

A man with a beard and a red beanie is the central figure, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a black t-shirt and has his right hand raised to his chin. The background is a gallery wall with several framed photographs of various people and groups. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong blue and purple hue across the entire scene.

STUDY GUIDE

GEFFEN  
PLAYHOUSE

# THE FIRST DEEP BREATH



WEST COAST PREMIERE  
**THE FIRST  
DEEP BREATH**

02.01–03.05.2023

GIL CATES THEATER

**SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Brian Dunning, Amy Levinson, Erick R. López, Olivia O'Connor, Christine Drew Benjamin, Isaak Berliner

**STUDY GUIDE COMPOSED BY**

Brian Allman

This publication is to be used for educational purposes only.

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ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

# THE FIRST DEEP BREATH

WRITTEN BY  
**LEE EDWARD COLSTON II**

DIRECTED BY  
**STEVE H. BROADNAX III**

SCENIC DESIGNER  
**MICHAEL CARNAHAN**

COSTUME DESIGNER  
**EDUARDO CASTRO**

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
**PABLO SANTIAGO**

SOUND DESIGNER  
**CURTIS CRAIG**

COMPOSER  
**RASHAD MCPHERSON**

CHOREOGRAPHER  
**DJ SMART**

FIGHT DIRECTOR  
**STEVE RANKIN**

INTIMACY DIRECTOR  
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DIALECT & VOICE COACH  
**TRÉ COTTEN**

DRAMATURG  
**LINDSAY A. JENKINS**

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER  
**ALYSSA ESCALANTE**

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER  
**AMBER R. DETTMERS**

CASTING DIRECTOR  
**PHYLLIS SCHURINGA, CSA**

## CAST

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**OPA  
ADEYEMO**  
AJ (ALEXANDER  
MICHAEL JONES)



**LEE EDWARD  
COLSTON II**  
ABDUL-MALIK  
(ALBERT MELVIN JONES IV)



**BRANDON MENDEZ  
HOMER**  
LESLIE CARTER



**ELLA  
JOYCE**  
RUTH JONES



**HERB  
NEWSOME**  
PASTOR ALBERT  
MELVIN JONES III



**CANDACE  
THOMAS**  
DEE-DEE  
(DENISE JONES)



**DEANNA  
REED-FOSTER**  
PEARL THOMAS



**KEITH A.  
WALLACE**  
TYREE FISHER



# SYNOPSIS

Pastor Albert Jones and his family are proud leaders of the Mother Bethel Baptist Church and pillars of their community. Plans are being made for a special memorial service to honor their late daughter Diane on the sixth anniversary of her passing. But when Abdul-Malik, the eldest son whom Albert blames for her death, returns home from prison, the family's veneer begins to crack as shocking revelations come to light. A ferocious new epic written by Lee Edward Colston II, *The First Deep Breath* chronicles the depths families will go to hide their skeletons from the outside world and each other.

**SETTING** Mother Bethel Baptist Church & The Jones Residence, Germantown, (Philly).

**RUNNING TIME** 3 hours and 45 minutes, including two intermissions.

**PRODUCTION NOTES** Contains strobe lighting effects, theatrical haze and smoke effects, profanity, sexual themes, staged combat, and adult subject matter.

## ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



**LEE EDWARD COLSTON II** *Playwright*

Philly native Lee Edward Colston II is a Black, Queer, former prison guard and MMA Fighter turned actor, writer, director, teacher, and author. He was a finalist for the 2017 IAMA Theatre Company's Shonda Rhimes Unsung Voices Playwriting Commission and a recipient of the National Black Theatre's I AM SOUL Playwrights Residency. *The First Deep Breath* received critical acclaim as "...one of the best Chicago plays of the decade..." after its world premiere at Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago, earning Colston a 2020 Jeff Award for Best New

Work as well as a 2020 Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award given by the American Theatre Critics Association. Past winners include Lynn Nottage, August Wilson, and Horton Foote. Some of Colston's other plays include: *Roost*, *For Which It Stands*, *Solitary*, *Holla*, and *Birth-day Cake*. Colston previously wrote on *Fargo* (FX) starring Chris Rock. His episode "East/West" was named one of the top TV Episodes of 2020 by *The Hollywood Reporter*. Colston has developed television projects at HBO with Academy Award winners Laura Dern, Eric Roth, and Alex Gibney. He has also developed with Emmy Award winners Joe Fields and Joel Weisberg at FX. Most recently, Lee is a co-producer on Ryan Murphy's *American Sports Story: Gladiator* and is developing a new series with Emmy Award-winning *The Handmaid's Tale* producer Warren Littlefield. Colston earned his M.F.A. in Acting at The Juilliard School and is repped by Jonathan Knight and CAA.



