

# Illinois Theatre Association

## In This Edition...

[ITA Announcements](#)

[ITA Events and ITA Member Events](#)

[Job Postings & Audition Announcements](#)

[Featured Performance](#)

[About the ITA](#)

[ITA Links](#)

[ITA Convention](#)

[The Initiative to Update Illinois' Theatre Standards](#)

[It Really Can Do Everything!](#)

[10-Minute Play Festival](#)

[Next Season's Shows](#)

[I'll Think About It Tomorrow](#)

[Open to Interpretation](#)

[Thoughts on Relevance in Light of Passing](#)

[Costume Conundrum](#)

[ITA Member Spotlight](#)

## ITA ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEADLINE EXTENDED (5/30) - Seeking Executive Director for IHSTF 2018. Click here for details.

IHSTF 2016 UPDATE - The IHSTF website has been updated. You can now SUBMIT A PLAY or sign up to BECOME A WORKSHOP LEADER. Visit [www.illinoistheatrefest.org](http://www.illinoistheatrefest.org).

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Each week the ITA sends out "Friday Announcements" to its Listserve (currently comprised

eFOLLOWSPOT May, 2015

## SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, September 19, 2015

Illinois Theatre Association's  
42nd Annual Convention  
*Celebrating Our Theatre Community:  
Advocating, Connecting, Supporting*

Featuring:  
Keynote Presentation by  
Ra Joy, Arts Alliance Illinois

Annual Awards of Excellence Ceremony

ITA's Annual Meeting

Workshops for ALL Theatre Divisions,

Networking,

and More!

Illinois Central College and Holiday Inn and Suites  
East Peoria, IL

Stay tuned to the June eFollowspot for details!

[Back to Top](#)

## The Initiative to Update the Theatre Standards for Illinois

by Elisabeth Westphal, ITA Member



Illinois State Board of Education

The new initiative to update the Illinois Arts Learning Standards is well under way. This initiative is a partnership between the Illinois Board of Education and the Illinois Arts

Alliance, headed by Ra Joy and Jonathan VanderBrug. The Initiative has brought together arts educators from around the state to review and adapt the new national standards for use in Illinois. The leaders of the initiative are working hard to provide transparency and receive public comment on this work. Members of the Illinois Theatre Association are going to be called upon to review and provide feedback on the draft of the theatre



of more than 2,300 theatre artists and educators from throughout the state). If you'd like to submit an item for inclusion in the weekly announcements, please click [here](#). [Suggestions for inclusion include: audition announcements, job postings, interesting theatre stories/experiences, lesson plans, community/life events, etc., theatre opportunities, etc.).

Also, please remember to submit your upcoming performances and/or events to the ITA's on-line performance calendar!!! Click [here](#).

## ITA EVENTS

### **September 19, 2015 -- 42nd Annual Convention and Awards Ceremony**

Illinois Central College and  
Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites,  
East Peoria

### **January 7-9, 2016 -- 41st Annual Illinois High School Theatre Festival**

#### Dare to Dream

Illinois State University,  
Normal

### **February, 2016 -- 37th Annual Statewide Non- Equity Professional Auditions**

Location TBA, Chicago

### **March, 2016 -- Annual Creative Drama and Theatre for Young Audiences Conference**

### **October, 2016 -- Annual Middle School Conference**

## JOB POSTINGS

**Mother McAuley HS** seeks a full-time Technical Director.

[Click here to visit the ITA's Job Board for details and more postings!](#)

## FEATURED PERFORMANCE

standards which is being prepared by a work group of theater teachers from around the state.

The updated Illinois Arts Learning Standards use the National Arts Standards as a starting point. Each art discipline has a work group with the charge of examining the National Arts Standards and adapting them to the special needs of the diverse schools in Illinois. The anchor standards, Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings, provide the structure and philosophy of the National Arts Standards; however, the average teacher will be far more concerned with the performance standards for the grade level and art form they teach. Much of the work of the theatre work group has been to examine and clarify the performance standards.

The performance standards are not written to be prescriptive. The goal is to write performance standards that can be achieved through a variety of types of activities and teaching styles.

