

Excerpts from...

PLAYS in DAYS

**A Fun, Focused Set of Helpful Tools
For the Busy School or Community Theater Director**

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Plays in Days - Preface

Is the story of your life as a director anything like mine?



There I was, stumbling into rehearsal with a giant plastic tub loaded with a stack of scripts (to replace all those lost by my actors over the last two months of rehearsal - Gee, only two more months to go. Yippee!), a three-hole punch (with that annoying plastic bottom thing that keeps falling off and strewing little white circle-dots everywhere) and a bunch of brightly colored, empty three-ring binders, (for the cast to put their scripts in so they can't POSSIBLY lose them this time). Pens, hi-lighters, bottles of water, snacks, some youth group kid's lost hoodie (with remnants of *last* week's rehearsal snacks smeared on it) filled the bottom half of the tub. Complete the overloaded picture with several half made props, a (poorly constructed) costume sample or two, to-do lists, reminders, and notes-to-self on fast food napkins. I had enough tales of exhaustion, frustration, and disappointment to fill a book.

Perhaps you could fill a book with stories like that yourself.

Or maybe you're new at this. You are considering starting a drama ministry or theater group but you're a little worried you will meet with frustration and too many demands on time you don't really have to spare.

This book and our corresponding website are filled with tested ideas and tools that suggest a fresh approach to the doing a play that we hope will encourage, uplift, inspire, and convince you that it doesn't have to be like I described it above. Whether you are just starting out or you need a little help

transforming a tiring and overwhelming task into a fruitful teamwork experience - this set of tools is for you. Use that great creative imagination of yours to have fun, get it done, and look forward to the next one!

From Chapter 5...

To the Diligent, Devoted Director

"Semper Paratus!" US Coast Guard Motto - "Always Prepared."

The great news is that the key to having a successful Plays in

Days

production is... YOU! Yep - You're the first string key player and it's yours to win. But unlike a sporting event, nobody is ever going to blow the whistle and yell, "Substitution!" because there is no substitute for you on this one. The nice thing is, you can determine how much time you'll take, you can prepare as many weeks ahead of time as you want and spend as many hours on it as you need, and all without taking up the time of one single other person, or worrying about coordinating their schedules with yours. You can be flexible scheduling your time and effort. You have autonomy over the whole thing.



**KEY
POINT**

The preparedness, diligence, and focus of the director are the things that make this system work.

You're probably one of those people who takes a lot on your shoulders anyway and that's why everybody loves you and wants you to be their director. So why not let that be the character trait that brings you success now? The best thing you can do for yourself, your sanity, and your own enjoyment of the production process is to be like the US Coast Guard (or the Boys Scouts and Girl Scouts) and "Be Prepared." Okay, you can stop saluting now.

From Chapter 9...

**Chapter
9**

**Production
Pizazz!**



“There’s no business like show business like no business I know!”

- Annie Oakley in Irving Berlin’s *Annie, Get Your Gun*

Soundtracks – The Sparkle on Your Gem

An old, out of tune piano is being played in an smoke-filled western saloon, when suddenly, a scruffy-bearded cowboy, dressed all in black, snarl on his lips, hands hovering over his six-shooters, kicks open the squeaky saloon door. (Piano music changes to an anxious song in a minor key) “I’m lookin’ for the fella that shot my Pa,” snarls Jake. “I aim ta even up the score.” Duhn, Duhn, Duhn...



Let’s face it – We have come to expect movies, television, and video games to be enhanced by sound effects and music. Think about the last time you saw a commercial, movie, or TV show that had only dialogue and no music or other sound effects. The omission of these things is only done for effect on rare occasions, so it is obvious to say that music and sound has become an integral part of show business of any kind. “But I’m no musician,” you say, “and we don’t have people at our school or theater who have time for that sort of thing.” Don’t Worry – You don’t have to do it yourself! PlaysInDays.com offers sound effects tracks and soundtrack music created specifically to enhance our plays. Using these tracks brings a more polished auditory experience that really draws the audience in and keeps them locked in to your production. As a side benefit, the sound tracks also help the actors feel “larger than life” and more professional during performances, which definitely enhances their enjoyment of being in the production.

The Emperor's New Clothes – Kids Version Pre-Costuming and Audition Suggestions

Costuming Ideas

Unlike plays in a traditional months long process where you cast your play and then your costumers get to work, many Plays in Days productions have the option to put a lot of the costuming work ahead of the audition. This can save time and stress and help with casting. Costuming and auditions can be linked.

