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PRESIDENTIAL PROFILE

THEY IS US

Ignore the grammar. The problem of seeking one's own identity, or of determining the roles we are to play, has always intrigued me. I suppose that is why I became involved with both theatre and education. I suppose that's what ultimately has dragged me back into graduate work after over twenty years of teaching. The questions of "Who am I?" has major implications in the context of a new organization such as AATSE. Who are we? And who are the "they" we hear so much about, that mysterious camp on the other side of the gulf: our students, our colleagues, our superstructure, the lay public?

Last month I sent a Holiday letter to our members that outlined where we have come in the brief time that the American Association for Theatre in Secondary Education has existed. The letter may have arrived late, but its message remained valid: we are in the process of becoming a vital voice for theatre in American education. Our members are for the most part teachers in American high schools who have discovered that the theatre is a dynamic art form which enriches and stretches the boundaries of our students' lives. It has also represented for us a methodology by which we can involve our students in the active individual search for identity and appropriate roles to play in the process of their emotional, intellectual, and social growth. We teach them to ask "Who am I?" and we too learn from and thrive on their search. We're not so far removed from it ourselves, are we? "Them" is "us."

We teach theatre because we like the theatre, and we appreciate what it has done and can do for our own private sense of well-being and curiosity. And we teach our students, because we like them too, and we have skills and knowledge to impart to them that they will find useful and exciting. Part of our potential was ably demonstrated to the public in a fine segment of NBC's *Today Show* on Jan. 6, which dealt with the work with inner city youngsters by New York University's Creative Arts Team. Heaven knows there are few enough other compensations for being a teacher. The appreciation suggested in a smile of discovery is a major reward for a good teacher, and one which we ought not to lose sight of. In our profession, we are often fortunate enough to see and hear such responses. They justify our doing what we do.



The joys expressed and the discoveries made by our students are ultimately the cause for our coming together in a professional association, as well. Within our own school districts, many of us must experience such rewards privately. We may find that we are the only member of a faculty who understands what is being awakened in our students, or who sees worth in the learning process brought to them by the art of theatre. Such isolation can be discouraging, and bring about self-doubts in many of us. Furthermore, it can rob the rest of the educational and theatrical establishments of knowledge of worthy models. We must have ways to speak to each other, to receive encouragement for our efforts, to share our ideas, and to inform the lay public of just how successful is our approach to teaching their children. A dedicated teacher, no matter how exciting and successful within the walls of a classroom, is in a vacuum if others don't know about her, can't use him as a model, won't be inspired by her, aren't persuading still others to value his efforts!

It is to combat such waste that AATSE has brought us together. We simply couldn't NOT exist. Many of us are former members of the American Theatre Association and of its divisions in community, university, secondary, and children's theatre. The history of the ATA, its dreams and its demise, will probably not be written for a long time to come, and will certainly not be attempted here. When ATA, despite dedicated efforts to keep it alive, finally announced last summer that it could no longer serve its members, theatre teachers were left with the need to create a new voice.

In a relatively brief span of time, AATSE has gained a strong core of dedicated members. We are independently incorporated, with a fully established board structure and a set of goals and priorities for our profession. We ARE the voice for theatre teachers in American high schools, and our voice will grow stronger as its membership chooses to be heard. Relations with our sister organization, the American Association of Theatre for Youth, grow rapidly stronger. It is with AATY that we have published a major piece of curricular research, and with AATY that we will sponsor a major convention of K-12 theatre educators in Chicago next summer. We are exploring the possibilities of an AATSE-AATY merger, resulting in a single organization that would offer increased services to our

membership and greater opportunities for advocacy and networking. AATSE also is seeking ways to cooperate with the International Thespian Society, the high school theatre organization whose members are primarily student troupes, with state departments of education, with related arts education professional associations, with state, regional and national theatre associations, and with anyone else who shares common interests with us.

It will all happen if we want it to, and if we see the need for it. Many of us are already members of those other associations, and many of them will become AATSE or AATY members. Who, after all, is "them," if not "us?" We are students, and parents, and members of other associations, and individuals with other interests, and members of a lay public. It falls on "us," the core membership of AATSE and our future friends, to take our goals and beliefs to "them," and to make our association of such value that "they" will come to "us." There is no "them" in a national office somewhere that we can blame for AATSE inadequacy. And there is no "them" who represent a rival association, or a political blockade. We are only "we," who together must find a way to work together to create a strong profession which is dedicated to theatre and the growth of our students. And we invite the active participation of every single AATSE member and friend who reads these words in the effort to bring that about.

