

a film by Peggy Stern



# Standing Tall

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## Study Guide

By Robert J. Landy, PhD, RDT/BCT



and in so doing, to feel more balanced and in control. In addition, through the film we see the teacher going through a similar journey toward understanding.

## The Model

The model presented in this film is of a dramatic process designed to help children cope with potential trauma. The intention of the drama therapist and drama educator was to distance the children from their direct experience of the events of 9/11 and move them into a fictional community named "Standing Tall," one where they could imagine figures similar to the real ones, coping with a disaster. The fictional community had figures that represented heroes, villains and victims. The facilitators took the children through an intensive but also playful process where they could make fun of the villains. The film portrays one example as the children imagine the pregnant parents of Osama bin Laden discussing their hopes and plans for their new baby boy.

This experience allowed the children to look at other sides of the roles of hero, victim and villain and humanize the figures. For example, the obvious heroes – firefighters and police and mayor – became Mom, who tells her son to express his feelings and not hide them. The villain, Osama, is made fun of and then humanized – he had a mother and father who had hopes and dreams for their son. He wasn't born bad, says one girl. And adds another, ironically, perhaps he fell on his head when he was small.

The model devised by drama therapist, Robert Landy, concerns gathering the stories and the roles created by the children in the workshops and writing a play based upon the children's creations. The play is then performed to the faculty and students in the school, as well as to the parents and friends of the children, living in the community. Moving into performance gives the children a chance to present their stories to an audience that needs what they did: a sense of clarity, and a ritual through which to share a common history. In the film we see how such a model of drama, storymaking and performance can enable an intergenerational community to transform a tragic event into one of hope and joy.



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for the film by Peggy Stern

# Standing Tall

## Introduction

*Standing Tall* was a project funded by the *New York Times* Foundation School Arts Rescue Initiative and implemented through City Lights, a youth theatre organization located in New York City. The purpose of the project was to help children in New York City public schools most affected by the events of 9/11 feel a greater sense of well-being by exposure to an experience in the arts.

*Standing Tall* drew upon the expertise of a drama therapist as well as a theatre teaching artist. Their work with a class of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in Manhattan's P.S. 3, all of whom witnessed the attacks on the World Trade Center through their classroom window, concerned the creation of a number of classroom theatre workshops and the presentation of an original play, based upon the stories and roles created by the children.

The film, by Peggy Stern, documents the process of transforming the children's stories and role-plays into theatre. Told from the point of view of the classroom teacher, this film explores and questions the ways that drama can help children learn how to transform a frightening, chaotic experience into one of hope and clarity. At the heart of this film is the notion that the arts, in this case, drama, have the potential for helping children to express the inexpressible in a safe and symbolic form,



## How to use this film

For those who are familiar with and skilled in implementing creative and therapeutic approaches to education, the model presented can be replicated with appropriate modifications based upon particular circumstances. This experience does not need to be a response to a trauma on the scale of 9/11, but rather can be a way to process any significant and/or troubling moment either current or past.

For those less skilled at implementing such a model, there is a fundamental philosophy at work that can guide them in their work with children. The main idea is that children learn how to process reality through a variety of creative and expressive means, some of which are more powerful than traditional cognitive and verbal approaches. If these expressive, creative approaches, such as role-playing, storymaking and performance, can be incorporated in education, therapy and even parenting, the adult has a powerful way into the mind and emotional life of the child.

Many adults who work with children will be able to make use of the approaches presented in this film. All will be able to view their work with children through the philosophical lens presented in the film.



## Objectives

The primary audiences for this film are teachers, school administrators, school psychologists, play therapists and trauma specialists, social workers, creative arts therapists and other who work with children. Even parents with elementary school-aged children can benefit from this film. The film is intended to help them understand the value of using a dramatic approach of role-playing, storymaking and performance as a means of helping children cope with difficult and potentially traumatizing experience.

