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The cast of "Rent" at Trumbull High School in Trumbull, Conn. (Photo by Howard Sherman)

Who Cares About Censorship on School Stages?

Fighting for freedom of expression in high school theatres can be a complicated cause, but it's clearly a fight that matters for all theatre artists.

BY HOWARD SHERMAN

“What’s the deal with all this high school theatre?”

That’s the kind of comment—spoken, written or tweeted—I’ve been getting regularly over the past four years since I began writing about [instances of censorship of theatre in American high schools](#) (and, on occasion, colleges). To be fair to those who may be skeptical about the extent of the problem, I myself have been surprised by the volume and variety of issues raised over the content of shows being done—and, in some cases, ultimately *not* being done—in school-sponsored theatre.

But between writing about these incidents, and directly involving myself as an advocate in some of them, I’ve come to believe that what’s taking place in our high schools and on our campuses has a very direct connection to what is happening (and will be happening) on professional stages.

So here are nine common questions that have arisen as my advocacy has increased, and some answers—although, as every attempt at censorship is different, there aren’t any absolute answers.

1. Why is there so much more censorship of high school theatre these days? There’s no quantitative study that indicates the policing of what’s performed is any greater than it was 10, 25 or 50 years ago. Everything is anecdotal. But the Internet has made it easier for reports to spread beyond individual communities and for news-aggregation sites uncover and accelerate the dissemination of such stories. It only takes one report in a small-town paper these days to bring an incident to national attention; that was a rarity in the print-only era.

2. Isn’t this just a reflection of our polarized national politics?

School theatre censorship doesn’t necessarily follow the red state/blue state binary division, because the impulse can arise from any constituency. While efforts to quash depictions of



A sign for a production of “Sweeney Todd” at Amity Regional High School in Woodbridge, Conn.

LGBTQ life—as with *Almost, Maine* in Maiden, N.C., or *Spamalot* in South Williamsport, Pa.—may be coming from political constituencies galvanized against the spread of marriage equality, or from certain faith communities which share that opposition, that’s hardly the only source. Opposition to *Sweeney Todd*, both muted (in Orange, Conn.) and explicit (in Plaistow, N.H.) was driven by concern about the portrayal of violence in an era of school shootings and rising suicide rates, while *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* was challenged by a black superintendent over August Wilson’s use of the “n-word.”

3. What’s the real impact of school theatre on the professional community?

The Broadway League pegs attendance at Broadway’s 40 theatres in the neighborhood of 13 million admissions a year and touring shows at 14 million a year. TCG’s *Theatre Facts* reports resident and touring attendance of 11 million. That totals a professional universe of 38 million admissions.

Based on figures provided to me by half a dozen licensing houses, there are at minimum 37,500 shows done in high school theatres annually, and conservatively guesstimating three performances of each in 600 seat theatres at 75-percent capacity, that’s more than 50 million attendees. In both samples, the numbers don’t represent the total activity, but high school theatre’s audience impact is undeniable, both as a revenue stream for authors and as a means of reaching audiences who might not see any other theatre at all.

4. Does it really matter what shows kids get to do in high school?

While there are valuable aspects to making theatre that apply no matter what the play choice may be, many schools view their productions as community relations, frequently citing that they want to appeal to audiences “from 8 to 80.” While the vast majority of students in the shows, and their friends who come to see them, will never become arts professionals, they are the potential next generation of audiences and donors for professional companies. If they are raised on a diet of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz* (both currently very popular in the [high school repertoire](#)), how can we expect more challenging work, new work, or socially conscious work to sustain itself 20 years on?

5. Are school administrators fostering an environment in which censorship flourishes?

I'm unwilling to accept the idea that our schools are run by people who fundamentally want to limit what students can learn—or perform. But they are operating within a political structure topped by an elected board of education, and can be subject to political pressure that often makes the path of least resistance—altering text or changing a selected show, in most cases—the expedient way to go. Unless an administrator (or a teacher, for that matter) is independently wealthy, they can't necessarily afford to risk their job fighting for the school play that may have challenging content. That said, students at Newman University rebelled against administration-dictated text changes, reverting to the script as written for the latter two of their four performances of *Legally Blonde in November*.

6. Isn't this a free speech issue?

In a word, no. Schools have the right and responsibility to determine what is appropriate activity and speech under their control, and just because students are exposed to all manner of content in the media and even in their day-to-day lives doesn't mean that schools can or must permit it, either in classrooms or performance. That *The Crucible* is in countless high school curriculums does not necessarily prevent it from being censored as a performance piece, despite the seeming double standard.



The same stringent oversight that affects school theatre is also often directed at school newspapers and media. However, while some school systems attempt to control all student speech, it is a First Amendment violation to infringe on student speech to the media about their dissatisfaction with the actions of a school, including censorship. Drama teachers, who are best equipped to make the cases for the shows they choose, are usually prevented from doing so by employment agreements which prohibit them from discussing school matters without the express approval of the administration, typically the superintendent.

7. Don't shows get edited all the time in schools for content?

In all likelihood, shows are constantly being nipped and tucked by teachers and administrators to conform to their perception of "community standards," whether it's the occasional profanity or entire songs. But that doesn't make it right, and it is censorship. Aside from violating copyright laws and the licensing contracts signed for the right to the show, it sets a terrible example for students by suggesting that authors' work can be altered at will, undermining the rights of the artists who created the work.

Some writers and composers have authorized school editions or junior versions of their shows for the school market to recognize frequent concerns and to keep from denying students the opportunity to explore their shows. But the rights must lie with the authors, not each and every school. If that isn't made clear early on, how can we expect to fight censorship anywhere?

8. When a show is canceled and then successfully restored through a public campaign, is that winning the battle and then losing the war?

That's a genuine concern of mine—that once there's a public battle over theatrical content, the school will thereafter clamp down even harder and apply greater scrutiny forever after to drama programs, academic or extracurricular. At the [Educational Theatre Association's](#) national conference this past summer, one attendee asked the others if there were shows that they believed would be great for their students but which they couldn't even raise as possibilities. Every single teacher in the room raised his or her hand. So the incidents that become public—ones in which a show is announced, then has approval rescinded—are the tip of the iceberg. Drama teachers and directors are already having their choices limited, often by self-censorship. There's [much more work to be done](#), but if blatant examples don't come to light, it may never be possible to galvanize support for school theatre that challenges students to do great work and great works.

9. Can professional artists and companies make any difference when incidents of censorship arise?

Local theatres—professional, community and academic—make superb allies in fighting against censorship. Institutions and individuals within communities that are respected for their art occupy a position from which to speak out forcefully and effectively for school theatre programs. Whether it's a nearby artistic director or a one-time resident who has gone on to a professional career, they bring a history and authority that will speak to both the local populace and the media. The vocal support of the Yale School of Drama and Yale Rep with the aforementioned *Joe Turner*, and of Goodspeed Musicals and Hartford Stage in the case of *Rent* in Trumbull, Conn., were key factors in the ultimately successful efforts toward restoring those shows to production.

