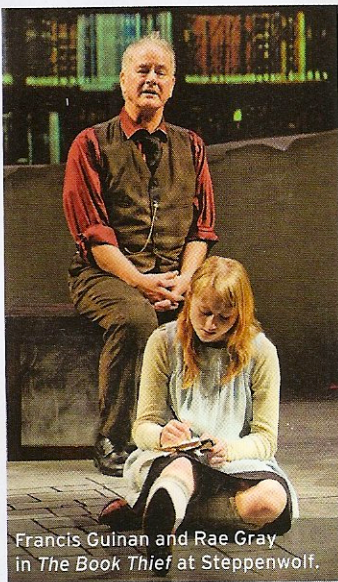


UNITED AGAINST VIOLENCE

CHICAGO: This month and next, Chicago wraps up a citywide initiative that has been sparking timely discussions since it was launched last summer. **Now Is the Time to ACT** brought together more than 15 participating theatres, along with other local organizations, to engage Chicagoans in conversation on issues of youth violence and intolerance. The initiative is one of several art-based projects on this topic unfolding around the country in the wake of the December school shooting in Newtown, Conn. (Most recently, the **NoPassport** alliance launched “Gun Control Theatre Action 2013” to coincide with January’s March on Washington for Gun Control.)

Now Is the Time to ACT gains additional relevance from, but predates, the Connecticut tragedy. **Steppenwolf Theatre Company**, **About Face Theatre**, **American Theatre Company** and **Victory Gardens Theater** are among the participating companies that hatched the concept of sculpting their 2012–13 programming with an activist chisel. (See “Case Studies,” page 16, for a closer look at one NITT ACT project, by **Collaboraction**.)

“As artists, we have a unique opportunity to help teens give voice to this epidemic,” declared Steppenwolf’s artistic and educational director **Hallie Gordon** in a release announcing the initiative last spring. Each of the NITT ACT participating theatres joined such allies as the **Chicago Public Library** and the international education organization **Facing History and Ourselves** in hosting at least one production, panel discussion or teen-centered community event that touched on the issue of violence.



Francis Guinan and Rae Gray
in *The Book Thief* at Steppenwolf.

MICHAEL BROWSILOW

Steppenwolf’s stage adaptation of *The Book Thief*—a novel by **Markus Zusak**, in which Death narrates the story of a young Jewish girl residing in Nazi Germany—was produced under the NITT ACT rubric last fall. This month, Steppenwolf for Young Adults (in tandem with **DePaul University** students) presents a patchwork interview-based piece titled *How Long Will I Cry?: Voices of Youth Violence*, created by **Miles Harvey**. **American Theatre Company**’s contribution includes a presentation of a revisited *columbinus*. That play, penned in 2005 by Stephen Karam and ATC artistic director PJ Paparelli, includes new information on the Columbine High School shooters and their families, along with firsthand accounts from that shooting and the more recent one in an Aurora, Colo., movie theatre.

This array of productions will be followed by performance-based studies led by educators and community leaders, evidence that NITT ACT’s community engagement has been heavily shaped by theatres’ education departments. The initiative’s online platform provides resources such as a “starter kit” for community leaders that provides prompts and event ideas to help spark conversations about the topic, as well as interactive workshops and performance resources for educators. Another product of the initiative is the creation of a youth council, made up of teens selected by the theatre companies. These teens have served as ambassadors to their peers during the time of each theatre’s allotted project. Visit www.nowisthetimechicago.org. —*Georgina Escobar*