### Specific objectives follow:

1. To understand the human need to tell stories as a means of making sense of difficult, potentially traumatizing experience.
2. To understand the therapeutic value of role-playing, storytelling and story dramatization.
3. To understand the concept of aesthetic distance in transforming potential trauma in real life into safely contained forms of enactment.
4. To learn how to transform stories and roles into script form ready for performance.
5. To explore the value of metaphor in role-playing, storytelling, scriptwriting and performance.
6. To extract a sense of meaning from the events of September 11, 2001, for children and adults.



## Discussion questions

- In working creatively with such a trauma as 9/11 in a classroom, should the leaders inform the children that their work will be about the trauma? When is the best time to do so?
- On the morning of September 11, 2001, what did Rachel's students actually see outside their classroom window? What creative ways can you think of to help them express what they saw?
- Does drawing a picture of or dramatically re-enacting a traumatic event re-stimulate the trauma or help a child release some feelings associated with the trauma? Or does it have some other effect?
- When the media portrays a political figure, such as Osama bin Laden, as a treacherous villain, are children able to see other sides of him? How?
- How does media coverage and public discussion post-9/11 shape the children's feelings and opinions?
- In dealing with the effects upon their children of a potential trauma such as 9/11, what is the role of the parents? The classroom teacher? The school administration?
- When learning through drama, should children be encouraged or permitted to enact stereotypical, even frivolous role-plays, i.e. portraying Osama bin Laden as a boy playing with a machine-gun? Viewing Osama's parents as buffoons?
- Do you agree with Rachel that the children's making fun of Osama bin Laden and, by implication, Muslims, was "uncomfortable?" How is this kind of stereotypical behavior useful or harmful to the process for the children and adults involved in the workshops and in the audience?
- What do children and adults learn about villains in the film? Heroes? Victims?
- Do villains stand tall?
- Are Moms heroes?
- When a student says that he understands the "true value of comedy," what does he mean?
- What is the true value of comedy when working with children who have witnessed a tragedy?
- Is drama an effective way for children to deal with a tragedy such as 9/11?
- How do the children's reactions and feelings mirror those of adults?
- Will the drama therapy experience have a lasting effect on the children and the teacher months or years later?
- When a student says that without the drama class she would have been "dead in my mind," what does she mean?
- How can teachers/social workers/theatre artists/youth workers adopt or learn this method?
- How did the dramatic process allow the children to share stories, feelings and thoughts that might not have been possible in straight discussions?
- How did the length of time of the process (2 hours per weeks for 14 weeks) contribute to its effectiveness?
- Were you surprised by the depth of the children's understanding or expression of feeling about the events of 9/11? How did watching them express their thoughts and feelings affect your views of 9/11?



# Transcript of the final play

## STANDING TALL

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A play about September 11<sup>th</sup> based upon stories and roles created by 9 and 10 year old children who witnessed the attacks on the World Trade Center.

By Robert Landy

with songs by Garreth O'Brien and Anna Resnick

*The play is set in a neutral space. It can be performed in concert reading style, with several lecterns, by two or more actors, or it can be fully staged and performed by a larger group of children and/or adults. The original version was fully staged at PS 3 in Manhattan in May, 2002. It was performed on this occasion by 31 children and two adults, but can be staged by as few as four children and/or adults. The production was designed on an open floor space with flexible set pieces. The audience sat on three sides of the performance space.*

*NOTE: This play is copyrighted by Robert Landy. For permission to perform the play, please contact Robert Landy, New York University, 35 West 4th Street, Room 675, New York, NY 10012.*

CHRISTA:

Places, places. Is everybody ready? Places, everybody. Quiet on the set! One, two, three...

ALL:

Action!

VICTORIA:

Early in the year 2002, our class began to work on a project called Standing Tall.

LINDSAY:

We were told by our teachers that we would learn about drama and would play roles and make up stories and then, at the end, we would create a play to perform for you.

GARRETH:

We weren't told what the play was going to be about, only that Robert, our playwright, would write it based on our stories.