In closing: The first time I inserted myself into a school theatre censorship debate in 2011, I assumed it was a one-off. I did not realize at the time that I had found a cause. Each time an incident comes to a conclusion, regardless of whether the outcome was, from my point of view, positive or negative, I think that surely the message is getting out there and this will be the last time. But then comes the phone call, the e-mail, the tweet, from someone I've never met and possibly never will, saying that a show is threatened or has just been shut down. And I begin my introductory speech, which is unfortunately well-honed at this point.

"This is no longer about education," I say, "this is no longer about art. This is now a political campaign." And off we go.

Howard Sherman is senior strategy consultant at [the Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts](#) and was executive director of the American Theatre Wing and O'Neill Theatre Center. He is the U.S. correspondent for London's *The Stage*.

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New Hampshire Educational Theatre Guild

Content Notification Form



The NHETG Board realizes that although theatre is a provocative art, some materials may be overly disturbing to audience members. Such topics may include subject matter concerned with sex, race, violent acts or language, religion, illness / death / suicide, or anything else your experience tells you may be a potential issue to any audience member.

EVERY PRODUCTION MUST SUBMIT IN WRITING A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ANY POSSIBLY UPSETTING MATERIAL. THIS MUST BE SUBMITTED EVEN IF IT SIMPLY STATES THAT THE PRODUCTION DOES NOT CONTAIN ANY POSSIBLY UPSETTING MATERIAL.

This content notification paragraph, is **due to Sarah Bunkley no later than Friday, 8 days prior to the show's regional festival.**

Regional Site	Regional Date	Due Date
????????????????		
Kingswood Regional HS	Saturday, March ??, 2016	Friday, March ??

Failure to submit the notification creates the potential of the show not being allowed to perform at festival. Please email a copy of this paragraph to Sarah Bunkley at bunksmit@roadrunner.com, and she will collate them and forward them to your host for distribution to directors at the festivals. These descriptions are not intended for distribution to audiences but will be shared with the festival directors before performances. It will then be up to the individual directors' discretion whether or not to share any of the information with students who may be adversely affected by the content.

This effort is designed to help the NHETG provide a positive educational experience that won't be overshadowed by upsetting incidents.

Thank you for your cooperation,

NHETG Board of Directors

Name of School: _____

New Hampshire Educational Theatre Guild Content Notification Form



Name of Show: _____

Please enter your Content Notification Below:

Director's Signature: _____

Email this unsigned form to Sarah Bunkley at bunksmit@roadrunner.com

Mail signed copy to: Your regional festival host
or bring a signed copy to the festival.



Performance Approval Certification Form

Name of School _____

Name of Show _____

Playwright _____

Publisher _____

I certify that I have obtained from the author's representative or publisher permission for my school to perform the play or cutting listed above, and that all royalties have been paid.*

Signature of faculty advisor: _____ Date: _____

As principal I certify my approval of the production that my school will present, I have seen the Content Notification as written by the director, royalties have been paid, and permission of the publisher obtained for the play and any music, projections, movies or pictures in use.*

Signature of **school principal**: _____ Date: _____

*1) A publisher's copy of the script (cannot be a photocopy) must be sent with this form for use or referral, if necessary, by the adjudicators (script will be returned after festival).

*2) A copy of the paperwork indicating that the required **royalties have been paid** with any letter which gives the performing school **permission to make any cuts or changes** to the script if need must be sent with this form.

*3) Written **permission** has been obtained and **royalties** have been paid as needed for use of **projections, movies or pictures**.

NEEDS SIGNATURE so Email a scan or picture

to: bunksmit@roadrunner.com

or can be snail mailed.

Sarah Bunkley

41 Thurlow St

Plymouth, NH 03264

603-536-3236

Due Friday, 8 days before Regional.



Program Disclaimers

“I know it when I see it”

Program disclaimers are tricky things. We all know to warn people about strobe lights so as not to provoke a seizure reaction, and likewise most folks will caution the audience if gunshots are to be used. No one wants to start a panic. But what about other issues? Is it okay to “drop the f-bomb” in a show with teenage actors and teenage audience members? Is it okay to do it twice? Ten times? Twenty? What about nudity, if it’s brief and really only implied? And what is a responsible director supposed to do not about short moments, but about concepts and touchy subjects? If theatre is supposed to stir a reaction in people, directors can’t stay away from those areas. As educators we must challenge our students’ perceptions, concepts, and values, but we must balance these efforts by protecting the students from harm. We must be able to present theatre that tests the complacency of the audiences without offending them so much that our good intent is lost. Satire can be constructive criticism to some people, yet be upsetting to others in the same audience. Does all this mean we must find the lowest common denominator, milquetoast Pollyanna plays that risk nothing? Hardly, but here are some questions to consider when you’re dealing with some potentially sensitive issues in a play:

- Does anything make my actors, administrators, or parents uncomfortable?
- Does it sacrifice integrity for the cheap laugh?
- Is any type of person portrayed without dignity? This doesn’t merely refer to racial stereotypes, but to any character who may represent any group: blacks, whites, mentally handicapped, school principals, blonds, one-legged postal workers, -- you name it.
- Does it cross lines? Does it cross lines without any good purpose? For instance, do we think he’s really funny because of his harmless sex jokes , or do we perceive the character as a schmuck because he uses sexual innuendo?
- Are sensitive issues raised? How central are they?

If you have any doubts at all, if your spidey-sense is making the hairs on the back of your neck tingle even just a little bit, seek the advice of a neutral colleague. Consider your audience. Then the responsible thing to do is to put a disclaimer into the program so that the audience – and the NHETG Board – can be forewarned to expect the material in its proper context. You don’t have to give away the moment or the story, and you certainly don’t want to scare away the audience, but be clear enough that there is little room for doubt. The following are some suggestions:

- Potential physical dangers: Strobe lights will be used in this show (strobe lights, fog into the audience, etc.)
- Frequent strong language
- Disturbing violent images
- Sensitive central theme: rape (or other topic)
- Graphic sex images (including jokes)

You get the idea. No one likes a rude awakening. Let the audience members prepare themselves to join in the challenge. Your work will be experienced by a more receptive audience, and those few who would have to excuse themselves will also be thankful for your effort to notify them.

<https://www.schooltheatre.org/advocacy/local/freedomexpression/recentlybannedandchallengedplays>

Here's a list of plays and musicals that have been the subjects of community challenges or official prior restraint actions in American high schools and middle schools (and in some rare instances, colleges) in recent years.

Thespians at Portage (Indiana) High School scotched an attempt in November, 2015 by school administrators to bowdlerize references to smoking, drugs, alcohol, and sex from their production of *The Bad Seed*, a 1954 play about a sociopathic child by Maxwell Anderson. The students took their concerns to the district Board of Education, pointing out that editing the play without permission would be a violation of copyright law and a breach of their contract with the play publisher. After investigating, Superintendent Richard Weigel directed the production would go forward without censorship. "From my perspective, the purpose of theatre is to provide insights into characters that reflect different ways of thinking," Weigel said. "Theatre provides an opportunity for our students to reflect on those characters, not become those characters."

