



LANGUAGE GUIDE

for communicating about the carceral system

The language we use carries a tremendous amount of meaning and perspective (bias). At Marin Shakespeare Company, we will try to use language that is not harmful. People are people first; when we use people first language, we acknowledge people's humanity.

WE DO SAY

✓ PEOPLE WHO ARE INCARCERATED

When we use these kinds of labels, we define people by the worst thing they have ever done, which is probably not the person they are today.

✓ PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN CONVICTED OF VIOLENT CRIMES

A conviction is not always an indication of guilt. Superpredators is a highly offensive and discriminatory term.

✓ PEOPLE WHO HAVE SURVIVED INCARCERATION, PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED. RETURNED CITIZENS, RETURNED RESIDENTS, RETURNED ARTISTS

When possible, use people-first language first before using these three titles, which are shorthand. These titles all have slightly different meanings and are not interchangeable.

✓ PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN MARGINALIZED, PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAUMATIZED

No one chooses to be marginalized or traumatized, no one is doomed to being marginalized or traumatized forever.

✓ SYSTEM-IMPACTED

Includes people, families, and communities who are or have been arrested, discriminated against, oppressed, incarcerated

✓ PRISONS, CARCERAL FACILITY

There is nothing "correct" about our prisons.

✓ PERSON WHO WAS/IS ENSLAVED

No one can be legitimately ethically owned by another person. No person is in a separate class of humanity that is a "slave." People who were or are enslaved are people who have been abused by oppressors.

✓ PERSON WHO ENSLAVE(D/S) OTHER PEOPLE

No one can legitimately ethically own another person.

✓ SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Victim implies a person without power; survivor implies a person with strength and power.

✓ DRUG/SUBSTANCE USE

User is a more accurate term. Abuser is dehumanizing. We recognize that drug and substance use is often a result of self-medication for people who have been traumatized.

WE DON'T SAY

✗ INMATE, PRISONER, CONVICT, OFFENDER, INCARCERATED PERSON

✗ VIOLENT CRIMINALS, SUPERPREDATORS

✗ FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE

✗ MARGINALIZED PEOPLE, TRAUMATIZED PEOPLE

✗ CRIMINAL

✗ CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES (UNLESS USING THE PROPER NAME OF A FACILITY)

✗ SLAVE

✗ SLAVE OWNER, SLAVE HOLDER

✗ RAPE VICTIM

✗ DRUG/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

With thanks to the Underground Scholars Language Guide, created by survivors of incarceration:

<https://undergroundscholars.berkeley.edu/blog/2019/3/6/language-guide-for-communicating-about-those-involved-in-the-carceral-system>

For a detailed disability language style guide, visit The National Center on Disability and Journalism: <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>



LANGUAGE GUIDE

for communicating about MSC programs

Avoid using language that implies a White Savior Complex. Teaching Artists, outside audiences, and others learn as much from the participants as they do from us.

WE DO SAY

✓ ARTISTS, ACTORS, PARTICIPANTS, ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

Student/teacher language perpetuates a paternalistic power structure. We do not want to unintentionally contribute to the infantilization of grown men and women.

✓ THE ACTORS/GROUP/ENSEMBLE I WORK WITH

We do not own the artists, nor do we take ownership of their artistry and work.

✓ WE PROVIDE INVITATIONS AND TOOLS THAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE USED TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES

Avoid white savior language. Our groups are meant to reinforce self-empowerment and self-healing.

✓ SELF-EMPOWERMENT, SELF-HEALING

Some people never had a safe home as a child, so never were habilitated to begin with. The process of healing is one that nurtures a person who is becoming, whereas rehabilitation tethers a person's growth to their past.

WE DON'T SAY

✗ STUDENTS

✗ MY/OUR ACTORS, MY/OUR GROUP

✗ WE CHANGE/SAVE LIVES

✗ REHABILITATION