JESSE:

It was exciting but a little confusing.

RU ZHOU:

Why were we doing this?

ANNA:

What should our stories be about?

AIDAN:

In the first class, we were asked to come up with three roles and we called them: Victim, Villain and Hero.

CELINE:

We acted out a scene about our characters and then Anna told a story.

CATIE:

In her story, a villain hurts a victim. Then he is defeated by a hero.

THOMAS:

Later, Niles said:

NILES:

Heroes don't always win.

LENA:

And David said:

DAVID:

Sometimes villains see themselves as heroes.

MOLLIE:

A week later, we were asked: "What villains can you think of?" Most of us answered the same:

ALL:

Osama Bin Laden.

ROBERT:

"Ah ha!" we thought, "This is no ordinary drama class."

D'ASHLEY:

We knew then that the class was about our experiences on September 11, 2001.

TAL:

Drama would be a way to help us make sense of what we saw outside our classroom window on our 4th day of school.

ANNA R.:

The shiniest and tallest buildings in our city were attacked. We saw the whole thing outside our classroom window, and we needed to find a way to stand tall.

SAMANTHA:

Drama is about pretending to be someone else and about creating a make-believe world.

ESTHER:  
The characters we created were victims, villains and heroes.

HUNTER:  
Our make-believe city is called Standing Tall.

ALEX:  
We invite you into our world.

JESSICA:  
Maybe it is not so different from yours.

DYLAN:  
Maybe like us, you witnessed the events that happened on September 11, 2001.

VANITY:  
Maybe if you come along with us, you will find a way to stand tall.

ANTHONY:  
Just like we did.

## **BEGINNINGS: VICTIMS**

RACHEL:  
Beginnings: Victims.

CHRISTA:  
Ordinary people become victims and heroes. Quiet on the set! One, Two, Three...

ALL:  
Action!

*A group of four on stage. They will create tableaux with their bodies and use props in response to the following lines:*

ALEX:  
One day in early September, a strange thing happened in the city of Standing Tall.

VICTORIA:  
I was in class. It was the first week of school, and so far in school, everything was going well.

LEE:  
It was a beautiful September day. A boy finished dressing, and his Mom took him downstairs to get on the bus.

JESSE:  
One normal Tuesday, a boy woke up and put on his clothes. His father walked him to school as always. When he got to class, he sat down and did his spelling.

CATIE:  
One day, people were walking to work and getting ready to do what they do every day. Everyone had a smile on their face.

GARRETH:  
It was a normal morning for school—wake up, shower, eat breakfast, brush teeth, leave and go to school.

LENA:  
Once upon a time there was a girl. She is a shy girl. She is good at times tables. Before she went to school, she hugged her mother and said goodbye.

ELTON:  
Once there was a boy. His class job was to water the plants.

LEE:  
On a very sunny day, John the fireman was driving to work in his Pontiac.

ALEX:  
One day, on a tiny insignificant planet called Earth, a policeman named Dereck was taking his son to school.

CATIE:  
One day, a little kindergartner was waiting in his kitchen for his older brother and sister to take him to school. When they were finally ready, they walked out and to their luck, the bus was right there.

ELTON:  
My name is Billy and I am a policeman and I help people that are in trouble and that need help.

RACHEL:  
It was a regular day for Bob, a reporter. Bob walked his two kids to school and went to his house to watch TV. He turned the TV to the news.

## **VILLAINS**

CHRISTA:  
Freeze! Villains who think they are heroes. One, two, three...

ALL:  
Action!

*Another group of four on stage. They will create tableaux with their bodies and use props in response to the following lines:*

ALEX:  
One day a boy named Osama was born. He hated America.

CATIE:  
Like every person, Osama had a dream. His dream was to become a super villain.

CHRISTA:  
Just before the birth of Osama. Mrs. Bin Laden is very pregnant.

MRS. BIN LADEN:  
I wonder what the baby will be like?