**STEVE H. BROADNAX III** *Director*

*Thoughts of a Colored Man* (Broadway), Suzan-Lori Parks's *Sally & Tom* at the Guthrie Theater (world premiere), Katori Hall's 2021 Pulitzer Prize world premiere *The Hot Wing King* at the Signature Theatre, Lee Edward Colston II's *The First Deep Breath* at Chicago's Victory Gardens Theater (world premiere and winner of the Jeff Award for Best New Work), Dominique Morisseau's *Blood at the Root* at the National Black Theatre (winner of Kennedy Center's Hip Hop Theater Creator Award), and William Jackson Harper's world premiere *Travisville*

at Ensemble Studio Theatre in NYC. Ensemble Studio Theatre member and serves as the Associate Artistic Director at People's Light Theatre and a Professor of Theatre at Penn State University; Co-Head of M.F.A. Directing.

# WHAT IS DEMENTIA & ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE?



PHOTO COURTESY PIXABAY.COM

Dementia is not a specific disease but is rather a general term for the impaired ability to remember, think, or make decisions that interferes with doing everyday activities. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. Though dementia mostly affects older adults, it is not a part of normal aging.

Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning—thinking, remembering, and reasoning—and behavioral abilities to such an extent that it interferes with a person's daily life and activities. Dementia ranges in severity from the mildest stage, when it is just beginning to affect a person's functioning, to the most severe stage, when the person must depend completely on others for help with basic activities of daily living.

Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills, and, eventually, the ability to carry out the simplest tasks. In most people with Alzheimer's, symptoms first appear later in life. Estimates vary, but experts suggest that more than 6 million Americans, most of them age 65 or older, may have dementia caused by Alzheimer's.

Alzheimer's disease is currently ranked as the seventh leading cause of death in the United States and is the most common cause of dementia among older adults. Scientists do not yet fully understand what causes Alzheimer's disease. There likely is not a single cause but rather several factors that can affect each person differently. Age is the best-known risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. Changes in the brain can begin years before the first symptoms appear. Family history—researchers believe that genetics may play a role in developing Alzheimer's disease. However, genes do not equal destiny. A healthy lifestyle may help reduce

## SOURCES

National Institute on Aging (NIA) — [nia.nih.gov](http://nia.nih.gov)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)



## THEMES & TOPICS

your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Two large, long-term studies indicate that adequate physical activity, a nutritious diet, limited alcohol consumption, and not smoking may help people. Researchers are studying whether education, diet, and environment play a role in developing Alzheimer's disease. There is growing scientific evidence that healthy behaviors, which have been shown to prevent cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, may also reduce the risk for subjective cognitive decline.

Alzheimer's disease is named after Dr. Alois Alzheimer. In 1906, Dr. Alzheimer noticed changes in the brain tissue of a woman who had died of an unusual mental illness. Her symptoms included memory loss, language problems, and unpredictable behavior. After she died, he examined her brain and found many abnormal clumps (now called amyloid plaques) and tangled bundles of fibers (now called neurofibrillary, or tau, tangles).

These plaques and tangles in the brain are still considered some of the main features of Alzheimer's disease. Another feature is the loss of connections between neurons in the brain. Neurons transmit messages between different parts of the brain, and from the brain to muscles and organs in the body.

In addition to memory problems, someone with symptoms of Alzheimer's disease may experience one or more of the following:

- Memory loss disrupts daily life, such as getting lost in a familiar place or repeating questions.
- Trouble handling money and paying bills.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure.
- Decreased or poor judgment.
- Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps to find them.
- Changes in mood, personality, or behavior.

Even if you or someone you know has several or even most of these signs, it doesn't mean it's Alzheimer's disease. Getting checked by your healthcare provider can help determine if the symptoms you are experiencing are related to Alzheimer's disease, or a more treatable condition such as a vitamin deficiency or a side effect from medication. Early and accurate diagnosis also provides opportunities for you and your family to consider financial planning, develop advance directives, enroll in clinical trials, and anticipate care needs.

