

MAD Drama

Your Guide to the Department

High School Drama at its very best!



This is the symbol for Troupe #2541 of the International Thespian Honor Society. The ITS is the Theatre Arts Honor society and is international in scope and contains approximately 80 years of history. The Thespians at Madison have been here since May of 1964

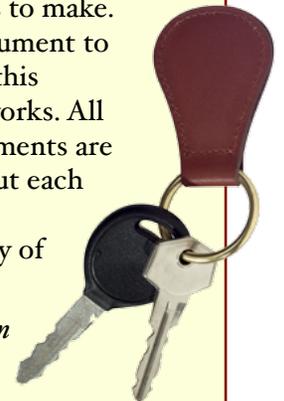
so you will be a part of a long tradition. You must, of course, earn your way into this organization. This document will give you some ideas as to how this is done. Be sure that you meet the officers right away so you know who they are.

Here are the keys

This document is one of your keys to Madison Drama. The other key is **involvement**. Drama is participatory. Can you imagine being in the marching band and just sitting there, not playing an instrument or marching? Of course not. If you're in the band, you play, if you're in Drama, you participate! It's that simple.

You have wide variety of technical crews to join, productions to audition for and memories to make. Read this document to find out how this department works. All drama departments are very similar but each has its own distinctive way of doing things.

-Mr. Henderson



THE PERFORMING ARTS DEPARTMENT

Madison isn't just Drama. I know that comes as a surprise to some but it's true. MAD Drama is a part of the larger performing arts department at James Madison. The other components are: Band, Orchestra and Chorus. Together, along with Drama, we represent the talent and learned skills that are presented live, on stage, in front of audiences by performers. The "fine" arts are static



artistic areas of endeavor that produce physical creations that come directly from the artist such as photography, painting, sculpture, etc. The four performing arts departments at Madison work together as much as possible. This is most evident during the spring musical in which Drama, Band, Chorus and Orchestra come together to create a unified performance.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Wow, this looks like a pretty big organization, and it is. A lot of students participate in Theatre Arts here at Madison and you've joined the ranks. There are the plays, of course, but there are also many other things to become involved with as well. I'll speak about those so that you are at least somewhat familiar with them and can choose to see if you wish to participate in or perhaps even lead them.

THE CLASSES

Yep, you're probably in one or would like to be in one and that's probably why you're reading this. You can take Drama classes all four years of High School (Drama 1 through 4) or specialize in a technical aspect of Drama (Tech 1 and Tech 2).

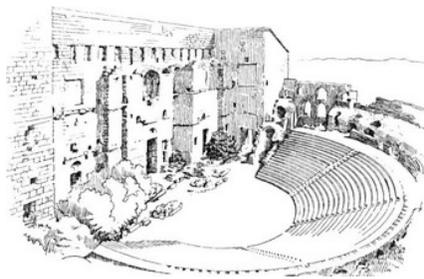


The classes are where the action is. You'll learn a lot. You'll get to know me, Mr. Henderson, very well, which is, uh, I guess a good thing. You'll begin to sound like an expert on theatre, how it works, its history, the performing aspects, the design and technical aspects, etc. You'll learn how to

work as a team and how to create a world on stage. The classes are where you fine tune your skills and become comfortable working on a performing on the stage. Most importantly, the classes are where you are able to work directly with others who share your interests.

THE THEATRE OR "AUDITORIUM"

Yep, we've got one. Psst! Interesting fact: you can always spot the people who don't know much about Drama -- they call it an "auditorium." Ha! We know better, right? It's a "theatre" of course!



It's not the best Theatre in the world or the most fully featured one but actually, it's pretty darned good. The acoustics are excellent -- especially compared to some others in Fairfax County. It seats 759 people fairly comfortably and has a nice, functional tech booth, a flexible lighting and sound system and a small but intimate stage-feel. In short, it's perfect for our audiences and the types of productions we put on here. A word of caution: don't *ever* eat or drink in there.

THE BLACK BOX, DRESSING ROOMS, ETC.

Cool, huh? A classroom named the "Black Box!" Why is it a box?