We look forward to meeting and talking with each other next summer in Chicago, and to participating in each other's seminars and programs. We look forward to reading of each other's ideas and programs in future pages of this *Journal*. We look forward to hearing news of our activities in the *Newsletter*. We look forward to each of us inviting increasing numbers of colleagues and friends to join with us in our Association, so that we may all derive the benefit of hearing what we each have to say. And we look forward to increased opportunities to remind ourselves that we are in one of the more rewarding professions on this earth.

Happy New Year!

William H. Rough
President, AATSE



CURRENT TRENDS IN HIGH SCHOOL PRODUCTIONS

Patti Gillespie
University of Maryland

As interest in secondary education grows alongside calls of "Back to Basics," teachers of the arts in high schools should consider carefully what is done and why it is done. Why, for example, in high school theatre programs do we produce plays? Or, stated another way, what is the educational purpose of our production program in high school? Are we trying to train theatre artists? Probably not, for far fewer than five percent of our students will try to become professionals in theatre. Are we trying to build self-confidence and poise? Perhaps. Are we trying to expand our students' understanding of drama? Of theatre? of life?

One way of gaining some understanding of our goals might be to examine our choice of plays. The annual surveys of the International Thespian Society, the largest and most visible of the national associations of high school theatre, may suggest some major trends.¹ Because it can be shown that the teaching of theatre changed in both high schools and colleges after World War II, this study considers data only from 1945 through 1984.

Comparing the twenty most popular plays of each decade reveals four major trends in the Thespians' production programs nationwide.

Trend #1: The popularity of musical plays grows steadily.

Before 1953, musicals were excluded from the Thespians' annual surveys. In 1953, the musical *Annie Get Your Gun* was the third most popular play among Thespians, but no other musical made the top twenty for the rest of the decade. During the 1960s, the picture shifted significantly. After 1961, at least one—and sometimes two—musicals appeared among the top ten plays each year of the decade. Among the favorite plays of the 1960s, six musicals—*Oklahoma!*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *The Music Man*, *Brigadoon*, *Sound of Music*, and *South Pacific*—made the top twenty. For the decade of the 1970s, *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*, was the third most popular play, and seven other musical plays appeared among the decade's top twenty: *The Music Man* (9th), *Oklahoma!* (10th), *Fiddler on the Roof* (12th), *Bye Bye Birdie* (17th), *Guys and Dolls* (18th), *Godspell* (19th), and *Hello, Dolly!* (20th). Between 1980 and 1985, musicals comprised half of the plays cited, whether in the top ten, the top twenty, or the top thirty.

Trend #2: New York's commercial theatre provides an increasing proportion of the repertory.

The decade of the 1940s saw high school troupes producing a variety of plays, many of which did not

originate on Broadway. Almost half of the top twenty plays of that decade, for example, are not listed in the New York Times' *Directory of Theatre*. Some, like *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay* and *We Shook the Family Tree*, were adaptations of popular books; others, like *Brother Goose* and *The Fighting Littles*, have more obscure origins. One popular high school play of the 1950s, *Little Dog Laughed*, was written especially for high school production and had its world premiere in an Illinois high school. Other plays among the top twenty grew out of popular movies (*Cheaper by the Dozen*), popular radio and television series (*Our Miss Brooks*), and popular books (*Seventeenth Summer*). All in all, nearly half of the 1950s' top twenty plays originated outside of New York. The 1960s shifted this pattern. All but three of the 1960s' favorite plays originated in New York. Of these three, both *The Mouse that Roared* and *Ask Any Girl* were popular movies of 1959, while the dramatic adaptation of *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay* continued to be popular. Again in the 1970s, all but three of the top twenty plays came from New York. *Up the Down Staircase*, the decade's most popular play, was first a popular book and then a popular movie; *David and Lisa* and *Flowers for Algernon* became plays after having been popular as books and movies (the latter under the name *Charley*). From 1980-1984 only *Up the Down Staircase* did not originate in New York's theatres.

Trend #3: The repertory, especially the non-musical grows steadily older.

