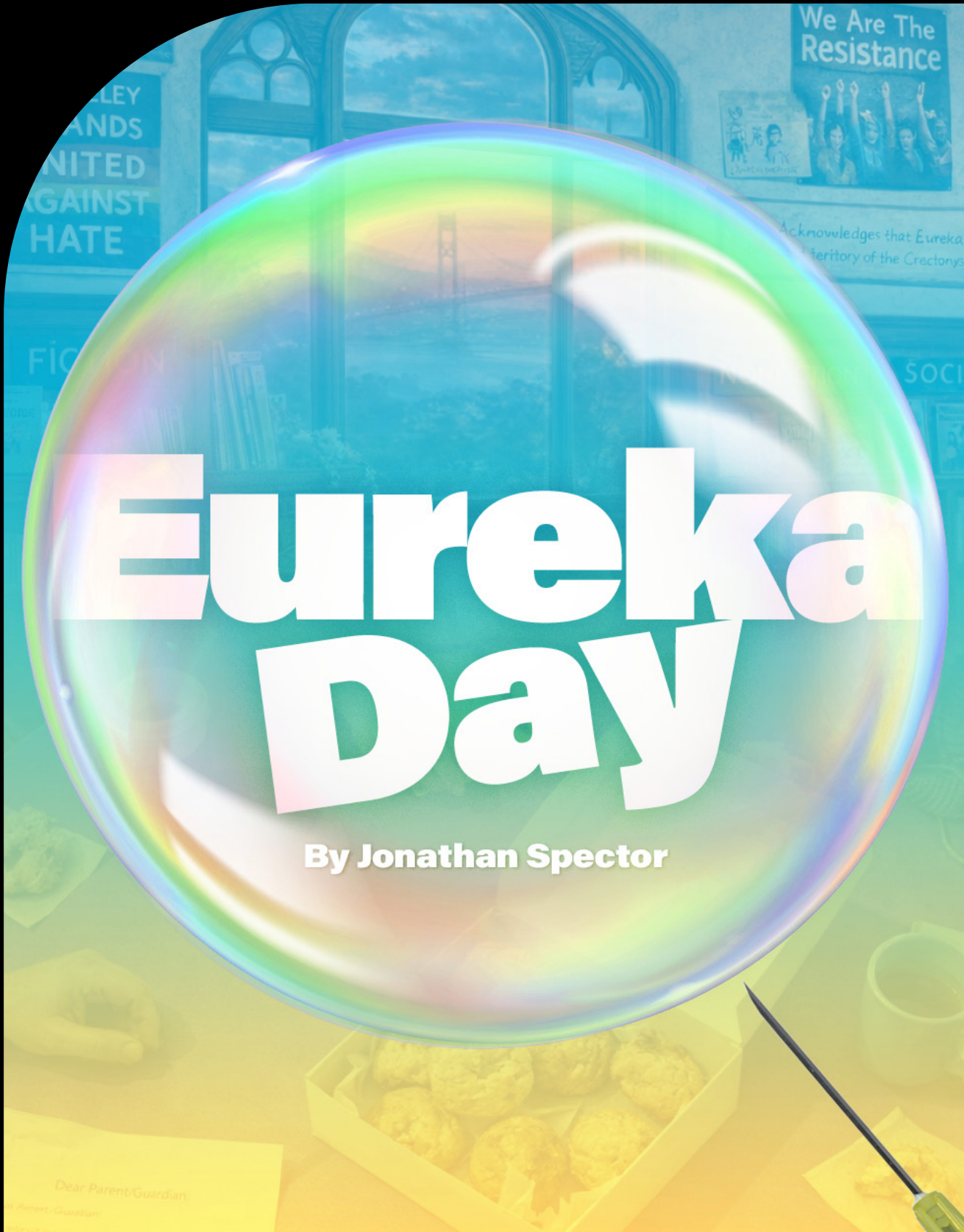


STUDY GUIDE



Eureka Day

By Jonathan Spector

Eureka Day

“Eureka Day” is a sharp, funny, and thought-provoking comedy by Jonathan Spector set at an elite private school in Berkeley, California. The school’s board of directors prides itself on making every decision through consensus, believing that every voice deserves to be heard and every perspective respected.

