

Advisor/Mentor Manual

2025-2026



Mission:

To celebrate and amplify the voices of students from all backgrounds, ensuring that our community is a welcoming space for everyone. Our focus is:

- ✓ To be 100% student driven review process
- ✓ To be 100% student driven award recognition
- ✓ To provide exposure to diverse plays/musicals
- ✓ To promote student confidence
- ✓ To promote local community awareness
- ✓ To promote development of tomorrow's readers

Please take this Mentor Binder with you to Cappies Shows. Reference this binder frequently.

This manual provides rules and answers to frequently asked questions pertaining to the Greater Cincinnati Cappies

THE CAPPIES

The Cappies is an international learning program for theater and journalism students.

Students are trained as theater Critics and organized into Critics' teams. They attend other schools' plays and musicals and write reviews. Mentors (teachers) Lead Critic discussions and select the most accurate and well-written reviews which are then forwarded for publication.

At the end of the year, Critics serve as award judges and vote for award winners, which are presented at the annual Cappies Gala. Each program holds a Cappies Gala, where awards are presented.

The program is managed by a Governing Board, based in the National Capital Area. Each regional Cappies program is managed locally.

The Cappies International Mission Statement:

- *to provide a unique collaborative learning experience for high school theater students,*
- *to encourage, and advance the training of, student writers, performing artists, and technical crew*
- *to inspire creativity and critical thinking,*
- *to offer constructive critical feedback for student theatrical endeavors,*
- *to foster more community recognition of student achievement in theater arts, and*
- *to enhance, celebrate, and add excitement to high school theater across America.*

THE BASICS

Every participating school must have:

- An **Advisor** (to oversee critics and to ensure school compliance)
- One or more **Mentors** (to supervise critics, lead assigned discussions, and handle reviews)
- A **Show Director** (of the school's own Cappies-reviewed show)

(These functions can be done by the same teacher.)

As the ADVISOR/MENTOR/DIRECTOR, you are responsible for making sure your school follows the rules for your Cappies Show. Please read (and, when requested, respond to) Cappies emails. Please note: All Advisors and Mentors must complete background check and sign an Advisor/Mentor Agreement.

ADVISOR/MENTOR/DIRECTOR CHECKLISTS

There are 4 checklists in this binder: Advisor, Host, Editor Mentor, and Discussion Mentor. Please reference these as you prepare for your own show, as well as prior to and during your mentor assignments. Editor and Discussion Mentors should also follow any other documents and information provided at training, including timelines for critiques, how to select critiques for publication and guidelines for leading a show discussion. There is also a Board Member checklist for your reference.

ADVISOR Checklist

This is not an exhaustive list. Please consult your Binder for a more complete description of all Cappies school duties and expectations. As your school's Advisor, you are responsible for making sure your school follows the rules and guidelines of the Cappies Program.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR

- ☐ Consult with your school's Show Director concerning selection of your school's Critic Team, Lead Critic, Mentors, and Cappies Show.
- ☐ Choose your Critics and designate a Lead Critic, ensuring that all Cappies rules are followed
- ☐ Register your school for the Cappies Program and familiarize yourself with CIS
- ☐ Note all required training sessions for the Program and make sure that all the necessary people attend. Contact the Cappies Program Director for make-up training dates if necessary, and ensure everyone is properly trained
- ☐ Meet with your Lead Critic and discuss how you will work together to oversee the Critic Team, including show attendance and review writing
- ☐ Meet with your school's entire Critic Team. You and the Lead Critic should make sure the team is prepared for the year. Cover CIS access, your specific expectation, the Team's show schedule, etc.
- ☐ Along with your school's director and administration, make sure all necessary forms and paperwork are turned in on time

THROUGHOUT THE CAPPIES SHOW SEASON

- ☐ Remain in contact with the Lead Critic as the Critic Team attends shows and writes reviews, ensuring that all Cappies rules are followed
- ☐ Use CIS to monitor the Critics' show attendance and review submission
- ☐ Ensure attendance and review minimums are met
- ☐ Be aware of any brush-up training required by Cappies; make sure those who need to attend attend

PRIOR TO YOUR SCHOOL'S CAPPIES SHOW

- ☐ Meet with the Director and Booster parents and discuss all preparation for the show, ensuring that all Cappies rules are followed. Support your Director/Boosters as necessary

DURING YOUR SCHOOL'S CAPPIES SHOW

- ☐ Greet the Mentors and Board Members who attend the show, making sure they have everything they need
- ☐ Make certain the Cappies room remains private throughout the show, especially when discussion is taking place

AT THE END OF THE SEASON

- ☐ Confirm the voting eligibility of each member of your Critic Team via CIS and any communications from the Program Director
- ☐ Make sure your Lead Critic communicates with the Board to schedule the Team's voting time and that all Team members attend

TO PREPARE FOR THE GALA

- ☐ Monitor your email for communications from the Board concerning Gala requirements and preparation
- ☐ When nominations are announced, support your Show Director in communicating with students, reminding them that the goal of the Cappies Program is to celebrate Theatre among all the participating schools. The spirit with which the nominations are received by a cast and crew will depend in part on how you and the Show Director respond to them
- ☐ Work with your Show Director/Boosters to share information about the Gala and to arrange ticket ordering, including both nominee, cast, crew, and supporter tickets

HOSTING a Cappies Show Checklist

PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

- ☐ Provide a Cappies room for Critics and Mentors (make sure it isn't too far from the theater and can be secured for discussion)
- ☐ Arrange tables and seats for good discussion
- ☐ Make sure the appropriate number of seats are reserved for Critics and Mentors
- ☐ Provide free refreshments in the Cappies room
- ☐ Have enough completed Director's Packets copies (category eligibility, critics' choice, tech evidence, etc.) in the room for all Critics and Mentors no later than 45 minutes before curtain
- ☐ Have enough show programs in the room for all Critics and Mentors (provide at least 5 extra programs for the Board Member for voting at the end of the year)
- ☐ Remind your show director that they should be available to the critics after the show for 5 minutes to answer questions
- ☐ Ask the audience to allow Critics to leave the theater first at intermission and final curtain

AFTER THE SHOW

- ☐ Submit 5-10 photos of your show, with captions for each photo within 48 hours of your performance
- ☐ Submit a PDF of the program art and program
- ☐ Submit available headshots of Critics' Choice, Crew, and Critics (labeled)

Note: You should receive your reviews within 2 weeks of your performance.

EDITOR MENTOR Checklist

PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

- ___ Bring your mentor binder and a pen
- ___ Have a copy of the attendance list (you will receive via email) just in case

PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

- ___ Arrive 45 minute before the show
- ___ Ask if the Cappies room will be locked. If not, advise the Critics to keep valuables with them.
- ___ Help the Board Member take attendance

DURING INTERMISSION

- ___ Make sure the discussion does not start until no one from the host school is in the Cappies room.

AFTER THE SHOW

- ___ Make sure no one from the host school is in the Cappies room
- ___ For rule questions, consult the Award Category Guide (Board Member will help)
- ___ Confirm name spelling for Critics' Choices with the show program.
- ___ Help fill out a Critics' Choice form for Board, Show Director, and yourself
- ___ Take home a completed Critics' Choice form, with names spelled correctly
- ___ Take home a show program
- ___ Help Board Member collect signed Critics' Choice form from all critics
- ___ Remind students of review due date and time
- ___ Make sure the Cappies room is clean before leaving
- ___ Check to make sure all Critics have been picked up/left before you leave

AFTER REVIEWS ARE SUBMITTED

- ___ Log into CIS
- ___ Read all the reviews
- ___ Select and rank the top 10 reviews for publication (use the Editor Rubric)
- ___ Enter and save your ranks on CIS
- ___ Edit the top 10 reviews in the manner described in the Mentor Binder—double check spellings with the show program
- ___ Edit all reviews to make sure they follow rules of criticism (check the Mentor Binder)
- ___ Email admincin@cappies.org if any reviews fall below the 300 word limit and/or if any review contains severe negativity or negatively discusses a student by name
- ___ Within 48 hours of the critics' review submission deadline, submit your selections, ranks, and edits to CIS

DISCUSSION MENTOR Checklist

PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

- ☐ Research the show
- ☐ Prepare an icebreaker, etc.
- ☐ Bring your mentor binder and a pen

PRIOR TO SHOW

- ☐ Arrive 45 minutes before the curtain
 - ☐ As necessary, arrange tables and seats for good discussion
 - ☐ As critics arrive, mix them up so they are not sitting with their own critic team
 - ☐ Promptly 20 minutes before curtain, start the pre-show discussion and continue until you are asked to take your seats.
- Make sure you cover all the points as laid out in the Mentor Binder.
- ☐ Make sure critics receive background information on the show
 - ☐ Remind critics to show good decorum, to be careful what they say around other members of the audience, and to turn off cell phones, etc.