During the 1940s, all of the favorite plays had first been produced in the 1930s and the 1940s. The earliest play, *Little Women*, premiered in New York in 1931, while the decade's most contemporary play *January Thaw*, opened there in 1946. The decade's two most popular plays were *You Can't Take It With You* (1936) and *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941). The decade of the 1950s kept several of the old favorites but added several contemporary plays: *The Curious Savage* (1950), *Mrs. McThing* (1952), *Time Out for Ginger* (1952). The favorite plays of the 1960s, in contrast, included only a single play written in the 1960s, the musical *Bye Bye Birdie*. Several plays written during the 1950s appeared on the list of favorite plays of the 1960s for the first time, plays like *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955), *The Miracle Worker* (1959), *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1953), and musicals like *The Music Man* (1957) and *The Sound of Music* (1959). The two favorite plays of the 1960s, however, were *Our Town* (1938) and *You Can't Take It With You* (1936). By the 1970s, old plays clearly dominated the list. Except for adaptations of recent movies, all of the non-musical plays dated from the 1950s or before, over half dated from the 1930s and 1940s. Among the musicals, by contrast, *Godspell* (1971) was a recent hit; *Charlie Brown*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Bye Bye Birdie* and *Hello, Dolly!* were 1960s revivals; and only *Oklahoma!* (1943) was of an earlier era. The 1980 merely echoed the patterns of the 1970s.

Trend #4: The repertory grows increasingly restricted.

The top twenty plays of each decade, ranked according to total number of performances and total number of years on annual lists, can be collapsed to produce a single list of the top twenty plays of the forty-year period, 1945-1984 (See Table One). Th

favorite plays of the 1940s bore faint resemblance to this master list, with only five of the decade's plays appearing on it. Subsequent decades, however, increased the number of overlapping titles significantly. Ten of the 1950s' favorite plays made the final list; seventeen plays from the 1960s and 1970s appeared; nineteen of the twenty plays of the 1980s overlapped the final list of favorite plays.

Rather than speculating now about the possible reasons for these trends or even about their possible meanings, let us examine in more detail the twenty most popular plays of the forty-year period. Refer to Table One.

Specifically, let us consider what might be the primary world views and values displayed in the repertory. It should be noted that these views and values emerge both explicitly (for example, sympathetic characters state them and others unquestioningly embrace them) and implicitly (for example, characters who believe in contrary ways are punished, or the play's structures and endings reward approved ideas).

The world of the plays is overwhelmingly white, American, middle-class, and—surprisingly for high schools—middle-aged.

Blacks are largely absent from the plays, but if present are outrageously stereotyped. Most of the blacks, who make up less than 1% of the total characters, are typically shown as domestic servants, students, or children's companions. The comic stereotypes offered by *You Can't Take It With You*, to cite a single example, are of blacks living in sin and on welfare.

Few foreigners appear; those who do are usually white and usually inferior to the Americans. The only play of the top twenty that displays a multicultural world is *Up the Down Staircase*, where the different ethnic backgrounds are a major point of the text.

Almost all of the plays are set in the United States, either in a small town or in New York City. Those plays set outside the States typically treat some aspect of World War II, showing (on the one hand) Europeans trying to escape Nazism and (on the other) American soldiers occupying recently liberated islands. In several of the plays the physical world of the characters is depicted as their sanctuary against an alien society. The most literal sanctuary is, of course, the attic in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, but other sanctuaries are Grovers Corners in *Our Town*, the asylum in *The Curious Savage*, the Brewsters' living room in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and Grandpa's home in *You Can't Take It With You*, to cite only the most obvious.

Material comforts in the plays are taken for granted: everyone has them, although their source is mysterious, since few characters work. Indeed, the attitude toward work in the plays is ambiguous. Several sympathetic characters, like Grandpa in *You Can't Take It With You* and Elwood P. Dowd in *Harvey* have retired early; others, like Mrs. Savage and the Brewster sisters, have inherited money and do not need to work. Teachers work in *The Miracle Worker* and *Up the Down Staircase*, and con men work in *Guys and Dolls* and *The Music Man*, but in general work is something other people do.

Teenagers and their problems seldom figure centrally in the plays. *The Miracle Worker*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Up the Down Staircase*, and perhaps *Our Town* are exceptions, but among the remaining fourteen plays, the actions revolve around characters who are middle-aged or older. When young people appear in the plays, they are usually in their mid or late twenties and "in love." Thus, the vast majority of roles in the plays are for people quite outside the age and experience of the available performers.

In the favorite Thespian plays, the values displayed are Christian and patriarchal, familial, and unchanging.

Women's interests are only in home and family. If a woman works outside the home, she has a traditionally female job—secretary, teacher, librarian, missionary—not a career. If she is not married, she is working to become so. Boys and men, by contrast, are either preparing to do something important (going to medical or law school) or holding one of a wide array of jobs: soldier, car salesman, prophet, crook, teacher, rock star, cowboy, reporter. Men are clearly preeminent, both inside and outside the home. Men know best; they can talk directly with God, as Grandpa does when he opens each meal with "Well, sir. Here we are again."

