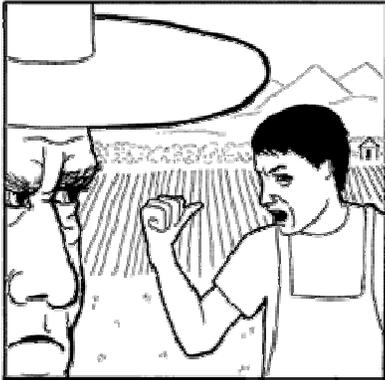


## NO DUTY TO RETREAT



RUN AWAY OR FIGHT?

# CODE WEST NEWS FROM (OUT)LAW & ORDER



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## A Night of Honor... *Drama...*

## Justice... and **TRIUMPH**



### Hello Friends and Colleagues!

The second wonderful year of (Out)Law & Order has drawn to a close with performances of culminating student plays, which powerfully dramatized the impact of their classroom learning experience. The student playwright/players simply wowed the audience, as well as themselves, as the Code of the West met the Code of the Street, onstage at the Autry Museum's Wells Fargo Theater.

—Lisa Citron  
Executive Director  
[lisacitron@outlawandorder.org](mailto:lisacitron@outlawandorder.org)

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### **In the Students' Words...**

This year's event proved more than ever to be an internally strengthening experience for the children, opening their eyes to learning from one another, and forging relationships:

***"I liked working as a team."***

—Gurpreet Basraom, Northridge Middle School

***"It helped me to express myself and not be shy."***

—Aroceli Bravo, John Muir Middle School

***"We all became better friends while practicing our performance."***

—Candice Glicksberg, Palms Middle School

Kids responded to what other schools were doing with the same material:

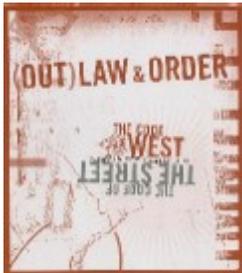
***"Their play is tight."***

—Raul Caprile, John Muir student to teacher referring to another school.

***"You were awesome."***

—Ryan Nolan, Palms student to a Northridge student.

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### **(Out)Law & Order Works in Middle Schools**

Eighth grade is one of the last opportunities for middle school students, who are becoming more individualized and peer-focused, to be influenced in their choices as they redesign their roles in relationships at school and at home. (Out)Law & Order meets the daunting combination of developmental and organizational change faced by middle school students, change that makes middle school the time that students are most likely to experiment with risky behaviors and to become disinterested and disengaged in academics. A drop in academic performance at this time can be especially detrimental, because middle school is the point at which adolescents begin to make pivotal decisions regarding their academic and career paths .

Our students come from low and moderate-income families, but (Out)Law & Order is designed to focus on the needs and interests of students of all backgrounds and educational circumstances. The schools we currently serve rank from 1 to 8 on the Academic Performance Index. Students range from those who are failing to highly gifted honors track, yet all schools have suspended students for "outlaw" behavior and violent conflict. Violence, both actual and virtual, is an issue in all students' lives and that of their communities.

They clearly grasped the parallels between the western frontier and the urban frontier:

***"It taught me about laws and history that I never knew."***

—Kejaninae Clayton, John Muir Middle School

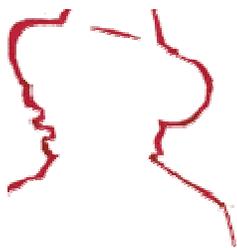
***"The most meaningful thing to me in writing our play was how we contemporized history and made it relate to us."***

—Sonia Kim, Palms Middle School

***“I learned how to view the story from two different views.”***

— Tom Le, Northridge Middle School

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### **Billy the Kid Visits 2004**

In a play called Billy the Kid, by Palms Middle School students, the infamous 14-year-old outlaw joins up with a gang of contemporary Crips, and fits in seamlessly with the violence of a modern day street gang. Young gang members, locked in a shootout to the death, match his “reckless bravado”.

Cop 1: **Put the gun down now. We don't want to hurt you.**

Cop 2: **You're not going to get past us, not alive anyways.**

Billy the Kid: **I'll take my chances pig!**

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### **Fistful of Honor Faces Race**

In *Fistful of Honor*, by John Muir students, two boys, Javier and Motif, one Latino, the other black, are involved in a race fight at school. Then, each one hears from his grandfather the same story—about a runaway slave girl who was raped by a Mexican officer during the Mexican-American War. The girl escapes him and smuggles her half-black, half-Hispanic baby to San Francisco, only to see some of her children grow up to be bandits. The boys want to know the how the story comes out.

