to be constantly making it and remaking it to accommodate one another — always in service to the story.

ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CHARACTER

SL: We knew we wanted to tell a contemporary story that's set today, and we knew that we had

ACTIVITY:

Connor's dad says, "There's no substitute for doing the work. None. It just takes a little patience" He's talking about breaking in a baseball glove.

In what other situations would this advice apply?

Playwright, Steven Levenson (cont.)

to somehow talk about social media. I compare it to *Bye Bye Birdie*, when they're using the telephones in "The Telephone Hour." It's like they're not using the telephones to talk about telephones, they're using them because that's how their world functions. And if we tried to tell our story today without cell phones and social media, there would be a real inauthenticity about the show. And at the same time we wanted to be sure we're using social media as a storytelling device and we were never interested in exploring social media as a theme or as an idea. We always wanted to make sure it was grounded in the story and part of the grammar of the show.

ON CREATING TWO VERY DIFFERENT FAMILIES FOR *DEAR EVAN HANSEN*

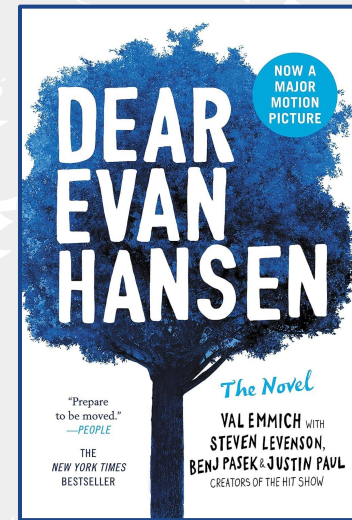
SL: Both families really came into focus as the story itself took shape. Larry and Cynthia Murphy, we knew, had to represent everything that Evan's own splintered family wasn't, his fantasy of what two stable and emotionally available parents might look like. As with all fantasies, Evan's rose-colored vision of the Murphys turns out to have a tenuous relationship to the reality underneath, but that discovery will only come later for him. In contrast to this ostensibly perfect family, Evan's mother, Heidi Hansen, strives to be what her son needs her to be, but everything she does seems only to push him further away. The most important thing for us, in creating these characters, was to present them honestly and without judgment: three parents striving in their own flawed and imperfect way to do what's best for their children.

ON KNOWING THIS IS WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL

SL: We had moments of real excitement throughout the process because we were so interested in the story and compelled by what we were doing. But there were also a lot of moments of incredible doubt. I'll never forget the first preview we had in D.C., where we had our first production. It was so tense and stressful because we didn't know what was going to happen; we were sure the whole thing would fall on its face. It's a tricky story, and we're asking the audience to spend the whole play with a character who doesn't tell the truth. But when audiences seemed to respond in that very first preview, we looked at each other and said, "Ok, we're not crazy." That was the first moment we felt like maybe we had something.

ON WHAT'S NEXT

SL: I'm really excited to keep working on musicals. There's part of me that's really excited to take on something on a larger scale—*Hansen* was always a chamber piece in a way. I'm always exciting by taking on something I don't know how to do, and that seems like a really great challenge.



FUN FACT: In 2018, *Dear Evan Hansen* was adapted into a novel, parts of which incorporate scenes and songs that were cut from the musical and expand on what did make it on stage. *Dear Evan Hansen* actors Ben Levi Ross, Mike Faist, and Mallory Bechtel narrated the audiobook version.

"A White Lie:" a harmless or trivial lie, especially one told to avoid hurting someone's feelings.

ACTIVITY: Is it ever OK to tell a lie?

From a young age, children are taught the negative implications of lying, but as we grow, sometimes our perspectives shift. We learn that the morality of lying is not always black and white and that perhaps there might be times when it is acceptable — maybe even appropriate — to lie. Drawing from scenarios in your own life, historical events, or Evan's experience, take a position and make your case. Consider every angle. What might be the benefits and the ramifications? Consider short- and long-term implications.

Perspective: Look at it from the other side. How does it feel to be on the receiving end of a lie? How might each member of the Murphy family feel about what Evan has done? And how about Evan's mom and the added lies he has told her?

Social Media

Social media can be defined as any platform that allows you to share media such as pages, videos, or text in different formats. There are different types of social media that serve various needs and social purposes.