Caring for a person with Alzheimer's can have significant physical, emotional, and financial costs. The demands of day-to-day care, changes in family roles, and decisions about placement in a care facility can be difficult. Becoming well-informed about the disease is one important long-term strategy. Programs that teach families about the various stages of Alzheimer's and about ways to deal with difficult behaviors and other caregiving challenges can help.

Good coping skills, a strong support network, and respite care are other things that may help caregivers handle the stress of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's. For example, staying physically active provides physical and emotional benefits. Some caregivers have found that joining a support group is a critical lifeline. These support groups enable caregivers to find respite, express concerns, share experiences, get tips, and receive emotional comfort. Many organizations sponsor in-person and online support groups, including groups for people with early-stage Alzheimer's and their families.

# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Something to notice throughout *The First Deep Breath* is the importance of the characters' names and how they are used, or not used, by others. Most characters are referenced by different names based on whom they are talking to in the scene. Nicknames, new names, and name changes are the results of the family's disfunction and inability to communicate openly. Their discussions, which often turn into arguments, are about living up to one's name, claiming & (re) naming oneself, and respecting others' preferences of identity.

Let's say someone in your life has asked to be called by a different name. Maybe they're a relative, a close friend, or someone at work. Whatever your relationship with them, it can be tough to understand name changes at first. And it can be hard to break the habit. But if you want this person to know that you respect them, then it's extremely important that you respect their name choice. Here are some helpful hints on how to navigate relearning a name.

## 1. Understand the Cultural Context for Name Changes

What you are called—or *more importantly, what you call yourself*—can be a very powerful tool in constructing an identity. Because we are given names when we are born without any of our own personal input, it isn't uncommon to assume another name or nickname as you grow older.

Sometimes explicitly choosing to take on a new name may have political reasons, cultural reasons, affirm a developing gender identity—or perhaps you just don't like your name. The point is, there are many valid reasons for changing one's name. For example, many people of color have worked very hard to reclaim cultures that White supremacy has attempted to erase. In preserving culture, occasionally people shed their "slave names" or "[insert religion here] names" with the main reasoning being that what they have been dubbed at birth was a reflection of the mass enslavement, oppression, genocide or general disenfranchisement of their ancestors.

**Some take on a new name in the pursuit of affirming their gender identity.** Whether choosing a more traditionally masculine name, a more traditionally feminine name, or even a unisex name, wearing a name that empowers self-identity can

be vital to a healthy relationship with oneself.

The only person who can define your gender is you! What you do with it and how you choose to present it is under your (and *only your*) control. Regardless of someone's rationale for taking on a new moniker, it's important to respect that person's wishes and address them by that chosen name.

## 2. Remember That it Isn't Your Place to Ask Certain Questions

It isn't polite to ask someone why they have chosen to go by a new name. There are a lot of reasons why someone would want to shed an old identity: dysphoria, trauma, hiding from an abuser—the list goes on. And these may not be experiences they want to share with you right now. That needs to be respected.

Try not to insert yourself into a conversation that doesn't concern you and try not to pry. It's vital to respect privacy, as prodding an individual may lead to accidentally triggering them. If you can't support their name choice, how can they expect you to support them on other matters? If that person wants to share the ins and outs of why they've changed their name (and how they chose the new one), then that is their business. But there is a reason they don't want to go by their birth name, so do everything you can to respect that.

## 3. Correct Yourself

If you accidentally refer to someone by the wrong title, take a moment to stop, apologize, and restate your sentence with the correct one. While you can't take away the hurt you might have unintentionally inflicted upon someone, it does help to show that you are acknowledging your mistake and doing all in your power to correct it.



**Note:** *Do all in your power to correct it.* Your apology will wear thin if it isn't accompanied by a deliberate effort to do better. This small gesture of respect is sometimes the best thing you can do to reinforce another person's identity.

#### 4. Don't Ask 'But What Is Your Real Name?'

Whether you mean to be rude or not, this question undermines any work an individual has done to assert themselves. Their real name is the name they choose for themselves and the name they identify with. By asking what someone's "real name" is, you're saying the name someone *else* chose for them is more important and reflective of them than the name *they chose and prefer*. This nullifies the validity of a person's individuality and autonomy to make their own decisions regarding what they are called.