DURING INTERMISSION

- ☐ Start promptly 2 minutes after the end of Act One, and continue for not less than 10 minutes
- ☐ Lead a discussion in the manner described in your Mentor Binder with a focus on the tech of the show

AFTER THE SHOW

- ☐ Start discussion promptly 2 minutes after bows. Do not remain in the theater for any post-show ceremonies
- ☐ Discuss the show as described in your Mentor Binder for 10 minutes
- ☐ When the Show Director is ready, allow them 5 minutes to answer questions from the critics
- ☐ Lead the selection of Critics' Choices
- ☐ Ask critics to fill out the Critics' Choice Form—remind the students to complete the top portion, rankings for each category, and sign the form
- ☐ Help the Board Member collect Critics' Choice forms
- ☐ Make sure the Cappies room is clean before leaving
- ☐ Make sure all Critics have been picked up/left before you leave

BOARD MEMBER Checklist

PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

- ☐ 48-72 hours before the show, check in with the Show Director and/or School Advisor to make sure they understand paperwork requirements and see if they need anything
- ☐ Print out and bring to show the attendance email from CIS
- ☐ Be prepared to serve as either mentor in the event they no-show (make sure you have researched the show)
- ☐ If time permits, check in with the Discussion and Editor mentors 12-48 hours in advance to verify they are prepared and see if you can help with anything
- ☐ Bring your binder and a copy of the suggested Critics Choice for the show

PRIOR TO THE SHOW

- ☐ Arrive 60 minutes prior to curtain
- ☐ Verify the Director Pre-show Packet for Critics is complete with sufficient copies for each Critic attending
- ☐ Verify the physical evidence in the room satisfies all categories identified on the Packet for technical categories listed as eligible
- ☐ In the event the Packet or Evidence is missing, aggressively pursue remediation from the Director or any adult authority representing the presenting school; if remediation is not achieved by 45 minutes prior to curtain, the show is disqualified from those technical awards
- ☐ Introduce yourself to the mentors and critics as they arrive
- ☐ Take attendance; real-time entry in CIS is preferred
- ☐ Emphasize to students as they arrive: (1) they need to observe the physical evidence in the room for technical categories, and (2) they should be aware of the time the show will end to arrange for rides
- ☐ Enforce the timeline if needed (pre-show intro needs to start by 20 minutes prior to curtain)
- ☐ Take photos of the student discussion and share with Board member responsible for social media

AFTER THE SHOW

- ☐ Make sure the discussion mentor does NOT skip the discussion parts of the evening and go straight to voting
- ☐ Provide clarification for critics' choice rules when necessary
- ☐ Record and keep a copy of the completed Critics' Choice sheet; make sure they also get entered into CIS
- ☐ Make certain all critics know when their reviews are due prior to being dismissed
- ☐ Collect the Critics' Choice sheets. With the help of the Mentors, check that each sheet has the top filled out properly and that one sheet has been turned in by each critic
- ☐ Remind critics to keep their notes and programs to bring to voting
- ☐ Collect 5-8 shoe programs (to have available at voting)
- ☐ Make sure all critics have been picked up/left the school before you leave

SHOW SELECTION

In your school's application, you proposed a date and time for your Cappies show and gave some alternative dates and times. Each program has a timeframe for Cappies show dates, and each program has rules about the number of Cappies shows that can occur in the same time slot/on the same weekend.

Some Show Directors prefer to schedule Cappies shows for nights when small (non-sellout) audiences are expected, to help fill otherwise empty seats. Others prefer to have Cappies shows on nights when they expect large, enthusiastic audiences, whose response to the show they hope will energize the cast and, perhaps, impress the critics. Some prefer opening night, while others prefer to wait for a show or two to enable the cast and crew to become more comfortable with the show.

Choose whatever seems best for your auditorium limitations and show.

SHOW ELIGIBILITY

Your Cappies show must be at least 75 minutes long, of one scripted show—or two scripted shows with a similar theme. (No festival of one-acts, please.) If the show you're planning to do is lengthy, you may need to set an early start time. Under the rules, if a show has final bows that start after 10:30 PM, it can be disqualified from some awards. (The goal is to enable student critics to have a good post-show discussion and return home by midnight.) It helps to have an intermission of 15 minutes or more, to enable the critics to have a good mid-show discussion, but the rules allow exceptions to this.

The performing cast must be at least half drawn from students in grade 9 through 12. There can be younger or older cast members in the show, or helping with the orchestra or tech aspects, but this will affect qualification for awards.

ELIGIBILITY FOR AWARD CATEGORIES

The Cappies have 38 award categories that are determined by the votes of the critics. Each of these categories has eligibility rules, along with guidelines for the critics to use when watching and scoring shows. Please read these pages carefully. If you wish, you are welcome to share them with your cast and crew, so they will know what critics are being encouraged to observe or hear.

Before starting work on your Cappies show, please consult the Award Category Guide at the back of this binder. Pay particular attention to the eligibility rules for non-performing categories, like Costumes, Props, Choreography, Orchestra, Creativity, etc. If you wish to qualify your students for award consideration in those categories, you must provide information prior to the show. For your students to be eligible for the tech award categories, it's important to take care not to have too much adult participation.

Please read carefully, and complete, the Award Category Eligibility form.

THE COMPLETED ELIGIBILITY FORM AND ALL EVIDENCE FOR EACH ELIGIBLE TECHNICAL CATEGORY, MUST BE IN THE CAPPIE ROOM 60 MIN PRIOR TO CURTAIN IN ORDER FOR A CATEGORY TO BE CONSIDERED ELIGIBLE. COPIES OF THIS DOCUMENTATION CAN BE FOUND AT THE BACK OF THIS BINDER AND AT CINCICAP.COM

For each non-performing category that involves a group of more than four persons (like an orchestra), please provide a name for the group. **You can list no more than four individual names in any one category.** You may also list 3 names and the word “crew”. The list should look like this: name, name, name, crew

SHOW UPDATES AND SCHEDULE CHANGES

If your school application did not list the name of a Cappies show, please alert program officials as soon as you know its name. If, for any reason, including weather, your Cappies show is canceled—or if you learn that there is a substantial risk that your Cappies show may be canceled—you must inform the Program Director immediately.

SHOW PHOTOS AND HEADSHOTS

5-10 show photos with captions, and the photo waiver (found at the back of this binder), must be uploaded 48 hours after show closing. The Program Director may also ask your school to assist in regional publicity campaigns, for the Cappies or high school theater in general. If so, please work with your school's Show Director (and, perhaps, critics) in providing what the Program Director may request.

HOSTING A CAPPIES SHOW

Please plan for your Cappies show, and make sure you know what is expected. Each participating school is asked to designate a Parent Booster, and that person can help—as can your school's critic team.

A CAPPIES SHOW and TICKETS

During a curtain speech or other pre-show announcement, please introduce the Cappies and ask guests to allow Cappies to exit the theatre immediately at intermission and at the final curtain. This will allow the Cappies to start their discussions promptly. If you intend any post-show recognitions, please wait to start that until after the critics have left the theater. (Please include this in your announcement.) The critics may not take part in any post-show audience discussion of the Cappies show. If you plan any other special recognitions, whether at the start of the show or before intermission, please excuse the critics from those, as well.

Directors are asked to come to the Cappies room after the performance for a short Q&A session about ten minutes after the show. This is a chance for Cappies to ask questions about the production and clarify any confusion. If the director would like to speak to the Cappies prior to the performance, please do so. PLEASE, do not enter the room until you know the conversation has stopped.

Under the rules, your school is required to provide complimentary tickets to critics and mentors. Please rope off wherever the critics are going to sit, and make sure your ushers enforce this until the critics arrive. The minimum ticket allotment for Cappies of Greater Cincinnati is 50 seats. If your theatre/program can accommodate more Cappies than 50, please let the program director know ASAP.

You are encouraged, but not required, to provide excellent seats—preferably center section, about rows five to seven. Do not seat critics in the first row or two—that can distract your performers—but make sure they are where they can see and hear well (even if sound and light problems arise), appreciate the intensity of the performances, and feel the energy of the audience response. At a musical, try not to seat critics too close to the orchestra.

Two weeks, one week, and two days before the show, you'll get an email telling you how many tickets are being requested. The final count is usually (but not always) slightly smaller than the final ticket count. Please note that you will be asked to provide two tickets for Mentors (in unusual cases, three tickets for mentors) and two for Cappies officials. You need hold tickets for critics only until five minutes prior to curtain. If you have a sellout, you can sell any tickets set aside for missing critics at that point.

CAPPIES ROOM

Please provide a "Cappies room" for critics and mentors. It can be a school room, chorus room, cafeteria, etc. You'll need to make that room available 60 minutes before curtain and up to 75 minutes after final bows. It probably won't take that long, but it might. Make sure your school's administration is aware of this. Please make every effort possible to have the Cappies room as close to the theatre as possible. Long walks or walks between buildings can severely affect the amount of time critics have to discuss your show.

Make sure there is enough seating for all the critics and adults attending. Please be aware that the mentors may move furniture around to accommodate good discussion. If that presents an issue, please let the board member present at your show know as soon as possible. Your school will need to provide free refreshments in the Cappies room— Whoever handles the food needs to know that they can't be in the room during pre-show discussion, intermission or after the show. Critic conversations are highly confidential.

You must provide at least one student usher, to stand outside the door of the Cappies room and escort the mentors and critics to their seats right before the show starts, and again after intermission. Please make sure your stage manager doesn't start the show, or resume after intermission, until you know that critics and mentors have been seated. It works well if they're the last ones seated, and then you start the show.