1. Social Networking Sites

These are sites mainly used for connecting with friends and family. They focus more on person-to-person conversations. Aside from personal conversations, these platforms encourage knowledge sharing. These platforms can have different types of content formats from text to photos, videos, emojis, and other creative forms of content. They include Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter).

2. Image-based Sites

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and content like infographics, illustrations, and images capture the attention of users more. Social media apps like Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat are designed to amplify the sharing of images.

3. Video Sharing/Streaming Platforms

Video content is one of the most captivating forms of engagement. They make understanding easier which is why it is largely preferred by users. One major platform that reshaped how people interact with video content is YouTube. With over one billion active users monthly, the platform sometimes serves as a search engine for most users.

4. Discussion Forums

Discussion forums are very essential because they allow users to ask questions and get answers from different people. These platforms are designed to spark conversations based on shared interests or out of curiosity. Some of such platforms include Quora and Reddit.

5. Blogs and Community Platforms

Platforms like Tumblr and Medium allow users to create a community where people with similar interests can follow them and read all they have to say about certain topics.

Social media can be a great way to connect with your friends, but it can also be a cruel and dangerous world. Here's how you can make it a better place for yourself and others.

Don't say anything that you wouldn't say to the other person's face. Insults hurt online too.



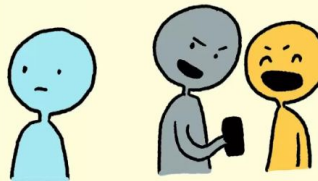
Don't post things you'd be embarrassed about if everyone could see them. Secrets are never safe online.



Remember that everything you post online could stay there forever, even if you delete it.



Don't talk behind other people's backs or make fun of them online.



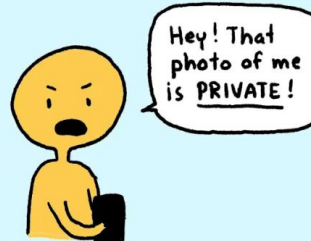
Don't accept friend requests from people you don't know.



Don't share personal information online, and never give anyone your password.



Don't post other people's pics or tag them without their permission.



If a friend is in trouble online, talk to an adult.



Report hateful, violent or inappropriate posts and comments.



© ELISE GRAVEL

Social Media (cont.)

Pros: Why is Social Media Good?

- staying connected with family and friends worldwide via email, text, FaceTime, etc.
- quick access to information and research
- online learning, job skills, content discovery (YouTube)
- involvement in civic engagement (fundraising, social awareness, provides a voice)
- great marketing tools
- opportunities for remote employment

Cons: Why is Social Media Bad?

- Online vs Reality. “Friends” on social media may not actually be friends, and may even be strangers.
- Increased usage. The more **time spent** on social media can lead to social anxiety, depression, and exposure to cyberbullying.
- Social Media is addicting. When you succeed at a game, your brain will give you a dose of dopamine making you happy.
- Fear of Missing Out. **FOMO** often leads to continual checking of sites and can affect your mental health.
- Self-image issues - earning others’ approval for appearance and comparing oneself to others.

Sadly, there is an ugly side to all that technology offers - **Cyberbullying**. Bullying, threats, and cruelty on social media are all signs that the person doing those things needs help.

- Every 7 minutes a child is bullied. Unfortunately, intervention is rare: an adult intervenes in only 4% of cases, and a peer in 11%.
- One out of four (25%) teens are bullied, while up to 43% have been bullied while online.
- An astonishing 85% of all cases of bullying are not addressed.

Social media poses risks and challenges, but it can also be a powerful tool for youth activism.

During the pandemic, young people found innovative ways to connect, learn, and educate others about the issues that matter to them. Civic engagement transformed and, with it, the World. Most notable is the use of social media to connect and engage with like-minded peers and promote online civic engagement. Hashtags, mentions, and direct messages make it easy for young people and organizations to interact and work together to create meaningful change.

The Power of Social Media to Spark Civic Discourse

Young people are also finding safe spaces online to connect with others who are like them or are facing similar challenges. Those who feel isolated or marginalized because of their identity or other challenges can find resources, information, and people they can relate to, forming connections and solidarity that can grow into political action. On TikTok, for instance, fun dance videos have been used to raise awareness about feminist issues, racism, and equal rights for all.