#### 5. Refer to Someone by the Correct Name, Even When They Aren't Around

This part is so important! Names are very specific ways of identifying who someone is, and it's so vital that we make an effort to use the right name even if we aren't around that individual. Titles can shape our perception of each other, and it's only fair that we perpetuate a person's chosen image. When you're talking about someone whose name has evolved, be mindful and make sure to use their new name with other people. Being a good friend means being supportive, and this means your support shouldn't change based on a lack of your friend's presence. Talking to your mom? Use the new name. Talking to mutual friends? Use the new name. Writing a birthday card? Address it using the new name.

#### 6. Don't Say 'But That's Not a Name' or 'That's a Boy's/Girl's Name'

It's not really your place to decide those things. Remember that our perception of what is masculine or feminine is subjective. Culture, upbringing, influence, language, or even personal taste can determine the way people consume presentation. And if you don't think someone's name *sounds* like a name, think long and hard about where your own name came from. (Hint: Someone, at some point, made it up.) Just take a second to recognize that not everyone thinks alike, and it isn't your place to police the way another person expresses themselves.

#### 7. Make Sure Using the New Name Is Okay in Different Spaces

Sometimes people are *out* to a group of friends, but not to family. Or maybe they're only comfortable asking one or two close family members to refer to them by a new name. Whatever the situation, you don't want to accidentally out someone by using the wrong name in front of people who aren't safe to be out with. It should be up to the person to come out however they so choose, and it's important that you respect that process. You don't want to accidentally make any decisions for others, especially such personal ones, so be courteous and aware of how your "helping" might not be so helpful. This can also apply to situations where you might want to correct someone for referring to someone using an old name. It's always a good idea to play it safe and check in with the individual whose name has changed before going around correcting others. Don't be afraid to ask! Simply checking in to make sure that their new name is to be used in *all* spaces is a respectful and positive thing to do.

#### 8. Make an Effort

Depending on what kind of relationship you have with someone whose name has changed, think of ways to make them more comfortable. For example, if you have an employee working under you who gives you a name for their interview and a different name for their background check, it could be a good idea to sit down privately with them and ask what they would prefer on their name tag. If there is anything you can do to make their work experience better, do try! Always make sure to check in with the individual to be sure what you have in mind is an acceptable way of handling their name change.

You might make mistakes, but don't let that scare you from making the change as smooth as possible. Just apologize and get the name right the next time. Sometimes all a person needs is another human being who is respectful enough to honor the name they have chosen to go by.

#### SOURCE

Jack Qu'emi, "8 Ways to Show Respect for Someone's Name Change," [everydayfeminism.com](http://everydayfeminism.com)

Read the full article: [tinyurl.com/RespectNameChange](http://tinyurl.com/RespectNameChange)

# HOW TO REALLY SAY, “I AM SORRY”

ALBERT

Sorry?  
 Sorry can't even prop the door open.  
 Sorry don't fix what you done broke.  
 Sorry don't bring your mother's memories back.  
 Sorry don't bring your sister back to life.

—*The First Deep Breath* (Act 1, Scene 4)

Who hasn't been on the receiving end of a bad apology?

- “Sorry, geez. I didn't know it was going to be such a big deal.”
- “I'm sorry, but you really shouldn't be so sensitive.”
- “I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings. I was just messing around.”
- “I'm sorry that happened, but, you know, it really wasn't my fault.”

More than likely, you've probably made a subpar apology yourself a time or two. That's absolutely normal. Apologizing can be tough, even when you genuinely regret making a mistake or causing someone pain. Admitting a wrongdoing generally isn't easy—especially when doing so means acknowledging that you hurt someone you care about. You want to make amends, but you might feel unsure about how. You might also worry about saying the wrong thing and making matters worse.

Here's the good news: Learning to make a sincere apology isn't as difficult as it might sound, and we're here to guide you through the process. The 8 tips below will help you craft a natural, heartfelt apology to anyone in your life.

## 1. Understand why you're apologizing

To make a good apology, you'll want to first have a good understanding of where you went wrong. Regret is a key element of effective apologies, but you'll probably find it difficult to express sincere regret when you don't know what you regret doing. “I'm sorry for whatever I did wrong,” and similarly generic apologies usually fall pretty flat—but they can also lead to more conflict. Recalling your mistake may not feel all that pleasant, especially when you know you hurt someone. If you already feel guilty or disappointed in yourself, you might even avoid thinking about it entirely. Remember, though: No matter how bad you feel, the other person likely feels worse. Failing to acknowledge their pain does them further injustice.