Home and family are more important than money, however, even for the men. Four of the top five plays depict genial eccentrics who have withdrawn from society's pressures in order to reassert the primacy of family and home over wealth and possessions. Characters who try to reverse these values are ridiculed or punished. Thus, the Kirbys in *You Can't Take It With You* are humiliated and jailed, the gamblers in *Guys and Dolls* are ridiculed, and the Savage offspring in *The Curious Savage* are denied their claims to inheritance.

Rural values are promoted over urban ones. When Conrad Birdie, the famous rock star, comes to Ohio, Ohio wins. When rural Oklahomans want to call up images of sin, they mention Kansas City. When residents of *Our Town* brag, they note that they need not lock their doors like residents of the big cities. Indeed, the only play that even hints at the existence and importance of urban values is *Up the Down Staircase*.

Stasis is preferred to change. Several plays make the point directly. The Stage Manager in *Our Town* recalls with obvious pleasure that "on the whole, things don't change much around here." The same point is made less overtly in most other plays of the list, however. In *Arsenic and Old Lace*, the pattern of comic killing threatens to repeat indefinitely. In *Harvey*, Elwood P. Dowd and his white rabbit not only beat back medical science but also persuade the family to do likewise. In *The Music Man*, the flim-flam artist falls in love, stops travelling, and prepares to settle down in Iowa.

Obviously, the world and values of these plays bear little resemblance to the world and values of today's life outside them. A partial explanation for this circumstance emerges from even a cursory look at the characteristics of the play list itself.

First, all of the plays on the list are American. Most are comedies or musicals, with only four serious

plays and a single courtroom mystery (*Night of January 16th*).

Second, all but two of the plays originated in New York's commercial theatre; popular books and a hit movie provided the two exceptions: *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay* and *Up the Down Staircase*. Thus, all of the plays (or the materials from which the plays were adapted) aimed originally at a mass, popular audience and had already been proved successful with that audience.

Third, most of the plays on the list date from the 1950s or earlier. Of the remaining four, three are musicals.

Fourth, most of the plays adopt the theatrical conventions of realism. Although the musical plays predictably romanticize that realism, only *Godspell* and *Charlie Brown* move outside the style altogether. In keeping with the conventions of realism, most of the plays depict times roughly contemporary with that of the writing. Six plays are loosely historical, with most of these choosing the preceding generation as their setting, apparently in order to promote the notion of "the good old days." The actions of only *Godspell* and *The Crucible* unfold before the twentieth century (although *The Crucible* supposedly treats an event contemporary with its own writing—McCarthyism).

The characteristics of the list help explain the characteristics of the repertory. Both are limited and parochial (white, American, male, middle-class). Both are geared toward entertainment and audience placidity rather than toward education and audience provocation. Both seek the safety of a known (and sanitized) past rather than the challenges of today and tomorrow. Indeed, the reliance on realistic plays written, on the average, about forty years ago probably tends to lull the audience into accepting the world of the plays as "the way things are" rather than the way things used to be—or never were. And the increasing reliance on musicals seems to underscore a determination to escape—from something.

From the summary of the high-school Thespians' favorite plays during the period 1945-1985, what might we infer about our reasons for including play production as a part of the education of high school students? The conclusions do not seem to me happy ones.

For example, we might be using high-school production programs to educate students about the great literatures or cultures or theatres of the past. But we obviously are not, for no plays of any kind from before 1900 appear on the list of favorite plays. We could be using our production program as a means of introducing students to other cultures or of exploring alternative ideas, values, or life styles. Clearly we are not, for the lists contain none of the great masterpieces of Europe, Asia, or Africa; nor does the list contain any plays from America's own sub-cultures (the Black, the Indian, the Chicano, the feminist, the gay). We could be using our production programs to educate students about the art of the theatre, but quite clearly we are not, for the list contains none of the great benchmark productions of our art; indeed, it contains no non-commercial plays of any kind—no original scripts, no anti-realistic scripts. We could be using our productions

as vehicles for a student's own self-exploration, but no evidence suggests that we do.

We are not using our production programs to teach students anything about the world in which they live, for their world is a world that is *not* mostly Christian, white, middle class; their world is not a world in which values like rugged individualism, patriarchy, racism, and capitalism pass unchallenged. Their world is, rather, one in which change is swift, answers are complex, and questions are common. Theirs is a world in which alternative religions, cultures, and lifestyles are highly visible. Their world is a world about change, not stasis, about alternatives, not absolutes.

