

Influence(rs)

by Jane McGinnes

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Influence(rs) follows middle schooler AJ Ryan as she embarks on a surreal guided tour of her own past, led by the creators of *Mythical Mayhem*, her favorite podcast. With their unique blend of humor and storytelling, the podcasters help her revisit pivotal moments in her past: a new school, a bereavement, and a social media calamity. Along the way, she discovers the power of perspective, forms a bond with her alter-ego AJ2, and begins to understand how her choices influence her path. With relevant contemporary themes, just the right balance of comedy and drama, and an epic climactic battle with a giant Kraken puppet, the play invites its teen audiences to assess the influencers in their own lives. Running time: 50 minutes.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The show was produced by the Sacramento Country Day School - Middle School Drama Class on January 14-16, 2025. It featured the following cast and crew:

AJ:	 Vivian Lang
AJ2:	 Violet Kennedy
BO:	 Ethan Minton
LARSEN:	 Ashton Tran
DAISY:	 Sofia Maltese
NADIA:	 Savya Bhullar
MINH:	 Julian Ott
DEANNA:	 Nichelle Lindgren
ROBERT:	 Luke Wood
WHIZZ:	 Fara McCormick
SAVANNAH:	 Maya Rajuan
GUITAR BOY:	 Will Haus
ENSEMBLE:	 Veer Aggarwal, Mohneet Gill, Jenny Mao, Kabir Natt, Taylor Scripps, Mary Webster, Celia Desai-White, Ariel Sandman, and Izzy Zhou
BIG VOICE/TECH:	 Brock Dunham
DIRECTOR:	 Jane McGinnes
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR:	 Laura Monahan

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Cast of 22+. 3 m, 6 w, 3 flexible, ensemble of 8-10.)

AJ: Female age 14.

AJ2: Female age 14.

MINH: Male age 14.

NADIA: Female age 14.

WHIZZ: Female age 12.

DEANNA: AJ's mother.

ROBERT: AJ's father.

BO: Podcaster 1. Any gender. Update name as needed.

DAISY: Podcaster 2. Any gender. Update name as needed.

LARSEN: Podcaster 3. Any gender. Update name as needed.

SAVANNAH: Female age 14.

GUJAR BOY: Male age 14.

ENSEMBLE: Teachers, Principal, Nurse, Students, Memes,
Commenters, News Announcers

SET

A bedroom, a classroom, the deck of a ship which can be maximalist or minimalist. Blocks become a bed, a ladder becomes the crow's nest, a yoga ball and pool noodles become a terrifying Kraken puppet!

Setting: Stockton, California (or any city with low rainfall)

Time: 2022

Prologue: Cacophony of Influencers

(AT RISE: The stage is bare. In the dark, the ENSEMBLE enters and builds AJ's bedroom: a partial wall covered in posters, and a bed strewn with stuffed animals. A desk with schoolbooks and papers. As they work, we hear their mash-up of Instagram reels and TikToks. Actors can write their own "influencer" lines.)

Make sure to moisturize your face.
Adorable cat breeds.
Number 3.
Before you put on your makeup.
If you want to build muscle.
Blend it with a mini blender.
Say *I am awesome*.
So ugly.
Two different size bristles.
Lavender infused bath bombs.
Every morning, look at yourself in the mirror.
Super cute.
For as little as 99.99.
Known for their docile and gentle nature.
I've been dying to try it.
The ultimate in school wear.
If you want to look your absolute best-
Welcome to 2022, people.

(The last ENSEMBLE member wheels on AJ, sitting on a swivel chair. LIGHTS come up on her, sitting at her desk trying to do her homework. She is clearly distracted.)

(Big Voice) Part One - The Ordinary World

AJ: *(Reading lines from "The Crucible.")* "Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life!" Bla bla bla... witches dancing in the woods... "I have given you my soul; leave me my name!"

(SFX: PING... PING.)

(MINH suddenly appears in his own small LIGHT. AJ looks at the phone - doesn't pick it up.)

(SFX: PING... PING.)

(AJ snatches up the phone.)