## 2. Start with ‘I'm sorry.’ Period.

Apologies that contain qualifiers or justifications typically

won't get the job done. Hint: Following “I'm sorry” with “but” is *never* the way to go. When you rationalize your actions, you're essentially passing the blame to another person. This sends the message that you don't think you did anything wrong and gives your apology a ring of superficiality. Even honest justifications can negate the sincerity of an apology you really mean. Say you're apologizing to a co-worker for failing to complete a group assignment: “I'm sorry I didn't finish my share of the project by the deadline, but I just can't keep up with this workload.” That might be completely true. Still, the elements missing from your apology may leave your co-worker with some lingering hurt feelings.

Instead, you might say: “I'm sorry I didn't finish my share of the project by the deadline. I know that makes you look bad, too, so I'll explain what happened and let everyone know it was entirely on me. My workload last month completely buried me, but I'll ask for help sooner next time.”

## 3. Take responsibility for your actions

Acknowledging your mistake can go a long way toward helping you convey remorse, but don't stop there. A sincere apology also involves empathy for the person you hurt, and it's important to acknowledge the pain your actions caused.

Consider this apology: “I shouldn't have commented on your hijab. I was curious about your religion, but that's no excuse for making a disrespectful comment. I didn't consider how that remark might make you feel, and I'm sorry for hurting you and making you uncomfortable.” You'll notice it contains an explanation: “I was curious about your religion.” Recognizing the difference between explanations and justifications can help you make a much more sincere and effective apology. Unlike justifications, explanations provide some context around your actions. This context lets the other person know you didn't intend to hurt them. It can also emphasize how you intend to prevent the situation in the future.

## 4. Focus on the impact of your actions—not your intent

Sure, you didn't *intend* to hurt anyone. Still, at the end of the day, your intent often matters less than the impact of your actions. You lied to your best friend about their



partner's cheating because you wanted to protect them. But, by holding back this information, you denied them the chance to make an informed decision about the relationship. You also betrayed their trust, which caused them even more pain.

When you apologize, you might mention you only wanted to protect them, but you'll want to follow up this explanation by acknowledging that your dishonesty ended up doing the exact opposite. Your apology should center on the pain you caused them, not the good intentions behind your actions. The person you wronged deserves the chance to share their own feelings, so recognizing the impact of your mistake often involves some empathic listening. This may feel uncomfortable, but it's an important step toward showing remorse.

### 5. Take steps to make amends

Effective apologies involve an effort to begin repairing the situation. Sometimes, reparative behavior is pretty clear. Such as:

- If you borrowed your sister's car without asking and got it filthy inside and out, your apology might involve paying to have it cleaned and detailed.
- If you rushed through a work assignment and gave your supervisor a report containing incorrect information, you might commit to staying late to fix your mistakes.

Other times, you might need to ask, "What can I do to make things right?" Then, show them you truly regret your actions by doing what they ask.

### 6. Don't overdo it

Generally speaking, the apology should fit the mistake. Excessive reparations or behavior that goes above and beyond what they asked of you might help ease *your* guilt, but it won't necessarily have any benefits for the person you wronged. It might even lead them to doubt your sincerity—after all, you didn't listen to their request. Say someone stole your friend's bike when you borrowed it and left it unlocked. They send you a link to a secondhand version of the same bike and ask you to purchase it as a replacement.

Instead, you choose an entirely different (and much more expensive) new model in an effort to convey how truly sorry you are. When you give them the new bike, they don't attempt to hide their disappointment and annoyance. While you might imagine a lavish gesture, or an apology you repeat every time you see them, shows your extreme

### SOURCE

Crystal Raypole, "How to Apologize: 8 Tips to Effectiveness & Sincerity", [medicalnewstoday.com](http://medicalnewstoday.com);  
Medically reviewed by Jennifer Litner, PhD, LMFT, CST  
Read the full article: [tinyurl.com/ApologizeHowTo](http://tinyurl.com/ApologizeHowTo)

contriteness, it can actually have a negative effect. Over-the-top apologies can seem mocking and insincere. They also tend to convey more of your feelings than any recognition of the other person's pain. Remember: The apology is for them, not for you.

### 7. Ask for forgiveness

Requesting forgiveness is an important part of the apology, because it gives the person you wronged some agency in the situation. In other words, asking for forgiveness tells them you don't assume they'll automatically forgive you. The process of forgiveness can take time, and you may need to do some work, like making amends and addressing problematic behaviors, in order to earn it. (Don't forget the importance of self-forgiveness along the way.) Keep in mind that forgiveness isn't guaranteed, no matter how sincere your apology. That said, you're more likely to earn it by making it clear you've truly repented your actions and made a serious effort to change.

