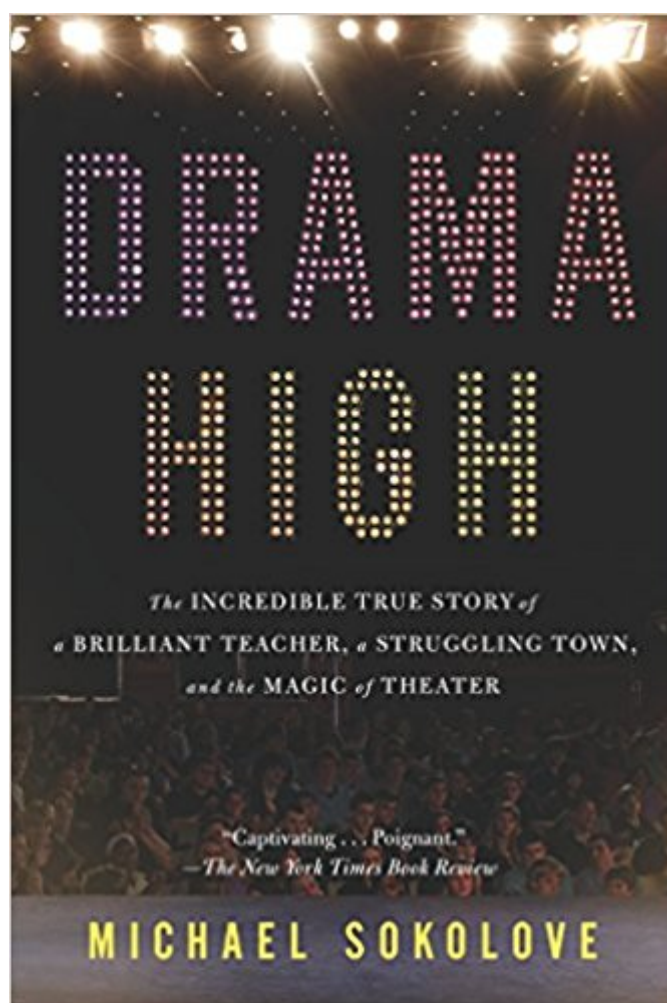


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# Drama High: The Incredible True Story Of A Brilliant Teacher, A Struggling Town, And The Magic Of Theater



## Synopsis

Soon to be a television series titled "Rise," starring Josh Radnor, Auli'i Cravalho, and Rosie Perez — the incredible and true story of an extraordinary drama teacher who has changed the lives of thousands of students and inspired a town. Why would the multimillionaire producer of *Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Miss Saigon* take his limo from Manhattan to the struggling former steel town of Levittown, Pennsylvania, to see a high school production of *Les Misérables*? To see the show performed by the astoundingly successful theater company at Harry S Truman High School, run by its legendary director, Lou Volpe. Broadway turns to Truman High when trying out controversial shows such as *Rent* and *Spring Awakening* before they move on to high school theater programs across the nation. Volpe's students from this blue-collar town go on to become Emmy-winning producers, entertainment executives, newscasters, and community-theater founders. Michael Sokolove, a Levittown native and former student of Volpe's, chronicles the drama director's last school years and follows a group of student actors as they work through riveting dramas both on and off the stage. This is a story of an economically depressed but proud town finding hope in a gifted teacher and the magic of theater.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Journalist Sokolove pays tribute to drama teacher Lou Volpe, who in the last 40 years has revolutionized the theater program at Harry S. Truman High School. Located in Levittown,

Pennsylvania, a blue-collar town that has been on a slow economic downswing since the 1960s, Truman has become known for its drama program, thanks to Volpe, whose productions draw not only critical acclaim but also the attention of famous theater producers. A dedicated teacher who inspires loyalty in students past and present, Volpe often stages productions that are controversial but that he firmly believes his kids will relate to. During the season Sokolove spends at Truman, Volpe and his kids put on the play *Good Boys and True* and the musical *Spring Awakenings*—both of which address teen sexuality, angst, and reckless behavior. Volpe pushes his student actors hard, but for most of them, being in one of his productions is transformative. Many alums go on to pursue careers in theater or the arts. A powerful look at the way a dynamic and dedicated teacher can change lives. --Kristine Huntley --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

“Poignant...Captivating...[Sokolove] shines a heartening light on how one of those passionate heroes devoted himself...to educating, rather than training, young people.”—The New York Times Book Review

“A good reporter can make almost any story interesting. A great reporter makes it blossom. With the kind of diligent, thorough and imaginative reporting not seen enough these days, Sokolove not only brings a teacher, his students and their community to life, he also opens the story to larger matters.”—The Washington Post

“Sokolove’s reporting tells an incredible tale about a brilliant, demanding and subversive teacher who practices the best kind of magic—the kind that’s real and that changes lives. *Drama High* is both provocative and heart-warming...an excellent book for teachers or anyone interested in education and the power of theater. A gutsy high school English teacher might even recommend it to his or her students.”—USA Today

“Required reading: for young people who can learn more about the challenge and rewards of theatre, for parents who may well need the same background, for anyone who doubts the value of theatre as an educational and character-building activity not only for those who would become professionals, for those who want to spark reveries of their own experiences in high school drama....Imagine if all of *Glee* sustained the level of quality and heart that characterized the story lines between Kurt and his dad, and you’ll get a closer approximation of what *Drama High* achieves.”—The Huffington Post