Spamalot, by Eric Idle and John du Prez, based on a screenplay by Monty Python. In July 2014, the drama director at South Williamsport (Pennsylvania) Area Junior/Senior High School went public regarding the cancellation of a planned production of *Spamalot*, saying that the school's principal had nixed it due to gay content. The school administration challenged her, but after internal emails were revealed in August 2014 under Right-to-Know laws, it was clear that "homosexual themes" were the cause. Four weeks later, the drama director was fired.

Sweeney Todd, by Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler. In March 2014 in Plaistow, New Hampshire, the Timberlane Area School District superintendent canceled a production of *Sweeney Todd*. After efforts by students and parents, and broad support at a school meeting called to discuss the issue, the show was restored and rescheduled for production in May 2015.

The Laramie Project, by Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project. Multiple challenges and cancellations, most recently in June 2013 in Ottumwa, Iowa. Ottumwa High School's planned production of *The Laramie Project* was canceled by the principal, who said "the play is too adult for a high school production but it does preach a great message." It was subsequently produced by the students at a venue off school grounds.

In June 2013, the superintendent of schools in Everett, Massachusetts eliminated all academic drama programs at the school, citing content in student written plays presented earlier in the year. His objections included references to sex and drinking, and one actor dropping his pants to reveal underwear.

Rent, book, music, and lyrics by Jonathan Larson. Multiple cancellations, most recently in November 2013, when the principal of Trumbull High School in Trumbull, Connecticut canceled a planned spring 2014 production. After a concerted campaign by students and

parents, the musical was restored and went on as scheduled. Productions of *Rent* were canceled in Newport Beach, California; Bridgeport, West Virginia; Red Wing, Minnesota; suburban Dallas, and other locations in 2008-09. Administrators generally cited language and what they consider to be inappropriately mature content. In the California case, it was widely reported that the principal at Corona Del Mar High School canceled the production because of the musical's treatment of "prostitution and homosexuality."

In December 2012, at Loveland (Ohio) High School, a drama director was fired subsequent to her production of *Legally Blonde*, a musical the school had approved. The administration ultimately said the production was too racy.

In February 2011, the Waterbury (Connecticut) Arts Magnet High School's production of August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* was canceled while in rehearsals due to the play's repeated use of a racial epithet. After effective student advocacy and a pledge from Yale Repertory Theatre to run educational programs at the school to put the play and its language in context, the play was restored and produced with a slight delay in schedule.

Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You, by Christopher Durang. In November, 2008, Southeast Missouri State University offered ticket refunds to any audience members who were offended by the Durang play—and more significantly, pledged to review its policies on the selection of plays for season subscriptions—after a wealthy donor objected volubly that the satire "ridicule[d] and scorn[ed] the Christian religion." As it happens, the school's theatre is named after the complainant, and her letter to the president of the university was published as an op-ed piece in the local paper, which is owned by her family.

The Tender Yellow Sky, by Tim Milhorn. Milhorn, a veteran teacher at Orland (California) High School who has frequently written plays for production by his students, was six weeks into rehearsals of this new title in the fall of 2008 when the school district superintendent announced the show was canceled. School officials said they were concerned that the play's exploration of teenage suicide might cause some students to consider killing themselves.

Higher Ground, a play about bullying written by Portland, Oregon drama teacher Jennie Brown for her students at Sherwood Middle School, was canceled three days before the scheduled performance in February 2008. School officials said the script's treatment of bullying, racism, homophobia, and intimidation was too mature for the students. Ultimately the play was performed at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts and the school's principal and district superintendent told the school board they were sorry for the way they had handled the matter.

Blithe Spirit, by Noel Coward, at South Walton High School in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, canceled by the county board of education after community complaints that the play might "encourage exploration of witchcraft and the occult" and undermine students' commitments to monogamous relationships. The production was moved off campus to nearby Seaside Repertory Theatre.

Catcalls, a short play by Peter Keahey, a student at Yellow Springs (Ohio) High School.

When administrators demanded changes in some of the dialogue a few hours before a scheduled February, 2008 performance, Keahey refused, and the cast and crew read a letter denouncing censorship to the audience instead of performing the play. *Catcalls* was later performed at a theatre space on the campus of Antioch College.

And Then There Were None, by Agatha Christie. Lakota East High School in suburban Cincinnati canceled a November, 2007 production of the play on the basis of an NAACP complaint that the mystery had once had a racially insensitive title. (First called *Ten Little Indians in the United States*, the play was based on a novel that was published in England under a title that substituted a racial epithet for "Indians.") Two days later, the principal's decision was reversed by the school board and the production went on.

Voices in Conflict, a piece adapted from the writings of American veterans of the Iraq War by students at Wilton (Connecticut) High School. A scheduled April 2007 performance was canceled by the school's principal, who said the script did not present a "balanced view of the war." Wilton theatre teacher Bonnie Dickinson was invited to bring her students to perform the piece at two Manhattan theatres, The Culture Project and the Public Theatre, the following June.

The Vagina Monologues, by Eve Ensler. Three students were suspended from John Jay High School in Cross River, New York after reading a selection of the play during a March, 2007 open mic session at the school. The suspension was later overturned after the playwright personally intervened.

The Crucible, by Arthur Miller, and *Grease*, by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey. A production of the Miller play scheduled for Fulton (Missouri) High School in the spring of 2006 was preemptively canceled by the school's principal after community complaints about "immoral behavior" in an earlier production of the retro musical. In a statement, the principal said he had canceled *The Crucible* "to avoid additional scrutiny that had already occurred as a result of the fall production of *Grease*."

Bang Bang You're Dead, by William Mastrosimone. "Too violent," according to East Guernsey, Ohio school officials in September, 2005.

Godspell, by Stephen Schwartz and John-Michael Tebelak. "A breach of church-state separation," said the same administrators. The two teachers involved in the drama program at East Guernsey's Buckeye Trail High School resigned their unpaid positions as drama club



Specimen district policies on play selection

From Miami and Northern Virginia, two sharply different approaches

Miami-Dade County, Florida

Loudoun County, Virginia

In Miami, a hands-off approach

The Miami-Dade County school system has a unique policy guideline on play selection that strongly endorses the student's right to free expression and places all of the responsibility for choosing scripts for production on the teacher's desk. Provided she stays away from plays that venture into any of four areas of unprotected speech (obscenity, defamation, material that is likely to be disruptive of school activities, or material that breaches the separation between church and state) a Miami-Dade theatre educator is empowered to select her school's repertory without administrative review. Principals are specifically enjoined from exercising prior restraint—that is, they cannot block production of a play unless it violates one of the unprotected speech guidelines—and from disciplining a teacher or student who has operated within the bounds of the policy.

Here's the text of the policy, known as "Guideline 28: Student Theatrical Performances."

Current practices and procedures

The Miami-Dade County School Board recognizes student theatrical performances to be essential to the establishment and maintenance of an atmosphere on campus that fosters open discussion, intellectual, cultural, and artistic exchanges, and freedom of expression.

It is, therefore, the policy of Miami-Dade County Public Schools that theatre arts students shall be afforded protection against censorship.