*Improvised scene, 3 actors. Osama is born.*

MRS. BIN LADEN:  
My dear little baby boy, what is your favorite toy?

OSAMA:  
My favorite toy is a machine gun.

CHRISTA:  
Good! In the next scene, Osama is eight. The family is in their cave, talking about what Osama wants to be when he grows up.

*Improvised scene, 3 actors. Osama acts up and his Mom and Dad give him a time out.*

CHRISTA:  
Freeze! In this scene, Osama is 21. His Mom and Dad take him to the United States for the first time.

*Improvised scene, 3 actors. Following this scene, an empty chair is placed on stage. Several actors come up one at a time and speak as Osama.*

DYLAN:  
I am Osama. I hate everything about the US – even the candy.

LENA:  
The US is so clean. Shouldn't they put some dirt in there?

GARRETH:  
I hate the US with their 'ooh, girls can go to school and ooh, our buildings are taller than yours.'

ALEX:  
They are too free in America. Men don't need facial hair. Women don't have to cover their bodies.

RACHEL:  
I am Osama and I plan to bomb the World Trade Center with planes.

CHRISTA:  
Freeze.

CATIE:  
"Other villains".

CHRISTA:  
I wonder what other villains we can think of besides Osama bin Laden?

VICTORIA:  
Al Qaeda, some of Afghanistan, also the people who flew the planes into the buildings.

GARRETH:  
George Bush.

LEE:  
The Taliban.

CATIE:  
People in charge who said that nothing was wrong, that nothing had happened. They were also villains.

CHRISTA:  
So far our villains have all been people. Can things be villains, too?

LENA:  
Fire can be a villain.

ELTON:  
And the plane.

*A fire tableau is set up. A chair is placed upstage and children speak one at a time.*

ALL:  
Fire!

JESSE:  
I am the fire, and I am starting to spread out a lot.

DYLAN:  
I am whipping around, filled with anger.

VICTORIA:

I am a red, hot cloud of madness, not knowing what is going on.

LEE:

20 firemen can't put me out.

RACHEL:

The fire spread like a cup of milk when you spill it and ate everything in sight. It was hungry.

GARRETH:

I don't wanna kill people. Never again will I work for the Taliban. I'm moving to Hawaii.

CATIE:

This is Garreth's song:

**BUILDINGS ON FIRE**

The floor began to shake,  
This was more than I could take.  
As soon as I looked  
Out the window I was hooked,  
And I knew I had made a mistake.

CHORUS:

Buildings on fire!  
Flames rising higher, higher!  
Burning through the shining glass,  
Twisted wire, fire blast,  
Buildings on fire.

I felt a hand on my shoulder,  
I bore its weight like a boulder.  
I looked into the face,  
Which looked pale as a vase,  
Of my teacher who's many years older.

Don't tell 'bout the  
Buildings on fire!  
Flames rising higher, higher!  
Burning through the shining glass,  
Twisted wire, fire blast,  
Buildings on fire.

I wish I could tell my mother,  
Hiding is such a bother.  
It's like a toad in my throat,  
I might explode,  
And tell you I'll never see other  
Buildings on fire!  
Flames rising higher, higher!  
Burning through the shining glass,  
Twisted wire, fire blast,

Buildings on fire.

Buildings on fire.

Buildings on fire!

CHRISTA:

Freeze! Flight 405 to Standing Tall now arriving at Gate 3.

*Two tableaux of planes are created.*

HUNTER:

More villains.

ALL:

The plane.

THOMAS:

I am the plane. I'm going to kill a lot of people and make them die.

LINDSAY:

I was not looking where I was going when I was flying.

RU ZHOU:

I am the plane. I am scared, because I'm about to hit the tower.

ANNA:

What about George Bush?

CHRISTA:

Well, is he a villain? Or is he a hero?

ROBERT:

Some people think he's a hero. He got rid of the Taliban. But some people think he made war and that is not what a hero does.