When a mumps outbreak forces the school to confront its vaccination policy, the board’s commitment to collaboration is put to the ultimate test. As parents, teachers, and administrators struggle to balance personal beliefs, scientific evidence, public health, and individual rights, discussions quickly become increasingly tense — and unexpectedly hilarious.

Although the play centers on a specific public health issue, it asks much larger questions about leadership, democracy, privilege, and what happens when people who share many of the same values discover they fundamentally disagree. Through wit and satire, “Eureka Day” explores how communities communicate, compromise, and sometimes fail to reach consensus.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Jonathan Spector is an award-winning American playwright whose work examines contemporary politics, culture, and human relationships through humor. Raised in Northern California, Spector draws inspiration from the communities and social dynamics he observed growing up.

“Eureka Day” premiered in 2018 and quickly earned acclaim for its witty dialogue, nuanced characters, and ability to spark meaningful conversation. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the play found an even larger audience as many of its themes — including public health, trust, misinformation, and civic discourse — became central to everyday life.

Rather than offering easy answers, Spector invites audiences to consider multiple perspectives while encouraging empathy, critical thinking, and honest dialogue. His plays often explore what happens when intelligent, well-intentioned people discover that solving complex problems is far more difficult than they expected.



Eureka Day

CENTRAL THEMES

CONSENSUS VS. LEADERSHIP

Can every decision truly be made by consensus? When is compromise productive and when must leaders make difficult decisions that not everyone will support?

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS VS. COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

How should societies balance personal freedom with protecting the health and well-being of others? The play encourages audiences to consider how individual choices can have broader consequences.

COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

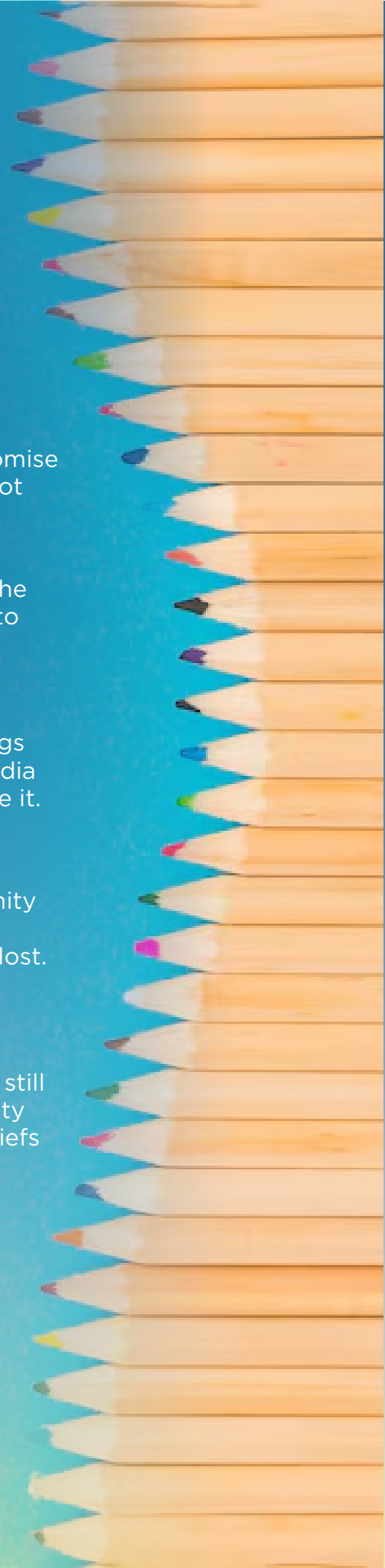
One of the play's funniest and most memorable scenes unfolds through an online discussion among parents. As misunderstandings multiply and emotions escalate, the play illustrates how social media and digital communication can amplify conflict rather than resolve it.