You may ask, “How, why would I create costumes for kids I haven’t seen or cast yet?” For some of our Plays in Days productions, having the costumes ahead of time actually streamlines the audition process. But in order for pre-costuming to work, you would need to have a basic idea how many actors you will have ahead of time. If you think you’ll have a small cast or have no idea how many children will show up to audition, we suggest you plan to schedule several days between auditions and your first rehearsals and use that time to make the right amount of costumes in the right sizes for the cast you have, rather than making them ahead.

For large casts, however, making the costumes ahead really helps. This was the case for our first production of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. We knew we were going to be working with an elementary school. We went ahead of time and, with permission from the staff, talked briefly to the students in each classroom about the upcoming play. We got a basic indication of how many students of each general age bracket would be interested in participating. There would be more than enough to cast the show.

We had done the most essential thing by pre-casting the two main leads, Stitches and Sewphia, with two multi-talented high school girls, Cindi and Christina respectively, who helped create the play. (More about them in the audition section.) We settled on their costumes early and built the rest of the costume designs around theirs. To save stress during rehearsal time, we spent a couple of days creating the other main characters’ and group parts’ costumes ahead of time. Based on the difficulty of songs, lines, and dances they would need to learn, we knew we would basically cast certain age/size kids in the different group parts.

You will be casting your leads first, but let’s talk about your group character parts and their costumes for now. Why talk about costumes before you even have auditions for your cast? Not only does it get the work out of the way and reduce stress during rehearsal days, it will help you picture the kids as they audition in the parts for which you’ve created the costumes. It really does help you cast the chorus or group parts more quickly. As you follow the audition process, you’re looking for the right talent *AND* the bodies to fit the costumes – two parameters to help narrow down your choices. For a few different production of this play, we followed these basic guidelines:

We allowed for up to six Jokers (athletic and a bit hyper kids ages 9 and up), up to nine Moths (expressive little kids ages 5-7), and up to ten Wardrobe Assistants (a variety of cute singer/dancers ages 7-12). We created the simple tunic costumes (described in the script) ahead of time. A simple tunic will fit most children ages 5 and older. If you make them roomy, you can always pin, belt, fold, tie, or cut off the excess. Some kids wore their own black clothes underneath. Since the school we were working with was in a lower socio-economic area, we built a little extra into the fee we charged the school to have us bring the show in and raided all the local thrift stores. We found various sizes of black T-shirts, turtlenecks and pants for the kids to wear underneath, helping out those families who were unable to provide their own clothes for under the costumes.

We prepared or found cute costumes for Spot and Princess that would fit kids ages 8 – 11 and basically chose from kids who might not be cast as a lead, but who had the right coordination and personality to play

these pets *and* also fit the costumes. (If you casually display the Spot and Princess costumes at the audition, it will also help any actors who might be cast as playing an animal, but may think it isn't as cool as playing a person, to be excited about these two parts. And probably make the other kids envious, but that's okay!)

We allowed for up to nine Laundry Servants (the best singers and dancers of the chorus-caliber kids ages 8 and up.) We found cheap, worn-out looking, long sleeve, white button down shirts (they rolled the sleeves up) and jeans they rolled to the knees. Since the Laundry Servants are worn out and tired, looking a little sloppy and frazzled works well. They wanted to wear colored bandanas. We found those at a dollar store. (If you choose a color other than white for the shirts, we suggest having them match as it makes dancing more impressive and minimizes any sloppy moves during the choreography. Also, all of the other groups wear matching outfits.)

For the leads and other main solo characters, we did a combination of preparing costumes ahead of time and finding clothing to fit (or the kids provided their own) once they were cast. The process went something like this for each of the leads:

- Stitches and Sewphia - Originally, these were played by Cindi and Christina, our teen co-producers, as mentioned above. ***It is essential to pre-cast at least these two parts if you want a short rehearsal and production schedule.*** Sewphia originally carried the scenes, lines, and songs that we later spread out between Sewphia, Tempa Cheer, and Missy Buttons. Because the parts were pre-cast, Sewphia's and Stitches' costumes were prepared ahead of time. Costume designs we went with are detailed in the script. (Feel free to create your own designs, of course!)
- The Emperor – We didn't have a fabulous - or magical ☺ - tailor on our crew, so we went to a local community theater as well as thrift stores and begged, borrowed, or bought the fanciest 1700s royalty-looking jackets (or ones that could be fancied up), capes, shoes, and hats we could find. Combined with making or adapting other cheap hats and pieces of clothing, cloth, feathers, and adding fancy accessories, we were able to come up with all the outfits he needed for his many changes. We determined ahead of time what basic size actor we thought would work to play the Emperor and went with clothing about that size. Since he only has to be overly expressive, move with a flourish, be able to change clothes quickly, and doesn't have to sing or dance, it was likely that a variety of actors could play this part and that it would be fairly easy to cast the actor to fit the costumes we came up with. He's all about the clothes anyway! ☺

As a side note, we took this show on the road to other schools and to our community theater and always found someone the right size to play the Emperor. One production we had a girl with a very low voice play the part. We drew a thin mustache on her and she fooled everyone and did a great job. You can also pre-cast the Emperor (or any other part) if you have fabulous costumes that fit an actor you want. The Emperor's costumes we used are described in detail in your script. You can probably come up with even better ones!