While the critics are in the Cappies room, the usher should stay by the door, in case there are any questions. It helps if the usher knows who's who on the cast. You, as Show Director, should be reachable, in case the mentors have any questions. Please arrange for the Cappies room to be secure, and locked, during the performance. If this is not possible, please alert the mentor to advise critics to keep all valuables with them at all times.

Critics are encouraged to help clean up the Cappies room after the final discussion. Mentors should be sure all paperwork with comments is given to the Board Member present and not left behind.

MATERIALS FOR CRITICS

Provide show programs, Critics' Choice forms, completed technical questionnaires, and completed award eligibility forms to all mentors and critics. It is much appreciated if you have filled in the crew/technical categories prior to giving the form to critics. You can also give critics any other materials you'd like, about anything you think they should know about your show.

***Make sure your show program spells all student and character names accurately—and spells them the same, every time they appear. Please proofread carefully, to prevent easily avoidable misspellings of names in published reviews.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL BOARD/MENTORS/DIRECTORS: CRITICS DECORUM AND SAFETY

Please remind your cast and crew that before and after the show, they may not socialize with any critic. Nor may they do so—including through text or social media—until the critic has submitted a review (or until the final deadline has passed). Afterwards, they may have social contacts with a critic who may be a friend but should never discuss anything said in the critics' discussion, including Critics' Choices and scores.

It is up to the Show Director and Advisor as to how and when they will reveal Critics' Choices to the cast and crew. These are the only people, not critics or mentors from other schools, who should reveal Critics' Choices to their own school.

Critics may not openly discuss any aspect of the performance within earshot of any member of the audience. If you notice this occurring, please alert a mentor. And, of course, please do not allow any parent to ask any critic for his or her opinion of the show.

The safety of critics is of paramount concern. No critic may be left alone, late at night, at an unfamiliar school. Under the rules, one mentor is required to remain at a performing school until the last critic has left for home. Encourage critics who need a ride to call for one before beginning the post-show discussion.

Cappies Reviews

All critics who attend a show are required to submit a review. If you are the editor mentor for a show, it is your responsibility to edit and rank the reviews of the show that you attend. This must be completed by the Thursday after the show date and must follow the rules for editing and ranking. (See separate sheet for more information)

Reviews for your Cappies show will be sent to your school, usually within one week to 10 days after your production. Reviews will be published to www.cincicap.com as well as Cincinnati Cappies social media platforms.

Cappies reviews are, on the whole, warmer than reviews of professional shows, but are permitted to contain criticism. Students are encouraged to make criticisms, and they usually do. Those criticisms must follow the rules, the key aspects of which are (1) no criticisms by name (or character name), and (2) no sarcasm or negative tone. Also, critics are not allowed to praise or criticize adult theater directors, by name or by implication. They may not praise or criticize another adult by name. They may not criticize any work done by students younger than 9th grade.

To learn more about what is and is not allowable in Cappies reviews, refer to the rules—or look through the critics' training materials, which offer numerous examples.

CRITICISMS IN CAPPIES REVIEWS

Cappies reviews are real theater reviews. While a core purpose of the Cappies is to promote and celebrate high school theater, the critical reviews must have integrity, fairness, and accuracy. Not every show can or should receive a rave review. Most shows have aspects that could have been better—and, therefore, most reviews should include some criticism.

In selecting reviews for publication, mentors are encouraged to select the best written, fair and accurate description of what actually happened on stage—and reviews that reasonably reflect opinions expressed during critic discussions. The reviews they select are not necessarily the most favorable reviews, but should adhere to the rules laid out during editor training. In their training, critics and mentors are told that critics are not evaluating experienced professionals but should assess shows based on quality of a high school production.

For these reasons, the critics are required to do the following:

- Don't criticize the playwright or composer. Focus on the production itself.
- Choose your words carefully. Be brief. With criticisms in Cappies reviews, a brief phrase, or even just a word or two, can make your point. State your criticism succinctly and then move on.
- Realize that Cappies reviews are often read very closely by the director, cast, and crew. As you write them, imagine the performing company reading them. If you attended the school whose show you reviewed, the cast and crew would probably be your friends. Think of them that way. State criticisms in the way you would state them to a friend.
- The best place to state a criticism is near the end of a review, but not in the last paragraph. It's often good to make them near the end of a paragraph, but not in the last clause.
- Try to state a criticism in a positive, constructive context. For example: Yes, there was this problem, but the

cast overcame it in such-and-such a way. Or: I noticed this flaw, but it did not detract from these other positives.

- Only work by students may be criticized (or praised). If the show includes performers younger than high school age, please either praise them or say nothing at all about them.
- At times, the most appropriate way to state a criticism can be to say nothing at all. If you say nothing about the lead performers but broadly praise minor characters, that may be all you need to do to make your point.

Editor mentors are required to edit all reviews for compliance with these rules.

If any reviews are forwarded to you that appear to violate any of these rules, you are encouraged not to share them with your cast. If they flagrantly violate the rules, please notify the Program Director of your Cappies program.

*** See the end of the binder for more details on review writing and editing reviews***

Cincinnati Cappies AI Policy

Students MUST disclose use of any AI program or app in CIS after the last line of their review before they submit. Students must identify what program they used and for what purpose (i.e. "Grammarly was used to check spelling and grammar in this review").

(Note- the program director will remove these lines before publication- Editor mentors should leave them alone.)

Any review that comes back as more than 55% likely to be AI generated through multiple checkers (no less than 3) will be flagged for AI use, for which the critic and advisor will be notified.

Critics will have a 24-hour rebuttal period before their review is struck and discipline is enforced for plagiarism. If a word doc, google doc, or other word processing program with version history capability satisfactorily proves the review was human generated, discipline will be dropped and the review and its ranking will stand. Handwritten reviews are not accepted as evidence. As the writer of the review, the burden of proof is on the critic. Beginning in the 25-26 season, on a first offense, failure to disclose or rebut to the satisfaction of the board will result in the review being deemed ineligible and an additional show and review will be assigned to the critic. On a second offense, the critic is removed from the Cappies program.

The Mentors will also select the very best reviews for publication. All of the Critics who attended the show will receive an e-mail letting them know whose reviews have been selected and for which publications. . However, these reviews are posted under "Reviews" at your chapter's home page on www.cincicap.com for everyone to see.

Critics' Choices

A Critics' Choice is not a nomination, but rather a decision to place a candidate on the year-end award ballot. A copy of the Critics' Choices for your show will be left with the show director by the show mentors on the day of your performance.

To be a Critics' Choice, a student (or group) must be eligible in an award category. For information about that, or to see what other guidelines the critics are following in selecting Critics' Choices, please see the Award Category Guide.

After a Cappies show, during their post-show discussion, the mentors and critics determine the award categories for which a show qualifies. In the non-performing categories, they base this on information provided by the Show Director. The critics then determine who their "Critics' Choices" are for each award category for which the show qualifies. They do this by consensus, or if necessary, by vote.

Between 7 and 10 days prior to award voting, the Program Director will send you a confidential email, listing the Critics' Choices for that year's Cappies show (or shows). This is to confirm name spellings and correct obvious errors *only*. Contact the program director with any corrections.

AWARD VOTING

After the final show, the critics will gather to vote online for "Cappie" nominations and awards. To qualify to vote, a critic must have submitted reviews for a minimum of 5 shows. Your school must have at least two critics eligible to vote to qualify for any Cappie awards at the end of the year.

The critics vote using specially designed computer software, through which they give scores and points to individual candidates. No critic sees all the shows (or anything close to that), of course, and the voting system has been designed to account for that.

The Cappies voting system has also been constructed to be totally even-handed to all schools, regardless of the size of their own critic team or the number of critics who attended their own Cappies show, to identify (and, hence, discourage) "gaming" or strategic voting by individual critics or teams, and to provide Cappies officials with clear and fully auditable results.

The critics vote through a combination of evaluation scores, nomination and award points, and tie-breaks. A complete description of the Cappies voting system is in the rules, and a summary can be read on the Cappies web site, on the "Rules & Forms" page.

AWARD CATEGORIES

The non-performing categories include marketing and publicity, sound, lighting, make-up, costumes, sets, props, special effects and/or technology, stage crew, choreography, orchestra, and creativity (which includes student directing, composing, playwriting, lyric-writing, and musicianship).

The performing categories include ensemble in a play, ensemble in a musical, male and female dancer, male and female vocalist—and featured, comic, supporting, and lead actor in a male or female role in plays and musicals.

A student may only be nominated once (per show) in the non-performing categories, and once in the performing categories.

There are three overall school awards: song, play, and musical

There are five critics' awards, including critics team, up and coming critic, returning critic, graduating critic and best critique.

COMMENDATIONS

Each school may, if you wish, name up to four students as Cappie Commendees to be recognized at the gala. Your Gala Director will advise you about this. You should wait to name your Commendees until after nominations are announced. You are encouraged, but not required, to select Commendees who are not nominees.

You have wide latitude to select Commendees—or not to select them. They must be students in grade 9 to 12, who in your judgment have made a significant contribution to your school's theater program. They might be performers in a non-Cappies show, performers or tech workers in your Cappies show whom you feel the critics may not have sufficiently recognized, students who did work (designing programs and posters, doing publicity, or handling box office) that fits within no award category, or any other student you may wish to recognize.