CHRISTA:

OK, let's watch.

ALL:

George Bush.

*Three create the tableau. Four storytellers come up:*

AIDAN:

I am George Bush, and I rule the world.

SAMANTHA:

I'm not coming to help New York. I'm going to just sit right here in my nice comfortable couch in Washington.

JESSICA:

And watch my football game.

ANNA:  
I am a moral person, and I really want to help people, but some people think I abuse my power.

HUNTER:  
I thought being president would be easier. I didn't think I'd have to go to war. I think people should be brought to justice and some lives might be lost in the process. And I'm OK with that.

CHRISTA:  
Now let's revisit Osama.

ALL:  
Osama bin Laden.

*Three create Osama as a tableau. Four storytellers come up.*

JESSICA:  
I am Osama. I'm gonna kill innocent people and then some more, because I feel like it.

ANNA:  
I am impulsive and vicious.

LINDSAY:  
I'm about to shoot people, and I've got good aim.

THOMAS:  
I am not a villain. Millions of people see me as a hero. I think I'm saving the lives of everyone.

*The tableau is disassembled.*

AIDAN:  
Like every person, Osama had a dream. His dream was to become a super villain. Osama worked out day and night. There never was a minute when Osama was not working out. He got so strong he was ready to become super Osama. Osama flew overseas to America. "Why America?" you ask. "Because America took something Osama loved."

HUNTER:  
Josama Jin Jaden, the mastermind, grins as planes hit the tallest buildings of Standing Tall, just as planned. His happiness grows as he hears them collapse.

JESSICA:  
"Don't make it a joke".

RACHEL C.:  
Stop!

ANNA:  
What's wrong?

RACHEL C.:  
This is a very serious topic and you are making it into a joke.

ROBERT:  
But comedy is good.

CHRISTA:  
Why?

ROBERT:  
It's about laughter.

RACHEL C.:  
And what does laughter do for us?

ROBERT:  
It makes us feel better.

CHRISTA:  
Does everybody feel better?

SAMANTHA:  
No, the planes are coming. I feel sorry for the buildings.

CHRISTA:  
We need another point of view.

*Two tableaux are set up, one of the twin towers and the other of the Empire State.*

THOMAS:  
Buildings as Victims.

CHRISTA:  
Quiet on the set. One, two, three...

ALL:  
Action!

RU ZHOU:  
Every morning in the town of Standing Tall the two towers would wake up and see tons of people walking into their mouths and making them full.

ANNA:  
The big and shiny building and its brother were the tallest and the shiniest buildings of them all. But this hadn't always been so. Long before these buildings had been born, there was another building that everyone admired, the shiniest, tallest and most beautiful of all. It was named the Empire.

AIDAN:

It only took a month or so before the crowd and bustle of admiration quietly slipped to the other end of the island. Now, the Empire was green with envy. Years passed and the jealousy turned from envy to anger to simply sadness.

LINDSAY:

"Oh, no! They're coming for me!" With that, the north end of Standing Tall's finest building had been hit by a devilish black jet. "Help! I'm burning, sister!" cried the tower. But all its sister could do was watch bright orange and yellow flames dance in devilish delight, as all the people scrambled in shock and horror. It was a sickening thing to see—her brother, the proud citizens--gone. From that second on, she decided to stand tall. She would show she wasn't scared to have an opinion. She wasn't scared of being different. She wasn't scared of the fact that she was an American. Then she was hit.

*The action of hitting the towers is played out.*

SAMANTHA:

"Boom!" The planes hit and made two holes. People started running and jumping out of the holes until the towers were starving with no food in their tummies.

LINDSAY:

She could feel the scorching flames telling her to change her mind. She refused. She heard her brother whimpering and moaning. "Stay tall, no matter what!" she said. They fought the flames, but slowly her brother fell, then her. When they fell, they weren't just wiped off the face of the earth. When they fell, they became unlimited, just like New York.