We'll is sort of shaped like one. Why is it black? Well, because we occasionally perform in there and when the lights go down, you don't want the audience to be looking at brightly colored walls with pictures of ponies or something so we paint it black.

It has a "light grid" so we can put real stage lights in there and use the student seating for audiences. Obviously, it's where most of the theatre classes are held but we occasionally move into the theatre or the dance room for various activities. A word of caution: don't *ever* eat or drink in here either.

Watch the "call board" just outside of the Black Box (and my office). There's a video screen out there where a lot of *very important* messages are posted.

We also have dressing rooms, one each, male and female, a "wood storage room" and a "props and costume" room.

THE TECH BOOTH AND THE CAT WALK

The tech booth is that room with the glass windows set up high at the back of the theatre. The cat walk or simply the "cat" is the access grid about 18 feet above the front edge of the stage. For safety and security reasons, you are not allowed in these areas unless you are in a Tech Class, an A- or B-licensed MAD tech or are working on a specific technical crew such as lights or sound. You are also not allowed in the "spot rooms" which flank the theatre at the rear and contain the spot lights.

THE CREW CHIEFS

Who are these “Crew Chiefs” that you keep hearing about? Basically, these are the people in charge of a certain technical area related to a production (play). One crew chief might be in charge of lights, another costumes, another sound and so on. These are drama students chosen to lead based on their interest in a specific technical area. An interview with Mr. Henderson gets you on the way to becoming a Crew Chief. All Crew Chiefs are in an area of responsibility and must lead other students and pass safety tests.

THE CREWS

The crews are where the show really gets created by Madison students.

Who can sign up for a MAD Drama Technical Crew? Well, any James Madison high school student can sign up. However, certain crews only require certain amounts of people to crew them. The larger crews are usually Set, Paint, Publicity/Fund Raising and House Management. Smaller crews are often Lights, Sound, and Stage Management. The Deck Crew can be huge or very, very small depending on the show. Costumes, Properties, and Hair/Makeup can vary in size depending on the needs of the production. Madison Theatre Arts students fill these positions first but any James Madison student in good standing with the school can join a crew if there is still space available.

Do you truly need to already know "tech stuff" to be a part of a crew? Not at first, no. You'll be shown safety procedures that go

along with your crew. However, if you are inexperienced otherwise, you will learn by doing like others on the crew. The Crew Chief will be the main person you will work with during the production. There will almost always be other more experienced students who you will be working with who will help you as you help them.

THE SEASON

MAD Drama has a tradition of alternating types of plays for a fall show and a spring musical.

Every other year, we do a fall show written by William Shakespeare. On occasion, we will do a classic play other than Shakespeare such as a Greek tragedy or something experimental such as an existential play.

When not in our Shakespeare or classic play year, we shift to perform a more modern piece (from the 20th or 21st centuries). On those years, we alternate between comedies and dramas (more serious themes). Still with me?

So a “cycle” might look like:



Shakespeare / Musical, Modern Drama / Musical, Shakespeare / Musical, Modern Comedy /

Musical. So, if you participate in all 8 of your High School mainstage shows from Freshman to Senior, you will have done 4 musicals, 2 Shakespeare productions (or another classic production), a modern drama and a modern comedy. Sandwiched in-between all of this are the One Acts which we'll discuss later.

THE FALL PRODUCTION

This is the large mainstage production that kicks off the new year (season) at Madison. The fall show is something the entire department produces. You might hear it sometimes referred to as the straight show or the straight play. This simply means that it's not a “musical” and contains little or zero singing and dancing.

It comes at you fast -- the auditions are usually in the first couple of weeks of school and the show usually goes up (is done) in the first half of November.

THE STUDENT-DIRECTED ONE ACTS

During the winter, the advanced students take over the job of directing from me. All I can say is: “Ahhh...it's good to let someone else give it a try.” Yes, students produce, audition, cast and direct their masterpieces. Sometimes they are student written, sometimes they are well known already published plays -- it depends on the director.

So, who are the directors? Well, Senior and then sometimes Junior drama students. I interview the potential directors and we talk about their vision for their show. All scripts must be approved by

me and the Student Activities Office.

