

## Keeping the Drama out of Drama Club

We've all heard or experienced the horror stories: directors bickering with designers or choreographer; Cast members dating each other; cast members breaking up halfway through the rehearsal period.

As theatre is an art form that depends upon people collaborating with one another, the danger of tension between people is always present. No matter how nascent or advanced your drama club, here are some tips to keep the drama offstage from affecting the drama onstage or backstage:

- Starting on day one, work towards building ensemble among your students. Lead acting exercises in early rehearsals that get students to be more aware of each other and to work together. Articulate a goal for the production that the ensemble will work toward and regularly remind them of it. It is easier to set differences aside when you are working toward the same goal.
- Avoid having students compete with one another. Even in auditions, which are inherently competitive in nature, you have the opportunity to build ensemble. Do not talk about auditions in terms of determining who the best performers are; instead, talk about finding who best suits each role in order to make the production successful. Consider having students read scene excerpts in different combinations rather than having them only perform monologues.
- Just as you would in your classroom, it is important to articulate how students should show respect in the theatre. Just as important, you should model this positive behavior. This should include ways we communicate about rehearsal. For example, when you or a stage manager announce a 5-minute break or a call to places in 5 minutes, everyone else should respond, "Thank you, five!" This not only emphasizes respect, it also signals a clear understanding of what was communicated.
- Make it clear that the space and time in which you rehearse for students is only for rehearsal. Establish clear, consistent rules for rehearsal. Silence cell phones and put them away. Clear away all other distracting items and materials. Keep the focus of activity and discussion on rehearsal when in the room. When you and the students can leave your daily baggage at the door, you can focus on the work at hand.
- It is important to make sure every student is engaged and feeling as though they are contributing. Look for opportunities on and off stage for all students to be active participants in the production. This will lessen lingering resentment some students may feel about casting decisions.
- Students will notice who has the lead roles and who only has one line. They will notice who gets the solos and dances downstage center and those who are ensemble members dancing in the back. Shift the student's focus to the importance of the ensemble and the goal you are collectively working toward.
- Students serving as student directors, assistant directors, or stage managers are in a position of authority over other students. Clarify for the entire ensemble what these positions entail, including the fact that these students may tell others what to do. Remind these student leaders that they should be respectful in how they communicate these orders, and be prepared to advocate for them if actors or crew members are insubordinate.
- When drama occurs, do not mediate these issues during rehearsal in front of everybody. Call for a 5-minute break or have a stage manager or student director run lines with the actors while you take the students involved out of the room. If the issue can not be resolved or the students are unwilling to set aside their differences before returning to the rehearsal room, send the student's home or ask them to sit out for the rest of the rehearsal.

## STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

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When students in your cast or crew are dating another member of the ensemble, it is important to appropriately clarify your expectations for them:

- Behave professionally during rehearsal. Just as coworkers wouldn't publicly display affection at work, PDA is inappropriate in the rehearsal space.
- Leave relationship issues at the door. There are appropriate times to address these issues, and rehearsal is not one of them.
- Relationships should not impact the rehearsal. School work needs to be done, lines need to be learned, and cues need to be followed.

When student couples are fighting or breaking up, remain objective.

- If students confide in you, do not take sides.
- A break-up can ripple out to other members of the ensemble as friends take sides to support one or the other. Avoid creating a rift in the ensemble by addressing your concerns head-on with the couple in question before rehearsal starts.
- Do not pry into their issues or try to be a relationship counselor. Remind them of their commitment to the ensemble and their responsibility to conduct themselves respectfully and professionally in the rehearsal room.
- If their issues adversely impact rehearsal, discuss potential solutions, which might include replacing them with other students.