

The Power of Storytelling: *SURVIVORS* Comes to Grant High School

In January 2026, Ulysses S. Grant High School and Magnets had the privilege of hosting *Survivors*, a powerful touring production by Arts for Change that teaches the history and enduring lessons of the Holocaust. The performance was especially meaningful to our school community because the playwright, Wendy Kout and the Executive Producer, Genie Benson are both proud Grant High School alumni.

Even before the curtain rose, Arts for Change provided our educators with an extensive Educator's Guide designed to help students better understand the themes and historical significance of the production. The guide included vocabulary, pre- and post-performance discussion questions, biographical information about the Holocaust survivors featured in the play, and numerous hyperlinked resources that enriched classroom learning and encouraged meaningful conversations with our students.

SURVIVORS has been performed, not just at Grant High School, but also at some of our neighboring high school campuses. Every educator I spoke with described it as an unforgettable experience. Based on the performance at Grant High School, they were absolutely right. At the Grant High School performance, we had an additional bonus: Los Angeles City Councilmember Adrin Nazarian spoke to our students about the importance of the play and also using lessons of history to inform our understanding of today's world. I should note that we have a significant Armenian population at our school, and the lessons of the Holocaust and *Survivors* reverberate even more deeply among our students since many of them know survivors from the 1915 Armenian Genocide.

The performance itself was remarkable in its simplicity and power. Featuring a diverse cast—some of whom portrayed multiple characters—the production relied on minimalistic set design and costuming. Yet those artistic choices only heightened the audience's focus on the stories being told. The message of the play transcended the stage, reminding us that some of history's most important lessons are carried through human experiences and personal testimony.

Following the hour-long performance, the production features a 30-minute question-and-answer session with the cast, playwright, and Holocaust survivors they call a "talk back." Many of our students were overwhelmed to learn that an actual Holocaust survivor was sitting in the audience alongside them. The opportunity to hear directly from someone who experienced these events firsthand added an extraordinary level of credibility, significance, and emotion to the experience. It transformed history from something students read about in textbooks into something deeply personal and real.

The lessons of *SURVIVORS* feel especially relevant in today's political and social climate. At a time when division, prejudice, and intolerance continue to challenge communities around the world, the play serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of hatred and the importance of empathy, courage, and standing up for one another.

Earlier this school year, I had the opportunity to participate in the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles' Third Annual Education Leaders Summit. It was one of the most powerful and thought-provoking professional learning experiences I have had in more than twenty-five years as an educator. The themes explored during that summit—memory, humanity, responsibility, and the importance of combating antisemitism and all forms of hate—resonated deeply with me as I recalled watching *SURVIVORS*. Those messages have stayed with me since both experiences and continue to shape my thinking about the kind of schools and communities we strive to create.

I am also incredibly grateful that this performance was made possible entirely through a grant and was provided to our school free of charge. The production's cast and crew demonstrated the highest level of professionalism, and their dedication to educating young people through the arts was evident in every aspect of the experience.

At Grant High School, we are committed to creating opportunities for academic discourse and fostering an inclusive and respectful environment where all students feel seen, valued, and heard. *SURVIVORS* was an important part of that work this year. Through the power of theater and storytelling, our students were challenged to think critically, engage in meaningful conversations, and reflect on their own responsibilities as members of a diverse and interconnected world.

We are thankful to Arts for Change, Wendy Kout and Genie Benson, and everyone involved in bringing *SURVIVORS* to our campus. The performance reminded us that history is not simply about remembering the past—it is about learning from it so that we can build a more compassionate and just future for all.



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