- Tempa Cheer, Missy Buttons – For one production after our original Sewphia went to college, we had a very talented high school girl excited to play the part, but she would be juggling our production with her many jazz band competitions. Because her time was limited, we created Tempa Cheer and Missy Buttons to pick up some of Sewphia's scenes, lines, and songs and then cast our very best sixth graders to carry the parts. It worked great and these two characters became part of the script, creating more lead parts for the kids. Win/win. Costuming these parts was easy as they could wear their own clothes with some adaptations, described in the script.

- The Doubleknit Twins – needed to be our cutest and best singers after Sewphia and Stitches -- and after Tempa Cheer and Missy Buttons once we added them. The first time we did this play, we found the double-knit suits before we cast the play. You will find the story in *The Emperor's New Clothes - Behind the Scenes*. Another time, the two girls who were perfect for the parts (not related but totally looked and sounded like twins) did not fit the costumes we had, so we found matching double-knit pants in their sizes at a thrift store and they wore nice matching blouses and bright scarves.
- Secretary, Chief Advisor – career wear was easily found *after* they were cast.
- The Workers – We had put together most of their necessary identifying costume pieces and props (tool belts, plaid shirt, lab coat, straw hat, overalls, cop shirt and badge, etc.). For each production, we chose six of the best actors and singers to form this group. Then, at their very first rehearsal, right after the auditions, we had a mini-audition to determine which of the worker parts each would play. Every time, the actors themselves instinctively knew what part would make them shine, but we still took into consideration the personalities and voices for the parts first and then the sizes of the costume items we had prepared. If our prepared costume didn't fit an actor who was totally perfect for a part, we figured out a way to find one that would work.

How We Prepared for the Auditions

All charts below are minimized for a general overview.

For more convenient enlarged charts done in landscape orientation, see appendix at back of book

Sewphia and Stitches worked with me, the Director, to figure out blocking for the play. They took notes on their scripts, and memorized every scene they were in. When we went to auditions, they could help cast. Then, for rehearsals, they could help direct. They also were an integral part of the audition process. For later productions, we chose an Assistant Director ahead of time, which was a huge help.

A few main things we did for a successful and smooth audition using the Plays in Days process:

- Got To Know It – Director, Assistant Director, Sewphia and Stitches were extremely familiar with the play, songs, and characters. (We didn't have the advantage of the audio files then, but they will be the perfect tool for your staff).
- Got Clipboards Ready – We prepared clipboards with lists as described below.
- Got a Plan Ready – We created a plan for who was doing what during auditions and rehearsals and followed the guideline below.
- Got Docs Ready – Printed permission slips. Since we did this back in the “Old School” days, we created a rehearsal schedule, copies of the scripts, and made CDs of the songs. Now, with digital copies available, you can put the scripts and rehearsal schedule as well as audio files on several flash drives that volunteers can use for kids or parents to upload on to their devices after auditions, several people at a time. OR if your budget is huge, you can provide flash drives for each family represented. OR you could make a blank list for parents to sign up requesting that you email the documents and audio files to them. You could perhaps make a few hard copies of the scripts and rehearsal schedules along with a few CDs of audio files for folks with no USB compatible devices. We had a grown-up on standby to help the Assistant and Director accomplish the distribution of materials at the end of our auditions.

The Clipboard Lists

We created a Volunteer form for parents, guardians, other interested adults.

Volunteer Name	Phone	Email	What you'd like to help with:		
			Costumes / Set & Props	Sound	

Sample Email form for those wanting scripts, rehearsal schedules and audio files emailed to them.

Parent or Guardian Name	Child's Name	Email address

Sample sign up for those who will pick up hard copies by _____ (date)

Parent or Guardian Name	Child's Name	Initial here if you will pick up hard copies by _____ (date)	Phone Number

Casting Charts

The casting charts below reflect two very different sized casts. The first reflects the large cast where we had dozens of actors to work with at an elementary school. Stitches and Sewphia were pre-cast. The second reflects the cast for when we did the YA and Community theater versions of this play. We only had about 22 actors to work with so many of our actors played several parts. Lots of quick costume changes, but they had a blast! Of course you can adjust these charts in any way you want to suit the number of actors you will have.

