

DON'T DIRECT HEDDA GABBLER UNLESS YOU HAVE A HEDDA!

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Ask any play director what a director is or what a director does, and the answer will be as varied as the approaches to directing itself. Directing varies enormously in style, organization, or coaching. Frequent discussions of directing will bring such responses as: the director controls all the actions, the director orchestrates, or the director keeps all directions to a minimum, allowing actors creative freedom.

The director of a high school play not only is its drama coach, "getting the actors to speak their parts," but, also, the director is the play's mastermind with fingertip control of all phases of the production. Learn to pace yourself by delegating duties; however, check and recheck progress so everything is prepared in time for the opening.

Directing a play is in many ways similar to coaching an athletic team, leading a choral group, or baking a birthday cake. The director gathers the ingredients of the play (script, cast, backstage crew, business staff, volunteer helpers, etc.), combines them in the right order and proportion (with rehearsals and staff meetings, costumes, properties, lights, telephone calls, and individual conferences), and adds flavoring (instruction, encouragement, and praise). The director bakes the mixture for the given rehearsal time, tops or ices the production with personal artistry (unique interpretation of the tone, mood, and theme of the play), and serves the special cake (a finished performance) to the guests (the audience).

Begin by reading scripts for consideration. Most important, never direct "Hedda Gabbler" unless you have a Hedda. Thus, when reading scripts, keep in mind the possible potential of the group you are to direct. Also consider:

- * the size of the group
- * the ages of the students
- * previous drama experiences of the students
- * budget allotted for the production
- * talent of the actors

A well-cast play makes the director's job an enjoyable endeavor. Therefore, when casting a play, try to be aware of the sensitivity of the student actors, perception into human behavior, and sensing the right students for the roles.

Director's work is divided into two distinct segments: pre-rehearsal preparation and rehearsal. Although many theories of directing exist, one suggests that a director should start preparing by getting the feeling of the mood and tone of the play. Visualize and create the setting in your mind first, and then begin working out the particular details of the scenes, including the emotional values and how they may be sensed by an audience. A ground plan must evolve out of the director's visualization of the life within the play.

The pre-rehearsal segment must consider type, style, theme, structure, characters, dialogue, and plot. The director needs to read the script over at least five times, each time concentrating on one of these segments and how it should be included into a unified whole. Individual scene blocking of the script may begin after this reading phase.

The rehearsal schedule timetable should also be worked out, production staff should be in place, and meetings set with direction and focus given. Crews should be chosen, set designs sketched, details scheduled to be worked out with the set production crew later. Next, set up a director's prompt script or production book. Once the pre-rehearsal phase is completed, the director may turn to the rehearsal segment of directing. This segment also consists of two parts: the actor and the stage.

In focusing on the actor, the director considers the composition, movement, picturization, rhythm, and pantomimic dramatization known as the Five-Note Scale of Play Directing. In focusing on the staging or blocking, the director needs to move the actors around the furniture without them bumping into it or into each other while effectively delivering lines and creating stage visuals the audience can relate to, culminating in a unified production of the play. Encourage students to create subtext to study their character's mood, actions, and feelings beneath the surface of the spoken text. The director also helps the actors polish their enunciation, the clear, concise and crisp delivery of the lines, while building their projection, the ability to convey the spoken words at a distance.

Finally, at your most frenzied point, remember the director is the guiding force, the controlling person unifying all facets of the production of the play. Remember, too, you are a multi-functional, multi-talented individual who assumes the responsibility for maintaining the theatre as a cultural medium in our society. On this note, all that can be left to say to any director of any production is, "BREAK A LEG!"

P.S. Still unsure if you can do it all? A helpful book, especially for new directors, is "Putting on the School Play, A Complete Handbook" by Adrienne Kriebel Holt and Grace A. Mayer, Parker Publishing company, Inc., PO Box 472, West Nyack, NY 10085, 1980.