The reality is that not every teacher is going to love every standard. Reviewing standards requires an open mind. As each of the theatre teachers consider the draft of the updated Illinois Arts Learning Standards, there are many things to consider:

- What are the "big ideas" in theater?
- Do the performance standard threads (concepts) reflect the big ideas in theatre?
- Are these big ideas translated into standards that are dynamic and inclusive of many different types of schools and teaching styles?
- What is the right number of standards for each process (Creating, Performing Connecting, and Reflecting)? Are there too many or enough?
- Do the performance standards show growth within a process over the grade band and between grade bands?
- Are the performance standards measurable and clear?
- Are there overlaps or repetitions between processes?
- Are the performance standards aligned both horizontally (across grades) and vertically (within a grade)?
- How will administrators expect the performance standards to be used?
- Do they meet the needs of all theatre teachers (knowing that they are written for teachers from the most rural to the most urban school districts)?

The members of the theatre task force encourage you to take the time to participate when the time comes for public comments on the theatre standards. Our greatest hope is that the state of Illinois will have standards that can be used effectively and serve as a model for other state as they begin the process of updating their own state fine arts standards. To learn more about this process, please check out the Illinois Fine Arts Standards wiki website: <https://ilartsstandards.wikispaces.com/>

[Back to Top](#)

Chicago Danztheatre  
Ensemble presents  
**Xtigone**  
Now through June 14  
Fridays at 8pm  
Saturdays at 8pm  
Sundays at 7pm  
Free - \$25  
[www.danztheatre.org](http://www.danztheatre.org)

**Want your performance to be featured here?**

Be sure to list your performance on the [ITA Performance Calendar!](#)

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[Advocacy](#)

[Board of Directors](#)

[Job Postings](#)

[Audition Announcements](#)

[ITA Divisions](#)

[eFollowspot](#)

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College/University Group Discussion

Community Theatre Group Discussion

Creative Drama Group Discussion

Professional Theatre Group Discussion

Secondary School Theatre Group Discussion

**It really can do EVERYTHING!  
(Even Student-Created Customizable Masks with Duct Tape)**

by Amelia Kmiec, ITA Secretary

Working with masks can be transformative; it has the power to completely change the wearer's outlook on his or her physical appearance to inhabit a role. Additionally, being the maker of the mask gives the person donning it more ownership and understanding of the energy needed to bring it to life.

These thoughts were at the forefront of my mind when I was approaching my upcoming Commedia dell'arte project for my Drama class. This was not my first Commedia dell'arte unit I had ever taught, but I really wanted my students to incorporate the mask work the Italians had employed 500 years ago. While Theatre History and Improvisation also encompass a huge part of the art form, little can substitute for the metamorphic gift the mask can provide. Being that my Drama class meets in a different teachers' classroom and I prefer not to turn my colleagues into enemies, I decided the mess that comes with paper mache or plaster was not a viable option. Instead, using a technique to make head pieces that I learned in graduate school and a Pinterest search, I was able to use what is often heralded as the solution to everything to create a less messy way to help kids become the master of their own masks.

**Step 1: Research the characters**

My students modeled their masks after particular Commedia dell'arte characters. Students need to understand their characters' temperament before working on their masks. There are some great websites out there (my favorite is <http://shane-arts.com/commedia-stock-characters.htm> - it has lots of references and different Commedia directors' opinions on particular characters.

**Step 2: Gather materials**

plastic shopping bags  
duct tape of many colors (I used beige/brown for Scapino and Arlecchino, blue for Columbine, maroon for Dottore, red for Pantalone, yellow for Capitano and black for other Zanni)  
cardstock  
tissue or toilet paper  
scissors  
\$1 masks\*

\*they do not need these, but it can help expedite the process or assist students who may not be particularly skilled with scissors.

**Step 3: Pair up students**

Only a certain number of students planned to portray each character with the understanding that if they were creating the same mask, they would not get to be in scenes together. Partners shared the same roll of duct tape and helped each other create the base for their head.

**Step 4: Make the base of the cap**

Theatre for Young Audiences  
Group Discussion

**FOLLOW OUR TWEETS:**

Illinois Theatre Association

IHSTF



The ITA is a network of dedicated theatre artists and educators advocating quality theatre throughout Illinois. Please join us!

123 Mill Pond Dr.  
Glendale Heights, IL 60139  
312-265-5922 (office)  
312-265-6101 (fax)  
[www.illinoistheatre.org](http://www.illinoistheatre.org)

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Intelligent Lighting

Light Chicago

USITT Midwest

**Associate Corporate Sponsor:**

Music Makers Theatre



While its justifiable to be nervous during this part, my professor in grad school assured us that with a few precautions, no one would be hurt. Start by cutting a slit half way up the front of a bag. The person whose mask is getting made places the plastic bag over his head with the half slit in the front so he can breathe. While the non-bag wearer tapes a ring around the crown of the wearer's head, he or she continually talks to the person who is wearing the bag to assure all that the person is okay. After the ring around the head is made and snug, the non-bag wearer places a piece of tape front-to-back and side-to-side, creating a cross. The wearer now takes the bag off, and the excess plastic is trimmed off of the person's head.