Such freedom does not extend to the following four classifications of materials that are considered unprotected speech because they are prohibited by law or not protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution (see section B for legal definitions):

1. Obscene as to minors;
2. Defamatory, including libel and/or slander;
3. Materially and substantially disruptive of school activities [as defined in the Supreme Court decision *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*]
4. Infringes on "separation of church and state."

Procedures

A. School/District-Sponsored Performances and/or Productions

1. Students who work on official student performances and/or productions, i.e., those sponsored by the school or district, will:



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- a. determine that the content of the student performance and/or production does not fall within any of the categories of unprotected speech, as set forth in section B. All other content is considered appropriate and shall not be censored;
- b. have the right to form and express their own opinions on controversial issues without jeopardizing their relations with the teachers, advisors, or administrators, provided, however, that their expression does not fall within any of the categories of unprotected speech, as set forth in section B; and
- c. consult with legal resources, local and national, in any case where the legality of content is questioned, with the understanding that the final resolution of disputes will rest with the teacher or advisor.

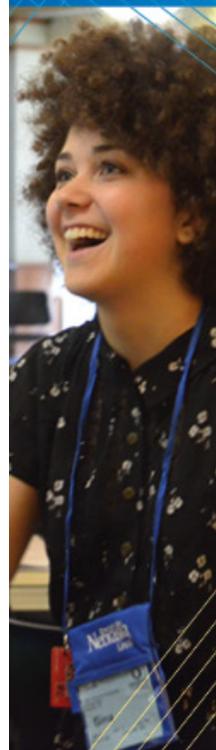
2. Theatre arts teachers and/or advisors to official student performances and/or productions will:

- a. guide students to an understanding of the nature, function, and ethics of free artistic expression;
- b. nurture among students a realization and vision that encompasses intelligent choices, a focused and unified production, and a central concept based on cultural, artistic, and educational growth;
- c. function as liaisons between staff and students to ensure full communication of administrative guidelines by:
 - (1) advising students of their right to perform without censorship or prior administrative review with the understanding that their expression shall not fall within any of the areas of unprotected speech, as set forth in section B;
 - (2) advising school officials that it is the duty of the institution to allow full and vigorous freedom of expression, with the understanding that students will not present material that falls within any of the areas of unprotected speech; and
 - (3) consulting with students, staff, and legal resources on questions regarding the legality of content before making any final determinations.
- d. be accessible to students who may seek assistance;
- e. not act as censors, except where performances and/or productions contain material that falls within the areas of unprotected speech, as set forth in section B; and
- f. ensure that theatrical productions are grade level appropriate.

3. School administrators will:

- a. communicate to the theatre arts teacher and/or advisor and theatre arts students any district guidelines that may affect student performances and/or productions;
- b. be aware of the most current court rulings as they relate to free speech;
- c. support the First Amendment rights of students and the efforts of theatre arts teachers and/or advisors to guarantee those rights in their daily work with performances and/or productions;
- d. communicate to other members of the school community the rights of theatre arts students to examine, explore, and express themselves through student performances and/or productions;
- e. exercise no prior review;
- f. not terminate, transfer, or remove a person from his/her theatre arts teaching position or advisorship for failure to exercise content control over student performances and/or productions or otherwise suppress the rights of free expression of theatre arts students, except in cases involving the endorsement of material whose content falls within the areas of unprotected speech, as set forth in section B; and

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g. not impose academic disciplinary action upon theatre arts students, except in cases involving material whose content violates the principles set forth in section B.

B. Definitions—unprotected speech

The following are the [four] classifications of speech that are prohibited, or not protected, by the First Amendment. Use of the following during a performance and/or production, may subject the user to legal and/or official school action:

1. Material that has content that is “obscene as to minors.” “Minor” includes any person under the age of eighteen. “Obscene as to minors” is defined as follows:

a. where the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the performance and/or production, taken as a whole, appeals to a minor’s prurient interest;

b. where the performance and/or production depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct such as actual or simulated sexual intercourse (normal or deviate), masturbation, excretory functions, and actual lewd exhibition of genitalia; and

c. where the performance and/or production, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

2. Material that has content that is “defamatory.” “Defamatory” is defined as the depiction of false unprivileged communication about an individual which injures that person’s reputation in the community or good name. If the depiction is written, it is libelous. If it is spoken, it is slander.

a. If the false depiction is about a “public figure” or “public official,” as defined below, then, in order to constitute defamation, the false depiction must have been presented “with actual malice,” i.e., that the theatre arts student knew that the depiction was false, or that the depiction was presented with reckless disregard for the truth without trying to verify the truthfulness of the presented depiction.

(1) A public official is a person who holds an elected or appointed public office.

(2) A public figure includes the following persons: one who has general fame and notoriety in the community; one who has voluntarily injected himself or herself into a public controversy in order to influence the resolution of the issues involved; and one who is an involuntary public figure and who is directly affected by the actions of the other public officials.

(3) School employees are considered to be public officials or public figures in depictions concerning their school-related activities.

b. If the false depiction concerns a private individual, then, in order to constitute defamation, the false depiction must have been presented willingly or negligently, i.e., the theatre arts students failed to exercise the care that a reasonably prudent person would exercise regarding the truth of the depiction.

c. Notwithstanding the preceding, under “the fair comment rule,” a student is free to express an opinion on matters of public interest and the student enjoys the privilege of criticizing the performance of school employees, provided the comment is free from actual malice.

3. Material that has content that will cause “a material and substantial disruption of school activities.”

a. Disruption is defined as: student rioting; unlawful seizures of property; destruction of property; widespread shouting or boisterous conduct; or substantial student participation in a school boycott; sit-in; stand-in; walkout; or other related form of activity. Material that stimulates heated discussion or debate does not constitute the type of disruption prohibited.

b. In order for a student performance and/or production to be considered disruptive, there must exist specific facts upon which it would be reasonable to predict that a clear and present likelihood of an immediate, substantial, material disruption of normal school activity would occur if the production and/or performance were presented. Undifferentiated fear or apprehension of disturbance is not enough to overcome the right to freedom of expression.

c. In determining whether a student performance and/or production is disruptive, consideration must be given to the context of the presentation as well as the content of the material. In this regard, consideration should be given to the past experiences of the school in dealing with:

(1) similar material;

(2) supervising the students;

(3) current events that influence student attitudes and behavior; and

(4) instances of actual or threatened disruption prior to or contemporaneously with the presentation of the student performance and/or publication in question.

d. School personnel must act to protect the safety of advocates of unpopular viewpoints.

4. Material that infringes on "separation of church and state." The First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, also contains the following clause: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Under the doctrine of separation of church and state, certain religious activities, such as proselytizing, have been held to be unconstitutional if conducted within the context of a school-sponsored activity.

In Loudoun County, even the playbill art gets reviewed

The Miami-Dade County schools policy on play selection and this one from Loudoun County, Virginia represent the opposite poles of approaches to the question of whether the theatre educator or the administration should be responsible for the school repertory.

Theatrical presentations

Loudoun County Public Schools administrative guidelines are designed to support drama presentations that challenge, nurture, and extend students' skills while adhering to the basic educational mission of teaching students boundaries of socially appropriate behavior, the rights and responsibilities of the exercise of free speech, and the importance of taking into consideration the sensibilities of the community. The drama sponsor has the primary responsibility and the principal has the final authority for ensuring that this policy is followed.

