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SHOOTING SURVIVORS TURN TO THE ARTS IN WAKE OF TRAGEDY



[\(/users/727\)](#) Submitted by [Mr. Jeff M. Poulin \(/users/727\)](#) on Tue, 2018-02-27 09:00

On February 14, 2018, seventeen people, including students and adults, were killed in a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Since this tragedy, the [voices of young people \(https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/26/us/florida-parkland-students/index.html\)](https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/26/us/florida-parkland-students/index.html) from the community have been lifted through their dynamic advocacy to call for reform to national, state, and local gun- and mental health-related policies. Many of the strong skills that they are using for their advocacy came from their immersion and studies in arts education.

The movement that the young people have started—*Never Again*—utilizes myriad skills that the students have [honed from their artistic learning experiences \(https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-the-survivors-of-parkland-began-the-never-again-movement\)](https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-the-survivors-of-parkland-began-the-never-again-movement). As reporting from the *New Yorker* noted, "...it's not a coincidence that a disproportionate number of the Never Again leaders are dedicated members of the drama club." Some members of the group [were in rehearsal at the time of the shooting \(https://www.reuters.com/article/us-florida-shooting-students/student-survivor-in-florida-puts-her-dreams-on-hold-to-demand-change-idUSKCN1G42NS\)](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-florida-shooting-students/student-survivor-in-florida-puts-her-dreams-on-hold-to-demand-change-idUSKCN1G42NS), while others referenced their participation in arts

courses during [town hall meetings \(https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/21/politics/cnn-town-hall-florida-shooting/index.html\)](https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/21/politics/cnn-town-hall-florida-shooting/index.html). One of the group's leaders, Emma González (who was in the school's auditorium at the time of the shooting), has received [much praise from numerous artists \(https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/8174063/emma-gonzalez-speech-florida-school-shooting-twitter-reactions\)](https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/8174063/emma-gonzalez-speech-florida-school-shooting-twitter-reactions) for her impassioned speech at Broward County Federal Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale a few days following the incident.

"All these kids are drama kids, and I'm a dramatic kid, so it really meshes well," said González. This remark and others have been wrongly interpreted by some to mean the students are actually paid "crisis actors," which has been dispelled, most notably by [student Cameron Kasky \(http://people.com/crime/cameron-kasky-everything-to-know-parkland-shooting-survivor/\)](http://people.com/crime/cameron-kasky-everything-to-know-parkland-shooting-survivor/), who told CNN that anyone who had seen him in the school's production of *Fiddler on the Roof* knows that "nobody would pay me to act for anything."

Other youth, such as [student journalist David Hogg \(http://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/stoneman-douglas-student-journalists-tell-their-own-story-after-school-shooting-10115118\)](http://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/stoneman-douglas-student-journalists-tell-their-own-story-after-school-shooting-10115118), are utilizing the skills they have learned in school and during extra-curricular time to tell their own stories about the tragedy. Many students recently traveled to the Capitol in Tallahassee [to be heard ahead of a critical vote \(https://www.npr.org/2018/02/21/587731782/students-from-marjory-stoneman-douglas-high-school-rallying-for-gun-control-in-t\)](https://www.npr.org/2018/02/21/587731782/students-from-marjory-stoneman-douglas-high-school-rallying-for-gun-control-in-t) in the state legislature. So, too, the lines of comparison between the arts and youth-led social change are cemented through the work of these young people—notably argued in [another *New Yorker* article \(https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-spring-awakening-of-the-stoneman-douglas-theatre-kids\)](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-spring-awakening-of-the-stoneman-douglas-theatre-kids) identifying the parallels between this tragedy and how the 2006 rock musical *Spring Awakening* was written as a response to the 1999 Columbine High School attack in Littleton, Colorado.

On February 21, one week after the tragic shooting, members of the Stoneman Douglas High School drama club performed "[Shine,](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW6cXVzRnuo)" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW6cXVzRnuo>) a song they wrote, in a live national broadcast on CNN from a [tribute concert \(http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/broward/article201988344.html\)](http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/broward/article201988344.html) in Sunshine, Florida. This act of artistic strength embodies the very tenets of [creative youth development \(http://creativeyouthdevelopment.org/\)](http://creativeyouthdevelopment.org/), which we so often discuss in the abstract. The youth in this Drama Club have harnessed their creative potential and applied it to their evolving worldview to create change in their community—and our nation. In "Shine," they sing:

"We're gonna stand tall, gonna raise up our voices so we'll never ever fall ... we're tired of hearing that we're too young to ever make a change."

In a series of spoken word statements during the bridge of the song, the students proclaimed:

"We refused to be ignored by those who will not listen."

"There are so many things you can do to become involved."

"Reach out to your Congressman; mail, call, and tweet."

"Be the voice for those who don't have one."

"Together we have the power to change the world around us."