**Step 5: Cover base with duct tape**

This can be done on the knee or the other mask maker can put a base of duct tape on while the other person is wearing the mask.

**Step 6: Create mask/attach mask**

My students made the Dollar Store mask eye holes bigger and then taped the mask to the already existing head piece. They can also create masks with the duct tape by placing strips vertically and diagonally on alternating sides, leaving space for eye holes. Additionally, a line can be cut halfway up the middle of the mask with scissors to leave space for the nose.

They then (carefully) had their partner place duct tape underneath the front of the mask to the side of the cap to create a continuous line. This covered some of the students' ears. This maybe bothersome at the moment, but they have the ability to cut ear holes out later on.



**Step 7: Work that nose!**

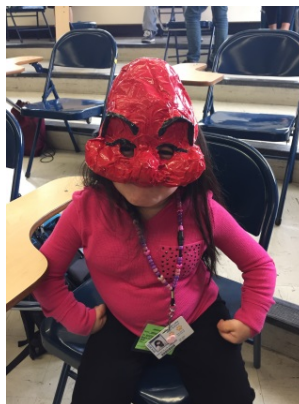
A nose truly says a lot about the character. If students want their noses to be long and pointy, use card stock. If students want them to be bulbous and round, use duct tape. Sometimes, a combination of both is necessary. Remember, duct tape can always be pulled up and replaced to achieve a desired effect. Often, using a hand to shape and mold the duct tape was useful if the person creating it was having a hard time achieving her desired



The Illinois Theatre Association is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

effect.

### Step 8: Create Eye brows, Wrinkles, Sags and Creases



This is the fun part! Cheek bone structure, forehead wrinkles, eye sags and eye brows are essential to creating a character. Is the

character being portrayed happy or sad? Angry or nervous? These can all be created using a variety of different combinations of tissue and cardstock. My tip with the eyebrows is to take a narrow strip of card stock and fold it in half (hot dog, not hamburger). While someone else holds the folded paper where you want the eyebrows, the mask maker can place duct tape both horizontally and vertically to achieve the desired look.

### Step 9: Add detail

Using a little bit of different colored duct tape for the cheek, under eye or eyelashes can really make the mask pop.

You are now finished and ready to begin work!

### Additional Notes or Tips:

I have three Special Ed students in my Drama classroom. I would suggest either providing help from a teachers' aide, another savvy student who finishes early or yourself to help complete their masks. I actually used each of these magnificent students to help me demonstrate how to make the masks when I had to show the class what to do. They loved being a part of it, and there is no reason not to include them.

There will be students who HATE the headpiece. After making the whole thing, I gave a few people the option of cutting out part of the back of the mask just so it covered the face. I have not tried this without using the head piece as the structure to begin with. I find it helps best to contour the mask to the face. Because of the potential waste of this method and ability to remain on the head more easily, I encourage my students to keep the headpiece.

For storage, we use a file cabinet, so make sure to bring Lysol wipes and clean paper towels for students to use before and after using the mask for the day.

Students have the option of continuing to work on their masks throughout the mask work process. I have kept extra tape and scissors on hand in case adjustments need to be made as the rehearsal process continues.



[Back to Top](#)



**3rd Annual Illinois High School 10-Minute Play Festival  
at Eureka College**

by Marty Lynch,  
ITA College/University Theatre Division Representative

Scripts are still being accepted for the Illinois High School 10-Minute Play Festival to be presented November 20-21 by Eureka College and the Peoria Live Theatre League. All Illinois High School students are eligible to enter. All scripts must be new, unproduced works. Six scripts will be selected as winners and produced by Eureka College



**Dates:**

**Submission deadline: Must be e-mailed or postmarked by July 1, 2015**

Evaluation period: Now through July 4, 2015

Authors notified: July 5, 2015

Selections announced: By September 15, 2015

Performance dates: November 20-21 (2 evenings)

Notification of scripts received will be made by July 5, 2015.

Notification of script chosen will be made by September 15, 2015.