To ensure that these criteria are met, drama sponsors should follow this protocol:

1. The drama sponsor will present a proposed play to the principal at least six weeks before any auditions are held or technical crews chosen. The final decision regarding a play's production will not be announced to the student body until it has been cleared by the principal.

2. When the drama sponsor presents a proposal to the principal, a discussion will be held as to the play's appropriateness. The discussion should allow consideration of:

a. the educational value of producing the play;

b. whether modes of expression expose minors to vulgar, indecent, lewd, or offensive language or acts.

3. The thematic content of a play should be appropriate to the emotional maturity of the target audience.

4. Plays with vulgar or lewd acts should not be presented.

5. Theatrical productions involving obscenity or advocating the commission of illegal acts or the violation of school rules or policies shall not be permitted.

6. The version of a script presented to the principal is the version to be performed. If modifications are made to an established script, they will be presented to the principal before the script is approved.
7. If the play is written by a student, the script must be completed before it is submitted for review. If modifications to a student script are made, the principal will be informed of these modifications so that they may be reviewed prior to the performance.
8. A principal may convene an advisory panel to discuss a play. If the work is student-generated, the student may be added to this panel. This will be an advisory panel only. The final decision on the play's production will be the principal's.
9. Once a play has been approved by the principal for production, a brief summary of the play will be posted on the school's home page.
10. Drama productions presented publicly will be videotaped unless prohibited by copyright law. All performances of student-written plays will be videotaped.
11. All play programs, including artwork, will be submitted for the principal's review. The program will be in a traditional format.

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Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

Alabama

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play, Studio Play, DI, etc.**
- Association Running the Contest: **Alabama Conference of Theatre**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
All work must be suitable for that school's community standards. All student behavior and conduct must also abide by the school's community standards as well as local laws
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

Alaska

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Arizona

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Arkansas

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Arkansas

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

California

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Colorado

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Connecticut

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **Connecticut Drama Association Play Festival**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

- Association Running the Contest: **Connecticut Drama Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**

Florida

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play Festival Competition**
- Association Running the Contest: **Florida Theatre Conference**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
High school division requires entrants to mark if a play contains adult content, but does not give guidelines as to what constitutes adult content.
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

Georgia

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **Georgia High School Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
Principals must review the school's play and sign the statement on the "One Act Play Information Sheet" stating that the presentation is in good taste for high school students, and is acceptable for the morals of that community
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

- What are the sanctions? None

Hawaii

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

Idaho

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **Idaho High School Activities Association Drama Tournament**
- Association Running the Contest: **IHSAA**
- Established rules regarding Standards: No
- School administrator approve the play for performance No
- The Rule:
Principals must approve all material their students will present at district and state competition in drama and speech. Students will not be permitted to compete at district or state drama unless this signed statement is received prior to the start of the tournament.

"Material presented shall be appropriate for use in all levels of competition and for public performance by high school students. Every precaution should be taken to insure that no questionable material is selected. Use of profane, vulgar, harassing or discriminatory language and/or subject matter is not appropriate."
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **Contest Official**
- What are the sanctions? **Disqualification**

Illinois

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

Indiana

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

Iowa

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **Iowa High School Speech Association All-State Festival**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

- Association Running the Contest: Iowa High School Speech Association
- Established rules regarding Standards: No
- School administrator approve the play for performance No
- The Rule:
IHSA rule on material and language
VIII. TOURNAMENT RULES
 - A. **Material: Material presented by all contesting groups shall be appropriate for public performance by high school students.**
 1. **Material which is inappropriate for public performance by high school students will not be tolerated. The principal is required to see and approve both the selection and performance of all material including substitute material, to be used by contestants from the member school in the contest series.**
 2. **IHSA By-law 6.010 will be applied in the event contestants utilize material which, upon investigation by the Executive Director, is determined to be inappropriate. By-law 6.010 states: Any violation of the Constitution and/or By-laws, Terms and Conditions, IHSA Policies and Guidelines, and/or other rules of the Association, shall be reported to the Executive Director, who shall have authority to investigate all alleged violations. The findings of the investigation shall be made known to the school (or schools), person (or persons), alleged to have committed violation.**

The Executive Director shall then have full authority to invoke penalties against such school or persons found to have committed violations. Penalties shall include, but not be limited to, written warning or reprimand or requisite affirmation corrective action. Failure to take the corrective action required by any penalty shall be the basis for further action up to and including suspension and/or expulsion.

Note that these provisions include possible penalties against the school or individual persons found to have committed violations. This means that competitors, coaches, directors, and/or principals may be penalized directly for the use of inappropriate material in the IHSA Contests. A performance (language or action) which is a literal, symbolic or colloquial expression describing or naming anything which is profane and/or vulgar, whether or not suited to a specific character being portrayed, IS ALWAYS CONSIDERED INAPPROPRIATE!
 3. **Use of Inappropriate Material. If, in the opinion of any contest judge, material which is performed for his/her adjudication is**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

inappropriate for public performance by a high school student, he/she may rank the performance down. Judges shall explain their opinions and actions in written critiques, and the contest manager shall forward a copy of the critiques to the IHSA office.

- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **Judges**
- What are the sanctions? **Disqualification Reprimand**

Kansas

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Louisiana

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Maine

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **Maine Drama Festival**
- Association Running the Contest: **Maine Principal's Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
“Script selections should be reflective of the maturity level of the performers and in keeping with the family-type audience that is usually in attendance. Directors and principals must be sensitive to the appropriateness of their script choices, particularly when another host school is providing your venue. Principals and directors who choose scripts with language or situations that could offend audiences at a host school should consider seriously the literary value of their choice. In addition to script considerations, use of props and the onstage actions of the actors and actresses during a performance should not reflect gratuitous or inappropriate sexual content. Directors should inform their Host Directors if their performance contains sensitive material that might warrant a note in the program or a pre-show announcement to audience members.”
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

Massachusetts

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **Massachusetts One-Act Play Contest**
- Association Running the Contest: **Massachusetts Educational Theatre Guild**
- Established rules regarding Standards: No
- School administrator approve the play for performance No
- The Rule:
**"STRONG SUBJECT MATERIAL OR LANGUAGE
If a production contains subject material, stage business or language that might not be appropriate for a general audience, the participating director must add a disclaimer to his/her program page.**

A play selected for entry must be approved by the participating school's principal as indicated by his/her signature on the Entry Form."
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule No one
- What are the sanctions? None

Michigan

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

Minnesota

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **One-Act Play Festival**
- Association Running the Contest: **Minnesota State High School League**
- Established rules regarding Standards: No
- School administrator approve the play for performance No
- The Rule:
"Directors are expected to select and adjust subject matter, language, and gesture to local standards. The play is a representative of the school and community that support the activity, and it should reflect their standards. Be reminded that plays are seen by students younger than high school age. A statement certifying that the contest production is representative of the

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

school and community standards in its use of subject matter, language, and gesture must be submitted to the Manager of the first level of MSHSL One Act Play competition by the participating School Principal or Superintendent and Director.