NOMINATIONS AND AWARDS

Nominations are announced a few days after voting. Nominations will be announced online. Awards are announced at the Cappies Gala.

ATTENDING A CAPPIES GALA

All critics and students involved in your theater program are invited to attend the gala.

If you are nominated to perform at a Cappies Gala, the Gala Director will contact you in a timely manner about rehearsals, scores, and other issues. Schools nominated for Song, Play, and Musical are invited to perform an excerpt at the gala. Plays are allowed a 5-minute excerpt, while Song and Musical excerpts are allowed 7 minutes. If a school is nominated for Song and Musical, the expectation is that the school performs the song that received the nomination. Schools may only perform a different song in this instance with permission of the steering committee. Schools only nominated for Musical may perform whatever song they wish, as long as the excerpt does not go over 7 minutes. It is mandatory for this excerpt to have performance rights granted by the licensing publishing house. The Gala Director will ask for your assistance in securing rights for your performance. If you are performing a song, you will also need to provide the appropriate sheet music (conductor, piano, bass, drums) or a prerecorded track of the piece you are performing.

AWARD CATEGORY GUIDE

During their discussion following a Cappies Show, Critics select a Critics' Choice in each category for which someone in that show may be eligible. This determines who will be on the award ballot at the end of the year, when the Critics vote for Cappie nominations and awards. After selecting those Critics' Choices, Critics give preliminary scores, on a one to ten scale, and make preliminary notations about which candidates they feel may be worthy of Cappie nomination or award points. These scores and points will be decided by Critics, when they vote at the end of the year.

The Four Required Factors

For each award category, these four factors must be considered when selecting Critics' Choices, and when scoring them on the 10-point scale:

- **Quality of presentation.**
- **Originality and creativity.**
- **Range of expression.**
- **Degree of difficulty.**

QUALITY OF PRESENTATION is perhaps the most obvious factor, and the easiest to apply. Whatever the category—sound, orchestra, ensemble, dancer, lead, song—simply ask: How good is it? How effective? How entertaining? In tech categories, you need to score the candidate only, so you may need to differentiate carefully between the work of the student(s) and the work of other people. Your own view is key here, but audience response and other critical opinions can help inform your own judgment.

ORIGINALITY AND CREATIVITY reflects the candidate's capacity to make the work distinctly his or her own. Did the performer's character strongly resemble that in a well-known film? Were the sets or costumes exactly what you would have expected, for that show (or time period)? Was there any aspect to the performance or crew work that was inventive, unusual, or surprising? When the show was over, were you still thinking about the intelligence of the craftsmanship (of a character, humor, vocal styling—or props, costumes, sets, lighting design, or anything else)?

RANGE OF EXPRESSION measures the candidate's willingness to attempt, and ability to achieve, different elements of theatrical work. Did a performer present more than one aspect of a character? Did a lead set more than one kind of mood in different scenes? Did a vocalist sing numerous kinds of songs—for example, a lovely ballad and something up-tempo? Did a set designer produce two very different looks on stage? Were the costumes well-selected in more than one period? Were there several kinds of special effects, or just one? Was the ensemble work funny in one scene, heartfelt in another?

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY means exactly what those words say. Whatever the candidate did, was it hard to do? Were the songs easy or hard to sing? Were the characters easy or hard to find? Given the script, did the performer get laughs the easy way, or the hard way? Was the set very basic, or did it involve careful engineering and delicate finishing work? Were the costumes rented or hand-made? Was the sound crew dealing merely with a few cues, or with the swapping of a dozen body mics whose volume had to be balanced against a full orchestra? On the whole, was this a tough show to do, or a relatively simple one?

Overall score For a Critics' Choice to receive a high score, several of these factors should leave a favorable impression. Was the work of high quality? Was it creative? Did it offer a range of expression? Was it difficult? If you can say yes to all four, or an emphatic yes to at least two of these factors, then a high score can be warranted. Conversely, if you feel the answer is no for all four, then you should give a Critics' Choice a low score.

Scoring Issues

Overall, critics are quite fair in scoring Cappies shows. Over the years, Cappies officials have noticed a few aspects of scoring that all critics, but especially new critics, need to keep in mind.

- For Sound, be sure to give sufficient weight to degree of difficulty. Do not take too much note of minor sound errors in musicals. On the whole, be careful not to score musicals lower than plays.
- For Costumes, differentiate carefully between student and adult work, and between rented or borrowed costumes and hand-made costumes—which can be more creative and difficult.
- For Sets, do not focus purely on the instantly observable aspects. Be alert to the creative contribution the set makes to an entire performance and the flow of a show.
- For Comic Actor or Actress, base a score not on the humor in the script, but rather on the performer's own comedic touches.

- For Vocalist, pay attention to the ability of a performer to deliver very different kinds of songs at a high level of quality.
- For Lead Actor or Actress, do not necessarily select the highest-quality performer, who might be in a Supporting but not lead role—and may stand a better chance of earning a Cappie nomination in the Supporting rather than Lead category.
- For Song, do not select one that is humorous or well-written, when another song was performed better. Try not to favor big ensemble numbers over solos or duets, males over females, and the title songs of musicals over the lesser-known works.
- For Play and Musical, be careful not to score famous shows more generously, especially if they are performed in familiar ways. In scoring, give credit to the creativity, originality, and often the difficulty of a cast and crew performing new or unfamiliar works—or performing famous works in unfamiliar ways.
- For Play and Musical, be sure to mark down a score before handing in your form after a show.
- If your own school has done or will do the same show as your Cappies show this year, you are not allowed to review that show. If your school is doing the same show in the same year but not as your Cappies show, or if your school did it a year or two before, you may review it, but be careful to score it fairly—and do not base your scores on any comparison with your own school's performance of that show.
- When you see a show that, overall, you consider below average, look for one or two aspects of that show that may have been better than the rest of the show. Similarly, when you see a show you consider excellent, reflect on what parts of the show may not have been quite as strong as the rest—and make sure your scores reflect this.
- Apply the same scoring standards to shows in the fall, winter, and spring. If, over the course of the year, you feel that your scoring scale has changed, you can fix that when you vote for awards at the end of the school year.
- Across all the shows you see, and all the Critics' Choices you score, try to keep your overall average score somewhere between a 5 and a 6—especially if this is your first year as a critic.

AWARD CATEGORIES EXPLAINED

MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

Marketing and publicity refers to the publicity campaign for the produced play or musical. The materials or description of campaigns must be available to the Critics prior to the show and must be the original work of a student or group of students in grades 9 through 12. This may include, but is not limited to:

- graphic design,
- poster,
- program,
- web site or social media,
- press release,
- trailer or other media, or
- lobby display.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

The caliber of the marketing and publicity should show a cohesive theme, a high level of artwork, an understanding of 'what sells', and should be attractively displayed.

Look and listen for:

Appeal. What was the quality of the presentation? Did it have eye-appeal (ear-appeal, if applicable)?

Originality. Was it original and creative?

Variety. Were there a variety of examples and types of publicity?

Difficulty. What was the overall degree of collective difficulty?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: A full scale marketing and publicity campaign showing numerous (five or more) examples of media at the highest design

level.

7 or 8: A marketing and publicity campaign showing at least four types of media from the seven suggestions above and/or something not listed, all at a very high level of design.

5 or 6: A marketing and publicity campaign showing at least three types of media from the seven suggestions above and/or something not listed, all at an average or slightly average high-school level of design.

3 or 4: A marketing and publicity campaign showing at least three types of media from the seven suggestions above and/or something not listed, all at an average or slightly below average high-school level of design.

1 or 2: A marketing and publicity campaign that clearly does not display the understanding of the concepts of marketing or publicity.

SOUND

Sound refers to the technical aspects of sound, including amplified sound, sound effects, and music not performed by live musicians. The extent of sound amplification, the frequency and timing of sound cues, the visual aspects of the placement of sound equipment, and the use of sound equipment by performers are factors. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students, in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible.

Keep in mind:

The question is not purely whether the performers can be heard, and you should evaluate amplified sound only. The nature and extent of the challenge faced by a sound crew can be very different, from show to show, and some theatres can pose special sound challenges. Nearly always, sound is more difficult in a musical than in a play, and scoring should reflect this. A play that uses no microphones, has a few sound effects, and has no sound errors should not be scored as high as a large musical with a dozen shared wireless microphones and a few sound errors. For a play, a high score should only be awarded if it poses technical sound challenges that are handled well. If the cast projects well with unamplified voices, which can be reflected in performer, ensemble, or overall play scores, but not here. In large musicals, small mistakes should be forgiven, especially if good adjustments are made. If mistakes recur, or are not quickly corrected when they happen, that should be reflected in the scoring.

What you are evaluating is the sound design and the work of the sound crew, not necessarily the overall quality of sound. Almost anything can affect sound quality – the size of the cast, the size of the theatre, the number of people in the audience, the speaker placement, the number of microphones the school could afford, even the costumes and prop. Squeaks and bumps can be a performer's fault. If a voice cannot be heard well, that can be as much the result of a performer's lack of projection and articulation as it is of the work of the sound crew. You are evaluating the work of the sound crew *only*.