The six selected plays will be staged in November 2015 at Pritchard Theatre in Eureka College.

**There is no fee to enter this competition.**

**Prizes:**

Eureka College will produce six scripts written by Illinois High School students. The six plays will be selected from all entries in the following categories:

Class of 2015: 1 script

Class of 2016: 1 script

Class of 2017: 1 script

Class of 2018: 1 script

At-Large: 2 scripts

In the event that no scripts from a class are submitted, another at-large script will be chosen. All student scripts are eligible for selection in the student's class rank and the At-Large openings.

We are dedicated to producing original works, and if we have the resources to produce more than six plays, we will select more than two At-Large scripts.

#### **Submission Guidelines:**

- You must be a high school student in Illinois.
- Electronic submissions will be allowed.
- Submissions must be original, unpublished, 10-minute plays.
- Plays should be written in proper script format.
- There is no limit to the number of plays that an individual may submit.
- Production requirements should be feasible. Since the winning plays will be produced, no play considered technically un-producible will be considered.
- Recommended maximum number of characters per play is four.
- Running time is to be 10 minutes or less, which may mean 6-10 pages depending upon the density of dialogue. Authors are responsible for submitting work that is within the 10 minute running time limit. Cuts will be requested of the playwright for any selected play which runs over the limit regardless of the number of pages in the script.
- Mailed scripts must be typed/word-processed, numbered, and stapled.
- Scripts cannot be returned. Eureka College and the Peoria Live Theatre League assume no responsibility for lost or damaged scripts.
- We are unable at this time to provide feedback to playwrights regarding their work.

#### **Submission Process:**

**Snail Mail** - Mail 2 copies of each script along with the two types of cover pages to:

Illinois High School 10-Minute Play Festival  
c/o Marty Lynch  
Eureka College  
300 E College Avenue  
Eureka, IL 61530

**E-mail** - Send a digital copy of the script and two types of cover pages (see above) to: [martyl@eureka.edu](mailto:martyl@eureka.edu)

In the subject line, please write "Illinois High School 10-Minute Play Festival."

The selection of directors, actors and designers for the selected plays is at the sole discretion of Eureka College. An author may participate in the process if participation is requested by the producing companies or the director selected for the project. Entry of a script into this festival grants to Eureka College the right to produce the entered play only for this specific event in November 2015, and authors retain all rights to their work for future production or publication. Authors, if their play is selected for

production, grant to Eureka College and the Peoria Live Theatre League the right to use their name, biographical information and photo for purposes of publicity and marketing during the period Aug 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015.



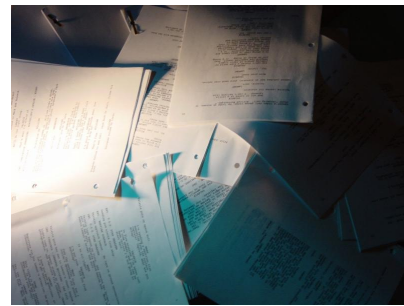
Questions can be directed to [martyl@eureka.edu](mailto:martyl@eureka.edu)

[Back to Top](#)

### **How Do You Select Your Next Season's Shows?**

by Cyndi Bringer,  
ITA Theatre for Young Audience Representative

It is that time of the year again where you must pick next year's plays and announce the lineup. The question is: how do you get to this place? If you are in a bigger school with several drama directors, I assume you collaborate, making sure all the selections fit in with one another. But what if you are the sole drama director with no one else to bounce ideas off of? Which of the following do you do?



- Pick a play that is popular and will fill seats?
- Pick a play that you have at least two different kids in mind for casting each part?
- Pick a play that is on your bucket list, even though it might not be the best fit for your audience?
- Pick a play with a lesson/moral?
- Pick a play that you've already done?
- Ask for help/suggestions from your fellow TYA ITA members?

If you haven't figured it out by now, I'm looking for my shows next year. If you have any suggestions of non-musical, middle school appropriate scripts, throw them my way! Which ones have you done that have worked well? Which ones can you tell me NOT to do? We are all in this organization to support the arts and each other. Thanks in advance for whatever suggestions you make! Please post them on the [ITA/TYA Facebook page](#).

[Back to Top](#)

### **I'll Think About It Tomorrow**

by Karen Hall, ITA Secondary Theatre Division Representative

"Hello, my name is Karen, and I am a procrastinator."

