

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Bel Kaufman is best known as an author, but her decades as a teacher in the New York public school system are what give Up the Down Staircase its authenticity. The granddaughter of the celebrated Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem, she published her first poem at the age of 7. At 12, after emigrating to escape the desperate poverty of post-revolutionary Russia, her family moved to New York. Not speaking any English, she was forced to start in a first grade classroom, but just 11 years later she graduated Magna Cum Laude from Hunter College, and went on to earn a master's degree in literature from Columbia University. She got into teaching almost by accident, when a friend let her take over her class. The first night of Southwest Charter School's performance of Up the Down Staircase marks her 102nd birthday, and Bel Kaufman is still teaching.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR:

Like the protagonist, Director Josh Tabshy is a first year teacher, but his experience in education and in theater goes back much further. He did his student teaching at Southwest Charter School, where he has also worked as a para-educator, volunteer and director. He has been in 16 plays in middle school, high school and community theater, including performances in Guys and Dolls and Our Town, and a starring role as Pip in Great Expectations during his senior year. He is also an experienced school theater director, having directed Much Ado About Nothing at Beverly Cleary Middle School, and Alice in Wonderland, The Mousetrap and Romeo and Juliet here at Southwest Charter School. Josh says "Theater is one of the best ways to build community with students. By the time you step on stage to perform, the bond that has been forged will last a lifetime. Every performance is like a state championship."