(SFX: PING... PING.)

(AJ exhales loudly.)

MINH: You there?
Raised eyebrow emoji.
You good?
Text me.
Soon.
Gritted teeth emoji.

(AJ does not respond.)

(SFX: PING... PING... PING.)

(AJ picks up phone.)

MINH: You good?
What u gonna do?
What u gonna do?

AJ: *(Throws down phone again. Talking to the room.)* I don't know what I'm going to do, Minh. And I'm definitely not good. *(SFX: PING.)* OMG!

(NADIA now pops up next to MINH.)

NADIA: What's your plan? *(SFX: PING.)* Let me know.

(AJ throws down phone. MOM enters with a graduation robe.)

MOM: Is this too long?

AJ: I'm TRYING to do my homework here, Mom.

MOM: I'm worried it's too long.

AJ: It's 8th grade graduation. Who cares?

(MOM exits.)

AJ: *(Cont'd. To herself.)* If I even get to graduate.

MOM: *(Shouting from offstage.)* I care.

(SFX: PING. AJ's sister, WHIZZ, barges in.)

WHIZZ: Can you help me with my math?

AJ: CAN YOU KNOCK!

(WHIZZ exits.)

(SFX: PING.)

(DAD pops up next to MINH and NADIA.)

DAD: How does the moon cut his hair? *(SFX: PING.)* E-clipse it! *(SFX: PING.)* Crying laughing emoji.

AJ: Oh, Dad.

(SFX: PING.)

MINH: Nadia is freaking out.

(SFX: PING.)

NADIA: Freaking out here, AJ.

(SFX: PING.)

DAD: *MythicalMayhem* has a new episode out. *(SFX: PING.)* Monster emoji.

(SFX: PING. PING. PING.)

NADIA: This is life or death, AJ - all caps, exclamation point, exclamation point, exclamation point.

NADIA / MINH: Text me PLEASE.

(AJ takes a breath. Puts her phone on vibrate, then puts it under her pillow. She covers it with her quilt and finally plops an octopus stuffy on top. MINH, NADIA, and DAD disappear. She tries to go back to "The Crucible" but can't concentrate.)

(SFX: VIBRATE - Faint but still audible.)

AJ: AAAARGH!

VOICES: *MythicalMayhem* - new episode available now.

(SHE takes the phone from under the pillow. LIGHT comes up SR. Three PODCASTERS appear at a desk with microphones, recording gear, etc. She gives in. She's not going to get any homework done. She puts in her earbuds and lies on her bed. The "MythicalMayhem Podcast" begins. SFX: Eerie music plays.)

BO: For every good villain there is a hero. The giant one-eyed Cyclops.

DAISY: Odysseus.

BO: The Wicked Witch of the West.

LARSEN: *(Accent.)* Lil'ol' Dorothy from Kansas.

BO: Chalk-white-snake-face-Voldemort.

DAISY: *(Accent.)* Harry Potter. *(Normal voice.)* A hero is someone we can identify with. Recognize in ourselves.

LARSEN: Heroes have admirable qualities.

BO: But they also have imperfections, quirks.

DAISY: Heroes overcome obstacles and achieve goals – but they also gain new knowledge and wisdom.

BO: A hero has to be willing to give up something of value. A loved one, a friend.

LARSEN: Heroes have to make choices, important choices.

DAISY: Will Dorothy give up her magic slippers to the nasty witch?

BO: Our man Odysseus. Does he sail past the six-headed Scylla and lose six of his men, or risk his whole crew in the raging whirlpool that is Charybdis?

LARSEN: Should Harry Potter sacrifice himself to destroy Voldemort?

ALL: Dun! Dun! Dun!

LARSEN: We're your hosts. Larsen!

DAISY: Daisy.

BO: And Bo.

ALL: *(Singing a cheesy jingle.)* Welcome to the *Mythical Mayhem, Mythical Mayhem, Myyyythyical Mayyyyyyhem mmmmm* Podcast yeah!!

(SFX: Thunderous applause sound effect.)

LARSEN: Hey, Daisy, Bo. Tell the audience who we're talking about today.