### 8. Know when you shouldn't apologize

Apologies can heal damage in relationships after mistakes or thoughtless behavior. But apologizing when you did nothing wrong, simply to prevent conflict, can affect your sense of self-worth and ultimately damage *you*. Here's something to consider: If a friend, partner, or family member regularly expects you to take the blame for things you didn't do, they aren't accepting responsibility for their mistakes or making amends for their wrongs.

### The Bottom Line

Your apology might begin with words, but it doesn't end with them. Once you've spoken your apology, you have the opportunity to live it by reaffirming boundaries, working to re-establish trust, and examining your behavior for other opportunities to grow. These changes, when made with sincerity, can help you earn forgiveness—but they can also help you avoid making the same mistakes again.

### CHALLENGE CORNER

Learn more about the Definition of Empathic Listening and some helpful exercises at [www.healthline.com/health/empathic-listening](http://www.healthline.com/health/empathic-listening).

# BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT



PHOTO COURTESY PIXABAY.COM

Breathing is usually an unconscious process. However, there are some optimal ways to breathe. Breathing, or respiration, is a complex process of air exchange that involves the lungs, the diaphragm, and the intercostal muscles, working together to allow a person to breathe. To breathe in, the diaphragm contracts and moves downward. This increases the space in the chest cavity, allowing the lungs to expand and fill with air. To breathe out, the diaphragm relaxes, reducing the space in the chest cavity. This causes the lungs to deflate and let out the air.

Although breathing is a natural process, some people may be surprised to learn that there is a right and a wrong way to breathe. Breathing through the nose can slow the breath and make the lungs work more efficiently. It also facilitates the intake of nitric oxide, which helps with oxygen transportation throughout the body. Breathing through the nose also allows the nostrils to filter toxins and allergens from the air, thereby preventing them from entering the body, warm air that is too cold, and humidify air that is too dry. However, breathing through the mouth is sometimes necessary if a person is exercising or has sinus congestion.

The most efficient way to breathe is by bringing the air down toward the belly. As the diaphragm contracts, the belly expands to fill the lungs with air. “Belly breathing” is efficient because it pulls the lungs downward, creating negative pressure inside the chest. This brings air into the lungs. Although it is useful to know how to breathe correctly, it is important not to overthink breathing. In some people, this could lead to anxiety and shortness of breath. People should remember that normal breathing is a carefully regulated process that does not require conscious thought.

Together, the lungs and kidneys keep the blood’s pH within a narrow range to allow the body to function properly. Receptors in the body monitor blood pH and oxygen levels. These receptors send signals to the brain, which, in turn, sends nerve impulses that tell the body how often to breathe, and how deeply.

## SOURCE

Louisa Richards, “How to breathe properly: Guide and tips”, [medicalnewstoday.com](https://medicalnewstoday.com); Medically reviewed by Stacy Sampson, D.O.

Read the full article: [tinyurl.com/BreatheHowTo](https://tinyurl.com/BreatheHowTo)



## THEMES & TOPICS

People can improve their breathing by maintainina, and quitting smoking. People can monitor the air quality in areas where they live and work. They can use this information to limit their exposure to pollutants and allergens that affect breathing. When possible, people should avoid areas of heavy traffic and always check the air quality before they exercise outdoors.

People who have respiratory conditions such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can take further precautions to protect their breathing and lung health. For example, they can try:

- **Staying hydrated**
- **Eliminating sources of indoor air pollution**
- **Using protective equipment at work**
- **Getting the flu shot or pneumonia vaccine**
- **Trying relaxation exercises**

Breathing exercises help slow down a person's breathing pattern and improve lung efficiency. They are particularly beneficial for people with asthma, COPD, and other conditions that cause shortness of breath. They can also help calm a person who is feeling anxious. However, people should try to begin practicing breathing exercises when their breathing is normal—not while they are experiencing shortness of breath.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- *The First Deep Breath* premiered in Chicago at the Victory Gardens Theater in 2019.
- Playwright Lee Edward Colston II is a former prison guard and MMA fighter turned actor, playwright, director, acting teacher, writing coach, and author.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

- *The First Deep Breath* takes place during various holidays. Rituals play an important part in *The First Deep Breath*: music, games, and even patterns of speech. What are some cherished rituals within your group of family or friends?