Look and listen for:

Amplification. Is the sound amplified just about right – or is it too loud, too soft, or uneven?

Clarity. How well can you hear performers' lyrics or words in amplified songs or dialogue?

Errors. What missed sound cues, static, whistles, bumps, or other errors can be reasonably concluded to have been partly or fully the result of the sound crew?

Microphone placement. Are the microphones located well? Do they look good on performers? Are they situated cleverly to minimize errors?

Adjustment to space. How well did the sound crew adjust to the special needs or challenges of the theatre?

Sound cues. Do sound cues add to the atmosphere of the story? Are there any unusual or hard-to-execute sound cues?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: There is substantial amplification with nearly no sound problems, which are hardly noticeable and never detract from the show, along with creative sound effects and/or design which enhance the show.

7 or 8: There is substantial amplification with occasional sound problems, which are noticeable but seldom detract from the show with appropriate sound effects or design which enhance the show.

5 or 6: There is substantial amplification with some sound problems, which are noticeable but at times detract from the show – or little or no amplification and creative sound effects or design which enhance the show.

3 or 4: There is substantial amplification with numerous significant sound problems, which are noticeable and occasionally detract from the show – or little or no amplification and sound effects which neither enhance nor detract from the show.

1 or 2: A show with substantial amplification has constant sound problems, often detracting from the show – or little or no amplification, with occasional sound flaws.

LIGHTING

Lighting incorporates the design and execution of stage lighting, including lights that are part of any sets, costumes, props, or still-projection (gobo) special effects. Factors to consider are the timing and coordination of light cues, and the use of lit areas by the cast on stage. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible.

Keep in mind:

Basically, if it lights up, then it's lighting. Lights do not need to command attention to be done well. They just need to work with the show. Some shows require flashy lighting, and others must be done more subtly. The key issue, always, is whether scenes are well lit. Try to distinguish between performer and crew error. If a performer is out of place, there usually is nothing a lighting crew can do about that. You may need to discern the difference between the light cue being incorrect and the performer going to a wrong location. (One skill of a good performer is one who moves fluidly into his light even when a cue is wrong.) All factors are important here – and keep "degree of difficulty" in mind.

Try to take into account what the performing school has in the way of lighting fixtures. Usually, you can see them from the audience, if you look around from your seat (or, better, look briefly from the front of the house during intermission or after the show). The more fixtures a school has available, the more options it has for using lighting creatively. Some schools have "intelligent" lighting fixtures that can move, change color, and have cutout patterns (gobos) that can be controlled remotely, through cues written before the show.

Look for:

Execution. Are the light cues well timed? Is the lighting well synchronized with the performance? Do spotlights hit their targets? Are any blackouts intentional?

Tint and Color. Is color used appropriately and well? Does the color reflect the time of day or mood of the moment?

Effect. Does the lighting create or enhance a scene? Does it help establish a mood? Do the lights correctly reflect the situation, emotion, and time period of a scene?

Complexity. Do the lights change frequently? Are there multiple effects?

Functionality. Can you see the performers well (especially their faces)? Are performer faces lit to look good? If their faces are in shadows, or have a flat or washed-out quality, might that reflect an artistic decision?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The lighting is complex and fits the show perfectly, with well-timed cues, well-lit performers, and very creative effects, significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The lighting is complex and fits the show nicely, with errors that are hardly noticeable, and interesting effects, nicely fitting the performance

5 or 6: The lighting is appropriate and fits the show, with errors that are hardly noticeable, fitting the performance... or, if simple, is very well done.

3 or 4: The lighting fits the show fairly well, with some noticeable errors in cues or lighting of performers, and workable effects, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The lighting does not fit the show well, with several noticeable errors and no helpful effects, detracting from the show.

SETS

Sets refers to the design, construction and finishing work on all scenes, including back walls, stage trim, furniture, and every physical item other than lights, costumes, and hand-held props. All design work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. A majority of the construction and finishing work must be done by students, but some adult participation is permissible, especially as required to ensure performer safety. Furniture need not be made by students. Crew work (in set changes) is not a factor.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

(In the past if the *set design* was done by an adult then no set award was possible even if the students did all the building.)

Keep in mind:

The set must fit the show's theme and mood. Sets can be elaborate or minimalist, realistic or cartoonish. Any style can work, and the most complicated set isn't always the best kind. The set should first fit the show and then impress. Many shows will have unit sets that require no scene changes, and others will have multiple or moveable set pieces. That involves an artistic decision, but the more complex the choices, the greater the challenge for set designers and builders. Some shows may be enhanced by creative and original set pieces, while others may call for a highly traditional look. A well-designed set will allow for nimble stage crew work. If the crew work is slow or awkward to watch, that may be, in part, a reflection on the quality of the set design and construction. The size of a stage, and a school's budget, can influence set choices. A small stage, or lack of wing space, can preclude a large set or multiple complex shifts. A set designer who works brilliantly with a difficult space or small budget should be scored accordingly. In shows (for example, in black boxes) with no more than a very basic set design, even if the set pieces work perfectly, the lack of difficulty, originality and creativity, and range of expression will preclude a high score.

Look for:

Aesthetics. Is the set enjoyable when the stage is empty? Does it make the show more enjoyable to watch? Does it help make the show unique? Are there any unconventional set pieces that add to the flavor of the show?

Theatricality. Are the set pieces consistent within an artistic concept? Do they correctly suggest a time period, location, and situation?

Usefulness. Does the set work in the show? Are there multiple entrances? Are there levels and divisions? Are they cleverly positioned? Does the set provide varying looks, for different scenes? Does the set add to the flow of the show?

Construction. Is the set well-crafted and nicely decorated? Are the details well-tended and interesting? If the goal is realism, does the set achieve that? If the goal is something else, does the set achieve that other goal?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The set has a quite complex design, was very challenging to build, is aesthetically superb, fits the show perfectly, allows creative staging options, is well crafted and decorated down to the smallest detail, and significantly enhances the show.

7 or 8: The set was somewhat challenging to design and build, is aesthetically pleasing, enhances the show, allows varied staging options, and is well crafted and decorated.

5 or 6: The set was somewhat simple to design and build, fits the show nicely, allows some staging options, and is fairly well crafted and decorated... or, if simple to design and build, supports the show.

3 or 4: The set fits the show fairly well, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The set does not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

COSTUMES

Costumes refer to the design, assembly and making of costumes, and the speed of costume changes. Costumes are defined as anything worn by performers, including hats and footwear. All design and assembly must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. *A significant proportion of the costumes must be designed and acquired or made by students specifically for the show.* Some non-student-made costumes (for example, costumes that are rented, made by parents, drawn from a school's costume collection, and/or borrowed from elsewhere) are permissible, but only if a list of rented or adult-constructed costumes is provided to Critics prior to the show.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

Differentiate carefully between student and adult work, and between rented or borrowed costumes and hand-made costumes – which can be more creative and difficult.

Look for:

Theme and period. Do the costumes demonstrate continuity in theme? If costumes are intended to be realistic, do they succeed at that? If the intent is cartoonish, do costumes succeed at that? Are costumes correct to the period, season, and location of each scene?

Character. Do costumes effectively single out lead characters? Do costumes help differentiate various groups of characters or ensembles? Do costumes help define the characters' personalities? Do costumes help distinguish age, gender, income class, or other character differences?

Aesthetics. Are the costumes eye-catching? Are there any beautiful costume moments?

Quality, functionality, and speed. Are the hand-made costumes well-made? Do costumes help conceal microphones? Do they fit well with the set and lighting? Are costume changes quick, especially for ensembles?

Quantity, variety, and creativity. How many costumes are there? How many of those are hand-made? How original are the costume concepts?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The costumes – many of them made by students specially for this show – are superbly designed, beautiful to watch, fit the show perfectly, and significantly enhance the show.

7 or 8: The costumes – some of them made by students specially for this show – are well designed, pleasant to watch, and enhances the show.

5 or 6: The costumes are well-designed, nice to watch, fit the show, and complement the show.

3 or 4: Some costumes are well-designed, nice to watch, and a good fit for the show, while others are not.

1 or 2: The costumes do not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

MAKE-UP

Make-Up refers to the design and execution of all facial (and other) cosmetics, hair, nails, and props (for example, fake noses, ears, hands, or feet) attached to performers' bodies. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. The extent of make-up done by specialist (as opposed

to performers doing their own) must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

In many shows, performers do their own make-up, requiring less pre-show preparation. The purpose of this category is to recognize make-up specialists. The basic purpose of stage make-up is for facial definition, to keep performers from looking too washed-out under the lights, and to make them look the age of their character. Some of the best make-up can be the least noticeable. Other times, make-up can help a performer create and shape a character. Special touches can be used for unusual looks (wigs, noses, scars, feet), unusual characters (animals, aliens, fairies, monsters), or unusual situations (blood, dirt, wounds, scars, tears). Those touches can be hard to do well. When evaluating make-up, look closely in scenes with strong lighting, where differences in quality are especially noticeable. All four of the evaluation factors should be considered equally here.