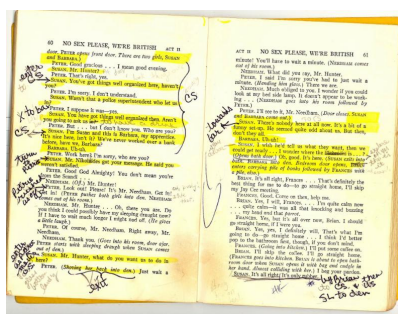


"Hello, Karen."

What do I procrastinate about ? You name it-writing, laundry and most recently getting off-book. I challenged myself to act in our spring play. I love performing, but I hate memorizing my lines - I always did. It's one of the reasons I stopped performing. I constantly struggled with getting dialogue memorized. But here I am trying to master a four page monologue, Mrs. Sorken by Christopher Durang.

It's been a quite an endeavor. I'm two pages down with two to go. So I've been researching some memorization strategies to see what else I can try to get these words in my aging brain. Here's some of what I've found:

One of the first techniques I remind my students about is making sure that you say the words out loud, not just in your head. For me that is essential. I can't get them down unless I say them full-out out loud. I also use the tried and true cover up your line with a note card, say it out loud, check yourself, and then do it again.



Actress Gwendolyn Whiteside stated in a recent Chicago Tribune article that she did some research and many scientists suggest committing a section to memory and then taking a nap, "...because somehow the brain

will process the short-term memory and push all of that information you just loaded into a different section of the brain that is better for longer recall." I tried that one yesterday, and believe it or not, I got a good chunk into my brain.

Others suggest moving while memorizing, whether it is walking or performing your blocking. Whiteside also points out, "If you actually walk instead of just sitting there, and you have your muscles moving while you're attempting to memorize, somehow it speeds the brain up."

Matt Newton in his article, "The 3 Fastest Ways to Memorize Lines" at Backstage.com likes writing them out. "This is quicker than you think, and you always remember the lines word for word when you are done. I have used this for memorizing longer scenes with lots of speeches. I find this works really well because you are connecting your mind to the action of writing the lines down and seeing the lines at the same time. They seem to go to a deeper part of your brain. I prefer writing them by hand instead of typing."

Another technique suggested is recording your lines and your cue lines. And there's an app out there for that. You can download Scene Partner for iOS products. I've tried that one, but I am not fond of the rather robotic reading the voice gives you. And yes, you can record them yourself so you don't have to listen to the robotic voice, but that seems just a bit too time consuming for me. There's

Rehearser 2 which is also for iOS products and seems to be very popular. Currently, I am just using a recording app on my iPad. I've broken my monologue into chunks and recorded myself performing it. And I play it any time I can: in the car, on my ear buds during my Freshman Study Hall, at Panera, etc.



So right now I am working on a combo platter of techniques to see which ones can get these words into my head. And I've just finished writing this article for the e-Followspot, which means I can check that off my list of things I have been procrastinating about!  
☺

Wish me luck!

[Back to Top](#)

### **Open to Interpretation**

by Allan Kimball,  
ITA University/College Division Representative

I am always struggling with helping young actors understand all of the "possibles" in a scene they are working on. They are good at getting the "givens": age, sex, marital status, jobs, etc. But when we start to explore what we don't "know," that is where they often get frustrated. As we analyze a piece, I will ask them questions like, "Why would he ask that?" or "What was going on with your character before you came into the room?" Inevitably, I will get answers like, "I don't know. The script doesn't say."

One of the activities that I use in my beginning acting class is one I call "Open To Interpretation." I give them a seemingly random set of words and phrases. Working with a partner, they are to come up with a logical reason that two characters might have the following interchange.

#### **The Scene:**

1: Ah.  
2: So?  
1: All set?  
2: No.  
1: Well...  
2: Yes.  
1: Why are you doing this?  
2: It's the best thing.  
1: You can't mean that.  
2: No I'm serious.  
1: Please...  
2: What?  
1: What does this mean?  
2: Nothing.  
1: Listen...  
2: No.  
1: So different.

2: Not really.  
 1: Oh.  
 2: You're good.  
 1: Forget it.  
 2: What?  
 1: Go on.  
 2: I will

Next, I have them brainstorm possible motivations, goals, intentions, etc. for each character and each line.

### Directions:

Put characters and conflict to the above dialogue. Who are these two characters and what is the "reality" behind this conversation? On the blank line beside each line of dialogue, describe what is happening and what is going on in the mind of each character at that moment.