Many media outlets are [recognizing the activism of students and youth](http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/editorials/article201021614.html) (<http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/editorials/article201021614.html>) throughout the community affected by the shooting. Musicians are [voicing their support](http://www.thereporteronline.com/arts-and-entertainment/20180222/rock-music-menu-musicians-react-to-stoneman-douglas-shooting) (<http://www.thereporteronline.com/arts-and-entertainment/20180222/rock-music-menu-musicians-react-to-stoneman-douglas-shooting>) for the student movement. Artists from around the country and the world are [drafting responses in their own media](https://www.newsday.com/news/nation/aaron-feis-shooting-cartoon-1.16900819) (<https://www.newsday.com/news/nation/aaron-feis-shooting-cartoon-1.16900819>) to be the voice of change (which has been observed after [previous incidents](https://www.buzzfeed.com/bradesposito/illustrations-las-vegas-shooting?utm_term=.vhzJ3kxp#.ndrR9w3W) (https://www.buzzfeed.com/bradesposito/illustrations-las-vegas-shooting?utm_term=.vhzJ3kxp#.ndrR9w3W) as well). It should also be noted that many of these responses were observed during the Black Lives Matters movement from [musicians](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/13/black-lives-matter-beyonce-kendrick-lamar-protest) (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/13/black-lives-matter-beyonce-kendrick-lamar-protest>) and from [students](https://blavity.com/high-school-students-black-lives-matter-art-piece-removed-after-school-was-slammed-with-complaints) (<https://blavity.com/high-school-students-black-lives-matter-art-piece-removed-after-school-was-slammed-with-complaints>).



Pia Guerra
@PiaGuerra

Hero's Welcome.#guncontrol #Parkland

4:45 PM - Feb 15, 2018

47.1K 21.9K people are talking about this

In an [article \(https://intimateexcellent.wordpress.com/2018/02/23/are-you-surprised-that-the-young-leaders-of-the-never-again-movement-are-theatre-kids-im-not/\)](https://intimateexcellent.wordpress.com/2018/02/23/are-you-surprised-that-the-young-leaders-of-the-never-again-movement-are-theatre-kids-im-not/), noted Los Angeles-based playwright Stephen Sachs observes the power that arts classes can have on students who are set to change the world:

“A theatre class is more than an artistic distraction for students. It can serve as a lightning rod of empowerment for young people. For many teens, the experience of standing in a spotlight on a stage in a play or musical, galvanizing the attention of adults in the audience, is the first time a young person discovers that what they say matters. They learn that words have power, that their voice can move and inspire others.”

This is precisely why, as arts education advocates, we fight tirelessly for more access to quality arts learning experiences; so that young people are empowered to lead their generation into the future with the creative capacities and critical skills necessary to face an unforeseen future.

As [the school re-opens this week \(https://www.npr.org/2018/02/25/588726066/marjory-stoneman-douglas-high-school-reopens-after-shooting\)](https://www.npr.org/2018/02/25/588726066/marjory-stoneman-douglas-high-school-reopens-after-shooting), and our lawmakers continue important discussions as a result of this tragedy, I hope that young people in every community across our nation continue to embrace the arts to inspire change in their communities, in states, and in Washington, DC. While [some schools threaten disciplinary action \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/for-student-protesters-consequences-are-across-the-map/2018/02/22/1ac1b07e-17fd-11e8-92c9-376b4fe57ff7_story.html?utm_term=.7f8bf952d201\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/for-student-protesters-consequences-are-across-the-map/2018/02/22/1ac1b07e-17fd-11e8-92c9-376b4fe57ff7_story.html?utm_term=.7f8bf952d201), the U.S. Constitution and Supreme Court [uphold a student’s right to creatively express and speak out about their beliefs \(https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/student-speech-and-privacy/can-schools-discipline-students-protesting\)](https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/student-speech-and-privacy/can-schools-discipline-students-protesting), the students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School not only deserve our applause, but also our support as followers while they emerge as the passionate and creative leaders of tomorrow. While nothing can lessen this tragedy, the arts are one way for people to find solace and strength.

Many national groups have begun to release statements about the incident ([including this one from NAEA \(https://www.arteducators.org/news/articles/371-naea-statement-in-response-to-the-south-florida-high-school-shooting\)](https://www.arteducators.org/news/articles/371-naea-statement-in-response-to-the-south-florida-high-school-shooting) and [NDEO \(http://ndeo.org/content.aspx?page_id=2507&club_id=893257&item_id=567&pst=5181\)](http://ndeo.org/content.aspx?page_id=2507&club_id=893257&item_id=567&pst=5181)) and its impact on students, educators, schools, and the arts. Others have compiled resources to help us look toward the future:

- [Alliance for Kids \(https://www.allianceforkids.org/resources-help-children-school-shooting/\)](https://www.allianceforkids.org/resources-help-children-school-shooting/)
- [American Civil Liberties Union \(https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/student-speech-and-privacy/can-schools-discipline-students-protesting\)](https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/student-speech-and-privacy/can-schools-discipline-students-protesting)
- [American Defamation League \(https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk/gun-violence-mass-shootings\)](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk/gun-violence-mass-shootings)
- [American Educational Research Association \(http://www.aera.net/Education-Research/Issues-and-Initiatives/Bullying-Prevention-and-School-Safety\)](http://www.aera.net/Education-Research/Issues-and-Initiatives/Bullying-Prevention-and-School-Safety)
- [American School Counselor Association \(https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/professional-development/learn-more/shooting-resources\)](https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/professional-development/learn-more/shooting-resources)
- [Association of Teaching Artists \(https://www.teachingartists.com/americansforthearts.htm\)](https://www.teachingartists.com/americansforthearts.htm)
- [Generation Citizen \(https://generationcitizen.org/resources-for-educators-addressing-the-parkland-shooting/\)](https://generationcitizen.org/resources-for-educators-addressing-the-parkland-shooting/)
- [National Association of School Psychologists \(https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis\)](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis)
- [The New York Times \(https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/learning/lesson-plans/resources-for-talking-and-teaching-about-the-school-shooting-in-florida.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/learning/lesson-plans/resources-for-talking-and-teaching-about-the-school-shooting-in-florida.html)

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