Look for:

Definition. Does the make-up show faces well in normal stage lighting?

Believability. Does the make-up help define characters? Does it reflect their ages?

Special or unusual touches. Is there any special make-up for unusual characters or conditions? If so, is it believable? Or, if the artistic choice is to be cartoonish, is that well done?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The make-up is exceptionally well done, fits the characters perfectly, includes some difficult and well-executed special touches, and significantly enhances the show.

7 or 8: The make-up is well done, fits the characters reasonably well, includes special touches that are well executed, and nicely complements the show.

5 or 6: The make-up is generally well done, fits the characters reasonably well, includes some special touches that are well executed, and nicely complements the show.

3 or 4: The make-up fits the characters fairly well, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The make-up does not look good and does not fit the characters well, detracting from the show.

PROPS

This aspect of theatre refers to the design, construction or collection, and use of student-designed props that are neither sets nor costumes (that is, handled by performers but not attached to their bodies). Examples include, but are not limited to, weapons, food, beverage containers, and live animals. This work must be specifically identified to Critics prior to a show. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. The quality of performer-use of props is a factor, but a performer who uses props and effects (for instance, a puppeteer or magician) may be considered only if she/he assisted in the design and/or construction of the props.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

Some scripts pose challenges that can be daunting for any show, especially one on a budget. Creative props can provide solutions to those challenges, making a show more fun and interesting. Usually, the prop crew can only provide what's in the script or what little can be added without deviating from the script. Depending on the show, props can be workable, extensive or few, realistic or fanciful, overlarge or miniaturized, serious or comical, appealing to the eyes or appealing to other senses. They can range from the startling and amazing to the predictable and merely workmanlike. Note that the selecting and handling of live animals are included here. All four evaluation factors should be equally considered.

Look for:

Theme and period. Do the props work well within the script? Do they demonstrate continuity in theme? If props are intended to be realistic, do they succeed at that? If the intent is cartoonish, do they succeed at that? Are they correct to the period, season, and location of each scene?

Aesthetics and illusions. Are the props eye-catching, or aesthetically pleasing in other ways? Do they create interesting illusions?

Quality and functionality. Are the props handled well? Are they sturdy?

Quantity, variety, and creativity. How many props are there? How many are hand-made? How original and imaginative are they in design and execution?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The props are extensive, creatively designed and superbly executed, convey the script perfectly, and significantly enhance the show.

7 or 8: The props are well-designed, suit the script well, and complement the performance... or, if minimal, are creative and superb and significantly enhance the show.

5 or 6: The props suit the script well and, whether extensive or minimal, neither add to nor detract from the show.

3 or 4: The props suit the script fairly well and may at times detract from the show.

1 or 2: The props do not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

SPECIAL EFFECTS AND/OR TECHNOLOGIES

This aspect of theatre refers to the design, construction, or collection of special effects and/or technologies that are neither sound nor lighting. Examples include, but are not limited to, video, magic, fog, aromas, projections, and digital effects. This work must be specifically identified to Critics prior to a show. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. The quality of performer-use of effects is a factor, but a performer who uses effects (for instance, a magician) may be considered only if she/he assisted in the design and/or construction of the effects.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

Some scripts pose challenges that can be daunting for any show, especially one on a budget. Creative special effects can provide solutions to those challenges, making a show more fun and interesting. Special effects are sometimes required by a script, and other times added as stagecraft. In some schools, their use can be limited by building codes and smoke detectors. Depending on the show, effects can be workable, extensive or few, realistic or fanciful, overlarge or miniaturized, serious or comical, appealing to the eyes or appealing to other senses. They can range from the startling and amazing to the predictable and merely workmanlike. Note that video light projections are included here. All four evaluation factors should be equally considered.

Look for:

Theme and period. Do the effects work well within the script? Do they demonstrate continuity in theme? If effects are intended to be realistic, do they succeed at that? If the intent is cartoonish, do they succeed at that? Are they correct to the period, season, and location of each scene?

Aesthetics and illusions. Are the effects eye-catching, or aesthetically pleasing in other ways? Do they create interesting illusions?

Quantity, variety, and creativity. How many special effects are there? How original and imaginative are they in design and execution?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The effects are extensive, creatively designed and superbly executed, convey the script perfectly, and significantly enhance the show.

7 or 8: The effects are well-designed, suit the script well, and complement the performance... or, if minimal, are creative and superb and significantly enhance the show.

5 or 6: The effects suit the script well and, whether extensive or minimal, neither add to nor detract from the show.

3 or 4: The effects suit the script fairly well but may at times detract from the show.

1 or 2: The effects do not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

STAGE MANAGEMENT AND CREW

This category incorporates the effectiveness and timing of all cues. In addition to the performance, the stage management should be evaluated on the evidence provided in the Cappies Room. e.g. prompt book, rehearsal reports, pre/post show checklists.

All work must be done by or under the direction of a student stage manager or a student management team, but adult guidance is permissible.

Keep in mind: Regardless of type of show stage management is responsible for being the head of communication during the rehearsal process, creating rehearsal reports, recording blocking, managing the schedule & keeping things running smoothly.

When looking at the stage management in a show it is important to remember that the management of these components during the rehearsal will lead to a smooth run of the show. During the production, Stage Managers call every light cue and sound cue during and work closely with the head of the stage crew backstage to keep the production running smoothly in and out of scene changes.

Look and listen for:

Execution/Cues. Do the light cues change on beat with music? As soon as set pieces are finished moving on or off stage the lights come up and the scene begins? Are there pauses waiting for sound or light changes?

Organization. Is it clear from the tech board that the stage manager had a clear organization system for communication with the cast? Had a clear way of organizing the rehearsal information (blocking, choreography, etc.)?

Rehearsal materials provided. Do the rehearsal reports contain detailed reports? Did the scene change plots have clear and detailed information on them? Did the prompt book have easy to follow and complete cues in it?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The stage management is difficult, creative, and very well-executed, swift and silent, hitting all cues, causing no distractions, and significantly enhancing the show. Rehearsal documentation is provided to show clear, detailed & complete organization and communication from the Stage Management team.

7 or 8: The stage management is challenging and uniformly efficient and enhances the show. Rehearsal documentation provided and thorough.

5 or 6: The stage management is uniformly efficient and complements the show. Rehearsal documentation provided neatly compiled but perhaps few in number or lacking in detail or not clear or detailed.

3 or 4: The stage management is efficient, with a few noticeable flaws, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show. Rehearsal material provided is loosely organized but perhaps lacking in detail or not clear or detailed.

1 or 2: The stage management is not well done, with numerous noticeable problems, detracting from the show and no documentation is provided that the stage management completed organized or clear assistance during rehearsal.

ORCHESTRA

Orchestra refers to a group of musical accompanists that performs not less than six full songs, as accompaniment to vocalists in a play or musical, and will be evaluated for tone, pitch, authority, balance, pace, performer support, and other factors of musicianship that may contribute to a successful show. An orchestra may be a combo, band, orchestra, or any other group of not less than 3 musicians, of whom not less than 80 percent are students in grades 9 through 12. (A four-member orchestra must be all students, a 5- to 9-member orchestra may have one adult, a 10- to 14-member orchestra may have two adults, etc.) A conductor who is an adult and does not play an instrument will not be included in this percentage. Whether the score is performed as written for professional orchestras, or as simplified for student orchestras (by the publisher or by the school's own music director) is a factor. If not otherwise specified, Critics will assume that the score has been simplified for student use.

Keep in mind:

Different scores have different degrees of difficulty. Scores that have been simplified for use by school orchestras are less difficult than those that have not. The mere fact that a school's music director may have altered some parts does not necessarily mean that they have been simplified. There are two ways to evaluate orchestras: to listen to them carefully – and not to try to listen to them at all, and see if what they do stands out, in either a positive or negative sense. At various points in a show, you should try to do both.

Listen for:

Command, intonation and technique. Does the orchestra play with confidence, in tune, flawlessly? Do all the notes sound right – or, if not, was that the composer's intent?

Phrasing. Does the orchestra interpret the music nicely? Does the music flow naturally? Are solo lines well articulated? Do they sound smooth? Does the music make sense?

Dynamics. Does the orchestra support the singers and not overpower them? Is the sound well- modulated, loud when it should be loud, and soft when it should be soft?

Style. Does the orchestra play in the style of the score, and period of the story?

Blend. Do all sections of the orchestra play complement each other, and blend well with each other? Does no section dominate too much? Are any instruments (over-amplified guitars and electric basses, drums, horns) often too loud?

Entrances and cut-offs. Does the orchestra start songs well, and have strong, solid finishes?

Support. Does the orchestra adjust to early or late entrances, vocal errors, or sound problems?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The students play a challenging score with superior execution.

7 or 8: The students play a difficult score with excellent execution or a less challenging score with superior execution.

5 or 6: The orchestra complements the show with few errors.

3 or 4: The orchestra sometimes distracts/overwhelms the show and/or makes several errors.

1 or 2: The orchestra frequently distracts/overwhelms the show and/or makes numerous errors.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Choreography refers to the design and teaching of dance choreography, stage combat, and/or other synchronized on-stage movements. To be eligible, a show must have a majority of its musical numbers, stage combat, and/or synchronized scenes

designed and taught to performers by a student, separate students, or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. Performer execution of the choreography is a factor. The entire set of student-designed choreography will be evaluated as a whole. Some adult choreography is permissible, as long as its location in the show is clearly identified to Critics in advance.