### Dialogue

Thought process/intent/motivation/goal/meaning/action/reaction/etc.

1: Ah. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: So? \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: All set? \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: Well... \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: Yes. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: Why are you doing this? \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: It's the best thing. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: You can't mean that. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: No I'm serious. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: Please... \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: What? \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: What does this mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: Nothing. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: Listen... \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: So different. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: Not really. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: Oh. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: You're good. \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: Forget it. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: What? \_\_\_\_\_  
 1: Go on. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2: I will. \_\_\_\_\_

Students will eventually present the scene for the class. Post-performance discussion would start by asking what the audience saw and what they got from the performance as presented. After all audience members have responded, I open it up to the actors to give us what their intent was. I have found that this is a fun exercise and really gets young actors thinking outside the box of simply writer's intent and start exploring performance choices.

### Some past scene ideas:

- A parent and a child leaving home.
- A drug dealer and an undercover cop at a drug bust.

- A parent and a child revealing a notice of academic probation.
- Two friends picking out new clothes.
- An advertiser & a customer answering an ad in the classified section.
- A newly married couple on their honeymoon night.
- Two friends at a class reunion.
- A teacher and a student confronting the class troublemaker.
- A divorced couple meeting at a party after the divorce.
- A boss and an employee-- "You're fired!"
- A couple ending an affair.
- A couple pickup at a bar.
- A parent and his/her child-- the sex talk.
- A parent and his/her child who is dropping out of school.
- A couple-- "you forgot our anniversary."

[Back to Top](#)

### **Thoughts on Relevance in Light of Passing**

by Madrid St. Angelo, ITA Professional Division Representative

As creatives, we all hope that the work we do, be it on stage or from the wings, in front of the camera or from behind the lens, possesses an enduring relevance. Oft times, we experience an immediate gratification: an audience's applause, a congratulatory handshake or hug from a fellow creative, Artistic Director, Producer or a momentary acknowledgment from Self that we've done a good job. Those things are important. But how do these moments of appreciation and recognition speak to those alongside whom we create? How do they leave a lasting imprint on a timeline that moves forward beyond the now, beyond today?

Recently, the Chicago theater community has lost several key players, respected individuals, creatives who worked tirelessly to bring light, love, powerful stories, and



storytelling to the stages that make up our vibrant theater community: Russ Tutterow, M.E.H (Maggie) Lewis, Molly Glynn, Erin Myers, and Bernie Yvon, to name a few. Some of these individuals I knew personally; others I'd only seen on stage or at various actor gatherings and outings.

Our community is a tight knit one and while we are many, those of us invested and involved in the busy work of theatre life (casting, auditioning, performing etc.) are fairly familiar with the movers and shakers in our biz: those memorable faces we see at auditions, in casting director offices, at agent's offices, on sets, behind the scenes, call backs, staged readings, workshops, and parties.

As creatives, we don't sing solely with our mouths, and we don't dance solely with our feet; we sing, dance, move, and create from our hearts. From a nagging and incessant need to relate, share, create, give back...give out. The work that we do is tedious, time consuming, gut wrenching. We make sacrifices beyond what most people know, be it the time we sacrifice with our loved ones or time away from jobs that often pay better than most of our acting gigs do. We bypass vacations and holidays with families; we labor over scripts and spend what seems like endless hours memorizing lines, learning blocking, all of this in the hope of impressing upon an audience something wonderful, something relevant, something that speaks to them long after the curtain goes down and the lights come up.



In thinking about those we've recently lost, I raise both hands in salute to not only the relevance of these individual's work, but the relevance of their lives. A friend told me

once, "Madrid, celebrate those who celebrate you." I think of this often, simply because so often it's difficult to gauge one's work, one's self...in light of critic's reviews, unforgiving and unappreciative audiences, poor ticket sales and small houses. I remind myself that so much learning comes by way of the creative process. So much joy comes by way of collaborating with other like-minded, passionate individuals like those we've recently lost. You see, the relevance of our work goes well beyond the work itself; it speaks to the relevance of creation itself and those brave enough to surrender to the impulses of creativity.

I encourage all of us, the next time we come face to face with a fellow creative, the next time we sit in an audience and watch a production...regardless of whether we like the show or not, to acknowledge the relevance of those lives invested in the work...those lives invested in the process. There's a powerful lesson here that can and should teach us to be a bit more appreciative, a bit more mindful of how fleeting life is, and how powerful our connections to one another are. It's not only about the work itself; it's about the lives invested in the creation of that work and all the sacrifice the work demands from us. The legacies of those we've lost are imprinted on each of us. Let's celebrate one another...just a bit more. Or at least, let's begin to be mindful of our need to do so.