In sum, we are not using our production programs to teach about other times, other cultures, other values, or about the art of the theatre or the world in which the students live, or even about self-awareness. Indeed, we seem not to be using our production programs to educate about anything. The evidence suggests rather that the production program in high school is about entertainment, about a safe, recreational pastime, a trivial diversion that might be reasonably compared with prime-time television, B movies, or Harlequin romance novels. It is as if the school's music program offered only performances of rock music and the art program only exhibits of cartoons. In short, in many of our high schools, the art of the theatre—with its two-thousand-year history and its reputation as a teacher of society—has apparently been relegated to the shelf and in its place has been installed a banal, commercial, entertainment.

The questions with which I began this study now loom more threateningly than before. Why do we produce plays in high school? If the answer is merely "to entertain," perhaps we ought to ask if the time and money invested in it is justified in an educational setting. If our answer is "to educate," then surely we need to change radically the plays that we choose to produce.

ENDNOTE

¹The Thespians' annual survey is published each year in *Dramatics*. This article is based on an analysis of these annual surveys. For a fuller treatment of the data (including its limitations) and for a listing of favorite plays by decade consult Patti P. Gillespie, "Thespians Favorite Plays," *Dramatics* (Fall 1985).

SPOTLIGHT

THEATRE HISTORY ON THE ROAD

Dennis J. Picard
Suffield High School
(Suffield, Connecticut)

Scene 1: 6:30 am, High School Parking Lot

The stage manager of high school touring children's theatre is supervising the loading of the van for the day's itinerary. The costume crew is making a last minute inventory of the Restoration costumes. Actors and actresses are dazed, but eager for this long touring day. Four actors pounce on the stage manager when they find out she's also in charge of the donut cache.

Scene 2: 9:15 am, First stop on Day's Tour

The actors and actresses are crowding into the two small restrooms adjacent to gym/cafeteria/auditorium of this elementary school. Stage crew is spiking set and audience perimeters on the floor of the playing space. The principal of the host school and the director of the tour are discussing how many lunches will be needed for the cast and crew. A third grade boy with a lav pass enters the restroom, has a face-to-face meeting with six wigged, made-up and costumed Shakespearean characters, and can be heard shouting down the hall, "I just saw the actors!"

Scene 3: 1:35 pm, Second Stop on Day's Tour

The actors and actresses are visiting the classrooms, while still in costume, for a post-performance question and answer period. In a grade one classroom the students want to touch the heroine's gown. In grade three, the students ask the "mute" character if he can really talk. In grade five, a member of the Greek chorus is asked to reveal how long it took him to learn the lines. The actor, not knowing that his director is standing in the back of the class, answers, "We're still learning them." The van is delayed from leaving because the hero of our play is still in a sixth grade classroom giving autographs.

Scene 4: 3:45 pm, High School Parking Lot

Students, on automatic pilot, are doing everything they did at 6:30 am, but now in reverse. The direc-

tor is reporting to the vice-principal that the "troupe" is back. A first year participant, still in Kabuki costume, exclaims, "Can we do this again tomorrow?" The veterans of the troupe somehow gather the strength to pummel her with the remaining stale donuts.

This scenario, with minor variations, has been taking place at Suffield High School, in Suffield, Ct. For the past nine years, the Suffield High School Touring Children's Theatre has been the major fall event of the high school drama program. From the opening of school, when reading copies of the script are available, to the in-house assemblies on Homecoming Day, just before Thanksgiving, the tour is a time-consuming, commitment-demanding enterprise. However, the rewards, both tangible and intangible, academic and personal, are worth every bit of energy expended.

The idea of children's theatre in a high school drama program is not new, but for a high school to mount an extensive 20 to 30 performance tour of schools and libraries is an unusual innovation. Our program, now at the nine year mark, is quite an accomplishment, organized and orderly after trial and error and much on the road experience.

In the 1975-76 school year, the students in the acting classes (we weren't a children's theatre yet) presented a play for the town's three elementary schools. The play was "The Twin Brothers," loosely based on *The Menaechmi* of Plautus. The initial success was gratifying, but since the play was a bit more sophisticated than the usual and familiar fairy tale production, some of the elementary school teachers wished there had been more preparation for their students. They suggested study guides with names of characters, plot synopsis, etc.

In our next season, we provided guides for our original Kabuki drama. Not only did we provide the teachers with their specific requests, but also with a list of Kabuki traditions, theatrical terms and "things" to look for in our production. We also added a performance at our town's library and an assembly performance at our own high school.