Motif: **So what happened?**

Jaime: **I don't know.**

Javier: **So what did you tell us this story for then? This story is without an ending?**

Seth: **The ending is up to you really.**

Motif: **What?**

Seth: **The ending is up to you.**

The outcome of this tale of race violence and mob rule is left up to the audience as well. Along with the students, the audience recognized, in an intense and visceral way, how we write our own destiny; we choose our own responses to violent situations.

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### **The Business Bandit Addresses Modern Day Ethic\$**

In *The Business Bandit*, Northridge students created the story of a businessman who's got big plans to evict his immigrant tenants, and build a prison on the land, from which he'll reap big profits. The play creates parallels with the historic Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, where Mexican landowners “protected” by the treaty, lost their land to squatters who bankrupted the landowners by taking them to court. The play also echoed the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act, which closed the door to Chinese immigration and

opportunities in the U.S. The students wrung every bit of dramatic irony from these comparisons. Morals, ethics, even human lives were shown to be disposable in the face of the almighty dollar:

Leticia: **It will be immoral.**

Marisol: **Unethical.**

Nigel: **But legal, baby.**

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### **A Gala Event**

At the end of the gala evening all ninety kids, along with their teachers and theatre teaching artists, united onstage. Susan Phillips and Barry Sanders, professors from Pitzer College, conducted an enthusiastic and candid Q &A.

***“I had a low self-image when I began and now look at me!”***

—Carla Torres, Northridge Middle School

***“This project gave me a lot of reasons to stay focused and work hard.”***

—Caitlin Fabrocini, Northridge Middle School

***“I learned to trust my fellow actors,”***

—Anthony Williams, John Muir Middle School

A follow-up written survey collected from the students elicited further responses:

***“It was really intellectual and it had a lot of meaning—no duty to retreat isn’t always good.”***

—Saher Nazir, Northridge Middle School

***“This project taught me more than just how to act, it taught me how to center my energy. It taught me how to interact with other people. And it taught me how things don’t always go as planned. Life isn’t always a box of chocolates.”***

—Lauren Edmondson, Northridge Middle School

***“I learned to stay confident with friends about harsh subjects.”***

—Aaron DeRobles, Palms Middle School

***“I think just using a story I could relate to made it easier to understand what the Native Americans went through.”***

—Paris Fried, Palms Middle School

***“It is a story about how, even a hundred years later, we are still doing the same things.”***

—Anthony Williams, John Muir Middle School

***“I will take my (Out)Law & Order book, experience from the play, and try to***

***keep honor and self-defense in my mind."***

—Justin Moss, John Muir Middle School

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### **A Final Thought to Carry Forward**

Finally, from the principal of Northridge Middle School comes her assessment of the second extraordinary year of (Out)Law & Order:

***"These things about character, ethics and violence are hard to teach in an isolated curriculum. The character education piece that schools were given was good, but it was still devoid of content. The words in that program are merely descriptive. (Out)Law & Order is so concrete and real, it connects students to history and ethics. In the hands of students it comes alive."***

—Penny Gwin, Principal, Northridge Middle School

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(Out)Law & Order is a challenging, new American history and theatre project in three Los Angeles middle schools. The subjects: Honor, Courage, Violence, and Justice—as they were in the Old West, and as they are today in students' own lives and consciousness. From the perils of the "Gunfighter Nation," to the struggles of diverse peoples for their places on America's fiercely "contested western ground," the standards-based (Out)Law & Order program immerses eighth-graders in the myths, and the realities, of the western frontier. At the same time, students bring to the classroom their special knowledge of what it takes to "stand your ground" on the urban frontier. The program culminates at year-end with student-created (Out)Law & Order plays, performed at the schools and at the Wells Fargo Theatre at the Autry National Center. A 13-minute video promo of the first year's dramatic performances at the Wells Fargo Theatre is available for viewing.

Some images in this newsletter are from the (Out)Law & Order student textbook, designed by Rene Neri and illustrated by Rachell Sumpter.

(Out)Law & Order 2004 performances were made possible, in part, by a grant from the California Council for the Humanities as part of the Council's statewide California Stories Initiative. The Council is an independent non-profit organization and a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. For more information on the Council and the California Stories Initiative, visit [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

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