

Putting on a Show

Things to Think About **BEFORE** You Start a Musical at Your School

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1) KEEP IT LEGAL

- No matter how good your intentions are, you must pay for the rights of any play or musical that you are presenting to a public audience. This is the law. With a proper budget, publicity, ticket sales and fundraising, any school can bring in enough money to cover all costs – including the rights to the show.

2) FACILITIES

- What kind of performance space do you have?
 - i. Is it free or will you need to rent? If so how much \$?
- What kind of backstage area do I have to work with?
 - i. Is it suitable for young children?
 - ii. Can the space serve as dressing rooms?
 - iii. What about stage-crew and props – do I have room for this?
- Where will we rehearse?
 - i. Is the space available every day?
 - ii. Do we need a back-up location?
- Is the facility large enough?
 - i. Can I fit my cast comfortably on the stage?
 - ii. How many people can I comfortably fit in the audience?

3) EQUIPMENT

- What kind of lighting and sound equipment do I already have?
 - i. Is the wiring up to code?
 - ii. Will I need any more?
 - iii. Do I have a piano/keyboard? Does it work/is it in tune?
 - iv. What kind of lighting and stands will I need for the orchestra or accompanist?

4) INSURANCE

- Double check with your principal to see if musicals/plays fall under extra-curricular activities and if so, are they covered under the schools insurance policy?

5) TALENT

- Do I have the talent and interest in the school to fill the parts?
- Do I have enough boys/girls to fill the parts?
- Do I have a musical director that is available for all rehearsals and show times?
- Do I have an orchestra or accompanist if you are just using a piano?
- Do I have other teachers or volunteers who will help with this show?

6) TIME

- An entire show cannot come together within a few weeks. It takes a lot of time to put on something this big! Make sure that you start plans in the summer or early September on what

kind of show you will be doing. Plan to perform the show in the spring (possibly in May) so that you have a sufficient amount of time for everything to be complete.

7) FINANCES

- Make sure that you speak with your principal about a budget. Can the school make a donation towards the show? Can local businesses help? Find out if the students in your school have parents with connections that may help you down the road. Will the students be responsible to pay for their own costumes? Can you borrow items (lighting, sound, costumes, and props) from neighboring schools or high schools?

CHOOSING YOUR SCHOOL'S MUSICAL:

This can be a daunting task – there are over 500 professional musicals to choose from! However, as a teacher you do have limitations that may immediately weed out quite a few options. Some of the limitations may be due to the seven items (from the previous hand out) that you need to think about before putting on a show – Legality, Facilities, Equipment, Insurance, Talent, Time and Finances. It is also important to keep in mind that you are working with children. Make sure that the show is appropriate both in content and in vocal range for the children. Always remember who your audience is – this could be an issue depending on whether or not you are in a Separate school board.

4 IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN CHOOSING A MUSICAL:

- The technical demands are reasonable
- The material provides solid entertainment
- The choreography is simple
- The book and lyrics are family friendly

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SHOW:

- comprehensible narrative line (usually involves a love story)
- music, lyric, movement & dance, dialogue to serve the narrative line
- develop emotional involvement
- comic relief
- character development/exploration
- performers that can sing/dance & act (suitable to the part/role)
- chorus integrated into the story
- strong visual narrative (story evolves – lighting)
- orchestra with orchestration (i.e. sound effects)

CAST - Before selecting your show, make sure you have the proper talent on hand. You must have the right people to play the leads and possibly back-ups – just in case.

AUDIENCE - Think about who your potential audience will be. Will the audience consist of only family and friends or will you advertise to the public as well?

KNOWLEDGE - Make sure you know the show that you choose inside and out. Research the history of the show; watch some videos on the show to get some ideas. Look up the composer and lyricist – find out their talents, why they wrote the show, other shows they wrote etc. Make sure that you really like the show because it will become a major part of your life for the next few months.

NEIGHBOURS – Find out what the other local schools have planned for their up-coming musicals - check to see what other local school did in the past so that you can attract an audience. Find out what dates other schools are performing their shows - maybe you could share resources.

I find it best to start from day one, and to work at every lunch hour recess that way the children are at school already and they get in the practice of showing up everyday. It is always my goal to have gone through all of the music by Christmas break that way once January rolls around you can concentrate more on blocking and dance as well as working with props.