[Back to Top](#)

### **Costume Conundrum**

by Stacy Deemar, ITA Member

Have you ever been in a predicament where you had no budget for your production, but wanted to costume your

cast of sixty-six second graders at your school? Is a production really a production without costumes? Can you operate without money? Where can you seek help and assistance? Are you morally obligated to costume your production from your own personal savings? Is it possible to accomplish this task without breaking the bank? Does every student need a costume, or can you select a few characters who wear a costume?

Directing sixty-six second graders with no prior theatrical experience in *Aladdin Kids* without a budget is a challenge. Acknowledging that the production is a process that is not making a debut on Broadway seemed to put my visions of grandeur into perspective. The goal is to take a theatrical journey with young artists and guarantee that each child's experience is rewarding. And having each cast member wearing a costume and/or using props is a bonus.

Here are some recommendations for finding success in this gargantuan task called the costume conundrum.

The best place to first attack a costume conundrum is by combing through your school's costume closets. Even though boxes may be clearly marked, take a moment to



peruse each box. You might be surprised to find "something" that you can salvage. In schools that serve kindergarten through eighth grade, the majority of the costumes are usually for the middle school students. But younger students can use small costume pieces including hats, capes, sashes, and props, too.

After you take inventory of your school's costume collection, expand your search into other schools' costume collections in your district. Send an email to your drama department colleagues with detailed information about what you are seeking. Have colleagues send pictures of what they have in their collection. Also, set aside some time to peruse another school's collection.

If you are unable to find what you need in your school and/or in other schools in your district, send an email to every child's parent in your production. Make a spreadsheet of all of the costumes and props needed. Organize the list similar to that of a wedding registry. Create a column for the number of items requested and another column for the number of items retained. Send weekly updates so parents can continue to make contributions.

Ask parents to donate items that can be borrowed and returned immediately after the production. For borrowed items, have parents label their belongings before transporting them to school. This will help expedite the return process. Refrain from asking parents to make a purchase or collecting money from parents. This could have an adverse reaction from your administration.





Expand your electronic communications to include all of the parents at your school through the weekly newsletter. E-blasts can be an excellent resource for

making costume inquiries. Aside from including a list of the items you are seeking, provide directions for labeling costumes and props, where to drop off donations, and a deadline for when you are accepting donations. If possible, run your e-blast at least three times.

If you find that you are not getting a positive response from parents, reach out to the older students in the school. Many students have costumes that no longer fit them. These students might want to make a donation simply to clean out closets, drawers and/or basement spaces.

Another great resource to utilize when you are experiencing a costumes shortage is your personal sphere of influence. Your neighbors, friends, and family might have "something" sitting in a basement collecting dust or in a drawer taking up space. Do not be embarrassed to ask people you know for help. Remember, "one man's trash is another man's treasure!"

How are your sewing skills? You can opt for making costumes from scratch or refurbish larger sized costumes into smaller ones. Old curtains, sheets, clothing, fabric remnants, and/or towels are good materials to utilize for costumes. If you need an extra set of hands to help with sewing, recruit parents.

For those who are masters with paper, you can design costume pieces and props from brown paper bags and cardboard boxes. The Paper Bag Player, a non for profit theatre group in New York City that performs original musical theatre for children three to eight years old, has been using brown paper bags and cardboard boxes for over fifty-six years. And their innovation and craftsmanship is remarkable. For more novel ideas using paper, look at [www.thepaperbagplayers.org](http://www.thepaperbagplayers.org).



The closer you get to production, time starts to tick faster, so you might have to make some creative sacrifices. For example, if you are unable to find guard uniforms, police uniforms can suffice. When the script calls for a character to change from a king to a rat and costumes are

unavailable, a hand puppet is the simplest solution. The alternative to a sultan can be a modern king. Again, is it better to have an alternative costume or no costume at all?

And after you have exhausted all of your resources, you might still find yourself short of both costumes and props. Where do you turn? Should you make a personal donation to your production knowing that you will not receive reimbursement? Is the teacher/director obligated to make a contribution?

Some might choose to forego costumes all together because with no money and few resources, your time is better spent improving other areas of your production.

Costumes or no costumes? That is the question. Only you can make that determination.

Break a leg!