The format works like this: I choose eight directors and they choose or write their shows and we spread them out in two groups of 4 over the course of a long weekend. So you might have play Group A perform Thursday night and Saturday Night and Group B perform Friday Night and Saturday Matinee. The point is, audiences get to see up to 8 shows over two different nights! Each evening lasts about 2 hours which, if you do the math, means that each One Act play is about 1/2 an hour long -- give or take.

THE MUSICAL

As springtime rolls around, so does the annual musical. This is often a big show with (predictably) singing, dancing and (hopefully) acting.

Do you already have to know



how to sing and dance? Not necessarily? Some of our most memorable actors in musicals started off very fresh to the concept.

The rehearsal period is a bit longer, due to complexity, and I'm often joined by a vocal director, a choreographer (dance coach) and a band director who leads the band and orchestra.

The auditions are a bit different as they are spread out into dancing, singing and acting over the course of three days. They usually roll around in late February or early March but can occur much earlier depending on the scheduling. The production is usually performed in very early May.

THESPIAN HONOR SOCIETY

According to legend, Thespis was the first greek actor who stepped out from the Chorus roughly 2500 years ago and became the fist individual actor. Since then, all actors are known as "thespians" in his honor.

The International Thespian Honor Society Troupe at Madison has been in operation since May 1964. To join, you must earn "points" -- specifically 10 or more points -- in at least two different "areas" such as publicity and acting.

You can use these points to become an inducted member of the Society if you wish.

The Honor Society meets monthly, hosts events, performs fund raising and many other tasks. There is a set of officers who are elected at the end of the year. In May or June, there is a formal induction ceremony for all new members. With enough points, you can become an Honor Thespian, a National Honor

Thespian and eventually, an International Honor Thespian.

THE CAPPIES

The Cappies are an awards and recognition program started in Fairfax County some years ago that has grown into an international phenomenon.

Basically, it's the Academy Awards for High School Theatre. There are awards for Best Play, Best Costumes, etc. for many,



many categories.

"Critics" from other schools all across the Washington area come on one chosen evening to evaluate our show. They write up reviews and often these are published in local papers.

At the end of the year, a huge awards ceremony is held at the Kennedy Center in D.C. It's a dress-up night and a large portion of the department usually attends. Madison may win an award or two, or simply be nominated and not win or not be nominated for anything at all. It's just like the

movies, you might have something great but it doesn't win anything! And with over 80 schools involved, it's quite a feat to win even one award. Regardless, the Cappies encourage us as a department to do our very best.

The Cappies critics only come for one night and only for one show. That means that it is either the fall production or the musical but not both in one year. Therefore, we switch off between the musical and fall show from year to year to determine which will be the "Cappies show."

That night we try to play the best host possible for these roughly 50 guests. We decorate Warhawk Hall, have a reserved seating section for them and much more.

We have 6 critics of our own who go from school to school throughout the year and evaluate other schools' productions. Each year the new Madison Cappies critics are chosen by Mr. Henderson from a combination of suggestions from the outgoing head critic, and writing samples and interviews.

THE NEW YORK TRIP

At some point during the year, inducted members of the Thespian Honor Society often take a trip to New York to see a selection of Broadway shows, backstage technology and the sights and sounds of New York in general.

VHSL

VHSL stands for "Virginia High School League" and is the basis for the Virginia State One

Act Play competition. Essentially, this is the sports equivalent of competing with other High Schools at the State level. MAD Drama participates through the Advanced Theatre Classes in the fall.

THE WEBSITE

MAD Drama has a website at: www.madisondrama.com. It's important that students, Crew Chiefs, actors, Crew members visit this site regularly as it contains a calendar of information relevant to the current production.

THE END OF THE YEAR BANQUET

Right around the time of the Thespian Honor Society induction, we hold a social event known as the End of the Year Banquet. We have a lot of fun at this banquet. We give away awards -- both funny and serious ones -- and eat a lot. At the end, there's usually dancing and loud music so that's a plus.

We hold it in the banquet room at P.J. Skidoo's on Highway 50. It usually goes from about 6:30 to 11:00 or so and costs \$30 - \$40 for all of the food and room rental. These times and prices vary from year to year but that's the general idea.