You might want to include after school rehearsals or Saturday rehearsals. Although they may create scheduling conflicts with family commitments they are incredibly worthwhile. These rehearsals tend to provide much more time than a lunch hour and much more productive work is carried out. Keep in mind that meal breaks should be included in rehearsals, ending before dinner on weekdays and breaking for lunch on a Saturday rehearsal.

Rehearsal Scheduling

It is often best to work backwards with rehearsal schedules. Remember to schedule some days off (perhaps one day off per week) – a relaxed cast is best to work with.

RETURN RUNS (bring back all borrowed or rented items on time)

CLOSING PERFORMANCE (followed by thank yous, strike of set [clean up] and cast party)

OPENING NIGHT (get dressed up, be prepared for anything)

FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL (open to public? trial audience?) – schedule a day off between the last dress rehearsal and opening night a rest for everyone is good for the nerves

DRESS REHEARSAL(S) (costumes, makeup, props and sets – performance expectations) – schedule 2 or 3 – last opportunity to fix anything – costumes, sets, lighting etc. – no stopping!

TECH REHEARSAL (costumes, props and sets complete) – stop only to fix effects in coordination with the actors, not necessarily sung – only marked

CUE TO CUE REHEARSAL [Wet Tech] (Rehearse all tech with actors – sound and lighting cue etc.)

DRY TECH (Director and Production Team, some actors – go over all cues and shifts)

T.B.A. REHEARSALS (go over rough patches with full cast) – run Act I twice and Act II twice

POLISHING REHEARSALS (problem solving, a lot of stop and start) – cast notes are customary for full cast rehearsals – everyone sits down – production team goes over things – keep it positive!

OFF BOOK/ADD PROPS (as soon as possible)

STAGING (work in small sections at first, chronological order)

MUSICAL REHEARSALS (vocal only – no movement)

FIRST READ THROUGH (introduce show and cast to entire company, explain rehearsals etc.)

CAST LIST – Post the class list as soon as the decisions have been made. There is no need to announce this procedure, word will get around. Without a doubt you will get some students who are upset with the decisions made, make sure you are available for any one-on-one discussion if the need comes up. Even though some students may not fit a lead role I try to have everyone who auditioned involved in some way. That is why I ask each student what they would be comfortable doing, most of the time they are happy to do anything, they're all just excited to be part of something like this.

Rehearsals

BEFORE REHEARSALS - Once the cast is chosen, it is best to hold a meeting during a lunch recess so that you can cover everything you want talk about and distribute. I always give each student a burned copy of the show's music on CD for their own personal use as well as the script or score highlighted for their part. That way they can practice at home and feel out how the show should sound. I also suggest that the students watch a video clip on their own time so that they understand the story of the show. Along with the score you might want to give your students the schedule of rehearsals – I tend to constantly remind the cast that the schedule is subject to change depending on what happens each day so they should listen to the morning announcements each day for reminders of when they are needed.

It is also very important to remind your cast just how important it is to be committed to this show and their school work. Some teachers go as far as making each student sign a commitment form stating the date, their commitment to the show, for how long, what they are responsible for, and that they will continue to achieve high grades or their position in the show might be jeopardized - you might also want to get this signed by parents as well.

<p>I have agreed to take part in _____'s school production of _____ . I understand that this is a large commitment that I agree to complete. I agree to show up to all rehearsals, activities and performances that I am need for, on time and ready to work.</p> <p>Signed: _____</p> <p>Job: _____</p> <p>Date: _____</p>
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SCHEDULING REHEARSALS - As for rehearsals, it is best to plan out your rehearsal schedule well in advance – before auditions are complete. When you are putting on a musical there are many components to put together – music, acting and dance. It is best to start with learning the music that way you can have the students practice the music/lines with the acting and dance. You can eventually have multiple rehearsals going on if you can find the facilities to do so, for instance the musical director working on the music, the director on acting and the choreographer working out dance routines.

POSTER COORDINATOR – This person is in charge of designing, printing and posting posters.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR – This person is in charge of designing and making the program. They may also be in charge of recruiting local businesses who wish to advertise in the program.

FUNDRAISING COORDINATOR – It is a good idea to have a person in charge of organizing a fundraising team or other teachers or parent volunteers. It is a good idea to set up an initial meeting of those who would like to help in this department and brainstorm ideas. Your production might want to design and sell t-shirt for the cast or others who are involved; local business will gladly donate items that can be used in a silent auction at the school the possibilities are endless.

Auditions and Casting

This process can be very stressful and draining, since casting can make or break the show you are doing. However, if you are organized and you know what you're looking for, chances are it may even be a fun experience.