ANNA:

As the twins crumbled to earth's crust, a severe pang of pain rushed through the Empire, clogging up all of its past envy and anger. The pang of pain rushed through him even when, with heads drooped, the crowds slid toward him.

JESSICA:

In a big city, there was a sad little building, because two of her friends were blown away by people who were jealous of how tall they were. This sad little building said: "If they ever come inside of me, I will throw a brick on them."

CHRISTA:

Good job. Let's shake off these roles. *(They do.)*

RU ZHOU:

A lot of kids felt scared that day.

THOMAS:

And a lot of parents felt protective of their kids.

ANNA:

The little girl saw what happened outside her window and her mother came and closed the blinds because she didn't want her girl to see such things.

HUNTER:

The boy was still frightened because he wasn't sure if he was safe. The frightening part has lasted.

SAMANTHA:

Some kids knew people who lost friends and family. Some kids had trouble sleeping. Some had nightmares.

ROBERT:

Some became startled by loud noises. Some stayed close to home and to their Moms and Dads. Some kids wanted to leave the city.

*A musical interlude occurs here, with wordless scenes of kids packing up and leaving the City.*

CHRISTA:

A lot of grown-ups felt scared, too, even more scared than the children. And a lot of people felt proud to be Americans who would stand tall no matter what. Some were angry and like the sad little building, wanted to throw bricks and bombs at the villains. And some were forgiving, hopeful that victims and heroes would just be ordinary people again.

NILES:

Heroes.

CHRISTA:

Who were the heroes?

MOLLIE:

Firefighters who put their lives in danger to help save others.

TAL:

Victims who helped other people were heroes, because they didn't want them to feel the pain that they felt.

ESTHER:

Spies were heroes.

D'ASHLEY:

They helped their country win the war in Afghanistan.

DAVID:  
Objects were heroes, too. The buildings made an effort to keep standing, so they were heroes.

CELINE:  
Stairs, fire escapes, ladders.

KENNY:  
Cell phones.

JOSE:  
Doors.

ESTHER:  
Water, because it helped put out the fires.

VANITY:  
A kindergartner whose teacher told him not to tell the other kids in his class what he saw. By finally telling his story, he helped other people.

CHRISTA:  
Who did he tell his story to?

DAVID:  
His Mom.

CHRISTA:  
Was his Mom a hero?

DAVID:  
I think lots of Moms were heroes.

CELINE:  
This is Tal's story.

*The story is narrated by two students. Others will act the roles of kindergartner, teacher and Mom, as well as other roles of bus, buildings, fire, etc. At the conclusion, students as kindergartner, teacher and Mom will stay in role and answer questions from the group.*

### **TAL'S STORY**

TAL:  
One day this little kindergartner was waiting in his kitchen for his older brother and sister to take him to school. When they were finally ready, they walked out and to their luck, the bus was right there. They got on and went to school.

ESTHER:  
His siblings dropped him off and they went to their own school.

TAL:  
Later that day the teacher was reading the class a book when the ground started to shake. The whole class was about to get up and run to the window when the teacher said: "Stay on the rug and listen to the story."

ESTHER:  
Now this kid doesn't always like to listen to his teacher, especially when he really wants to find something out. So he crawled over to the window where he saw two, no three, buildings on fire.

TAL:  
These buildings aren't very important buildings in the town of Standing Tall, but they're big and have a lot of people, innocent people in them.

ESTHER:  
Then all of a sudden he felt a hand on his shoulder and he heard some giggling. Slowly he turned around to see his teacher wearing an expression that said: "What do you think you're doing?"

TAL:  
Then he heard his teacher whisper in his ear: "Don't tell anyone."

ALL:  
Don't tell anyone!

ESTHER:  
So this kid doesn't really understand, and he really wants to talk to someone, but he can't tell the kids in his class because they wouldn't understand, and he's not allowed to talk to them about the buildings anyway.

TAL:  
At the end of the day when his Mom picked him up, he asked her what was going on.