In our third season our town librarian contacted other libraries in our inter-library loan consortium and we got additional bookings there (we're a children's theatre by now). This season also saw the first direct mail campaign to nearby elementary and middle schools. Our abridged production of *The Taming of the Shrew* came complete with guides that now included vocabulary and information on the author. This production was presented 25 times and we've been on the road ever since!

In the last five years we have recreated Greek drama, an environmental in-the-round production, an abridged *The Tempest*, a Russian folk legend and, most recently, a Restoration comedy. The direct mailing to schools and PTO's covers an ever widening area of Connecticut and Massachusetts. However, we've found that word of mouth is the best advertisement. After our initial appearance in any town's school system, we can count on more bookings there the following year. Since so many of our performances are during the school day, the shows are usually double cast so the same students won't be missing too many days of classes for these approved field trips.

The tours have fluctuated each year in number of participants, complexity of set and costumes, and logistics, but the one constant, unifying force has been our primary educational objective. All of our productions, whether based on original scripts or published works, have been geared to tell a story, and through the method of story-telling, to present lessons about theatrical traditions and customs. Through use of the study guides, the children know what to look and listen for and what the proper terms are. For example: the word "soliloquy" was introduced and defined in our guides for *Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tempest*; we made sure that the actors stepped forward in the play to reveal their thoughts. In our guides for the environmental theatre production we introduced "theatre-in-the-round" and alerted the students to watch for ways in which the actors played the entire space.

Character delineation is also an important aspect of our productions. We coined the term "choreographed characterizations" to mean the entire movement, vocal and prop-oriented nature of the character. In the rehearsals for our mini-*Tempest* we discussed the use of Prospero's cape, book and ring and how they could be significant in expressing the magical nature of the character. Our "Everyone in the Chocolate House," a compilation of Restoration mistaken identity, endangered lovers tricks, used a great deal of quick repartee to highlight the classic Restoration dialogue. It was also in this production that terms such as "love" and "cuz" were given extra vocal shading to show the audience the moods of the characters. Our experiences have shown that the youngest audiences understand the physical and broader aspects of the characters, while the upper elementary grades respond to the more sophisticated and verbal humor as well.

Our productions also capture the flair of each theatrical period in carefully researched costumes, props and simple set pieces. Even our opening and closing music is from the period or as close as possible. Within the limitations set by the size of our van and maintaining mobility, we have been able to give our audiences a semblance of the theatrical period.

We pride ourselves in our return visits to many schools for we know that by our yearly appearances those students are receiving an ongoing and entertaining course in theatre history.

The objectives for the audiences are also the objectives for my own students. They, too, are learning about different periods of theatre; their work with the set, costumes, props and language of our

recreations also instills in them a knowledge of theatre history. They have to know what they're dealing with in order to perform convincingly, as well as to be able to answer questions in post-performance classroom visits.

Aside from the educational goals, the high school group learns a lot about work—and its vital and important place in theatre. Moving a production two or three times a day isn't easy, and the students all have specific tasks and are held accountable for misplaced props, banged-up sets, etc. The students must also act professionally off the stage as well as on. In our host environments the school day is already upset by assemblies, so the teachers and administrators don't need high school actors and actresses roaming the halls looking at all the "cute kiddies." Our young audiences see the actors for the first time when the production begins—and not before.

The responsibility factor is also important in my students' independent maintenance of their grades. The students must keep homework up to date, accumulate notes given on field trip days and be sure to set make up time for missed tests. The double casting plan allows a student to miss a performance if he/she needs time in school; it also provides the director with some leverage if a student is reported falling behind in school.

The program not only utilizes the students' dramatic talents, but goes beyond to test the students in assimilating the performance to different environments, conserving energy for long tour days and controlling the performance for different age groups.

The study guides, as mentioned before, provide the teachers with enough information to prepare youngsters for maximum understanding and enjoyment of the production. Although we do give a complete plot synopsis, it is up to teacher discretion to reveal surprises or endings. It is very gratifying during our classroom visitations to see the characters' names written on the blackboard or see pictures of that particular period posted on a bulletin board.

One unexpected benefit of our program has been the valuable public relations. Newspapers love pictures of local children sitting entranced by a theatrical production. This free publicity has not only increased our bookings, but also drawn raves for our high school students. The fact that these young performers are presenting professional-calibre theatre is admired and applauded.

Our final two performances are given on the pre-Thanksgiving Homecoming Day. At this time our middle and high school students get a chance to see their peers in action.