TRUST AND EXPERTISE

Who do we trust when making important decisions? Scientists, physicians, educators, parents, government officials, and community members all bring different forms of knowledge and experience. "Eureka Day" asks audiences to examine how trust is built — and lost.

IDENTITY AND VALUES

The members of the "Eureka Day" community see themselves as compassionate, thoughtful, and progressive. When disagreement emerges, they discover that people who share similar values may still arrive at very different conclusions. The play examines how identity shapes our beliefs and how communities respond when those beliefs are challenged.



VACCINES AND VACCINE SKEPTICISM: AN OLD ARGUMENT

by Neena Arndt

**“An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.”
–Benjamin Franklin**

- The history of vaccines dates approximately to 10th century China, where smallpox raged. Medical practitioners developed a method of putting ground up smallpox scabs up a person's nose in order to give them a very mild case of the disease. This meant they would not be in danger of developing a more severe, lethal case. (It's not appealing, but worth it to save lives.)
- In 1796, English physician Edward Jenner noticed that milkmaids, who faced frequent exposure to the mild disease cowpox, never caught smallpox. He tested his observation by inoculating a boy with material from a cowpox blister, then exposing him to smallpox. The boy stayed well.
- In 1885, French scientist Louis Pasteur developed an attenuated vaccine for rabies. “Attenuated” means that it uses a weakened version of the disease to expose the immune system to the disease without causing great harm.
- Throughout the early-mid 20th century, more scientists developed vaccines for diseases like tetanus, diphtheria, tuberculosis, and polio.
- Vaccines for measles, mumps, and rubella were developed in the late 20th century and were combined into a single vaccine (often called the MMR vaccine) by Maurice Hilleman in 1971. Later, varicella (chicken pox) was added to that vaccine, making it the MMRV vaccine.



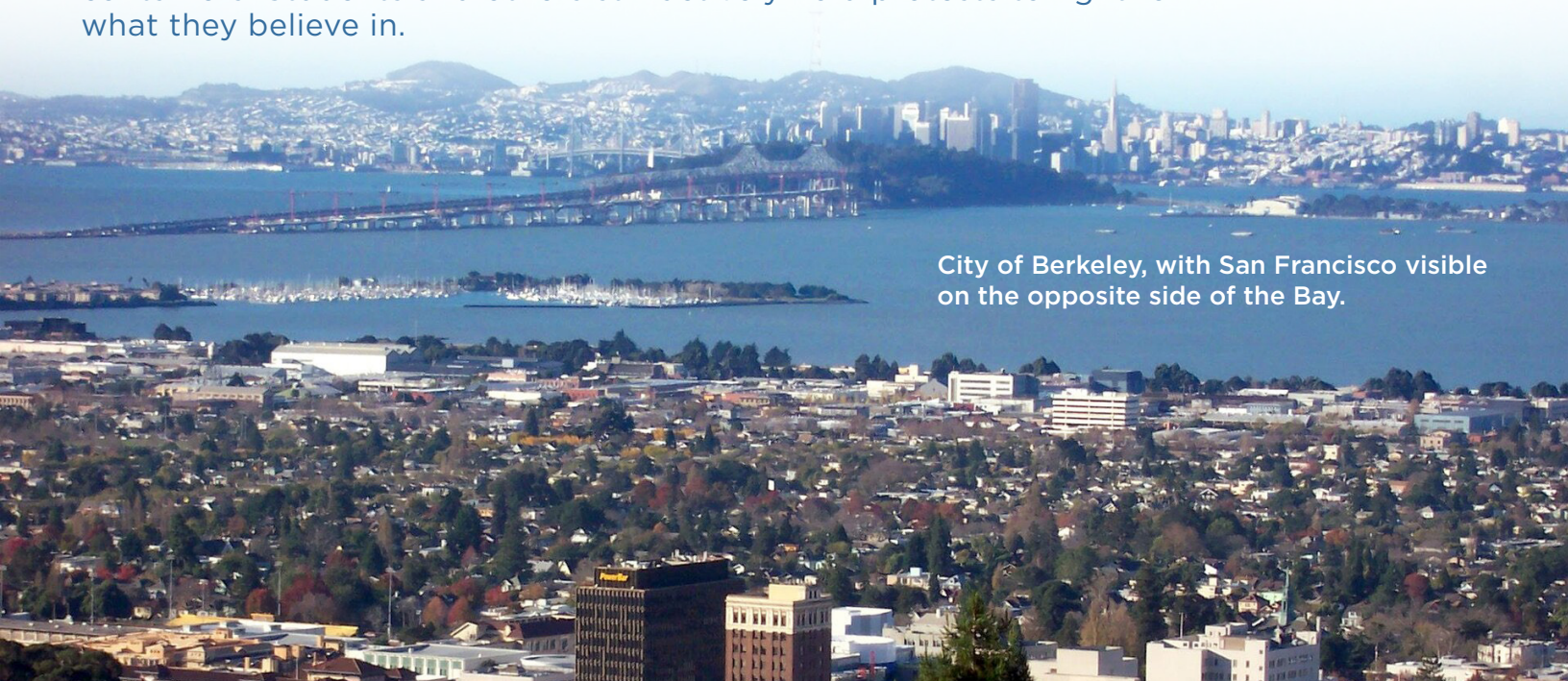
“THERE’S A ROUGH PATTERN: the more vaccines and the more force used to encourage or require vaccines’ widespread adoption, the more resistance we see in the population.” - Elena Conis, medical historian