# PRACTICING PROPER BREATHING TECHNIQUES



PHOTO COURTESY SHUTTERSTOCK

Using correct breathing techniques can help improve a person's lung efficiency. It can also help alleviate stress and anxiety. Correct breathing is therefore beneficial for both physical and mental health. Taking a few minutes each day to practice breathing techniques can help people form better breathing habits. It can also help people with respiratory conditions manage periods of shortness of breath.

The American Lung Association (ALA) recommends two different breathing techniques for people to try: pursed lip breathing and diaphragmatic (belly) breathing. Ideally, people should practice both exercises for 5-10 minutes every day. Some people may need to build up to this duration gradually.

## **EXERCISE 1: Pursed lip breathing steps**

1. Sit down in a chair and relax the neck and shoulder muscles.
2. Breathe in slowly through the nose while keeping the mouth closed. Inhale for 2 seconds.
3. Pucker or purse the lips, as if whistling or blowing out a candle. Exhale slowly for 4 seconds.
4. Repeat the above steps.

## **EXERCISE 2: Diaphragmatic breathing steps**

A person can perform the following steps while lying down or sitting up straight in a chair.

1. Place both hands on the abdomen, feeling the rise and fall of each breath.
2. Close the mouth and take a slow breath in through the nose, while feeling the abdomen rise and inflate like a balloon.
3. Breathe out slowly through pursed lips, as if blowing bubbles, with each expiratory breath taking about two to three times as long as each inhalation.
4. Repeat these steps for 5-10 minutes. Keep your hands on the abdomen to help improve awareness of the correct breathing technique.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH ERICK R. LÓPEZ



PHOTO BY ISAAC BERLINER

## **What is your position and how long have you been at the Geffen?**

I am the General Manager and I have been with the Geffen Playhouse for about 4 months.

## **What educational, artistic, and professional experiences led to you working at the Geffen?**

While in college I gigged as an actor and stage manager at local theaters and that is how I was introduced to the world of Arts Administration. I discovered that being an administrator really played to my strengths: I'm organized, am a people person, and love making theatre. I completed both my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Arts Administration and have had the privilege to working in several non-profit environments including a living history museum, a performing arts center, an arts foundation, several producing organizations, and a couple of universities (not to mention the many retail jobs in between)—all jobs where I honed the skills I needed to work at the Geffen Playhouse.

## **What are your primary responsibilities as General Manager?**

Most days, you will find me collaborating with our Executive Director, Producer, Artistic Director, Casting Director, and Chief Financial Officer helping negotiate the contracts that allow us to put on our shows.

## **What key skills and dispositions does a General Manager need to possess in this day and age?**

I believe that a General Manager must be mission-driven, demonstrating a deep commitment to the mission of their theater, and have a passion for the arts. A GM must have a high level of cultural competency, a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and have the strong conviction to create inclusive theatrical ecosystems. Making theater is all about working collaboratively and requires a GM who can to engage confidently and pleasantly with a wide range of people.

## **Was there a pivotal moment when you realized you wanted a life in the arts, or did it occur incrementally?**

The arts are just where I have always felt the safest. The arts gave me the chance and the space to be all sorts of people through the different roles that I would get to play, it nourishes my creativity, and is an avenue by which to connect with people.

## **What do you find most challenging about your work?**

The most challenging part is commuting from the East Side!

## **What do you find most rewarding?**

There is a cathartic moment at the end of the show when the actors are taking their bows and you realize your hard work has paid off and you finally get to reap the reward—the applause.



# CULTURAL IDENTITY MONOLOGUE FESTIVAL



## YOU ARE INVITED!

Geffen Playhouse is hosting a Cultural Identity Monologue Festival on Saturday, February 25, 2023, at 11am, on Zoom. This virtual celebration of Cultural Identity will feature students throughout Los Angeles that work with Geffen Education's High School Partnership Program. Geffen Playhouse is thrilled to host this Cultural Identity Monologue Festival that allows LAUSD students to share their voice, exercise their agency, and claim their identity.

### HOW TO BE A PART OF THIS CELEBRATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

#### **1. MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

Saturday, February 25, 2023 at 11am for the First Annual Geffen Education Cultural Identity Monologue Festival

#### **2. REGISTER**

Register to attend at: [tinyurl.com/MonologueFestival](https://tinyurl.com/MonologueFestival)

#### **3. LOG IN & JOIN US**

Log into Zoom on Saturday, February 25, 2023 at 10:45am to celebrate Cultural Identity, theater making, and the Geffen Playhouse's Education & Community Engagement programs.

