

About the Artist: **STEPHANIE MORIN-ROBERT - BLINDSIDE**



Artist Biography:

● Where did art start for you?

I discovered my passion for creating and performing when I was just a little girl. It was my way of expressing myself and my way of working through my insecurities and family struggles. That said, it all started in my family's living room.

● What motivated you to pursue this art form?

My motivation to pursue this art form professionally was triggered by a Musical Theatre production I saw in middle school. Shortly after, I auditioned for that same company, was accepted and ended up touring with them for four consecutive years while completing my high school education correspondence on the road. And I've been touring ever since.

● Artist's vision and/or professional goal

My goal as a multi-disciplinary artist is to create and inspire. I create work that is true to my values and beliefs, while challenging myself (and audiences) to move outside their comfort zones. I inspire others to move towards self-acceptance, healthier relationships and maybe even spark their interest in sharing their personal experiences to help others.

● What inspired you to perform in schools?

- School is where I discovered my passion for the performing arts
- School is where I navigated the most difficult situations in my life
- School is where I gained the tools to empower myself (and others)
- School is where I learned to truly embrace differences in myself and others
- I want to be the spokesperson I needed when I was young. I want to help students empower other students and share the message that it is alright to be different. I want to pay this message forward to middle and high school students at an influential time in the growth of society.
- Working with youth is among one of the most rewarding jobs that I have done. ArtStarts is a trusted organization that will help me continue doing this work in a professional and highly effective context.

About the Performance

Brief description of the performance:

● Discipline

multidisciplinary (interactive comedy, storytelling, dance, live video projection)

● Duration/sequence

45 minutes + Q&A (flexible depending on the needs of the class and school)

● What to expect during the performance

- Informative facts about the eye cancer I had (retinoblastoma) and how prosthetic eyes are crafted
- Stories about my prosthetic eye falling out during a game of dodgeball and at a freeze dance party when I was in the third grade
- Stories about my cat from the make a wish foundation
- Stories about my first time meeting someone else who has a prosthetic eye at summer camp and how that changed things for me
- How I used my prosthetic eye as a superpower to get out of class, scare my substitute teacher and make money
- Removal of my prosthetic eye from the eye socket and using the prosthetic as different puppets that help tell my story
- An invitation to audience (student or teacher) to hold my prosthetic eye

● What is expected of the audience during the performance

Know

The audience is free to react: to laugh, gasp, cry, giggle nervously etc. All reactions are welcome. The goals of the show are to defuse fear and shame around disabilities, to develop empathy, encourage vulnerability, and normalize and celebrate differences.

● **Brief description of who and what the students will see during the performance**

The show starts off with me standing in front of a camera, with a close up of my face projected on a screen. I move from the camera to centre stage and share all true comedic stories about my 7-year-old self changing schools in the middle of the third grade and trying to fit in as a one-eyed cancer survivor. Throughout the performance, I move back and forth from the camera to centre stage. There is a shadow dance section that represents my countless hospital visits and near the end of the show I gently take out my prosthetic eye. I talk about how the eye is made and about the type of cancer that I had. I use comedy to enlist the audience in understanding the details of my disability without becoming overwhelmed. I take care to ensure audience safety throughout the arc of my story.

● **Technical requirements**

Sound system and microphone, lights off (as dark as possible) and white surface/wall or screen for projection, if possible.

● **Links to artist websites or additional resources for teachers to access**

<https://www.stephaniemorinrobert.com/blindside>

About the Art Form

Background information of the art form:

● **History of the art form**

Stephanie is an interdisciplinary artist whose work is devoted to breaking boundaries. Colliding contemporary performance with frank and authentic storytelling, she creates intelligent content while cultivating simplicity, accessibility & direct relationship with audience. She is especially well-known for her expansive interpretation of storytelling and choreography and her ability to foster audience interest for theatre in non-traditional settings.

● **Main themes or guiding concepts for students to be aware of for the performance**

Themes: Connection, inclusion, diversity, support, expression & difference

The power of honesty in storytelling. This show will give students a better understanding of empathy, vulnerability and trust. For secondary students it is suggested that they come to the performance without any preconceived notions of what to expect so that the story will have maximum impact. Telling them the show is about bullying or self-expectancy may turn them off. I say let them discover it for themselves.

● **Value of the performance for the students. What is the message that you hope students take away from the performance?**

Everyone is beautiful in their own way. If you are comfortable with yourself, anything is possible. Being different is cool. Comedy is a great tool for coping with hard times. Laughter is healing and contagious. It's ok to be curious and ask questions.

● **Links to additional resources for teachers to access (optional)**

Additional information about **Retinoblastoma**: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retinoblastoma>

Additional information about **Ocularists** (people who make prosthetic eyes): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocularist>

Additional information about **Inclusion**: https://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=213%C2%A0

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions	Links to Curriculum
○ How is your body different than other people? ○ What do those differences allow you to do? ○ What things in society exclude persons with disabilities? ○ What is inclusion?	● Arts Education: choosing artistic elements; purposeful play; exploring identity; using processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques & environments to create and communicate; inclusion and diversity. Performance connects our experiences to the experiences of others. Experiencing art challenges our point of view and expands our understanding of others. Creative expression of our unique identities and voices. ● Social studies/Health & Science: Learning about cancer and the social impact of childhood trauma. Recognize and respect for the diversity of individuals in our communities.
Post-Performance Activities	Post-Performance Discussion Questions
1. Take a closer look - (Writing & Representing) - 60 min Have each student recall a personal experience whereby they were either:	● Can you identify what types of theatrical expression Stephanie uses in her storytelling (comedy, tragedy, melodrama etc)?

- bullied or
- they bullied someone or
- they were a bystander to a bullying event

Understand

It could be an experience at school or outside of school and at any age, from minor to major. The important thing is that they can recall the events that happened. Next have them each write at least a paragraph describing the experience on blank paper (all the same kind of paper for anonymity). TIP: Remind them to include how they felt during the experience. They should remain anonymous – no names on papers. This will keep the confidentiality of this sensitive subject.

Next, collect the finished stories, mix them up and then hand them out – one to each student, making sure they confirm that it is NOT their own work. Then have the students learn the story and “own” the material like an actor, and present it in front of the class in a “cold read”, which means that they must not read into the page but instead speak as much of the text as possible with their heads up and out to the audience. This forces a slower and more focused read. The stories will no doubt be informative, moving, carry an impact and usually create empathy among the students, as well as help those who may have felt “alone”, feel less so. Other feelings and issues may arise and may be important to deal with later with the school counselor.

2. Find your “inner storyteller” -50 min

Here is an exercise to help students to find their personal, natural and most engaging talents in storytelling. With the students have one student play the role of listener while the other answer does their best to answer the following prompt. Describe a time in your life when you were the most frightened, or describe what you did on your birthday last year. The listening student should take mental notes on what was most engaging about the recounting including facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, pauses, overall energy, voice tone, syntax, the way the story unfolded, the way it started, etc. Then have the students switch roles and do it again. They will learn from each other through their own feedback, by learning to actively observe and by taking mutual risks all of which will help to develop strong and responsive storytelling skills. Working in partnered pairs offers students a direct and personal reflection of how their own natural qualities can be employed (and potentially honed) to move and inspire people through storytelling.

- How did comedy affect the mood and focus of her story?
- Can you identify a use of symbolism in Stephanie’s performance to convey an abstract idea?
- What do you think Stephanie is communicating when she moves between storytelling, dance and video projection?
- What you have personally learned from Stephanie’s performance?
- If you were to create and perform a solo show based on your own personal experience or insecurity, what would it be about?

Learn more about this artist online at artstarts.com/aotd