- Ever since vaccines came about, some people have opposed them. Some do so on religious grounds, saying that God should decide who lives or dies from a disease. Some point to the risks associated with vaccines (exactly what risks vaccines pose has always been a point of debate).
- In the late 20th century and early 21st century, vaccine skeptics believed that vaccines might pollute the body. Some vaccine skeptics expressed concerns that vaccines introduced harmful substances into the body or disrupted children’s natural development. To bolster their arguments, they drew on rhetoric from the women’s movement, the environmental movement, and other left-wing social movements of the time. As physicians began recommending an increasing number of vaccines for infants and young children, some parents felt that they, as guardians of their children’s health, should have the right to limit or decline vaccines.

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA: A BASTION OF PROGRESSIVISM

Located on the Eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay, the city of Berkeley is known as a hotbed of progressive politics. Once the home of the Ohlone tribe, Berkeley is now a bustling city of about 125,000, and many residents are associated with the University of California at Berkeley.

In the 1960s, the campus and city became a popular place for hippies and protestors, some of whom were students and some of whom were simply looking for like minds. Since then, Berkeley has been known for its left-leaning politics. The nation’s first curbside recycling program began in Berkeley in 1973, and in 1988 the city banned Styrofoam food containers. Students and others still actively hold protests to fight for what they believe in.



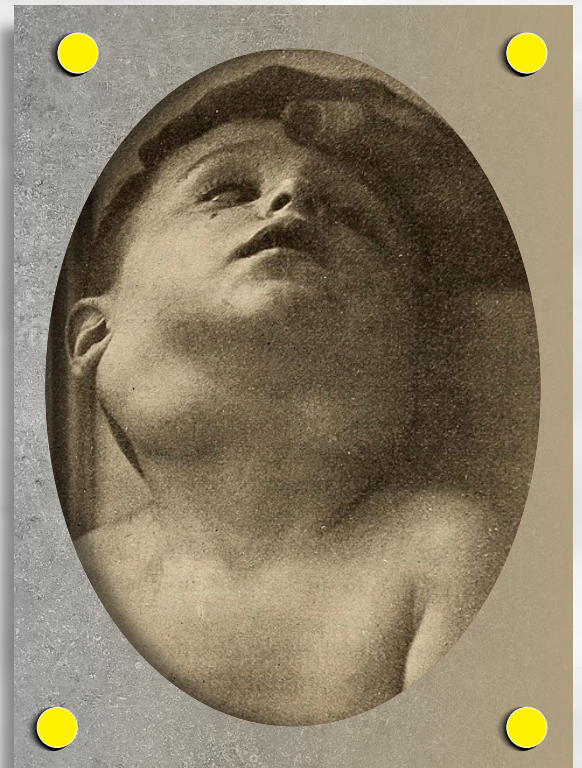
City of Berkeley, with San Francisco visible on the opposite side of the Bay.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE: SCHOOLS IN BERKELEY

