

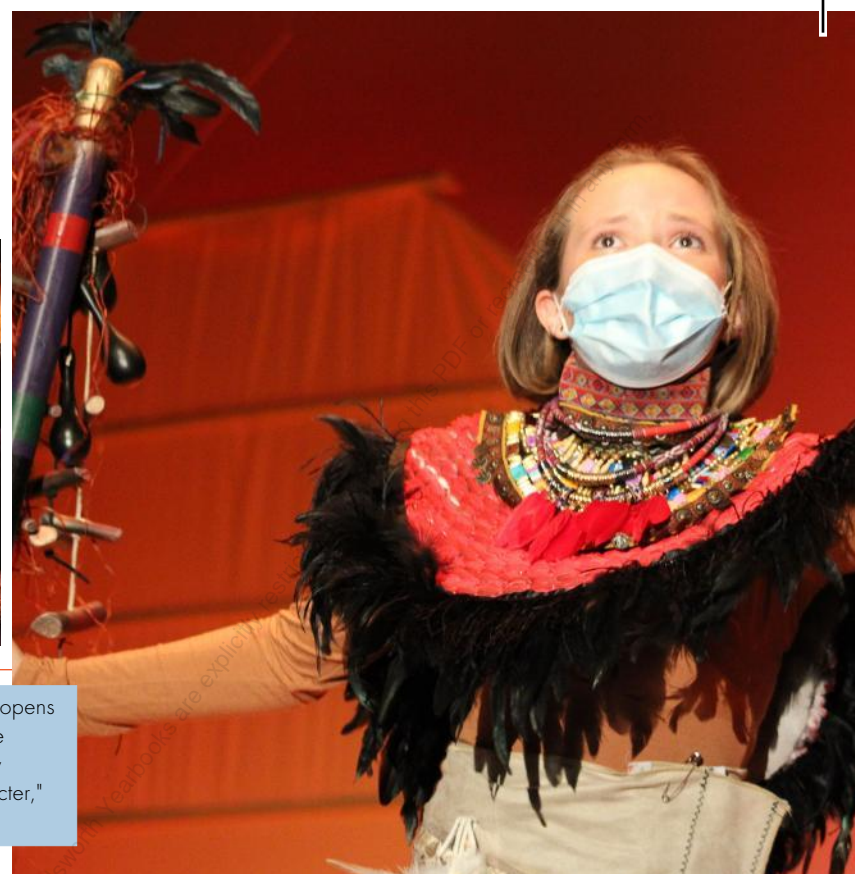
MOURNING MUFASA. Natalie Cowgill (8), who played Sarabi, holds Annie Ervin (7) and grieves with the other lionesses during Mufasa's death scene.

"The show in general was great. It was not just playing one character; it was just being a part of the show that was amazing," said Cowgill.



photo by anguyen

CURTAIN UP. Evelyn Donaldson (8) opens the show with "Circle of Life" during the production. "It felt great to let out every emotion and very cool to be my character," said Donaldson.



RETURNING roars

Restaging the Lion King, the cast makes unforgettable connections. Story by Sadie Weborg and Ella Engle

The lights dim; the only sounds come from the audience in hushed whispers. In the silence of anticipation, she takes a few steps into the darkness. Feeling the prickles of sweat and the stirring of butterflies in her stomach, she mentally repeats her lines over and over. All that is left to do is to take a deep breath and trust. It is time to shine. "I was very nervous because I had only ever practiced in front of the cast. Then, during opening night, everyone, including my friends, were there watching," Stella Eames (8), who played Rafiki in the production of *The Lion King*, said.

Holding hands, heads together, Ezra Tingué (8), Azariah Rohrs (8), and Sadie Weborg (7) did a chant before going on stage. "Every time," said Rohrs, "it just made going on so much easier knowing that we were all friends." On the other side of the stage, the ensemble raced to get their props. "It was vital to stay calm," Bailey Williams (6) said. "We had about five minutes to switch costumes throughout the show."

From auditions to closing night, *The Lion King* wasn't always a smooth ride. In 2019, the show came to a heartbreaking end due to COVID school closures. "It was one of the most heart-wrenching things that has EVER happened in my teaching career," said director Laurel Wicke. "After all that work, we felt we had to restage it, but it wasn't easy."

Even for returner Ahna Smith (8) who was in the original 2019 cast, the first rehearsal gave her pause. "I felt that the first rehearsal was pretty hectic," Smith said. "I wasn't sure how this would work with so many people." With double casts, ensemble, and chorus, the total cast numbered a whopping 78 students with another 20 crew members.

The rehearsal process, while a lot of work, brought happy memories and inside jokes. Natalie Cowgill (8) said, "I remember when Nora was singing 'Shadowlands', and this time she skipped over Bella to hug me first. The look on Bella's face was priceless. We all fell on the ground laughing."

Even though the show was amazing, the things that went on backstage were almost even better. "When *Shadowlands* came on, I looked across the stage and on the other side, Tate (Simba) was singing and dancing his heart out," Moriyah Martin (7) said. "It was almost my favorite part of the show."

The stage crew, those that put the whole show into motion behind the scenes, had the most weight on their shoulders. Elle Molinaro (8) who controlled the lights said, "One mess up could ruin the whole show. It put a lot of pressure on me."

After not being performed in 2019 to a show stopper in 2021, *The Lion King* was truly an iconic performance. When the lights dimmed for the final time, the cast couldn't help but hug each other. "I walked back into the auditorium at the end," Wicke recalled, "and every single cast member was on stage singing one last time in an empty auditorium. I'll never forget it." Added Roen Casari (8), "The *Lion King* will always be a part of me."



ON THE ATTACK. While playing Mufasa, Erik Cochenour (8) protects Simba. "I loved all of the fun times that our cast experienced during rehearsals," said Cochenour. **JUNGLE TOUR.** Tate Wride (8) shows Ahna Smith (8) his new home. "I loved singing and laughing with everybody," Wride said.



EVERYBODY LOOK LEFT. Roen Casari (8) performs the high energy number "Just Can't Wait To Be King." The choreography required him to climb a human staircase and fall into the arms of some of his cast mates. "I felt happy and powerful while playing Simba," said Casari.



UP, UP AND AWAY. During the number "Just Can't Wait to Be King," Shasta McCuen (8), lifted by Zander Mladenovic (8) and McKenzie Doebele (8), flies across the stage while playing Zazu. "Flying through the air as Zazu felt kind of magical, and seeing that production come together was truly wonderful," McCuen said. **NO WORRIES.** Lincoln Wicke (7), who played Pumbaa, sings the song Hakuna Matata. "It felt nice to make people laugh with the jokes, and I had fun acting with my friends," said Wicke.

Playing THE PART

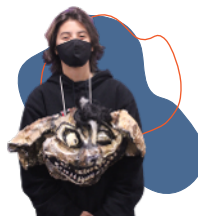
Lion King, Jr. cast members share their favorite memory from the production.



"My favorite part was hanging out with Emma and everyone else in the production."
-Hudson Oliver (8)



"My favorite part of The Lion King was getting the whole experience. I also enjoyed being a lead and in the chorus."
-Nora Wallace (8)



"My favorite memory from the production was hanging out with my friends and making new friends. I was pumped up for the show."
-Azariah Roars (8)