[Back to Top](#)

### **ITA Member Spotlight: Emily Larkin**

by Judy Klingner, ITA Second Vice-President



#### **Please share your first memory having to do with theatre.**

I vividly remember auditioning for my first summer theatre show - which I didn't make! The summer after 4th grade, I had to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," and I went all out wearing my finest red, white, and blue. I was terrified to sing alone in front of a bunch of kids I didn't know, let alone the directors! Needless to say, I

needed a little more practice under my belt. Luckily, I eventually got that chance...but I'll never forget that first audition!

#### **Describe your education/training in theatre.**

Like many ITA members, I participated on-stage and behind the scenes of many plays and musicals, beginning in 6th grade. I was a Thespian in high school, and I also sang in several choirs and took private vocal performance lessons. As an English major at the [University of Illinois](#), I took every non-major acting class I could, as well as speech and many drama-focused English classes. I became involved with Illini Union Board Musicals there, where I performed in four shows and assistant directed one. I also continued to perform and direct summer theatre shows in my hometown of Woodstock throughout college.

#### **Tell us about your career path.**

After graduating from U of I, I joined [Teach For America](#) and I spent three years teaching English (and sponsoring the Improv Club, which I founded!) at an inner-city middle school in Bridgeport, Connecticut. I then joined TFA's full-

time staff and spent two years training and coaching new inner-city teachers in NYC, Tulsa, Chicago, and Indianapolis. I missed home and missed the classroom, so last year I was fortunate enough to be hired as an English teacher at Palatine High School, where I also have the privilege to serve as Productions Coordinator for our Winter Musical and Director of our Group Interpretation program.

### **What inspired you to join the ITA?**

I am excited to work with the staff at PHS to build our theatre program into one that offers as many opportunities to our students as possible. Next year, we will re-activate a Thespian troupe that's been inactive since the early 1990s, and we will seek approval to take our students to Theatrefest, which we haven't done in some time. I know that ITA provides a great network of colleagues and mentors, and I am excited to learn and grow from their experience and mentorship as I take on these endeavors! I also hope that, eventually, my experience will be useful to others, as well!

### **Of what theatrical accomplishment are you most proud?**

Oh gosh, this is hard. As a performer, I'm most proud of IUB Musicals' production of *Urinetown* in 2008. I played Bobby Strong's mother, and although my back hurt for weeks after because I played the aged character with a cane, I had a fabulous time, and I know we put on a great show. As a director, I would have to say that this winter's production of *Annie* at PHS is something of which I'm really proud. Our kids worked so incredibly hard, and it absolutely paid off - we had standing room only on closing night because our kids created such a buzz. It was amazing to see how much they were able to grow as performers, and how responsive our school community was to those efforts. Publicity was part of my job, but the kids' performance really did that job for me.



### **What is the best thing about your job?**

What's not to love about my job? Seriously. I work with the most sincerely kind and hardworking staff and students in the state. I'm absolutely convinced of this.

### **What is the biggest challenge you face related to your work in the theatre?**

Specifically in my current role, we face a couple of challenges. One is that students have self-segregated into separate programs, and there's not a ton of overlap between various performing arts activities. The other is our physical space. Our school has a beautiful auditorium that's not really built to be a theatre, which presents a challenge when it comes to sight lines, set building and storage, and even dressing rooms (which are really the choir and band rooms). With little to no backstage area, we've had to get creative with how we're using our space! However, this challenge is ultimately a good one, probably, because it forces us to be thoughtful and resourceful.



**What are your short/long term goals related to the drama program at Palatine High School?**

Short term, I'm excited to re-establish a Thespian troupe next year, and hopefully, take our kids to

Theatrefest! I'd also like to continue to build relationships with other directors and colleagues to learn and grow. Long-term, I hope to grow the theatre department at PHS into one that's competitive and renowned. My hope is that ten or fifteen years from now, we can run two weekends of the musical, and it's sold out every night. Our Group Interpretation program will involve the most talented kids in Palatine, and we will be competitive at the sectional and state levels. I have big goals for our kids and our programs!

**Please share details about a theatre project/production with which you are currently involved.**

Currently, I'm working with our musical staff to decide on major productions for next year - details TBD! Be on the lookout for a family-friendly musical with a large chorus, coming to Palatine High School February 3-6, 2016! I may be assisting with the musical at another district school, as well, which would make me a three-season director...who could ask for anything more? :)

[Back to Top](#)