

Episode 7 - Life In The Middle @ NHMS

[00:00:05] Hi, everyone, and welcome to our Life in the Middle podcast. I'm your host, David Simpson, and I'm the principal here at Northern Hills Middle School. Every episode I'll be sharing updates and happenings from NHMS along with bringing guests to share advice and tips on how to help us all navigate these middle years. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29] Good afternoon and welcome back to another outstanding and exciting life in the middle at an NHMS podcast. We are super excited. We have a record number of guests in the recording studio today. We have four of members of our Husky crew and not just any members of our husky crew, but we have four students who just came off a week of performing in their drama class, whether they were on stage behind the scenes and they put out an outstanding show. Drama is a class here, semester long class here at Northern Hills, and it's an exciting opportunity for kids to get involved. Last episode we heard from some of our fall athletes and today is just another example of what helps make Northern Hills. But what makes that middle school experience an exciting one is that there is something for everyone. Kids can get involved, whether it's through sports like we featured last week or here in our in our drama performance.

[00:01:29] And I can say, having watched both the Wednesday and Friday performance this year, it was outstanding. So we have four of our drama students in this recording studio today. We have Meredith, Katie, Avery and Jordan. How are you today, Meredith? I'm doing great. Thank you. So, Meredith, was this the first time you had signed up for drama? Was this a repeat class for you?

[00:01:52] This is a repeat class for me. I did it last year, too.

[00:01:56] What made you decide to sign up for drama again?

[00:01:59] I guess last year it was just a really fun experience to get to know everyone in the cast and be a part of something really cool.

[00:02:06] What was your role in this year's production of Parent? What was the parent trap? Right. Yeah, ok. I played Maggie the mom. And what was that like for you is pretty cool.

[00:02:18] I had a lot of lines, a lot to memorize, but other than that, it was really cool. I liked being a part of it.

[00:02:24] When you first got your script and you saw your lines, were you overwhelmed by the amount that you had to memorize?

[00:02:30] Well, not really. I kind of gotten used to it after a little while, but yeah, I really was a lot.

[00:02:38] So when I ask that question, Avery over here was shaking her head. Yes. Avery, do you mind? What were you laughing out, laughing at it with that question?

[00:02:47] I didn't think that I was going to have as big of a role in the play that I did. So I got the script and I was like, whoa!

[00:02:56] Well, with a lot of lines. What was your role in the play? I was Vicky like the evil step mom. The evil stepmom. Yeah.

[00:03:04] All right. Would you describe yourself as evil in real life? Was this a hard thing for you to play?

[00:03:08] Kind of. I'm kind of like a more shy, timid person. So I had to kind of really get into character.

[00:03:15] And how did you do that, if that's. Is that part of something you learned in class that Sra. Groce Helped you with that or.

[00:03:21] Yeah, she helped. Like, I could I just kind of picked one person and then just kind of pretended to be them. Like whether it was someone I knew or like a celebrity and just tried to impersonate them because they were close to the character.

[00:03:33] So, Avery, as a seventh grader, this is the first time that you took drama. Why did you sign up for drama?

[00:03:39] I am kind of a musical geek. I love watching that kind of stuff. I love to sing. So I just thought that that would be a cool class to try to see the behind the scenes of it.

[00:03:51] And did it meet your expectations? Were able to see behind the scenes and perform as well? Yeah, for sure. Awesome. So, Jordan, we're gonna switch over to Jordan. Jordan, what was your role this year and the performance?

[00:04:04] I was Mrs. Inch, that camp counselor.

[00:04:07] What was your experience this year with drama?

[00:04:10] It was really good. I feel like backstage. There is so much going on. And then onstage. You were just like a little bit nervous, but like everything was still very like it was very much an experience.

[00:04:21] So Jordan, Senora Groce described you as a stage master who stepped up and organized the stage crew. Why would she say that?