This certified form must be submitted to represent the school at ALL levels of competition for which the school qualifies, though production modifications may be made to reflect critiques received.”

- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule No one...
- What are the sanctions? None

Mississippi

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **One-Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **Mississippi Theatre Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: No
- School administrator approve the play for performance No

Missouri

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **Missouri State High School Activities Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: No
- School administrator approve the play for performance No
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule No one
- What are the sanctions? None

Montana

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

Nebraska

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **Play Production Contest**
- Association Running the Contest: **Nebraska School Activities Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: No
- School administrator approve the play for performance Checks
- The Rule:
Play Production content has been carefully examined, and the performances are approved for presentation by the students of our school. The school also takes responsibilities for royalty payments and permission granted from the author when required.

Standards. Directors shall review materials for content that may not be acceptable in a high school educational setting (i.e.: graphic sexuality/violence; obscene language, actions or scenes; and plagiarism). The administration of the school in conjunction with the director shall ensure that the play and requirements are in compliance with the educational mission of the school. The signed Review Form serves to certify that the materials presented have been carefully examined and reviewed for presentation. Nothing in these standards is intended to permit or encourage censorship on the basis of topic or viewpoint. The NSAA supports academic standards and academic freedom."

- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule No one
- What are the sanctions? None

Nevada

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

New Hampshire

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

New Mexico

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **New Mexico Activities Association**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**

New York

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

North Carolina

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **High School Play Festival**
- Association Running the Contest: **North Carolina Theatre Conference**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
"NCTC does not have rules regarding adult content, but we encourage you to select age-appropriate works so that your fellow educators would not need to get parental consent for their students to watch your play. "
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

North Dakota

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **One-Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **North Dakota High School Activities Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**

Ohio

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Oklahoma

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

- Name of the Contest: **One Act**
 - Association Running the Contest: **Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association**
 - Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
 - School administrator approve the play for performance **Yes**
 - The Rule:

The play presented in the regional and state contests must be void of profane language, vulgar gestures, nudity and obscenesenes. The play must meet the above requirements. Use of profanity, vulgarity, nudity, obscenity, and hate speech may result in lowered ranking or disqualification by the judges and a protest filed with the tournament director. It is the school's responsibility to make arrangements with the author or publisher for the right to use the play selected and to pay any royalty which may be due. Sponsoring institutions and officials shall in no case be held responsible for any irregularities that may occur.
7. **Protest Procedure**
 - a) **Protest must be filed with the contest manager within 15 minutes of the conclusion of the final show.**
 - b) **A protest may be filed by a coach or a judge citing the specific violation(s) in writing.**
 1. **At Regional and State One Act play contest a protest will be handled in the following way:**
 - 1) **The contest manager will contact the OSSAA representative. The OSSAA representative will contact**
 - 2) **two (2) impartial committee members. This committee will render a decision.**
 2. **After review, the contest manager will announce the decision to the coach.**
 3. **Applicable penalties will be imposed.**
 4. **All protest forms/Improper Performance forms will be available to involved parties at the time of protest.**
 5. **Protest involving a Report For Allegations Of Improper Performance must complete speech Form Q and**
 1. **file with protest. All other protests should use Form P.**
 6. **All forms will be mailed or faxed to the OSSAA the Monday following the contest by the contest**
 1. **manager.**
 7. **The OSSAA will establish penalties, if any, after a review, concerning the issue.**
 1. **Penalties That May Be Imposed**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

Individual, Coach, Team, School

1. **Warning: Private or Public Reprimand:** A private reprimand may be oral or in writing in which the penalties shall be published in the OSSAA Newsletter. The school or individual may continue to compete during this period.
 2. **Probation:**
 3. **Public Reprimand:** A public reprimand shall be in writing and the penalty published in the OSSAA Newsletter. A school or individual shall forfeit all rankings and awards earned at the contest. The school or individual may not continue to compete during this period until the school has taken action to show the OSSAA corrective measures have been taken.
 4. **Suspension:** A school, individual and/or the team shall forfeit all rankings, and awards earned at the contest.
 5. **The school, individual and/or the team may not participate in OSSAA One-Act Play or Speech and Debate activities, not to exceed one year.**
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **Committee and Contest Official**
 - What are the sanctions? **Disqualification Reprimand See above**

Oregon

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Pennsylvania

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **One-Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **Pennsylvania High School Speech League**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
High school division requires entrants to mark if a play contains adult content, but does not give guidelines as to what constitutes adult content.
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

Rhode Island

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

South Carolina

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest No

South Dakota

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play Festival Competition**
- Association Running the Contest: **South Dakota High School Activities Association One Act Play Contest**
- Established rules regarding Standards: Yes
- School administrator approve the play for performance No
- The Rule:
Section 1. CONTEST PLAYS SELECTED. Plays used in competition may be selected at the discretion of the director. They may be written as one-acts or may be cuttings from longer plays. In choosing the contest play the director should pick a play with literary merit. The play selected should not offend the moral standards of the community nor be in bad taste.

Directors should be especially sensitive to the creation of scenes which depict situations of questionable taste or involve the use of offensive language, including cursing or profanity. Audiences at contests will be quite diverse and involve varying standards of community acceptance in regards to moral issues.

Article VII, Section 4 creates a penalty for plays that "offend the moral standards of the community" or are in "bad taste." Judges will be instructed that they are to rate and/or rank a play lower if, in their opinion, the cast did not abide by this regulation.

- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **Judges**
- What are the sanctions? **Receive a lower ranking if judge chooses**

Tennessee

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play Festival**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

- Association Running the Contest: **Tennessee Theatre Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**

Texas

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play Contest**
- Association Running the Contest: **UIL**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **Yes**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
Standards. Directors shall eliminate or reject profane references to a deity and obscene language, actions or scenes from the approved production. The administration of the producing school shall assure that the director complies with these requirements and that the play does not offend the moral standards of the community. When a script and the staged production are examined and approved by the administration of the producing school, the production is eligible for presentation at any contest site. The Standards Compliance Form serves to certify that the play and production have been carefully examined and approved for presentation. The UIL's Play Appraisal Committee may eliminate language, actions or scenes as a condition for approval of plays not on the approved lists.
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

Utah

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **Utah High School Activities Association Theatre- One Act Plays**
- Association Running the Contest: **UHSAA Theatre**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

- School administrator approve the play for performance **Checked**
- The Rule:
Administrative Awareness & Play Royalties: Form 22 - All performance material for both individual events and plays must be approved by individual school principals who must sign Form 22. Form 22 must be submitted to the region and classification representatives at the same time as the royalty verification. This form is available on the forms page of the UHSAA website. Schools which fail to submit Form 22 may be subject to penalties imposed by the UHSAA.

The meet director will be required to put a disclaimer in the one act play programs for appropriate material content. This disclaimer should also be posted in individual event competition areas.

- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

Virginia

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **Virginia High School State Theatre Festival**
- Association Running the Contest: **Virginia High School League**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **No**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **Checked**
- The Rule:
101-1-2 The choice of the script is important. Schools should select material which is honest in its fundamental concept, which is suited to the emotional development of the cast and which is handled with taste and restraint. Content should be appropriate to the audience for which it is performed and in support of contemporary community standards. Any editing of published work must be honest to the original text. It is important that coaches review questionable content, language, use of firearms or other weapons or use of tobacco or other drug with the principal prior to performance. The principal's signature on the entry form will indicate approval of material to be performed. Competition directors will not disqualify a selection approved by the principal unless editing or performance decisions significantly alter the selection after approval has been given.

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

(In Judge's section-)

Do not consider the choice of the play in terms of personal tastes—all forms of theatre are permitted, and the question is what they do with what they have chosen. Is this play appropriate for this cast? Questions of staging and appropriate content are determined locally, and if a principal approves it, we do not question it.

- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **No one**
- What are the sanctions? **None**

Washington

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

West Virginia

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **No**

Wisconsin

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest **Yes**
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **Wisconsin High School Forensics Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **Yes**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **No**
- The Rule:
In its most obvious form, ethics is about honesty. In the theatre some of the ethical issues may include dealing with racial, ethnic, sexual, or cultural stereotypes, script cutting/alteration, script duplication, and royalty payment. As theatre educators we must address these issues in an open and honest way. We need to be aware of the ethics we are modeling for those we seek to educate.

This was found embedded in an essay within the drama handbook

- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **Content Official**
- What are the sanctions? **Disqualification**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

Wyoming

- Host a State-Wide Play Contest Yes
- Name of the Contest: **One Act Play**
- Association Running the Contest: **Wyoming High School Activities Association**
- Established rules regarding Standards: **Yes**
- School administrator approve the play for performance **Yes**

- The Rule:

8.4.3 CHOICE OF MATERIAL:

It is strongly recommended that Directors use good judgment in selection of the play or material that is high school appropriate. Judges may be offended and students may pay a consequence for this choice.

Obscenity Clause and Procedure for Grievance

It is up to each school's administration to determine that each production brought to the Wyoming State Drama Competition does not offend the moral standards of their community and that obscenity has been eliminated.

If the script has been read and the staged production viewed and approved by the administrator of the producing school, the production is eligible for presentation at any contest site.

- 1. Each school's administrative team* must affirm this review when they sign the "Community Standards Compliance Form." If the play cannot be cut to meet community standards, then the play should not be selected for contest use. It is the duty of each director and their administrator to make a responsible selection for the students you work with and the community you represent. Make sure that you discuss the choice of script and questionable language and business with your administrators.**
 - ❖ administrative team may include principal, activity directors, and/or school board. Because schools differ in size and personnel, we have left this term unspecific. However, this term usually applies to principals, superintendents, activity directors, and/or school board.**
- 2. Directors who have secured approval from their administration as specified on their "Community Standards Compliance Form" may also choose to submit an e-mail WEST if they feel their material requires a preface or caution to viewers. This will be added to the list serve as a way for other directors to decide if such material is something they wish their students to attend. Although such disclosures are NOT required, establishing communication among directors is appreciated**

Texas UIL's Survey on State-Wide One Act Contests

in an attempt to create a safe and educational environment for all schools and guests.

3. In the event that WEST or WHSAA is contacted regarding "obscene material," it is proposed that the following procedure be followed. Complaints must be submitted via e-mail to the WEST Board within two (2) weeks of the State Competition
- Who hears the complaint or enforces the rule **Committee Contest Official**
 - What are the sanctions? **Disqualification**



Statement on Freedom of Expression

This document was created under the auspices of the Coalition for Theatre Education, a collaboration among the leadership of the Educational Theatre Association, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. It is intended to provide guidelines and support for theatre educators in the play selection process and policy guidance for school and district administrators concerning issues of free expression in school theatre. It was endorsed by the governing boards of the three constituent organizations during the summer of 2008.

Theatre educators and their students work at the confluence of two of the foundational values that support a free society: freedom of expression and the unfettered pursuit of knowledge. Yet too often educational theatre is confronted with external efforts to draw boundaries defining acceptable content. Where these constraints are undertaken without a sound artistic or educational purpose, they are acts of censorship that have the effect of stifling free expression and stunting the educational process.

The undersigned organizations affirm their support for the following standards for free expression in educational theatre. For the purposes of this document, educational theatre is defined as any theatre performance or learning activity in an educational setting for students in kindergarten through post-graduate study.

Standards for freedom of expression in educational theatre

1. Theatre programs operating in a school, college, university, or other educational setting should provide diverse productions, teaching activities, and support materials that examine the spectrum of human experience and present a range of points of view concerning the issues and problems of our times. No theatre production should be altered or canceled because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

2. Scripts, textbooks, and other production and educational materials should be selected for their capacity to inform, educate, enlighten, and engage the interest of the school theatre community. In no case should materials that meet educational or artistic criteria be excluded on the basis of the race, gender, nationality, or sexual orientation, or the social, political, or religious views, of the author or another creative participant.

3. The right of free expression does not encompass a right to make changes in another artist's work without permission. Educators, administrators, and directors have an obligation to provide the public with truthful access to the complete work of art. Educators and administrators should be aware that selective censorship or editing of a script without the consent of the author is a violation of copyright law.

4. Student writing for the theatre should be subject to the same standards and protections with respect to free expression as any other work that is considered for production or classroom use.

5. The right of an individual to admission to any theatre production, workshop, or class must not be abridged on the basis of race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, social or political views, or disability. Where admission restrictions on the basis of age are deemed necessary, such restrictions should be reasonable and consistent with community standards.

6. Educational theatres should cooperate with those persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgement of free artistic expression.

Freedom of expression in college and university theatres

At the post-secondary level, the principles of academic freedom are well established. We endorse the 1990 policy statement on academic freedom and artistic expression by the American Association of University Professors, which states in part that “artistic expression in the classroom, studio, and workshop... merits the same assurance of academic freedom that is accorded to other scholarly and teaching activities. Since faculty and student artistic presentations to the public are integral to their teaching, learning, and scholarship, these presentations no less merit protection.” (See Appendix A for the full text.)

We further endorse the 1997 report of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education’s Ethics Task Force, which reads in part:

As theatre educators, we espouse freedom of speech, equal access, and diversity. We seek to create responsible learning environments in which any idea may be explored. We insist that these learning environments are sensitive and responsive to differences in religion, race, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, or sexual orientation. We expect to foster engagement that leads to awareness, understanding and respect of self and other, and courage to push boundaries in learning about and making theatre.

Guidelines for administrators

We make the following observations and recommendations regarding “best practices” for administrators with respect to educational theatre.

1. We urge schools and school districts to establish policies recognizing the regularly appointed theatre faculty as the most qualified and appropriate people to make decisions regarding play selection, casting, and other aspects of theatre programming.

2. We acknowledge that some school administrators will reserve the right to review faculty members’ repertory choices. Where such review is desired, we encourage the establishment of policies designed to prevent arbitrary restrictions on content and to ensure that prior restraint of a theatre production is exercised rarely and only as a last administrative resort. Administrators who seek to exercise prior restraint should be required to meet a burden of proof that the proposed production is inconsistent with the theatre program’s established artistic and educational objectives. The policy should also constrain administrators from retaliation against a theatre educator on the basis of a repertory choice. (For a specimen district policy on prior restraint of theatre productions, (see Appendix B.)