ESTHER:  
She told him how there are bad people in the world and this bad person did this bad thing, setting the buildings on fire.

TAL:  
After a couple of days, he told everything to his Mom, and she listened. When he was done, he felt a lot better.

*The actors playing kindergartner, teacher and Mom remain in role. The others exit. Questions are asked from the students offstage.*

VANITY (*to kindergartner*):  
How did you feel before your Mom talked to you?

KENNY (*as kindergartner*):  
Weird, funny, confused.

D'ASHLEY (*to Mom*):  
Was it hard to talk to the kids about it?

MOLLIE (*as Mom*):  
Yes, because there are some things you can't talk about with them, because there are some things they don't understand. It's hard to explain why villains don't like us and how some people don't like our country.

VANITY (*to kindergartner*):  
After it happened, how did your Mom help you?

KENNY (*as kindergartner*):  
She told us everything that happened and made us feel better.

VANITY: (*to Mom*):  
Did you ever think about not telling the kids?

MOLLIE (*as Mom*):  
Well, a part of me said they're too young – they won't understand. And it will change the way they'll act around other people. But part of me said that if I didn't tell them, it would ruin their lives forever.

CHRISTA:  
Good! You can let go of your roles. (*They shake them off.*)  
What about us? Are we heroes, too?

D'ASHLEY:  
We're heroes by thinking about it, by talking about it and not forgetting.

JOSE:  
We're sharing our feelings with other people.

VANITY:  
We're creating a memorial for the World Trade Center.

#### **A MEMORIAL FOR THE WORLD TRADE CENTER.**

CHRISTA:  
Villains, victims, heroes--these are the people who lived on Standing Tall. Fire, planes, buildings, water, ladders, stairs--these are the things that held so many of the feelings of the people, feelings of anger and fear, jealousy and guilt, pride and hope. Standing Tall is a place that has

become very important to us. It is like a book with 1000 stories. It is like a magic box that contains all our feelings, both bad ones and good ones.

ESTHER:  
Standing Tall is our creation. We built it with hope. We did this as a way to fix our city that was broken not so long ago on September 11, 2001.

MOLLIE:  
We who have witnessed the terrible events have needed to tell our stories. But you should know that sometimes it is difficult. Sometimes we don't have the words, and sometimes we want to forget and move on with our lives and see all the good things before us. But we need to tell our stories to help us make sense of the terrible thing that happened some time ago.

DAVID:  
September 11, 2001. This is Nile's story.

#### **NILES' STORY**

NILES:  
September 11, 2001, 8:30 a.m. I was in class. It was the first week of school, and so far in school, everything was going well.

MOLLIE:  
I had my favorite teacher, and even though I was one of the new kids in the class, I felt like I was getting to know some of the other new kids.

VANITY:  
I looked out the window and realized that I had a great view of the twin towers. Five minutes later, I was going to show David the great view that was there when I saw it. It was a plane that hit the World Trade Center.

KENNY:  
I looked over, and I said "Rachel, Rachel, come quick." I told her what I had seen out the window. She couldn't believe it.

NILES:  
Then I thought about my mother, who works across the street from the World Trade Center. I wondered what would happen.

D'ASHLEY:  
Slowly, it was spreading around the classroom. Rachel rang our bell to quiet us down. She put on the radio to the news, and the reporter said, "It seems that a plane has hit one of the twin towers."

JOSE:

There was silence in the room. We gasped. Then the radio went off. Rachel didn't want us worried.

TAL:

Twenty minutes later, the second plane hit. I saw it, and Thomas's dad saw it, too. I saw the plane coming toward the second tower. This was no mistake. This was an attack.

ALL:

Babooooooooommmmm!!!!!!!

ESTHER:

There was an explosion and a huge fireball came busting up into the air.

CELINE:

Rachel immediately turned on the radio, "And look at that," the reporter said.