[00:04:31] I feel like some people for a stage crew were like, oh, I'm perfect to be onstage more so they're like, I don't really need to know the stage stuff. And since I had kind of a smaller role, I paid attention to where all the props needed to go. And so like sometimes like the Martinelli signed for one of the scenes, like was on the table when it wasn't supposed to be. So like people would move it around. And like some people that actually paid attention to we're supposed to be like, say, where it's supposed to be.

[00:04:57] So one of the things when you watch a drama performance or a musical or a play as the audience members, we see the actors and actresses performing lines. But as you just said, there's so much behind the scenes that we don't even realize and I know Sra. Groce was super proud of the stage crew because there was a lot of transitions this year compared to previous performances. Did you ever stress you out at all?

[00:05:21] I would say, yeah, cause for one of our scenes in the beginning, we had to have milk instead of taking the milk out, we left it in. So for our practices, we had to switch the

milk because it was starting to spoil so much that it was gonna explode. So yeah, we had to figure that out and it was just an experience for everything, even on stage, but it was a really good experience.

[00:05:43] That would have been a memory to have exploding in milk during the performance of the parent trap. Katie. Katie, how are you today? I'm good. And so tell us, as an eighth grader, was this your first time in drama or had you taken it before?

[00:05:59] This is my second time doing job. I did it last year and a second semester.

[00:06:04] So same question I gave Meredith. And then why'd you come back? Why'd you sign up for drama again?

[00:06:08] I came back because it was really fun. And you get to meet a lot of new people every year if you do it. It was just really fun to know was. What was it like to go on stage or go backstage and see what was happening?

[00:06:23] So let's pretend you're being interviewed on a podcast. Oh, wait, you are being interviewed on a podcast? What would be the best experience if you could describe it? Maybe the best experience from this semester of the parent trap, a memory you've had could be in there leading up to it. The performance itself. What would be your experience that you'd want to highlight?

[00:06:42] Probably the play itself, because those are some of the days where you're like you're like you're kind of nervous, but at the same time, you're like, really ready for it. Pretend not that you don't show up on stage, but then like backstage you're like, oh, I don't. But it is pretty fun to do.

[00:07:01] I saw I saw the hard work. You had some after school, you during crew. It was a lot of time again. These things just don't come together. And I think the hard work that the four of you and the rest of the class put into it was definitely seen. So, Katie, what was your role in this year's performance?

[00:07:19] So this year, I pledge one of Sharon's friends, Ruth. And it was actually very small roles. And what I had last year, which was one of the main roles last year.

[00:07:28] So what was that experience for you having a different level of role this year?

[00:07:32] Well, I didn't really mind having a small role because then if I when I was finished with the scenes that I was in, then I could just help out backstage more, too.

[00:07:43] Was that a neat learning experience, kind of being behind the scenes to as well, seeing all the different things that Jordan talked about, all the different blocking and props and everything?

[00:07:52] Yeah. Because this year I think I had a lot of more moving around than what I think was last year, second semester play did.

[00:07:58] So Meredith. Yes. So parent trap. Who. Who decides that? Is that a Sra. Groce Decision? Is that a collaborate decision among the class? And then is that did you do anything with the script? Did you do some editing with that as a as a class? Can you tell our listeners about that?

[00:08:14] So we decide as a class whether we want to make an already existing play or just come up with our own kind of like MASH two plays together. And we all voted and decided to do an already existing play. So then we had to figure out what do we want to do? So each like we got into kind of groups and we each group came up with like one or two plays that they wanted to do. And we kind of wrote it down and then voted from there and we had to. We ended up coming up with the parent trap, but we had to edit it from there because we have to do a smaller play than what was already existing. So we did take out a few lines, but we tried to make it as relative as possible to the original.

[00:08:57] What was the reasoning or the thinking besides writing your own play? What were the pros and cons of that, do you think? Do you talk about that as a class?

[00:09:07] I don't really remember talking about it as a class, but I'd say one of the pros is you get to kind of know what it's like to write a script. I don't know. It's hard to explain, but one of the cons will be it's hard to like mash it all together in 30 minutes when there is like a two hour play.