3. When faced with community objections or challenges to a proposed theatre production, institutions should consider these concerns according to their own established policies regarding other curricular matters such as selection of course readings.

We further encourage administrators to accept these additional responsibilities with respect to free artistic expression in their theatre programs:

- Making a commitment to hiring competent, qualified theatre educators.
- Maintaining an atmosphere of free inquiry.
- Supporting students in their exploration of a wide range of issues.
- Becoming familiar with the materials and practices of educational theatre.
- Promoting aesthetic education and artistic expression.
- Attending school performances.

Guidelines for theatre faculty and staff

In asserting a right to free expression in making artistic choices, theatre educators must be prepared to accept responsibility for these choices. Toward that end, we encourage all theatre faculty and staff to devote significant time and resources to the following goals:

1. Mastery of content (literature, history, criticism, skills, etc.) and the ability to articulate a philosophy of theatre and education to administrators, parents, and students.

2. The formulation of educational and artistic objectives for each play, scene, reading, and/or creative drama experience.

3. The development of workable techniques, activities, and materials relevant to the interests, abilities, and maturity of students.

EdTA Statement on Freedom of Expression

4. Regular communication regarding educational theatre activities and goals to students, school administration, and (where appropriate) parents. This may include providing students with instruction on educational and artistic reasons for inclusion of particular plays in the repertory, and discussion of considerations such as audience, technical capabilities, casting, and other factors that influence repertory choices.
5. Respect for works of dramatic art, which encompasses paying royalties as appropriate, complying with copyright law, and obtaining permission for text changes when required by contract or statute to do so.
6. A good-faith effort to inform administrators of potentially controversial issues well in advance of the scheduled production.
7. Consideration of community expectations and attitudes in the selection of study and performance materials.
8. Providing the community with information regarding the artistic and educational objectives of the theatre program.
9. Maintaining an environment in the classroom, rehearsal, and performance that promotes the free exchange and examination of ideas of social significance.

Additional concerns

The communal quality of the theatre experience makes it a powerful venue for engaging individuals who hold divergent views in a conversation about difficult questions and issues. The theatre educator can and should facilitate student and audience dialogues around the subject matter of a theatre production. This can be done by framing the issues in director's notes in the playbill and by arranging panel discussions, post-show audience talkbacks, lectures, community meetings, and other forums in connection with performances.

Finally, the right of free expression includes the right to refrain from speech or performance that is contrary to one's personal values. Theatre educators should be prepared to offer alternative performance opportunities, where practical, to accommodate students who have sincere and conscientious objections to performing specific material in a production. To prevent disruption of the production process, we recommend asking students to acknowledge that they have read the entire script before auditioning.

Portions of this text are adapted from "Freedom of Artistic Expression in Educational Theatre," published by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education in 1993.



Statement on Freedom of Expression

This document was created under the auspices of the Coalition for Theatre Education, a collaboration among the leadership of the Educational Theatre Association, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. It is intended to provide guidelines and support for theatre educators in the play selection process and policy guidance for school and district administrators concerning issues of free expression in school theatre. It was endorsed by the governing boards of the three constituent organizations during the summer of 2008.

Theatre educators and their students work at the confluence of two of the foundational values that support a free society: freedom of expression and the unfettered pursuit of knowledge. Yet too often educational theatre is confronted with external efforts to draw boundaries defining acceptable content. Where these constraints are undertaken without a sound artistic or educational purpose, they are acts of censorship that have the effect of stifling free expression and stunting the educational process.

The undersigned organizations affirm their support for the following standards for free expression in educational theatre. For the purposes of this document, educational theatre is defined as any theatre performance or learning activity in an educational setting for students in kindergarten through post-graduate study.

Standards for freedom of expression in educational theatre

1. Theatre programs operating in a school, college, university, or other educational setting should provide diverse productions, teaching activities, and support materials that examine the spectrum of human experience and present a range of points of view concerning the issues and problems of our times. No theatre production should be altered or canceled because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
2. Scripts, textbooks, and other production and educational materials should be selected for their capacity to inform, educate, enlighten, and engage the interest of the school theatre community. In no case should materials that meet educational or artistic criteria be excluded on the basis of the race, gender, nationality, or sexual orientation, or the social, political, or religious views, of the author or another creative participant.
3. The right of free expression does not encompass a right to make changes in another artist's work without permission. Educators, administrators, and directors have an obligation to provide the public with truthful access to the complete work of art. Educators and administrators should be aware that selective censorship or editing of a script without the consent of the author is a violation of copyright law.
4. Student writing for the theatre should be subject to the same standards and protections with respect to free expression as any other work that is considered for production or classroom use.
5. The right of an individual to admission to any theatre production, workshop, or class must not be abridged on the basis of race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, social or political views, or disability. Where admission restrictions on the basis of age are deemed necessary, such restrictions should be reasonable and consistent with community standards.
6. Educational theatres should cooperate with those persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgement of free artistic expression.

Freedom of expression in college and university theatres

At the post-secondary level, the principles of academic freedom are well established. We endorse the 1990 policy statement on academic freedom and artistic expression by the American Association of University Professors, which states in part that “artistic expression in the classroom, studio, and workshop... merits the same assurance of academic freedom that is accorded to other scholarly and teaching activities. Since faculty and student artistic presentations to the public are integral to their teaching, learning, and scholarship, these presentations no less merit protection.” (See Appendix A for the full text.)

We further endorse the 1997 report of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education’s Ethics Task Force, which reads in part:

As theatre educators, we espouse freedom of speech, equal access, and diversity. We seek to create responsible learning environments in which any idea may be explored. We insist that these learning environments are sensitive and responsive to differences in religion, race, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, or sexual orientation. We expect to foster engagement that leads to awareness, understanding and respect of self and other, and courage to push boundaries in learning about and making theatre.

Guidelines for administrators

We make the following observations and recommendations regarding “best practices” for administrators with respect to educational theatre.

1. We urge schools and school districts to establish policies recognizing the regularly appointed theatre faculty as the most qualified and appropriate people to make decisions regarding play selection, casting, and other aspects of theatre programming.

2. We acknowledge that some school administrators will reserve the right to review faculty members’ repertory choices. Where such review is desired, we encourage the establishment of policies designed to prevent arbitrary restrictions on content and to ensure that prior restraint of a theatre production is exercised rarely and only as a last administrative resort. Administrators who seek to exercise prior restraint should be required to meet a burden of proof that the proposed production is inconsistent with the theatre program’s established artistic and educational objectives. The policy should also constrain administrators from retaliation against a theatre educator on the basis of a repertory choice. (For a specimen district policy on prior restraint of theatre productions, (see Appendix B.)

3. When faced with community objections or challenges to a proposed theatre production, institutions should consider these concerns according to their own established policies regarding other curricular matters such as selection of course readings.

We further encourage administrators to accept these additional responsibilities with respect to free artistic expression in their theatre programs:

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