Keep in mind:

This category pertains to synchronized stage movement, not to the simple blocking of performer locations or the creation of stage pictures. It encompasses the design and teaching of choreography, and you cannot separate what was designed from what was taught, so you can only evaluate what you see. The success of the ensemble, or individual dancers, in carrying out the movement is what you should evaluate. The four required factors are equally important. Creative touches are important, but there may be times when the best choreography will bring to mind the original Broadway production. The larger the number of dancers, the more challenging it is to do difficult choreography.

Look for:

Dance technique. Are the dancers following the proper technique for that style of dance? Are toes pointed? Are legs straight? Is the dance done crisply? Are everyone's gestures tightly coordinated, so the entire ensemble looks like one dancer doing the move?

Rhythm, timing, and showmanship. Does the movement stand out? Does it grab your attention? Is the dance tight to the rhythm, with a good start and finish?

Complexity and extent. How complex are the movements? How lengthy are the segments with movement? How many performers are involved?

Use of stage and props. Are the dancers using all the stage, and using sets and props creatively?

Suitability. Does the movement suit the ability of the dancers? Do the performers make it natural and easy? Does the movement suit the show, and reflect the time period of the story? How well does the movement help tell the story? Does it make sense, where it occurs?

Size of ensemble. How many dancers are doing any choreography? Difficult choreography?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The movement is of superior design, complex, executed energetically, cleanly, and significantly enhances the show.

7 or 8: The movement is very well designed, challenging, executed energetically, cleanly, and enhances the show.

5 or 6: The movement is well designed, interesting, and presented well, nicely complementing the show.

3 or 4: The movement is presented fairly well but with some noticeable problems, sometimes detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The movement is either not well done or very simple (or both), and presented with frequent noticeable problems, detracting from the quality of the show.

CREATIVITY

Creativity refers to creative achievement – by a student or group of students in grades 9 through 12 – not encompassed in another category. Only one creative achievement may be identified as the Critics' Choice in each Cappies show. Areas of creative achievement include, but are not limited to:

(A) Musicianship; (B) Composing; (C) Lyric Writing; (D) Play Writing; and (E) Directing.

Guidelines for evaluating these areas of creative achievement are given below and on the following pages.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

This applies to each of the Creativity categories: Musicianship, Composing, Lyric Writing, Play Writing, and Directing.

A. Musicianship

This creative achievement refers to an individual or group playing on stage during a production, in at least two songs, totaling not less than 60 seconds. The songs including solo segments by the student musician must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Keep in mind:

Nearly always, this category will apply to a musician who performs as an on-stage soloist, rather than as part of an orchestra pit. If so, listen more carefully than you watch. Very slight and subtle variations in performance can separate an excellent from a good musician. You do not need to be a skilled musician yourself to detect this, but you do need to pay very close attention. If a musician is also a vocalist, with two or more solos, he or she may also be considered in that

category.

Look and listen for:

Command. Does the musician command attention as a soloist?

Intonation and technique. Does the musician play in tune? Does the musician play flawlessly?

Phrasing. Does the musician interpret musical lines nicely? Do the musical lines fit naturally? Are they well articulated? Do they sound smooth? Does the music make musical sense?

Style. Does the musician's style fit the show?

Theatre. Is the musician enjoyable to watch, as a performer? (This will not apply, if the musician is not on stage.)

B. Composing

This creative achievement refers to student composition of at least 3 songs for a Play or Musical. The songs written, or orchestrations made, by a student composer must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Keep in mind:

In a musical, the music is central to the show. In a play, any music should add to the show. Composition is a difficult task that requires a special skill set. Orchestration is an even more advanced skill. The simple fact that a student is composing and, perhaps, orchestrating songs, is itself an achievement. Composing songs suitable for vocalists (and lyrics) is a somewhat different task than composing pure music. If a candidate qualifies as a Composer, Playwright, Lyricist, and/or Musician, under the above definitions, the candidate can be evaluated in only one of these aspects, in which case the quality of the other aspects will not be a factor.

Look and listen for:

Instrumentation and orchestration. Are the songs written for several instruments, and do those instruments complement each other well, and blend together well?

Melodies and harmonies Is the composing interesting melodically? Are the melodies memorable? Do the set the proper tone for the moment? Is the music interesting harmonically (the kinds of chords used, and progression from one chord to another)?

Context. Is the music appropriate to the moment? To the character? To the time and place of the setting of the show?

Range and structure. Does the music have variety, from song to song? Within individual songs? Does the music have a logical musical progression?

Originality. Does the music sound original, or too derivative? Does it sound too much like anything you recognize?

Fit to lyrics. If there are lyrics, how are they set, rhythmically and melodically? Do the musical lines require any distortions of natural speech patterns?

Vocal range and support. If there are vocalists, are some sounds set too high or too low? Does the composer give the vocalist proper places to breathe?

C. Lyric Writing

This creative achievement refers to student lyric writing of at least 3 songs for a Play or Musical. The songs written by a student lyricist must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Keep in mind:

It is not hard to write song lyrics. Nearly anyone can do this, to some degree. The challenge lies in separating good or excellent lyrics from everyday ones. A lyricist needs a real feel for the language, and for music. The best lyrics combine poetic rhythms and rhymes with clever word play, an effective use of emotions, and a solid craftsmanship, with words fitting very comfortably to music. The very best lyrics join with a well-designed composition to produce a song that sticks in your head as you leave the theatre.

Look and listen for:

Subject: Are the songs interesting? Do they speak broadly? Are they original ideas?

Context. Are the songs and lyrics well-placed? Do they fit the moment? Do any of the songs advance the story? Are the lyrics appropriate to whatever time period is required? Do the lyrics convey what the story needs to convey?

Emotion. Do the songs convey emotions effectively? Do characters start singing at points in the story where it feels natural and even necessary?

Balance and range. Is there a good variety of types of songs – ballads, comedy songs, rhythm songs, charm songs, aggressive songs, dance songs, other types? Is there a good mix of solos, duets or trios, and ensembles? Are songs spread well among the characters?

Fit to the characters. Are the lyrics appropriate to the characters? Do they convey emotions, and use words, that are believable for the characters?

Fit to the music. Do the lyrics fit naturally and comfortably with the musical lines? Do they bring to mind the

natural flow of speech, set to music?

Rhymes. Is there an interesting use of rhymes – end rhymes and inner rhymes? And is there an interesting occasional use of unrhymed lyrics?

Vocabulary. Are the words smart and interesting? Are the lyrics poetic, or heightened speech? Do the lyrics follow the natural rhythms in the language?

D. Play Writing

This creative achievement refers to student playwrighting of not less than one full act of a Play or Musical, totaling at least 40 minutes.

Keep in mind:

Writing a play takes perseverance, but not necessarily great skill. What is hard to do, and what takes great skill, is to write a play that makes you truly look forward to act two, to see what will happen – and then, when it's over, you keep thinking about the story and characters on the way home. The challenge is to separate the quality of the writing from the quality of the performances (and directing).

Look and listen for:

Story. Is it a good one, told concisely? Does it offer an interesting perspective on questions larger than the story itself? Is there a logical dramatic arc to the story? Is any conflict plausibly constructed, and just as plausibly resolved in the end? Is every member of the audience allowed to reach his or her own conclusions (or is the story "preachy")?

Lead characters. Are the lead characters believable and interesting? Are the lead characters draw your interest, either because they are likeable or for other reasons? Are they who and what they seem to be? Are their social and psychological aspects well developed? Are they consistent within themselves and within the story? Do they develop (have a "character arc") over the course of the story?

Secondary and ensemble characters. Are the secondary characters helpful in advancing the story? Is there a good mix of characters? Do their subplots provide a useful contrast, whether comic relief or something else? Are their varying aspects – young or old, male or female, people of different wealth, ethnicity, nationality, or religion – effectively portrayed?

Scenes. Are the scenes well structured – comic scenes, tragic scenes, combat scenes, highly emotional themes? Do the scenes flow well, one to the other?

Stagecraft. Do interesting things happen onstage? Does the story break at the right spot, between act one and act two?

Musical aspects. In a musical, is there a good balance between dialogue and musical sections? Do some of the songs advance the story? Are the songs sincerely presented by the characters?

E. Directing

This creative achievement refers to student-directing of all aspects of an entire show, including casting, tech work, sets and costumes, blocking, and scene and character direction, with minimal guidance from a theatre teacher or other adult.

Keep in mind:

Occasionally, a student is given the title of "director," but still is, in effect, an assistant to an adult show director. For a student to be eligible for this award, the show must be directed almost completely by that student. In fact, as well as in name, the student must lead a group of their peers, create among them a cohesive team of actors and technicians, and make and execute decisions about creative concepts, casting, tech, costumes, blocking, rehearsals, scene and character development, and all other elements that go into a production. This is a very large challenge for a student.