SPREAD THE WORD – After deciding and receiving the rights to a musical and your production team is ready to go it is time to spread the word to the rest of the school community. Hold staff meetings, put up posters to advertise this school wide event, have the student council advertise it to each classroom – just get the word out there and get everyone excited about the show.

ANNOUNCE AUDITIONS – Once the word is out, announce the procedure of auditions (time, location and requirements) – this should be done the 3rd week of September. It is usually best to hold a meeting over lunch recess on a Friday for the students who are interested in auditioning. Have a form ready for everyone who is interested to announce how the auditions will be carried out and to let the student's parents know what they are preparing for. At this time each student should receive some music, and possibly a monologue that they can practice over the weekend – it is often best to get a section from a female and male solo to give to the corresponding student. If your musical director is there have them sing the melody with the students. That same Friday, have a sign up sheet posted in the school for students to sign up for auditions for the following week. It is best to book a whole week for this procedure, since it is time consuming. Hold the auditions either at lunch recess or after school – whatever works out best for you and your students.

RUNNING AUDITIONS – It is best to have a secure room for the panel to hold auditions as well as a supervised waiting area. There should be no more than 3 – 5 people on the panel my suggestion would be the director, music director and the producer – maybe even the choreographer. You should have a standardized form for you auditions that everyone has to fill out for each person. Have the name of the student, grade, teacher, also ask the student if they would be comfortable being considered for a lead role, the chorus or just backstage work. It is also helpful to video tape the auditions that way you have something to refer to and remind yourself of what went well. Make sure that you have an accompanist on hand for the students. For elementary level, I would go over the melody with the student first and then have them sing the melody themselves. Then ask them to repeat a line of music that they have never heard before to see how quickly they learn. Also try to see how wide their vocal range is. Keep in mind that the students will be very nervous so try to keep a 'low-key' type of atmosphere. Remember that you are looking for potential not perfection!

DECISION MAKING – This is a stressful step, just remember to not talk about this process with anyone who was not on the audition panel. Keep an open mind about students whom you already know. Make sure that all those who audition know that this is their first commitment; never cast a person with a major commitment or you will set your show up for failure.

Once you have established your numbers you must calculate the numbers to make sure you at least come up even or make some kind of profit for possibly the next year.

Total Income – Total Expenses = Project Profit (If you end up with a negative number you should probably reassess your budget or think of some creative fundraising strategies!)

The Production Team

NO HEROES ALLOWED - If you are doing this to prove what a wonderful person you are, don't. **Putting on a show is not about you – it is about everyone involved.** Musicals are collaborative efforts. Everyone has to operate as part of a team, including you. **It is not your show – it's the school's show!**

PRODUCER – Oversees or manages all aspects of the production. Keeps everyone on task and informs every one of any changes etc. In some productions, the producer and the director are the same person.

DIRECTOR – Has the final say on all artistic aspects of the show, and in charge of all movement on stage.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – This person can help take some of the pressure off the director and allows for more than one rehearsal to be going on at the same time (i.e. different scenes rehearsed).

MUSICAL DIRECTOR – Someone with extensive musical knowledge is key! This person conducts and rehearses all aspects of music on stage and with the orchestra/accompanist. They also will conduct or cue during performances.

CHOREOGRAPHER – Someone with some experience or training is a good idea here, especially for shows with a lot of dancing. This will lead with fewer headaches and less injury.

SET DESIGNER – This person will design and build the sets for the show as well as the props. This person should have free artistic rein and should not be hindered by what has been done in the past.

COSTUME DESIGNER – This person should be a capable seamstress – they know what works best and is easiest to make. This person will have free artistic rein in designing the costumes and making them or heading a group of volunteers to help.

LIGHTING DESIGNER/MANAGER & SOUND DESIGNER/MANAGER – Although one person may be in charge of designing the lights and sound it is often appropriate to have one person organize each one.

STAGE MANAGER – This person is the director's right hand, they help organize, set up and facilitate rehearsals. They keep a script handy to write down any important cue or suggestions; they also are the actors support for forgotten lines. This person also manages the curtain calls, lighting and sound managers.

STAGE CREW & PROPERTY MASTER – These people are responsible for props and sets and although these jobs can go to students, they must be responsible and mature since they can make or break the show. It is a good idea to have a teacher or adult assisting in this area.

HOUSE MANAGER/USHERS – This job may be completed by students; an adult supervisor would be helpful. They help with seating the audience, selling the tickets and refreshments at the door.