Director's Only List – Large Cast					
	Character Name	Actor's Name		Character Name	Actor's Name
1	Tempa Cheer		27	Laundry Servant	
2	Missy Buttons		28	Laundry Servant	
3	Doubleknit Twin		29	Laundry Servant	
4	Doubleknit Twin		30	Laundry Servant	
5	Emperor		31	Laundry Servant	
6	Honest Child		32	Laundry Servant	
7	Worker (Farmer)		33	Laundry Servant	
8	Worker (Psychologist)		34	Laundry Servant	
9	Worker (Doctor)		35	Laundry Servant	
10	Worker (Carpenter)		36	Joker	
11	Worker (Teacher)		37	Joker	
12	Worker (Officer)		38	Joker	
13	To-the-9s		39	Joker	
14	Chief Advisor		40	Joker	
15	Secretary		41	Joker	
16	Spot		42	Wardrobe Assistant	
17	Princess		43	Wardrobe Assistant	
18	Moth		44	Wardrobe Assistant	
19	Moth		45	Wardrobe Assistant	
20	Moth		46	Wardrobe Assistant	
21	Moth		47	Wardrobe Assistant	
22	Moth		48	Wardrobe Assistant	
23	Moth		49	Wardrobe Assistant	
24	Moth		50	Wardrobe Assistant	
25	Moth		51	Wardrobe Assistant	
26	Moth				

Director's Only List – Small Cast		
	Character Name	Actor's Name
1	Tempa Cheer	
2	Missy Buttons	
3	Doubleknit Twin	
4	Doubleknit Twin	
5	Emperor	
6	Honest Child, Moth	
7	Worker (Farmer)	
8	Worker (Psychologist)	
9	Worker (Doctor)	
10	Worker (Carpenter)	

11	Worker (Teacher)	
12	Worker (Officer)	
13	To-the-9s, Joker	
14	Chief Advisor	
15	Secretary	
16	Moth, Laundry Servant, Joker	
17	Moth, Laundry Servant, Joker	
18	Moth, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
19	Moth, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
20	Moth, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
21	Joker, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
22	Joker, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	

The list below is for reference at the end of casting during auditions (for a large cast). It can also be used for your program later.

We prepared a clipboard with a numbered list like the example below. *This list was kept private between Directors and Assistants.*

Director's Only List					
	Character Name	Actor's Name		Character Name	Actor's Name
1	Tempa Cheer		27	Laundry Servant	
2	Missy Buttons		28	Laundry Servant	
3	Doubleknit Twin		29	Laundry Servant	
4	Doubleknit Twin		30	Laundry Servant	
5	Emperor		31	Laundry Servant	
6	Honest Child		32	Laundry Servant	
7	Worker (Farmer)		33	Laundry Servant	
8	Worker (Psychologist)		34	Laundry Servant	
9	Worker (Doctor)		35	Laundry Servant	
10	Worker (Carpenter)		36	Joker	
11	Worker (Teacher)		37	Joker	
12	Worker (Officer)		38	Joker	
13	To-the-9s		39	Joker	
14	Chief Advisor		40	Joker	
15	Secretary		41	Joker	
16	Spot		42	Wardrobe Assistant	
17	Princess		43	Wardrobe Assistant	
18	Moth		44	Wardrobe Assistant	

Sign in/
Rehearsal
Materials
Table

Assistant
Director/
Volunteers

“Group Intro”

Director, Sewphia, Stitches

Group of those auditioning

X x XX X x x XX X xxx X xx

x X X xxX X X X X xxx

X X X xx X xxx XX x

xxx X xx XxX xxx X xx X

xx X XX xx X X Xxx

X x X Xx x X X x xX

“Giant U”

Actors line up shortest to tallest heights

Shortest

Tallest

Side 1

Side 3



Medium Height

Side 2

"Casting Starts"

Actors have started being cast and moved to positions

Side 4

Tempa Missy Doubleknit Doubleknit Emperor Honest Child
Cheer Buttons Twin Twin XXXXX Other "Tapped" Actors XXXXX

Side 1

x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x

x x x x x x x x x

X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X

Side 3

Side 2

"Casting Done"

Actors have all been cast and moved to these positions

Side 4

Tempa Cheer Missy Buttons Doubleknit Twin Doubleknit Twin Emperor Honest Child Workers 1 thru 6 To-the-9s Chief Advisor Secretary Spot & Princess

C
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M
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H
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1 thru 9

Side 1

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Side 3

1 thru 8

WARDROBE
ASSISTANTS 1 thru 10

JOKERS 1 thru 6

Side 2