*If you do not have a Zoom account, you can create one for free at [www.zoom.us](https://www.zoom.us)*

#### **QUESTIONS?**

Call 310.208.6500 x151 or email [education@geffenplayhouse.org](mailto:education@geffenplayhouse.org) for more information.

# AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE



PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

Going to the theater is a unique experience, and we all need to be mindful of “audience etiquette.”

**THE AUDIENCE’S ROLE** The audience plays an essential role during the performance of a play. Without an audience, the actors are only rehearsing. Audience members’ concentrated silence and responses, such as laughing and applauding, provide energy to the actors as they bring their performance to life.

**BEHAVIORS TO AVOID** Since the actors can hear the audience so clearly, it is important not to engage in behaviors that might disturb or distract them—and fellow audience members. These actions include:

- Talking
- Texting
- Allowing cell phones to ring
- Taking photographs or video
- Getting up to leave before intermission or the end of the show (unless it is a true emergency)
- Eating or drinking
- Unwrapping candy or cough drops.

**USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA** We appreciate you sharing your Geffen Playhouse experience via social media, but ask that you **do not do so inside the theater, where the use of electronic devices is prohibited.**

We recommend that you post your status in the lobby after the performance, and invite you to tag @GeffenPlayhouse and use #GeffenPlayhouse to share your experience and continue the conversation with us online.

**AUDIENCE AWARENESS ACTIVITY** Before going to the Geffen Playhouse for the first time, compare and contrast the experience of seeing a live play with:

- going to the movies
- attending a live sporting event
- watching television

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

- If you were onstage performing in a play, how would you want to experience the audience?

# POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Depending on the time available and your participants' interests, guide them to respond to questions selected from those suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, while having respect for differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Ask for several volunteers to share their groups' answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching this show? Engaged? Conflicted? Amused? Inspired? Provoked? Put off? What made you feel this way?
- The play is bookended with time-jumps. Were you able to follow along with these jumps in linear time? How were you able to tell that time had passed between scenes?
- What did you enjoy most about the play? What did you find difficult to enjoy? Why? (Provide evidence from the production.)
- How would you describe the inner life of each character in the play? Are they conflicted? If so, how, and why?
- Did you identify or empathize with any of the characters? If so, which character(s) and why? If not, why not?
- How does the title *The First Deep Breath* relate to the themes, plot, and characters of the play?
- What did you find most moving about the play?
- Discuss the importance of characters' names, the decisions to change names, and which characters decide to respect these name choices.
- What did you appreciate most about the performances by the actors?
- How did the set, props, costumes, and music contribute to the impact of the show?
- Would you recommend this production of *The First Deep Breath* to other theatergoers? Why or why not?



# RESOURCES

**CALL** the National Drug Hotline at **1-844-289-0879** if you or a family member needs help.

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**DO YOUR PART.** January is Human Trafficking Prevention Month. Learn how to help stop human trafficking at **[www.dea.gov/human-trafficking-prevention](http://www.dea.gov/human-trafficking-prevention)**.

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**EDUCATE** yourself about Medicare for All at **[www.medicare4all](http://www.medicare4all)**.

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**GET ASSISTANCE** improving and building your work resume at **[tinyurl.com/ResumeHelpOptions](http://tinyurl.com/ResumeHelpOptions)**.

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**KNOW** your legal disability rights at ADA. **[www.usa.gov/disability-rights](http://www.usa.gov/disability-rights)**

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**LEARN** how to support those incarcerated. **[tinyurl.com/SupportFamilyPrison](http://tinyurl.com/SupportFamilyPrison)**

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**LISTEN** to a short podcast on how a healthy lifestyle may help reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. **[tinyurl.com/AlzheimersGenes](http://tinyurl.com/AlzheimersGenes)**

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**REACH OUT** to the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health if you are suffering from overwhelming grief or loss. **[dmh.lacounty.gov/resources/grief-loss](http://dmh.lacounty.gov/resources/grief-loss)**

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**SUPPORT** LGBTIA+ Youth Health at HRC. **[tinyurl.com/Support-LGBTQ-Youth](http://tinyurl.com/Support-LGBTQ-Youth)**

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**TEXT OR CALL** "988" nationwide to connect directly to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

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