We realize that our program could never have gotten off the ground without the support of the administration and faculty. Our principal and vice-principal's philosophy has always been that a lot of learning occurs outside of the building, and so we tour one day a week with their approval and blessing. (To be sure, the great PR is appreciated by them, too.)

Over the years we have learned many valuable, time-saving tricks. Sets that FOLD, actors of the

same size double cast in the same role, miles of masking tape, checking in with school custodians, giving study guides to our high school English Department for preparation of school assembly—the list is endless. But surprisingly, each year a new trick or hard-knock lesson is acquired.

The brief scenes at the start of this article are all based on actual events that have occurred over the years. However, my favorite anecdote is about an incident that happened upon our arrival at one elementary school during our Greek drama tour. I reported to the principal's office at our host school and alerted his secretary that we had arrived and would be setting up in the cafeteria. The students and I then went about our hectic preperformance routine—crew on set, actors in restrooms and director in consultations. Somehow the secretary and principal never exchanged information, and about

15 minutes before the scheduled start of the performance, the principal called my vice-principal back at our high school and frantically asked him, "Where are they?" Our vice-principal reported to him that we had left on time. In a panic, the principal left his office and confronted his secretary who told him the news. He then searched me out in the cafeteria. "I pride myself in knowing everything that goes on in this building," he said, "but I never thought that 25 high school students working for an hour in my school could go unnoticed." *That's* a compliment, and it was assuredly followed by another one after our performance.

Our next goal is to have two different productions in one tour and to operate as a true repertory company. With the school support, eager audiences and tireless, talented and dedicated students I have encountered, that goal is in easy reach.



SPOTLIGHT

A PERFORMANCE EVALUATION THAT WORKS

Rosalind M. Flynn

The biggest problem I had as a beginning drama teacher was how to grade student performances. My college classes did not prepare me with a method. Examples I found in books did not satisfy my needs. Everytime I sat down with a form to grade students, I would realize, mid-performance, that some category was missing.

Kelly sways like a human metronome as she performs her monologue—do I take off for blocking? David has his lines memorized perfectly, but he does not seem to be listening when other characters speak—how do I reflect this in his grade? Terry's concentration wavered but her portrayal of her character is so imaginative—how do I give her credit for this?

I found no source that offered me a complete, thorough, all-inclusive, demanding-but-fair, easy-to-use drama performance evaluation, (was that too much to ask?), so I had to develop one myself. After many incomplete and unsatisfactory tries, I came up with the form that follows this article. I think it finally contains all the various categories necessary for a quality performance (group or individual).

My performance evaluation is thorough and detailed. Using it in class made my grading more objective, easier to complete, and more accurate in terms of student accomplishment. That's all I wanted—a more effective way to grade, but I got a few fringe benefits as well. Since the students knew they would be assessed so particularly, they worked harder, more seriously, and gave better performances. The improved quality of my evaluations resulted in the improved quality of my classes.

Because I found that a good evaluation tool is an essential element of a good class performance assignment and because no professional sources provided me with a good one, I offer mine for your consideration. Here are some guidelines for its use:

Have the evaluation form ready to pass out to the students when you first make the assignment; it serves as a list of objectives. Your expectations are stated in writing. From the beginning, the students understand what they will have to achieve to receive a high mark. Yes, you will lose points if you crack up during Sophie's monologue. Yes, your score will be higher if you use props and costumes. No, you will not be given more time to rehearse if you goof off.

The students also understand that this performance assignment is to be taken seriously. Just

as with assignments in academic classes, this project requires homework, study (rehearsal), and forethought.

Specify a due date for the project. Allowing only a limited amount of time for preparation motivates students to begin working quickly. It also helps avoid the boredom that usually comes from spending too much time in rehearsal. I suggest that all students be given the same due date. If they are called upon to perform that day, they either perform or lose points. Thus, those who are ready on time begin with a point advantage and unprepared students suffer a point penalty.

The Member of the Wedding scene which goes up as assigned on Tuesday deserves recognition for meeting a deadline, something vital in the world of theatre. *The Odd Couple* scene which is not ready until Friday does not merit as high a grade.

Of course, because of time, not everyone will be able to perform on the due date. If they are prepared but not chosen to present their project, they have an extra day to rehearse—it is all a matter of chance. (You may even choose to take off points for each day the assignment is late.)

This action may sound harsh, but it gets results. The students respect and respond to the seriousness of this possible loss of points. The results: more students ready on time, better use of classroom time—better quality of performances—and fewer arguments from students who receive lower grades (because they understood the terms from the start).