An infographic titled "Social Media & Mental Health" in a large, bold, black font at the top. The background is a light blue gradient. In the center, a man with dark hair, wearing a yellow hoodie, is looking down at a black smartphone. Surrounding him are several icons: a speech bubble with a hashtag, a sad face, a heart with a plus sign, a speech bubble with a question mark, and a blue speech bubble. The infographic is divided into two main sections by dark blue rounded rectangles. The left section is titled "Signs it's affecting your mental health" in white bold text, with a red circular icon containing a white exclamation mark above it. Below the title are three items, each with a white icon on a dark blue background: "Distracted during work/school" with a person icon and a thought bubble, "Comparing yourself to others" with a profile icon and a magnifying glass, and "Doing things just for likes" with a thumbs-up icon. The right section is titled "How to modify your use" in white bold text, with a green circular icon containing two white sliders above it. Below the title are three items, each with a white icon on a dark blue background: "Remove addictive apps" with a trash can icon, "Prioritise other activities" with a flowchart icon, and "Turn off notifications" with a bell icon and a red 'X'.

ACT I

ACT II

- Creating and displaying awareness posters at school
- Selling awareness-raising buttons
- Developing a social media campaign
- Speaking at a student assembly
- Launching a Kickstarter fundraising campaign

Do you unite behind a single cause or are there many individual interests? What are some of the actions you can take to be a changemaker around an issue that is important to you?

Understanding Social Anxiety

In *Dear Evan Hansen*, the title character struggles with social interaction and maintaining relationships, isolates himself, and fears being judged by others. Although Evan's specific problem is not named in the play, these are classic signs of social anxiety disorder, a mental health disorder that affects many young people, usually beginning during the early teen years. Also in the play, the character Connor Murphy takes his own life. Before his suicide, he is depicted as angry, oppositional, and isolated, which may be seen in young people struggling with depression. Self-harm, suicide attempts, and completed suicide are also strongly linked to adolescent mood disorders such as depression.

WHAT IS SOCIAL ANXIETY?

In the teen years, young people start being more aware of what other people think. There are “right” things to wear, or say, or do — and things that teens shouldn't do that could be embarrassing or weird. Some feel so worried about what others are thinking about them that it starts to impact negatively on their everyday lives. This kind of worry is called social anxiety disorder. Kids with social anxiety disorder aren't just nervous when they are at parties or giving a speech in class. Even answering a question in class can feel extremely scary; some kids worry they will humiliate themselves simply by eating in the school cafeteria or walking into a room. That's because kids with social anxiety fear they might do something embarrassing or offensive, and it will make others judge or reject them.

When having to perform in front of or be around others, people with social anxiety disorder may:

- Blush, sweat, or tremble
- Have a rapid heart rate
- Feel their “mind going blank,” or feel sick to their stomach
- Have a rigid body posture or speak with an overly soft voice
- Find it difficult to make eye contact, be around people they don't know, or talk to people in social situations, even when they want to
- Feel self-consciousness or fear that people will judge them negatively
- Avoid places where there are other people or situations where they may have to interact with others
- Analyze their performance and identify self-perceived flaws in interactions
- Expect the worst possible consequences from a negative social situation

Children and teens with social anxiety disorder may also experience:

- Trying to avoid going to school
- Difficulty in making friends
- Complaining of stomach aches or headaches
- Having emotional outbursts in social situations
- Refusing to speak or participate in social situations

ACTIVITY:

In the musical, the character Evan gets scared and panics onstage in front of the public. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt full of social anxiety?

What are some tools a person can use to help center themselves and calm themselves down?

IS IT STRESS OR AN ANXIETY DISORDER?

Life can be stressful—a person may feel stressed about a demanding job, a performance at school, or a life change. Everyone feels stress from time to time.

Stress is the physical or mental response to an external cause, such as having a lot of homework or having an illness. A stressor may be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can happen repeatedly over a long time.

Anxiety is the body's reaction to stress and can occur even if there is no current threat.

While occasional stress and anxiety are normal, they shouldn't control your life.

Understanding Depression

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

A young person with depression experiences persistent, intense feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and irritability that make it hard to function day to day. We don't know exactly how or why depression develops, but it's not usually caused by bad things happening.

Depression is called an "internalizing disorder," which means that it primarily affects a young person's emotional life rather than their behavior. Because of this, it can take a while for others to recognize it — or for a young person to realize that his/her thinking, and emotional responses, is troubled. Adolescent depression is more common than some people think. According to some statistics, more than 12% of teens ages 15 and 16 struggle with depression. For teens ages 17 and 18 it jumps to more than 15%.