DAISY: Lars, today we're exploring the life and adventures of AJ Ryan.

BO: The one and only AJ Ryan from Stockton, California.

AJ: *(Reacts, looks around.)* What?

LARSEN: Like the aforementioned heroic figures, AJ has faced some pretty daunting obstacles.

AJ: What is happening here?

DAISY: She has plenty of imperfections.

BO: And quirks.

LARSEN: And -- she has a gargantuan decision to make.

DAISY: Oh yes, Lars. It's a juicy one.

AJ: *(Rips off headphones.)* Why are you talking about me? Who are you?

BO: Your favorite podcasters.

DAISY: Friendly storytellers.

LARSEN: Think of us as your own personal narrators.

AJ: I don't want my own personal narrators. Go away. I'm turning off my phone. *(SHE does.)*

DAISY: We're still here, AJ.

BO: In any hero adventure, the audience needs to see the hero in her ordinary world.

AJ: Hold on. What? What audience?

BO: Our listeners.

DAISY: And that audience -- out there.

AJ: *(Noticing them for the first time, jumping in fright.)* Jeez.
They are watching me? This is creepy. AND utterly humiliating.

(An actor, AJ2, enters the bedroom, dressed in exactly the same clothes as AJ with the same hairstyle.)

AJ2: Hey.

AJ: Who are you? Get out of my room! What is happening here?

AJ2: I'm playing you.

AJ: This is not funny. Mom! Whizz! Is this some kind of prank?
Did my dad put you up to this?

BO: You can sit. Relax and watch.

AJ: Relax? This is freaking me out!

AJ2: Don't worry, I'm a good actor. I recently did a national toothpaste commercial, and I was an extra in a popular teen TV show.

(AJ2 takes up the same position on the bed as AJ earlier. She puts on the headphones and picks up the phone and turns it on.)

AJ: This is not funny. I am not OK with any of this.

BO: The purpose of hero stories in the ancient world was to warn people.

DAISY: To guide people on how to live their lives.

LARSEN: The general population learns from them.

AJ: Learns what?

LARSEN: Learns from their triumphs and their mistakes.

AJ: Who's going to learn anything from my life?

BO: You'd be surprised.

(THEY laugh hysterically.)

AJ: Is this a nightmare? I just sat on my bed. I am NOT asleep.

DAISY: We're podcasters. Daisy, Lars, and Bo. We're not in the business of nightmares.

LARSEN: To fully understand our hero, the audience needs a little of her backstory.

AJ: Stop calling me that. I've done nothing good or heroic.

BO: Cue upbeat yet comforting music.

(SFX: MUSIC plays. DAD enters.)

DAD: Robert Ryan. AKA Bobby. AKA DAD.

AJ: Dad? What are you...? Is he an actor too? He looks exactly like my dad.

DAISY: No, that's your dad.

LARSEN: But he can't hear you.

DAD: Community college professor of history. Focus-maritime history. Four out of 5 stars on Rate my Professor dot com. Into mythology, action movies and bad dad jokes.

(SFX: MUSIC plays. MOM enters.)

MOM: Deanna McCalister. AKA Dee Dee. AKA Mom.

AJ: Mom!

MOM: Data analyst. I apply statistical methods and data modeling techniques to interpret data and make predictions. I just love to identify patterns, trends, and anomalies. I also make cute little garden gnomes and sell them on Etsy.

DAISY: *(Baby crying.)* Waa. Waa. Waa.

NURSE: *(Enters holding a wailing bundle.)* Mrs. and Mrs. Ryan. Your beautiful baby girl.

MOM: Let's call her Alexi-Jo.

DAD: AJ for short.

AJ: We're going that far back?

BO: Waa. Waa. Waa.

NURSE: Mr. and Mrs. Ryan, your beautiful baby girl.

DAD: Let's call her Elizabeth.

MOM: Lizzy.

AJ2: *(Overacting a lispy toddler.)* Ewizabiff. Whizzy. Whizz. Whizzy.

DAD: Whizz.

End of Freeview

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