The evaluation form breaks the performance down into workable areas. This is helpful to students as they rehearse because they can refer back to something concrete, something written and use it to help focus their rehearsals. It serves as a checklist. Am I projecting of yelling? Am I speaking too rapidly? Have I created a good character?

The areas of concentration on the evaluation help make your grading easier because you can indicate where the student is succeeding and where he needs to improve. You can give a category a low rating without tearing apart the whole performance; you can note the excellent aspects of a mediocre presentation. Laura spoke too softly but she did create a wonderful mood in her scene. George's character was too brash, but his projection was excellent.

Points are awarded according to your estimation of how well the criteria for that category were met. (Excellent=4, Good=3, Fair=2, Poor=1, None=0) The categories are then totalled. The grade, therefore, is still subjective, but less so than if you just

labelled the performance B or C, with no concrete justification.

During the performance, the evaluation sheet is in front of you which makes it easy to note problem spots and highlights while still giving your attention to the actors. Each category is blocked off so that there is room for your notes, comments, and immediate reactions.

By taking just a little time after each performance to rate each category, add up the points, and record the total in your grade book, you can pass back the graded evaluation to the student on the very day of the performance. The student gets immediate feedback on his work while it is still fresh in his mind and you are not burdened with a lot of paperwork requiring you to remember acting performances that occurred several days earlier.

The grade you record can be the number of points earned (ex. 36 out of a possible 44), or you may interpolate the score in terms of 100% (ex. 36/44 = 82), or you may designate a letter grade range (ex. 35 - 38 = B). I preferred the number grade based on the total number of points available because I could then avoid labelling the performance A, B, C, etc., and concentrate instead on the strong and weak areas of the students' performance skills.

After a performance project is completed, keep the evaluations on file. They will provide verification of a student's work for parents, guidance counselors, and administrators.

It took me several years to develop this evaluation to the point where it satisfied my needs. Maybe my efforts will save you a few valuable years or at least provide you with some new ideas to add to an already successful grading method.

Components of the evaluation form. The following are suggestions of what to consider under each category as you are grading.

MEMORIZATION, PREPARATION

- Are all lines memorized?
- Is all movement prepared?
- Are all cues executed correctly?
- Are costumes used?
- Are props used?
- Is there a suggestion of a set?

MOVEMENT, BLOCKING

- Is posture correct?
- Is the stance solid?
- Is the walk appropriate?
- Is positioning correct?
- Is blocking well-executed and memorized?
- Is there any unnecessary movement, fidgeting?

CONCENTRATION

- Is the actor focused on the performance?
- Is there any unnecessary laughter?
- Does the actor become flustered?

ARTICULATION, DICTION

- Are words spoken clearly, precisely?
- Are word endings pronounced?
- Is a dialogue or accent used?
- Is the speech pattern appropriate for the character?

PROJECTION

- Is the voice audible, but not strained?
- Is the volume consistent?
- Can ends of phrases be heard as well as beginnings?

EXPRESSION, CHARACTERIZATION

- Is it appropriate?
- Is it consistent and complete?
- Is it believable?
- Is it imaginative, original?
- Is there interaction with other characters, ensemble playing?

RATE OF SPEECH

- Is it appropriate?
- Is it too fast or too slow?

POISE, STAGE PRESENCE, APPEARANCE

- Does the actor appear to be comfortable on stage?
- Is nervousness apparent?
- Is the actor dressed correctly for this part or assignment?

ENERGY, CREATIVITY

- Does the performance seem to have life?
- Is there evidence of an attempt to bring something new to the part, the scene?
- Is there enthusiasm, imagination?

OVERALL EFFECT

- Was this performance worth watching?
- Was the timing good?
- How involved were the actors in this performance?
- How involved was the audience?
- How evident was place, setting, time period?
- Was the performance convincing?
- Was the performance memorable?
- Did the performance have the appropriate impact?
- Did the performance create the appropriate mood?
- Would you like to watch this performance again?

READY ON TIME

Due Date:

Performed on:

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Theatre Class Performance Evaluation

Name _____

Project _____

	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)	None (0)
MEMORIZATION, PREPARATION					
MOVEMENT, BLOCKING					
CONCENTRATION					
ARTICULATION, DICTION					
PROJECTION					
EXPRESSION, CHARACTERIZATION					
RATE OF SPEECH					
POISE, STAGE PRESENCE, APPEARANCE					
ENERGY, CREATIVITY					
OVERALL EFFECT					
READY ON TIME					
Subtotals					
Total					



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