HOW CAN YOU SPOT SOCIAL ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION?

Young people with social anxiety disorder often think their anxiety is obvious, which can create more anxiety. But, in actuality, other people might not recognize it, because a lot of the symptoms of anxiety are happening under the surface. Panicked thoughts, a racing heart, or an upset stomach aren't apparent from the outside. For other kids, however, anxiety can produce outward signs such as anger or aggression.

Similarly, adolescents are often moody so it can be difficult to recognize when someone has become depressed. The first sign people tend to notice is withdrawal from friends, or when someone stops doing things he/she usually likes to do.

These are some of the most prominent signs of depression in teens:

- Persistent sadness or irritability
- Feeling worthless, or hopeless about the future
- Diminished interest in most activities, especially things they used to enjoy
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Low energy and motivation
- Decline in academic performance
- Decreased ability to think or concentrate
- Thinking about suicide or death

THE STIGMA OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Many people don't want to believe that young people can have mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. They say that young people with serious mental health problems are just going through regular growing pains. As we see in *Dear Evan Hansen*, the emotional problems that young people face are very real.

Adolescent psychiatric disorders are common (one in five children and teens struggle with a diagnosable disorder), and have real biological

and environmental causes. But the denial of these facts leads struggling teens and their families to feelings of shame and fear of judgment. Millions of children and teens don't seek treatment because of this stigma, but it is vital to be open and ask for help.

HOW CAN TEENS GET HELP IF THEY ARE ANXIOUS OR DEPRESSED?

Teens who think they need help with an emotional or mental health issue might not know how to ask for help. If they are very anxious, it might be embarrassing for them to admit that things that seem easy for other people are very hard for them. If they are depressed, they may worry that others won't understand and will tell them to "snap out of it" — or that family and friends will be disappointed. But parents, teachers, and friends can be more sympathetic and less judgmental than teens imagine. First, however, they need to know how a young person is feeling. The sooner a teen asks for help, the sooner they will start feeling better.

5 Action Steps to Help Someone Having Thoughts of Suicide

 ASK <p>"Are you thinking about killing yourself?"</p>	 BE THERE <p>Listen without judgment and acknowledge their feelings.</p>	 HELP KEEP THEM SAFE <p>Reduce their access to lethal items or places.</p>	 HELP THEM CONNECT <p>Call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988).</p>	 FOLLOW UP <p>Stay in touch to see how they're doing.</p>
--	--	--	---	---



Resources

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, don't wait—

- Tell a trusted adult (parent, teacher, school nurse, coach, pediatrician, etc.)
- Contact an anonymous hotline:
 - Text or Call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Hotline (988)
 - The Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ+ youth):
 - ◆ Text 'START' to 678-678
 - ◆ Call 1-866-488-7386
 - 1.800.LIFENET (543-3638)
 - Utah Crisis Line (direct): 801-587-3000 or 833-723-3326. You'll receive phone support and Mobile Crisis Outreach or Stabilization and Mobile Response to come to you.

Not an emergency but need to talk:

- Utah Warm Line: 801-587-1055 (8 a.m.–11 p.m., daily). Peer specialists offer support when you just need someone to listen.

ACTIVITY: Write a letter to yourself that begins like this:

"Dear _____, Today is going to be a good day and here's why..."

What are you most looking forward to? What, if anything, do you hope to achieve? What are the challenges you might face? How will you work to overcome those hurdles?

Across

2. Connor Murphy's sister
5. Instrument that Zoe plays in Jazz Band
6. an act/token of remembrance (also a song title)
7. First word of a popular song title from this show

9. Evan's pretend messages are formatted in ____

11. "you will be ____"