- Like most cities, Berkeley has both public (government funded and free to attend) and private (tuition-based) schools. At some private schools in Berkeley, many parents hold the belief that vaccines are dangerous or unnecessary for their children. For example, in 2018, only 29% of incoming kindergartners at the Berkeley Rose Waldorf School were vaccinated.
- “Eureka Day” depicts a fictional private school that somewhat resembles real private schools in Berkeley. “Eureka!” is the state motto of California. Derived from Ancient Greek, it means “I’ve found it!”. So, the name “Eureka Day School” (“Eureka Day” for short) places the fictional school firmly in California and also suggests that the school values discovery and learning.
- While public schools are run by the government, a private school is run by a board of directors. The board members might be parents or community members. Their job is to approve budgets and set policies for the school.

HERD IMMUNITY AND MUMPS

- If most of the people in a school or community are vaccinated, that community has what immunologists call herd immunity. This occurs when many people are immune to a disease, either through illness or vaccination, so the disease cannot spread. When a significant portion of people are unvaccinated, there can be outbreaks of diseases like mumps or measles. Even worse, since many vaccines are not fully effective in all people who receive them, sometimes a vaccinated person can get ill once the disease is spreading in the community. In “Eureka Day,” mumps spreads at the school because many children are unvaccinated. Because no vaccine is 100% effective, some vaccinated people may still become ill during an outbreak, particularly if vaccination rates in the community are low.
- If a person is infected with mumps, they usually develop symptoms 12-25 days after exposure to the virus, although some people show no symptoms (but are still contagious). Symptoms can include fever, chills, muscle aches, and exhaustion. About 12-24 hours after onset of symptoms, the salivary glands swell, resulting in a painful and swollen neck that lasts for 3 to 7 days. While most people recover fully within a week or two, mumps can lead to severe complications.



Little boy with mumps, before the vaccine was available

COMPLICATIONS CAN INCLUDE:

1. Meningitis or encephalitis (swelling of the brain or the tissues surrounding it). These are potentially life-threatening.
2. Pancreatitis, or swelling of the pancreas, a vital organ that produces hormones and digestive enzymes.
3. Orchitis or swelling of the testicles (in male patients).
4. Temporary or permanent hearing loss.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you think a private school should require all students to be vaccinated, or should parents have the right to choose?
2. If a child gets a disease because their parents refused vaccination, should their parents be held responsible? How?
3. Imagine you are the parent of a new baby. How would you decide whether or not to vaccinate your child? Where would you find information about vaccination?
4. If you lived in 10th century China, would you be willing to put the scabs from smallpox blisters up your nose in order to get a mild case of smallpox, gain immunity, and avoid a more severe case?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. CONSENSUS CHALLENGE

Divide students into small groups and ask them to make a decision entirely by consensus — for example, planning a school event, selecting a class trip, or choosing a charitable cause to support.

Afterward, discuss:

- What made consensus difficult?
- Did everyone feel heard?
- Was the final decision stronger because everyone participated?

2. BOARD MEETING ROLE PLAY

Assign students roles from the play — board members, parents, teachers, or administrators — and present a fictional school dilemma unrelated to vaccination. Students should defend their perspectives while attempting to reach a group decision.

