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COCA TO PRESENT INAUGURAL COCAWRITES FESTIVAL OUTDOORS AND ON FILM

Suffer the Children, written by Mariah Richardson and directed by Jacqueline Thompson, to premiere as outdoor film on COCA's campus with additional plays by student playwrights featuring St. Louis actors

ST. LOUIS—[COCA](#) begins a new tradition with its premiere of the [COCAwrites Festival](#), a festival of new work created by a multi-generational team of St. Louis theatre professionals and COCA students for multi-generational audiences. This year, the Festival will take place outdoors on COCA's East Lot on March 27–28, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. as a part of the COCA Presents season.

The headliner of the Festival, *Suffer the Children* by Mariah Richardson, will be directed by Jacqueline Thompson with Associate Director Gaby Rodriguez and projected as a film onto COCA's new Ferring East Wing. Preceding *Suffer the Children*, audiences can see 10-minute companion plays written by COCA students and featuring actors Ryan Lawson-Maeske, Carl Overly Jr., Thomasina Clark, and David Wassilak. The plays, *A Day in the Life of Finnigan Daniels* by Sophia Levinson and *Hate the Sin, Love the Sinner* by Nikki Prodes, are directed by COCA students and overseen by the Festival's dramaturg.

As further commitment to developing new work in the St. Louis region, COCA will also participate in the early development phase of local playwright Colin McLaughlin's new play, *RealTalk*. The reading will be directed by COCA's Artistic Director of Theatre Jennifer Wintzer and will star St. Louis Visionary Award winner and actress Kathryn Bentley.

"The Festival marks a new movement in COCA's Theatre programming," said Jennifer Wintzer, COCA Artistic Director of Theatre. "In the COCAwrites program, professionals mentor students in all areas of theatrical production, including design-tech, dramaturgy, and acting, to create new work. The COCAwrites Festival uplifts the voices of young people, adding a fresh perspective to the growing St. Louis new work landscape."

Suffer the Children is part of a series of plays about Delilah, a young girl exploring questions of community and coming-of-age in St. Louis. This dramatic piece looks at issues of race, white supremacy, gun violence, and immigration, highlighting the real fears that children, and adults, face today. The play asks St. Louis audiences to lean in and listen to the words and seek restoration through the ideas of our young people.

Suffer the Children features St. Louis actors Ryan Lawson-Maeske, Carl Overly Jr., Alicia Like, Chris Ware, Thomasina Clark, David Wassilak, Fannie Belle Leiby, Michael Tran, and Michele Yamin, as well as student actors Peyton Webster, Kamiyah Jones, Parker Collier, and Nikki Prodes.

Early ticket holders will have access to sneak peek releases of *Suffer the Children* and a rebroadcast of COCA's Speaker Series featuring Golden Globe Award Winner and Repertory Theatre Playwright-in-Residence Regina Taylor. Audiences have the option to buy tickets to see the Festival in-person with a socially distanced live audience or virtually. The Festival of new work goes on sale on February 22 and is recommended for ages 11 and up. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit cocastl.org/coca-presents.

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ABOUT COCA

COCA's mission is to *enrich lives and build community through the arts*. With a commitment to equity and access, COCA serves as a regional hub for learning in and through the arts for all ages from all backgrounds. One of the most diverse cultural institutions in St. Louis, COCA serves over 50,000 students, audience members, artists and families from over 220 zip codes across the St. Louis region every year. The fourth largest multi-disciplinary arts organization in the country, COCA is committed to supporting the vitality and creativity of over 200 artists at the heart its work in schools, community centers, local business, cultural organizations, and on-site at its campus in University City.