12. The app "X" used to be called ____

Down

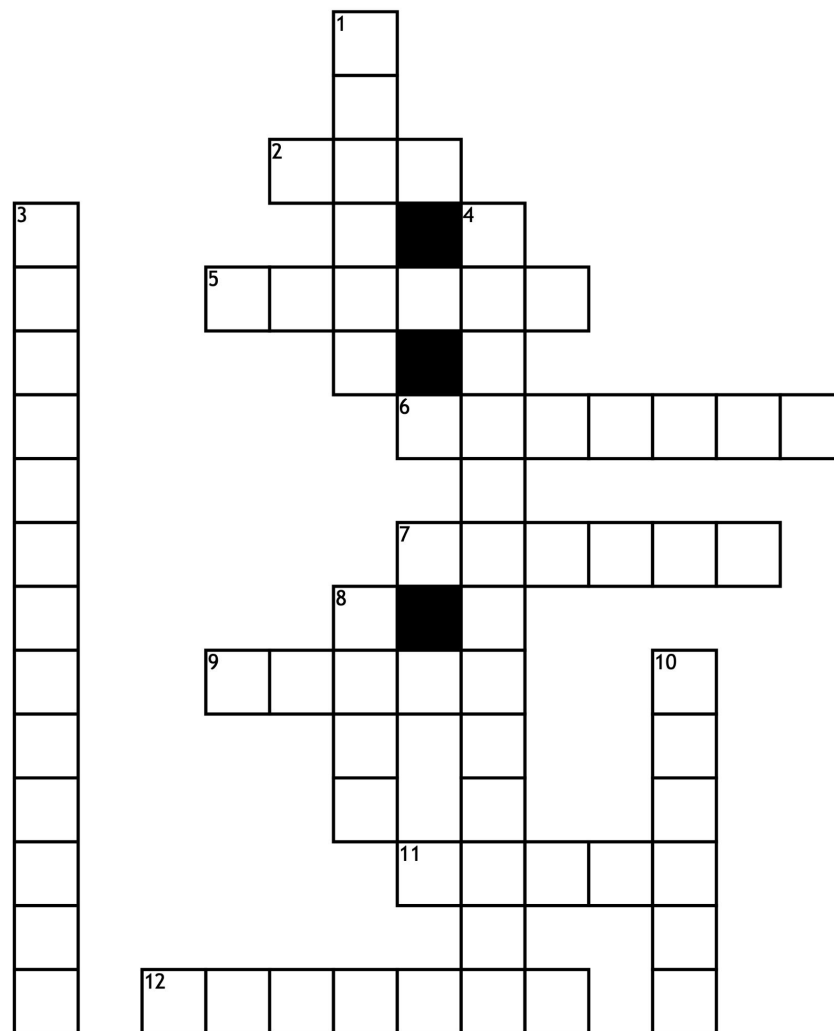
1. Small pictures in texts to Express emotion

3. organization Evan creates in Connor's memory

4. Sports object that Larry sings to Evan about

8. Evan's broken arm has a ____

10. Evan is waving through a ____



Meet the Cast



MARIKA AUBREY* (Cynthia Murphy) has worked in television, film, cabaret, theatre, voiceover, and features on five album releases. She is best known for her role of Mrs. Wormwood in the Royal Shakespeare Company's Australian production of *Matilda the Musical*. Other career highlights include *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*; *Songs for A New World*; *The Last Five Years*; Lincoln Center's *South Pacific* at Sydney Opera House; and Aldonza in *Man of La Mancha*. Most recently, she played Beverly Bass in *Come From Away*, on the 1st National Tour and on Broadway. This one is for the 6 - no matter what.



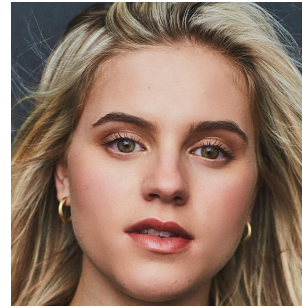
JORDAN BRIGGS* (Connor Murphy) is an actor, singer, and writer currently based in Salt Lake City. He is so excited to be returning to PTC after appearing in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* earlier this year. Other local theatrical credits include: Adam Hochberg in *An American in Paris* (The Ruth), Jack Kelly in *Newsies* (Sundance), Ray Dooley in *Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Hart Theater Company), and many others. He has also performed abroad in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland with Kloun's Theater Company. Upcoming film projects include *The Edge of Normal* directed by Carlota Pereda and *Return to Strasbourg* directed by Jake Van Wagoner. "As always, this one is for my little brother, Landon; your soul is beautiful." Jordan is represented by Talent Management Group. Insta: [@_jordan.briggs_](#)