REVIEW – Make sure to review your materials with your director, musical director and choreographer. It is important to have this meeting to make sure that all of those in charge can handle the materials as well as the children that will be involved. *(Just because you saw it in a movie doesn't mean that you can necessarily do the same thing on stage with students under the age of thirteen!)*

SECURE THE RIGHTS – Before you make any announcements to any other teachers, parents or students, make sure that you secure the rights to your show and you are 100% positive that your show can be done. Licensing companies only give out the rights to do certain shows a few times per year; also certain shows may be 'frozen' if they have recently been performed in a professional setting.

The Budget

Keep your budget simple. It is very important that you do not underestimate anything! When you need to estimate numbers – round up just in case – it is better to have more money than not enough. Make sure that you stick to your budget; you really do not want to shut down production once everything is up and running and children have their hearts set on something. Here is an example of a budget listing for expenses that most amateur shows use as a guide.

EXPENSES	
Publicity	Posters, newspaper ads etc.
Performing Rights	Licensing agency can give figures ahead of time
Equipment Rental	Lighting, sound, special effects
Facility Rental	Rehearsal and performance space
Facility Repair	(If any) – or unexpected mishaps
Costumes & Accessories	Construction, materials, or rentals
Sets & Props	Construction, materials, or rentals
Make-up	For cast – as needed
Printing	Programs, tickets, posters, notes to parents
Shipping Costs	(If any)
Refreshments	To be sold during performances
Music – rentals, stands, lights	For orchestra or accompanist
Postage	(If any)
Insurance	If not provided by school
Other	

Now that those numbers are complete you have to do the same type of thing for your expected income.

INCOME	
Starting Funds	What you have to start, possibly from the school
Fundraising	Realistically what you will raise
Program Ad Sales	Programs can turn a profit for local businesses
Refreshment Sales	Can the refreshments be donated? So that profit can be made
Ticket Sales	Find numbers for selling 100% of the seats as well as 75% (just in case)

PREPRODUCTION (analysis, research, design, deadlines, budget, production team etc.)

DURING REHEARSALS:

- Be organized and goal focused
- Know the material, and what you want to achieve
- Plan what you will accomplish each rehearsal
- Block the show in order
- Each week schedule one TBA rehearsal for extra work
- Do not rehearse 7 days a week
- Establish rules – 3 strikes you’re out
- Be firm, but calm – nip foolishness in the bud
- Keep a light and positive atmosphere – everyone wants to work hard and still have fun!

On opening night it might be a good idea to have a timing schedule of what should be happening when and who is in charge of organizing and running what. Here is a sample chart or a guide of what should be happening on opening night, which I received from a musical theatre course that I completed a few years ago. It is based on an 8:00 PM show time.

Time	Person	Task
6:00	Stage Manager & Crew	Open facility, turn on lights and prep stage
6:30	Tech Crew	Check all equipment
	Box Office	Open for ticket sales
	House Manager	Checks seats and facility, clean-up if necessary
	Cast	Performers arrive, check costumes, etc.
	Make-up	Application of make-up begins for cast
7:00	Cast	10 – 15 vocal warm-up with Musical Director
7:15	House Staff	Arrive, meet and prepare
	Cast	Finish costumes and make-up
7:30	Full company	Meet for notes, chats and last minute reminders
7:40	House Staff	Opens facility for the audience
7:45	Stage Manager	15 minute call
	Orchestra/Music	Assemble and warm-up
7:55	Stage Manager	5 minute call
8:00	Tech crew, Stage Manager	Check for cue to start, confer on start time
	Stage Manager	“Places please!”
	Cast	Places for Act I, Scene I
8:03	Stage Manager	Cues Musical Director
	House Staff	Shuts door and dims lights
	Musical Director	Enters – performance begins
End Act I – 15 Minute Intermission		
15 min.	Stage Manager	Turns on facility lights
	House Staff	Open doors, sells refreshments
5 min	Stage Manger	5 Minute call
	House Staff	Blinks lights for audience to reassemble in seats
2 min	Stage Manager	Calls places
	Orchestra	Places

	Tech Crew	Places
	Cast	Places for Act II, Scene I
0 min	Tech Crew, Stage Manager	Check for cue to start
	House Staff	Shuts door and dims lights
	Stage Manager	Cues Musical Director
	Musical Director	Enters – performance begins
After Curtain Calls		
	House Staff	Lights on and doors open
	Cast & crew	Clean up on stage and back stage
Director or Stage Manager lock facility		