“Sokolove sucks us in quickly....*Drama High* is a love letter to a brilliant educator and the crowd-pleasing tale of a quest for glory, but it’s also an argument for arts education and a discussion of

class. — •Newsday — “An extraordinary book — a viscerally real reminder of the pain and excitement of being a teenager, an honest and compassionate discussion of class in America, a wondrous, lightning-in-a-bottle book. — •Curtis Sittenfeld, author of Prep — “Part Glee, part Hoop Dreams, Drama High is a bravura performance, the true story of that teacher we all remember or wish we did, the one who pushes us to be better than we thought possible. You’ll clap and cry at the end. Sokolove deserves a standing ovation. — •Elizabeth Weil, author of No Cheating, No Dying — “What makes a great teacher — the kind who truly transforms lives? The answer lies between these covers, in Michael Sokolove’s intimate portrait. This book ripples with emotion, with humor, with heart. Like a great performance, Drama High won’t just move you. It will inspire you. — •Jonathan Mahler, author of Ladies and Gentleman, the Bronx Is Burning — — — Praise for Michael Sokolove — “Sokolove is a natural literary stylist with the gifts of a social historian. — •The New York Times — “A terrific read, made to work by Sokolove’s insightful reporting and deft writing . . . a sad, powerful, thoughtful, totally engrossing work. — •Chicago Tribune — “A narrative defined by its compassionate, clear-eyed tone. — •Entertainment Weekly — “A first-class work of sound reporting. — •Roger Angell, The New Yorker

Mr. Sokolove has penned a rousing and hearty portrait of Levittown, PA drama teacher Lou Volpe. Most of us, I think, wish we’d been blessed with a teacher like Mr. Volpe, whose work over 40 years stimulated the impressionable minds of teens and magically transported them to a world of imagination and expansion, while invigorating their parents and inspiring a community that’s had its fair share of struggles. It leaves no doubt that teachers have an opportunity to make a difference, to change the world (or at least a small, but significant, part of it). I wish there a law was on the books requiring that anyone over 30 who thinks our schools don’t need to, or even shouldn’t, teach the arts, read this splendid and “Incredible True Story of a Brilliant Teacher, a Struggling Town and the Magic of Theater.” Buy and read this book and u will be Inspired with a capital “I.”

As a teacher, I can only hope to inspire students a fraction of the amount Mr. Volpe has. He has truly left a legacy and one can only imagine the far reaching impact of his guidance and inspiration. As a theater fan, I loved reading about the process of staging both the large scale musicals and the smaller, but equally important, plays that Mr. Volpe put together. There are so many gems within each page. I appreciate that along with the craft, students developed true respect for all aspects of

theater. It is a testament to Mr. Volpe, his students, and the school district that three large scale, world-famous musicals entrusted their program with piloting the school editions. What an opportunity those students were given! This is a book that any fan of theater, teaching, or inspirational stories should not miss!

I've had the privilege of seeing several of Mr. Volpe's plays at Truman, and for most years his productions had more meaningful artistic content than many of the productions in professional regional theatre. The story is compelling (I read the book in one - long - sitting) and the message of what Lou achieved with these 'blue collar' kids is relevant anywhere in the world. ALL kids from all backgrounds are capable of greatness as long as those kids have someone who believes in them, and have gifted teachers and motivating parents. Read this book, then find a way to stimulate greatness in education within your own community. Also, can't wait to see the NBC TV series based on this book, in the Fall of 2017.

If you appreciate theater, were a theater kid or the parent of a theater kid, there is much to like in this book. Sokolove is a great journalist and Drama High is a unique lens on how one teacher can change lives and a community. It is not a light read about putting on shows. Drama High pulls together several important stories - understanding the teacher, the school, the community, the students, and what goes in to a show, way beyond a typical high school production. There's also a lot to reflect upon related to the challenges of kids to thrive with limited personal and school financial resources. So many books lose steam half-way through. Drama High starts a little slow as Sokolove takes on a complex story, but it keeps getting better. I also liked learning about shows I knew little about.

Anyone who has been a teacher knows how difficult it is to connect in a meaningful way and impact students for the rest of their lives. For a gay drama teacher to change the culture of student life in a blue collar town is impressive. Football players choose drama class with tremendous time requirements over sports and are proud of themselves for doing so. The author writes in a journalistic style and manages to show maturation and character development at the same time. I did not want the book to end, but it did so in a logical manner with closure for the characters. The author captures the dignity of the teacher and the students.

"Drama High" is an enthralling read. I highly recommend it. Writer Michael Sokolove has placed

layer upon layer of brilliant writing into this work. Headline writers have tabbed this book to be about a "real-life 'Glee'" or "'Glee' meets 'Friday Night Lights'." Those are too pithy and don't do justice to the book's impressive scope, depth and emotional resonance. Ostensibly, Sokolove's book is a paean to his former teacher, Lou Volpe, retiring after four decades at his post as drama teacher at Harry S Truman High School in Levittown, PA. While the book focuses on Volpe's career as its touchstone, so many other excellent themes here including: the role of arts programs in American high schools; the effect of budget cuts; theater programs' position in lower- to middle-class communities; the regression of the middle class; the roots, struggles and perseverance of Levittown; Volpe's family history and sexual identity; the stories of Volpe's ex-wife and now-adult only child; the business of high school musical; the kids' stories, motivations, fears and dreams...and so much more. Lou Volpe is an American hero.

A standing ovation for this book. Sokolove is a great writer because of his personal relationship to the teacher, school, town. Fascinating look at productions of dramas and musicals in this high school. Big hugs to Lou Volpe and all the good people that are involved here. It is wonderful what some teachers can do and a pity that a lot of USA schools are cutting arts. I read this from the library but already bought it as a gift because it will brighten the day of any theater lover or any one that cares about our younger generations. Applause, applause!

This book is a MUST READ for ANYONE who is a current teacher or considering going into education. I'm a theatre arts educator and found Lou Volpe's story extremely inspiring---we need to push the envelope sometimes and the biggest problem with public schools is that everyone is too afraid of controversy. Lets start raising the stakes and treating teens like young adults.

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