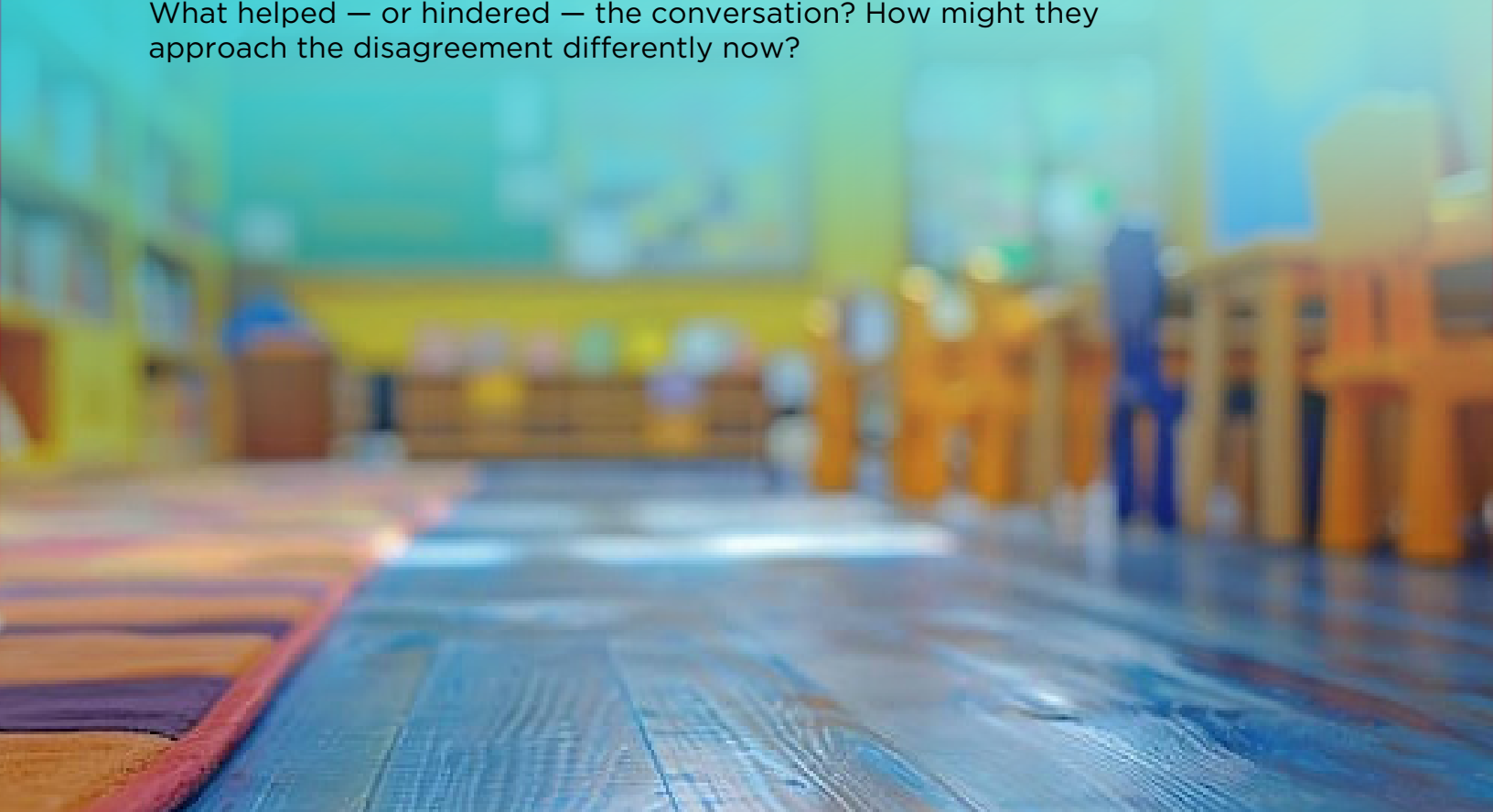
3. EVALUATING SOURCES

Provide students with a variety of articles, news stories, opinion pieces, and scientific sources on a current issue. Ask them to evaluate:

- Who created this source?
- What evidence is presented?
- Is the information factual, opinion-based, or persuasive?
- How can we determine whether a source is trustworthy?

4. CIVIL DIALOGUE REFLECTION

After seeing the production, ask students to write about a time they disagreed with someone. How did each person communicate? What helped — or hindered — the conversation? How might they approach the disagreement differently now?



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Actors: Suli Holum, Brandon J. Pierce, and Sarah GlikoBoyajian



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