[00:09:31] Yeah, that makes sense. I could see that it could be a difficulty, especially with only a semester long class seeing each other for a day and then also having to actually perform the actual play.

[00:09:40] Avery, coming back to Avery now, one of the great things about being a someone watching the play is that sometimes there are mistakes or goofs that happen that we as audience members will never know anything like that happened this year. That was funny. Or a sign being wrong or a missed word. Again, that's the great thing about a musical or play. Oftentimes the audience has no idea that there was something wrong. You're smiling.

[00:10:07] So there were a couple things. So the first one was my little like Mike. We had a little sponge over it to help get some milk to stop feedback from coming, and it fell off in the middle of the scene. And the girl who played the priest, like, casually picked it up and pulled it out of her popcorn box and gave it to me. And the other one was me and Meredith were doing a scene. And we completely missed like two whole paragraphs of lines, missed him completely. They saying, no, yeah, we just completely missed them. And we just kinda like made it work from there. And it was it was like it was kind of funny because we were just like this seemed like this should be a longer conversation. But then we just. I decided it was fun.

[00:10:53] So when you said you made it work, did you then have to ad lib to make sense of it? Because otherwise it may have not made sense.

[00:10:59] Yeah, a little bit. We just picked a couple lines from those paragraphs that we could like sneak in to make it look sound like an actual conversation.

[00:11:08] So, Jordan, you were backstage backstage during this time? Yes. Are you aware of these mishaps as are happening, as kind of the stage master backstage, or do you hearing this and just shaking your head or are you laughing? And what's the scene behind behind the stage? Would all of, you know, kind of a mistakes happened, but nobody else does.

[00:11:27] Shockingly enough, I was actually backstage when Avery comes in saying, I don't know where my sponge went. And so I'm like, okay, cut like our like made. Could she like actually like pretend to like sweep or pick it up. And then Johanna just comes in with like her little popcorn and you're super funny. And then I also remember one of the mishaps was I was watching from the side. She was the other stepmom, Vicky. She put her mike on the wrong side, which was OK. But you could see the honey enough because I put actual honey on her. And when getting out of the tent, she had honey on her hand. So she slipped. But I looked purposeful like she actually did it. But she didn't. And then she got honey all over the stage and everyone that picked it up got honey like all over them. And it was just crazy.

[00:12:15] I do remember that slip. But you're right to us as the audience. It looked like it was planned and she did a good job with that slip then. So, Katie, your laugh and over there during this entire time, what do you want to add?

[00:12:27] Oh, well, I have actually seen some really funny scenes that for mishaps. But like, you just don't say anything. But it was really funny when she accidentally slipped, you know, that it wasn't on purpose, but it did look real.

[00:12:45] And I was impressed. Everybody kept their cool and no one. You're all probably in the inside laughing or backstage laughing. But everybody kept their cool and made it seem like it was supposed to be. So, again, I just think the performance this year and I I know talking to students and staff was fantastic. And part of school, we learn a lot of academic content. You know, we learn math and science and really important stuff. But some would say that and I would say this is to as you learn a lot through a drop in drama performance, through putting on a production like this. Meredith, what are some things you think you've learned through this experience of being a in drama class here at Northern Hills?

[00:13:26] I remember from last year we had like a quiz at the end of the semester and I remember it was kind of hard to study for that because I did take a couple classes at Civic about theater, but I never really learned any of that stuff. So it was really fun to learn about that. I don't remember any of it now, but I think mainly blocking was something I learned about because it's like you have to write down on your script where you have to be when you have to be there. And it's really difficult to keep track of all that, but you really learn to keep up every.

[00:14:01] What would you say is something as a seventh grader that you learned in drama that you wouldn't have learned maybe in a traditional class? So why is this elective elective important?

[00:14:11] So I learned a lot of things. One of them was memorization. She taught us lots of ways to help memorizing lines, ways to like little tricks, to help you get through the mall and make sure they're in the right order. And we like we had to rewrite all of our lines and blocking on separate sheets of paper. Then the day after that, we had like a quiz and most people knew every single one of their lines from not knowing them like a day before. So it was pretty cool.

