

## If you go

**What:** "Hold On, It's Just the Middle"

**When:** 7 p.m. Friday, March 6

**Where:** Godby High School Auditorium, 1717 W. Tharpe St.

**Tickets:** \$5. Those who wear their Green Dot gear can get in for \$1. The Green Dot Movement aims to shift campus culture and prevent violence with the help of bystanders.



Chokwe Bennett, right, and a castmate rehearse a scene in "Hold On, It's Just the Middle." AMANDA THOMPSON

# Real-life advice

## Godby theater students aim to ease middle school angst with 'Hold On'

**Amanda Kariioth Thompson**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Middle school is a notoriously difficult stage in a child's life. It's an awkward, in-between time when the world seems topsy-turvy and things don't always work out as you hope. The transition phase from youngster to young adult can be painful and sometimes traumatic, but Godby High School theater students are using a creative strategy to help.

Inspired by her own high school theater experience, Randi Lundgren, director of theatre arts at Godby, recognizes the theater's potential to spread a message of compassion and support. In that spirit, her students have created an original variety show titled "Hold On, It's Just the Middle." The production reinforces the idea that it does get better and offers skits, poems,



Randi Lundgren directs a rehearsal of Godby's original production. AMANDA THOMPSON

scenes, monologues, choreography, songs, and pantomimes, about life during and after the middle years.

"The world has changed since I was in high school," Lundgren said. "Middle schoolers need this now more than ever. There are many more things that we need to talk about, especially with the uptick in the teenage suicide rate and social media. The bullying doesn't happen physically so much anymore, it's now virtual."

The show deals with parent and child relationships, suicide prevention, depression, social media responsibility, positive body image, anti-drug and alcohol abuse, anti-violence, acceptance of others and understanding and loving oneself.

The subjects are rooted in reality because

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# Show

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they are written by Godby theater students about their own personal experiences. They explore deep topics, but all the scenes end in a positive and uplifting tone. There will be three days of performances for Leon County middle schoolers as well as a public performance.

"I cast it by saying who identifies with this situation, who feels this way, who's been through this. Let's face it, kids can see right through something that's not authentic. I've been hitting that home with my students, saying don't make it superficial."

Theater is an especially useful tool for exploring these difficult subjects because it's a natural outlet for self-expression. "They're able to take all the stuff they went through, and what they're still going through, and express it cathartically, which allows them to heal," Lundgren said.

Chokwe Bennett is a senior and, though he's relatively new to the stage, he'll continue to hone his natural talent at the New York Conservatory after he graduates. He's passionate about theater. "I realized that I look up to so many performers without even knowing it," Chokwe said. "That feeling they give me, I want to give that to other people."

A powerful connection exists between the actors and the audience. Chokwe knows he can create poignant moments by tapping into his own memories and experiences. "I went through a lot during my middle school years," he said. "There's stuff I wish I would have known in middle school. Mostly, I want them to understand it's OK to feel and have emotional awareness."

The stage is a perfect tool to represent the wide emotional swings many middle schoolers experience. Actors are trained to project and amplify so the audience gets the message. Chokwe explained "when middle schoolers feel emotion, they feel it in an exaggerated sense. Our exaggeration on stage, I'm hoping will come across as how they're actually feeling inside, even if they're not expressing it. Expressing yourself in such an exaggerated way equates to understanding your exaggerated feelings."

Katelyn Cummings, is in 11th grade and her character has an unreciprocated crush which causes heartache and insecurities. "These are some of the things that middle schoolers experience, and it's honestly just hard," she said. "I'm an example to them that I've been through this, so you can get through it too."

"I hope this show helps them find themselves before they get in a place of deep sadness," Katelyn shared. "I want them to see that there's more to life than getting out of middle school. Coming to high school is like a whole new world. Going from high school to college is going to be a whole new world for

## Excerpts from 'It's Just the Middle'

Excerpt from Godby's original, student written production "Hold On, It's Just the Middle"

### What do you wish someone had told you in Middle School?

1. Everyone does not have your best interests at heart.
2. It's OK to stand out.
3. Standing up for others is the right thing to do.
4. It may be a bad day, but it's not a bad life.
5. Grades do matter.
6. Trust your gut. If it doesn't seem right, it isn't. So don't do it.
7. Be yourself and love yourself.
8. Find someone that you can confide in so you don't bottle everything up.
9. It's OK to not understand something.
10. It's OK to fail.
11. Everything isn't as hard as it seems.
12. One mistake doesn't make you a failure.
13. Your body is perfect just the way you are.
14. Try to understand each other.
15. Don't give people the opportunity to expose you.
16. Violence is never a good answer.
17. One choice can lead to a lifetime of regret.
18. You don't have to try so hard to fit in.
19. It's OK to admit when you are not OK.
20. It really does get better.

us. So, it's step by step. Someone is always going through the same transition as everybody else before them so, there are always people they can talk to, who know what they're going through."

The public performance of "Hold On, It's Just the Middle" is on Friday, March 6, at 7 p.m. at the Amos P. Godby High School Auditorium at 1717 W. Tharpe St. Tickets are \$5 for all. This is a Green Dot Movement event. Those who wear their Green Dot gear can get in for \$1. The Green Dot Movement aims to shift campus culture and prevent violence with the help of bystanders.

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).*