Costume Designs for Stephen Karam’s “Speech and Debate”
Designed by Ariadne Watum

Speech and Debate
Directed by Carrie Baker.
Scenic and Lighting Design by Kade Mendelowitz.

In 2007, three high school students struggle with finding themselves in the face of a local sex scandal in this contemporary dark comedy.

The costumes for Speech and Debate focused around a number of design factors. It was important to make sure that the college aged actors looked like high school students from 2007, that the character of Diwata looked ‘frumpy’, that the double cast character of the Teacher/Reporter looked distinctly different in both roles, and that whatever costumes the 3 high school students were put in would be easy for quick costume changes between scenes.

Solomon
He’s a 17 year old reporter for the school newspaper from a conservative family. Design wise, Solomon is stuck between wanting to be taken seriously: seen as an adult and being stuck in the clothing that his parents have approved of.

Howie
He’s an 18 year old transfer student from Portland whose main goal is to get through his senior year and go off to college. Howie’s older, openly gay, and design wise, has much more freedom to choose his own clothing. The emphasis was on casual, well fitted jeans and graphic t-shirts which was a direct contrast to Solomon’s costumes.

Diwata
The youngest of the student trio, Diwata is 16 and describes herself as ‘frumpy’. Her clothing is a mixture of hand-me-downs, thrift store finds, and pieces she’s altered for various reasons. Diwata’s main costume pieces are her waitress uniform and her pilgrim dress, which were built in the costume shop to ensure that they were virtually identical, since the pilgrim dress is a dyed version of her waitress uniform.

Teacher/Reporter
The only two adults in the play, the role was double cast, so the same actor played both. The challenge here was to not only make the actor look different enough not to confuse the two characters but to give two very different ‘types’ of adults for the students to interact with and play off of. The teacher was given a conservative but not too formal outfit. The reporter was younger, hipper, and contrastingly, has the job Solomon wants, but looks completely different than what his mental image of a reporter is.