[00:14:40] And you started off this podcast talking about being shy a little bit, and I guess I would be surprised at that through this podcast. Does a class like drama help you with that or help with that public speaking?

[00:14:53] Yeah, I used to have a fear of public speaking, so we did lots of exercises to like get rid of stage fright and other things too. Like help you like branch out a little bit.

[00:15:04] In Jordan, we're going to finish with you as a student, as our seventh graders get the chance to select classes for next year or our sixth graders who are at northern trails, think about their core selections. What would you say about someone thinking about signing up for drama here at Northern Hills?

[00:15:21] You should do it just. It's a really, really fun class. There's not that many boys in it. So boys are less likely to do it. But I feel like then you have more input and you're more likely to get a role because there's you know, we had to have some girls playing boys because they dropped out of the class. But it helps you a lot, especially if you want to do like theater in high school. And I just truly think that you should do it because it just helps on so much.

[00:15:52] Awesome. Well, I want to say, on behalf of our listeners, I want to say thank you to Jordan, Avery, Katie and Meredith for joining us here in the recording studio. And thank you for your performance last week. I know it wasn't easy. You took a lot of courage and a lot of hard work. And I just wanna let you know how proud all the teachers we all were of your performance.

[00:16:11] So thank you so much for coming in the studio today and look forward to seeing the second semester performance of drama class. Thanks.

[00:16:23] And we are now lucky enough to have the instructor, the teacher of our drama class, Amisha Groce in our studio with us. Sra. Groce, thank you so much for coming in today.

[00:16:33] Well, thank you for having me, Dr. Simpson. It's a pleasure to be here now, Sra. Groce.

[00:16:37] You're smiling, the old a little more relaxed and less stressed than I than I saw you last week. What was that like last week with the performance?

[00:16:45] Last week was a whirlwind. Again, people like to give me in the class credit, but there it really does take a village to put together production. We get a lot of student help from students after school. And actually this year, one student who wasn't even in our drama class did our lights for us. Her name's Nora.

[00:17:05] That's awesome. So tell our listeners a little bit. We had a chance to hear from Jordan, Avery, Cady and Meredith and all four loved drama. Can you tell us a little bit about the history of the class? Because this is now my third year as the principal here at Northern Hills. That class was already here tonight when I got here. Do you know the history of that or how? How long have you been teaching drama and any background information on the class?

[00:17:28] Yeah. A little bit about the background. I know that it originally was a class. They had plays that were already selected and the kids kind of got to choose from just plays that were already written and they were put on the production. And that was kind of what it was. I've been teaching it, I think about six years now. Honestly, I can't remember. But when it fell on my lap, which I was very glad it did, because they were almost got rid of it. And I was like, please, no, please, can I just just let me try it? And I decided that I

wanted it to be an elective. I mean, I'm sorry, a sampler of drama and all things drama. So the kids get to write. They get to direct. They get to do auditions. They get to be stage crew and act. So they get a taste of all of the various aspects of what theater is like. So that if they go to the high school or go to civic theater, they kind of have an idea what it is that they are good at or what it is that they love about drama.

[00:18:34] So I could see you have a passion for drama. Our listeners probably don't know, but you are a wonderful actress yourself and you perform here in the local community, is that correct?

[00:18:46] That's correct. And more recently, I've been kind of shifting my hat to directing and writing. So, yeah, that's correct.

[00:18:54] That's exciting. It's it's it's fun to see just as as the principal here to see teachers with with the passion that of the things that they teach.

[00:19:02] And you can definitely see that now in talking with some of our teachers during the performances this year of the Parent Trap, we were all blown away. We were very impressed with the professionalism, the work of our students. And one thing we learned from talking with our students earlier was that all the behind the scenes work, the stage crew, there was a lot of stage changes this year. Can you talk us some highlights about that or what do you think about your stage crew this year?