ANDREW SAMONSKY* (Larry Murphy) Pioneer Theatre Company debut! Broadway/NYC: *Lempicka* (Tadeusz Lempicki, original cast recording), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Neville Landless), *Scandalous* (Ormiston, original cast recording), *South Pacific* (Lt. Cable, Live from Lincoln Center PBS Broadcast), *Merrily We Roll Along* (Encores!), *Fiorello!* (Encores!), *Austen's Pride* (Darcy, Carnegie Hall), *Queen of the Mist* (Russell, Drama Desk nomination, original cast recording). National Tour: *Parade* (Hugh Dorsey), *Come From Away* (Kevin T.), *The Bridges of Madison County* (Robert Kincaid), *Disney's On the Record* (Nick, original cast recording). World Premieres: *Little Miss Sunshine* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Benny & Joon* (Old Globe), *Tales of the City* (ACT), *Somewhere in Time* (Portland Center Stage). TV: *Elementary*, *Madame Secretary*. Soloist: NY Philharmonic, Boston Pops. Studio cast album of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Captain Phoebus).



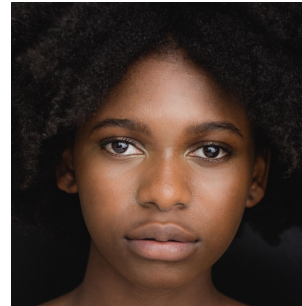
LARRY SAPERSTEIN* (Jared Kleinman) is excited to be making his PTC debut! He gained widespread recognition as "Big Red" in the 14-time Emmy-nominated series, *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series* on Disney+. Recent/Favorite credits include *The Bad News Bears* (Industry Workshop), *The Griswolds' Broadway Vacation* (Premier Reading), *Miracle on 34th Street* (West Coast Tour), and *Fiddler on the Roof* (Engeman Theater). Check out his weekly podcast, *Let's Talk About That! With Larry Saperstein and Jacob Bellotti* on all audio streaming platforms! All socials [@larrysaperstein](#)



ELYSE BELL* (Zoe Murphy) is thrilled to be making her regional theatre debut at Pioneer Theatre Company! Other credits include: *Don't Say Good Luck* (Netflix), and *Queens* (ABC). She is a BFA graduate of Pace University, and a Jimmy Awards alumni. [@elysecbell](#)



KYLE DALSIMER* (Evan Hansen) is THRILLED to be making his Pioneer debut with a character he's dreamed of playing since he was in high school. Recent credits include *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (Ivoryton Playhouse), *Ride the Cyclone* (Arena Stage), *American Psycho* (Monumental Theatre, Helen Hayes Award - Lead Performer in a Musical), *The SpongeBob Musical* (Toby's Dinner Theatre, Helen Hayes Award - Lead Performer in a Musical), *Bright Star* (Franklin Performing Arts Company). Thank you to Geoff Josselson, with love to Jim, and to Mom, for teaching me to never give up on your dreams. Instagram [@KyleDalsimer](#)



KHADIJA SANKOH* (Alana Beck) is a first generation Sierra Leonean-American artist born and bred in New Jersey. She is so excited to be portraying this dream role and sharing Alana's story! Select credits: *Little Shop of Horrors* (Off Broadway); *The Diary of A Wimpy Kid Studio Cast Recording* (streaming!), 92NY's *Lyrics and Lyricists* (Dir. Christian Borle); *Ten Brave Seconds* reading at PTC... She was nominated for the 2021 Paper Mill Rising Star Award for Outstanding Solo Performance ("Waiting For Life" from *Once On This Island*). Most impressively, she's listened to *The Phantom of the Opera at the Royal Albert Hall* soundtrack an unhealthy amount of times. Love to my dream team Mara Ent and Buchwald, shoutout to my voice teacher Deric Rosenblatt! [@khadija.e.sankoh](#)



DONNA VIVINO* (Heidi Hansen) is thrilled to make her Pioneer Theatre Company debut. At age 8, she originated the role of Young Cosette in *Les Misérables* on Broadway. Since then, she's starred as Elphaba (*Wicked*), Grizabella (*Cats*), Diana (*Next to Normal*), Mary (*Merrily We Roll Along*), and Jersey in Alicia Keys' *Hell's Kitchen*. Other Broadway credits include *Hairspray*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and *Fame Becomes Me* opposite Martin Short. A 2024 Grammy nominee for *Sondheim Unplugged*, her screen work includes *Law & Order: FBI: Most Wanted*, and *Ezra*. Donna is artistic director of Broadway Unlimited, a youth arts program. A proud single mom, this role is a dream come true. Instagram: [@donnavivino](#)

ANSWER KEY

