

WHO IS THE STAGE MANAGER, AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?

by Linda Apperson, The Drama Teacher's Resource Room

The stage manager is a crucial position in any production, although in my experience, one that is sometimes overlooked in school shows. The teacher in charge of the show may end up doing most of the stage management tasks because they are too busy to actually train a student to do it. But it is well worth the time and effort to cultivate student stage managers.

So, who is the stage manager and why is it worth taking time to train someone? The stage manager is responsible for making sure everything relating to a particular production happens when and how it is supposed to happen. The tasks can be broken down into two categories:

WHEN it happens:

1. convey information about time and place (of rehearsals, photo calls, fittings, performances, etc.) to company members
2. time each scene or act to know the general pace of a show, and to have that information for the house manager or director
3. make sure rehearsals start on time and that breaks end on time
4. call the cast together before a performance for notes
5. make sure technical crews know how much time they have before the house opens or rehearsal starts (especially during technical rehearsals)
6. call 1/2 hour, 15 minutes, 5 minutes, and places before curtain to the performers and crew
7. call light, set, and sound cues during the performance

HOW it happens:

1. take blocking during rehearsals (recording the actor's moves in a script, using standard block code: US for upstage, DS for downstage, C for center, X for cross, V for sit, ^ for stand, and so forth)
2. keep rehearsals running smoothly when performers are off book (no longer using their scripts) by giving them lines as needed
3. set up rehearsal props or set pieces so that the rehearsal space is ready
4. be aware of and communicate to the appropriate persons changes regarding the set, props, or costumes during rehearsals
5. organize set changes, knowing exactly what gets moved, when, and who is moving it
6. make sure the set is ready and props are set before the house opens for performances

The stage manager needs to be organized, reliable, efficient, diplomatic, and assertive (without being bossy). The stage manager is a hub, gathering information and dispensing it to the parties that need it. Once a show opens, the stage manager should be the person in charge, no small task for a student, but one that can be a great learning experience. The stage manager is also a diplomat, garnering cooperation from performers and crew, giving notes when necessary, and keeping order backstage.

The person in charge of a production needs a stage manager to keep things running smoothly and to keep from burning out while trying to do everything. For the student, being a stage manager is a wonderful opportunity to learn a great deal about theatre and working with others. It is a job that engenders growth, appreciation of the need for collaboration between everyone involved in a production, and understanding of the effort it takes to create theatre.