[00:19:31] I think this year, probably more than kind of other years. Stage crew was really. And I want to say challenging, but they had a lot to do because they wanted to incorporate various scenes, etc. and so they had to learn how to work as a stage crew, some people just think, oh, you just put a prop, they had to learn the synchronization that's required with a stage crew, that the quickness that they have to do things. And I think it was a huge learning experience for them and they really, really rose to the occasion as soon as we met with earlier.

[00:20:07] Earlier that I spoke with are repeat customers, they came back for drama a second time. What do you think the draw is? Why do you think kids are so excited? What do you see?

[00:20:19] The one reason I think the kids enjoy it more than just being on stage is the buy in. They write it. They write it. They again, direct it. They get to play a role in it. They get a lot of ownership. So it's not just me telling them what to do. It's it's their thing. It's their baby. And I'm just the person to help them put it all together. I think that's one of the biggest deals.

[00:20:47] So with this semester's performance of the parent trap. What was something that you were really proud of, that the that the students overcame a challenge or some adversity that they overcame to put on this production? Could you share something with our audience?

[00:21:01] One of the things that I was very proud of this was actually a cast of all girls. And one of the things that I was really proud of was the way that they were able to come together. And I know a lot of people. Middle school gets a bad rap for being very cliquy, especially with girls. And they supported one another. They knew their strengths. They helped each other. And I think I don't think I know that. It took a lot for them to be supportive of every person, because that's tough in middle school, because everybody has

their certain friend groups in this class is no different. But they realized about partway through that if we don't work as a team, this is not going to work. And they rose again. They rose to the occasion. Both crew and actresses. So kudos to them.

[00:21:52] No, I think their performance showed that they came together and they really supported one another and they had a lot of laughs as they were sharing some stories. Some of the things we talked about us, some of those those mishaps or those bloopers that the audience oftentimes has no idea that occurred, like the the slip with the honey, apparently, and some missed lines. But those are memories our kids are going to take with them. And we talked a little bit, too. We think all our classes are important here at Northern Hills, that they're learning at deep levels. But with drama, they're going to learn some things that they're not learned in other classes. What do you think some of those things when you as you as the teacher that you see when kids enter your classroom and in August and now they're leaving? Where were some of the most growth happening for them?

[00:22:37] Do you think, ironically enough, a lot of those students that I get for drama have a fear of public speaking stage fright and even just standing up in front of people and not speaking? I think that is typically what I see. We do a test at the end with terms, et cetera, and they talk about their growth. And usually that is the most. Important one for them, because I say, you know what? From drama, what can you use in real life? And they always say, you know, I can use the public speaking skill. I'm no longer afraid to get up in front of people and also getting to know people that are different for me, because they they have to bond in order to give an authentic performance, at least at this level, maybe not in the adult level or other worlds, but it shows if they don't genuinely support and care for one another.

[00:23:35] No, I think I think you're right on and Avery actually talked about that, how her she had that fear of getting in front of others and speaking, but as a result of the class and I think about what we talked about with our families and our students, that Northern Hills is just not about 7th and 8th grade, but it's about your life and getting you ready to learn at deep levels to be able to communicate and problem solve. And that's what I saw happen in talking with your kids and seeing the performances. They had a problem solved when someone missed lines or a prop fell and they had to be able to share their performance in front of a large audience in front the entire grade level. You know, we have each grade level see the performance once. So I just want to say it was kudos to you and kudos to the team, the entire class, because they really came together. If I could if you could leave our listeners, especially our students who might be listening, who are current seventh graders or even some of our sixth graders, you might hear this. Why take drama?

[00:24:31] I definitely think you should take drama because you never know how fun it is being someone else until you try it. That is pretty huge. You can be whoever you want to be and it gives you permission to do things that you don't necessarily get to do in other classes.

[00:24:49] That is some wise advice from Sra. Groce. So on behalf of our listeners and our studio audience, thank you for what you're doing for our students. Thank you so much. All right. Thanks for coming in.

[00:24:59] Thanks again for listening to Life in the Middle podcast. I'd like to thank Kevin McCloud for composing the music featured on this show. Have a great day.