MOLLIE:

Everyone in the room said what it was. I said it was another plane. I knew right then that it was going to be the worst day of my life.

NILES:

The reporter said, "It appears one of the news helicopters has crashed into the tower." I said, "It's a plane," but no one listened except David and Thomas's dad. Then the reporter said, "It was a plane."

DAVID:

Then we had to go to the library to play games so we couldn't see the towers. Then we went back up to the room, and we couldn't see the towers.

VANITY:

We said to Rachel, "What happened? Where are they?"

KENNY:

She realized they were gone; they collapsed.

MOLLIE:

My dad then came early, like all the other parents. My father told me that my mother was all right, and that she had not gone to work yet that day.

D'ASHLEY:

We had to walk twenty blocks to his office. There, the armory across the street was busy. One man was a pilot that worked in the building. He said he heard one of the planes flying and said it shouldn't be flying that close to the ground.

JOSE:

Then, I went home in horrible traffic.

ESTHER:

I had dinner, and we talked about how lucky we were to not have lost any family members, and how there would be a war.

TAL:

I went to bed worried about it.

*Bells begin to toll as all the kids return to the stage, participants in the memorial service.*

MOLLIE:

The mayor of New York City was a hero. He could have stepped right out of the pages of Standing Tall. After the buildings fell down, he led a service at St. Paul's Church.

NILES (AS MAYOR GUILIANI):

We are a city that has withstood the worst attack of any city in the history of America and people are standing up as tall, as strong and as straight as this church. We are in a very holy place, hallowed in very special ways, by the presence of George Washington and all of our brave heroes that gave their lives. We should think about how we can find the most creative minds possible who love and honor America and can express that in artistic ways. And we should think about a memorial that just draws millions of people here. We have to be able to create something here that allows people to build on it and grow from it-- a soaring beautiful memorial.

VICTORIA:

We are the artists. We are the builders. We are the children, the hope, the reason this city must be rebuilt.

LEE:

And so we went to work.

JESSE:

We made art and installed it on our classroom windows.

CATIE:

It was the first thing we saw when we looked out at the empty space in the skyline where the tall, shining towers used to stand.

DYLAN:

We put art in the windows so we'd see things that would make us feel better. We wrote songs about the New York that we knew and loved.

ALEX:

This is Anna's song:

**ANNA'S SONG**

Look out! There's Harlem blues,  
Watch out, those 42<sup>nd</sup> Street tunes,  
Change lights at the bust of the horn,  
You've gotta be grateful that New York's  
Where you're born.

Yankees, get a hat and a tee,  
Bronx for the zoo and Natural History.  
You've gotta get to Chinatown  
And Little Italy.

CHORUS:

City lights,  
Ba dooba dooba dadoo.  
City lights,  
Ba dooba, dooba dadoo.  
City lights,  
Ba dooba dooba dadoo.  
City lights.

Central Park, the best in the spring,  
Statue of Liberty, take a ride to Fort Greene.  
Want toys? The biggest of course  
Are found at FAO Schwarz.

CHORUS.

Macy's, Thanksgiving parade,  
Taxi cabs, buses and trains,  
Shopping, as easy as one step out the door,  
A dizzying mix of department stores.

The Empire, big buildings that shine,  
Cafes, nice places to dine,  
Street lamps, evenings so bright,  
Isn't it nice those city lights.

CHORUS.

CHRISTA:

And so the children began to rebuild, one story at a time,  
not with bricks and mortar, but with words and images,  
until the city of darkness was once again a city of light  
and hope.

GARRETH:

We are the artists.

ROBERT:

Our city is a place called New York, New York where  
buildings stand tall.

ANNA R.:

Our city is a place where we stand tall. This play is our  
memorial.

*As lights fade to black, two light sculptures are created,  
representing the two phantom towers. As each person turns on  
their flashlight, they begin to hum softly. The humming  
increases as a bridge is created between the two towers of light.  
The humming dims as the flashlights go out.*

**THE END**

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