All four factors apply here, in roughly equal measure. Consider many of the same aspects as for the Play or Musical categories, except (apart from casting choices) you cannot hold the director accountable for every individual performance. Ask yourself, through the show, whether you are noticing director issues more than you usually do at shows. If not, then the student director may be doing good work. If you find yourself thinking "this is a great show," and not "this is a decent show, considering it's student run," then the student director may be doing very good work.

Look and listen for:

Show choice and casting. If the director chose the production, is it one within the capability of the cast and crew to do well? Has the show been appropriately cast? Do the actors suit their characters?

Staging. Was the show well staged? Did the director use the space of the theatre and the set to enhance to production? Did the staging help tell the story? Does the staging look planned and rehearsed?

Character work. Do the performers look like they were given direction? Do they look sure about where to be and what to do? Are the characters sharply defined, and developed well? Do lesser characters (and less talented performers) have fully developed characters? Do performers exhibit good on-stage chemistry and appear to work well together?

Pace. Does the show move briskly? Are cues well-timed? Is crew work quick and efficient?

Musical aspects. If the show is a musical, how well are the songs integrated in the story?

Technical aspects. Are sound, lighting, sets, costumes, and other tech aspects used to enhance the story line? Are

these items used to an appropriate degree? (Or could the show have made do with more of them – or less?)
Originality. Is this production unique in significant ways? (Or does it look like other productions of the same show – or a movie – that you may have seen?)

For all creativity categories consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The creative element is of superior quality and significantly enhances the show, and nearly all of the above questions can be answered with a clear "yes."

7 or 8: The creative element is of excellent quality and enhances the show, and nearly all of the above questions can be answered with a clear "yes."

5 or 6: The creative element is of good quality and enhances the show, and many of the above questions can be answered "yes."

3 or 4: The creative element is basic and answers some of the above questions can be answered "yes."

1 or 2: The creative element is not well executed, and only a few of the above questions can be answered "yes."

A NOTE ABOUT PROJECTIONS: Projections will be categorized by who DESIGNS and/or RUNS the projections. Example: if projections are run by a lighting crew member - they will be considered in the lighting category. This would be the same if run by a member of sets, running crew, or stage management. If projections are designed and/or run by a separate, independent crew, it could fall under Creativity.

ENSEMBLE (PLAY / MUSICAL)

Ensemble refers to a distinct and recognizable group of performers who frequently (at a minimum, in more than one scene) appear on stage together as an intended/named unit, but it may not include the entire cast, or an adult in a prominent role. A majority of the ensemble performers must be students in grades 9 through 12. In a Musical, the Ensemble must be supporting in at least one song. In a Musical, this award is intended to recognize a chorus, although other ensemble groups are eligible. As long as they appear together, they may represent different character groups. For example, the Winkies/Ozians in "The Wiz", the secretaries in "Thoroughly Modern Millie," or the villagers/utensils OR the Silly Girls in "Beauty and the Beast." Though the ensemble may include a performer eligible for a lead category, the ensemble may not solely consist of leading actors e.g. The Jets (yes, All of them) are OK. The Delta Nu's can be an ensemble even though Elle is among them.

Keep in mind:

Ensembles can be large or small. They can include performers (in supporting or lead roles) who may have a key identity wholly apart from the ensemble. An ensemble usually provides some counterpart to the story – humor, intrigue, or jolts of energy. It works best when it functions as a team, with good dynamics and chemistry among its members – but can include well-defined individual characters. Of the four factors, quality of presentation matters most. An ensemble can be distinctly un-original, while lending a useful flavor specific to the period of the story. Usually, an ensemble need to have less range of expression, or character arc, than individual performers. What it is at the start may be what it remains at the end of the story. Achieving good dynamics with a two- or three-person ensemble may be less difficult to with a larger group. In a musical, an ensemble should have a significant musical role, with at least one song in which it is defined and supporting. It might also participate in several other songs, lending strong harmonies – and aggressive (perhaps humorous) dance sequences.

Look and listen for:

Character and story. Does the ensemble have its own distinct identity? Does that identity serve the purposes of the story?

Style and period. Does the ensemble convey a particular style or period? Is it eye-catching?

Comedy. If humor is part of the ensemble's purpose, is it funny – vocally, facially, and physically?

Energy and measure. Does the ensemble bring useful energy to its scenes – and give a measured performance, not going "over the top" and providing too much of a good thing?

Vocals and dance. If the show is a musical, does the ensemble sing well, with strong voices and good harmonies? Does it dance well, with coordinated movements?

Cohesion and focus. Does the ensemble work well as a team, with good group dynamics? Do ensemble performers give proper focus to individual performers, when required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The ensemble is distinct, and engaging, with high energy and outstanding dynamics – and, in a musical, has superior vocal and dance skills – significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The ensemble is distinct with high energy and solid dynamics – and, in a musical, has excellent vocal and dance skills – nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The ensemble is distinct with good energy and solid dynamics – and, in a musical, has good vocal and dance skills – nicely complementing the show.

3 or 4: The ensemble is distinct – and, in a musical, has inconsistent vocal and dance skills – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The ensemble is distinct but uneven – and, in a musical, has weak vocal and dance skills – detracting from the show.

FEATURED (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE – PLAY/MUSICAL)

A Featured performer creates and defines a memorable character, in a role that may OR may not have significant stage time, character presentation, and involvement in the story line. A role that is too small to qualify as Supporting will qualify as Featured. Examples in a musical are: Grandmother Berthe in "Pippin", Freddy in "My Fair Lady", and Marcellus in "The Music Man".

Keep in mind:

A role cannot be too small – but can be too large – to qualify as Featured. A Featured performer can dominate one long scene or two short ones, and can have a minor role in several other scenes. More than that is too much to be considered Featured – and qualifies the performer as supporting. When two performers comprise an ensemble, with roughly equivalent stage time, they must either be both deemed Featured performers, or both deemed supporting (or comic) performers. In a musical, a Featured performer may have some solo lines, and may be part of a duet if the other vocalist is supporting more, but not as an equal part of the duet. Originality and creativity in the crafting of a role can often be the key factor here.

If the same performer creates more than one different Featured role in the same performance, select the most memorable of those roles, and score only that, disregarding other roles by the same performer. If no Featured role is in fact "memorable," none should be selected and scored.

Look and listen for:

Character. Does the Featured performer create an interesting character, with a distinct identity, that serves the purposes of a scene – or the story?

Impact. Does the Featured performer make a quick, vivid, and lasting impression?

Voice, physicality, and comedy. Does the Featured performer have a distinctive voice and physical gestures? If humor is part of the character's purpose, is the Featured performer funny – vocally, facially, and physically?

Energy and measure. Does the Featured performer bring useful energy to a scene – and give a measured performance, not going "over the top" and providing too much of a good thing?

Focus. Does the Featured performer give proper focus to other performers, when required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The Featured performer creates an engaging character with distinct qualities and superior execution while making a very vivid impression – and significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The Featured performer creates a dynamic character with distinct qualities and excellent execution, bringing energy, making a solid impression – and nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The Featured performer creates an interesting character, making an impression – and slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The Featured performer creates a somewhat interesting character – and neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The Featured performer creates a flat, uninteresting character that detracts from the show.

DANCER IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE

A Dancer is a performer in any role, whether lead, supporting, or featured, who dances, either solo or as part of an ensemble, but who must be supporting, at least briefly, in one or more one dance numbers, but not necessarily as a solo. The dance will be evaluated for movement, expression, timing, technique (for instance, leaps, turns, jumps, or pirouettes), and the effectiveness of their integration. Non-dance movements (including gymnastics) may be considered, if part of a dance sequence. A performer's singing and acting, in dance scenes or elsewhere, are not factors. To be eligible, dancers must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

To be considered for this category, a dancer should be supporting, preferably downstage, either solo or as part of a small ensemble, for roughly 32 beat counts (four 8-counts), about 15 to 20 seconds. A dancer can be, but need not be, a lead or supporting performer in the show. The dance can be in any style. Stage combat does not make a performer eligible as a dancer, but can be considered in the performer categories. Most dance segments will be of one style, which may not be original. The major issue should be the excellence and difficulty of the dance.

In any musical with substantial dance segments, an effort should be made to rate a dancer of at least one gender, and if appropriate, both.

Look for:

Technical excellence. Does the dancer have technique? If so, is it done well? Are toes pointed? Are legs straight? Are gestures strong? Does the dancer make a hard technique look easy?

Showmanship. Is the dancer drawing you in, entertaining to watch, with strong overall appeal? Does the dancer show confidence, high energy, and good facial expressions throughout?

Style. Does the dancer effectively convey any particular style? If so, is it appropriate to the number and to the show?

Complexity and extent. How complex are the dancer's movements? How lengthy are the segments with movement? How many

performers are involved?

Rhythm and timing. Is the dancer tight to the rhythm, with a good start and finish?

Ensemble work. When in an ensemble, are the dancer's movements coordinated with others? Does the dancer appear to provide leadership for other members of the ensemble?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The dancer shows superior technique and performance with challenging choreography, significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The dancer shows excellent technique and performance with challenging choreography, enhancing the show.

5 or 6: The dancer shows good technique and/or performance with less challenging choreography, enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The dancer shows some good technique and/or performance.

1 or 2: The dancer shows a lack of technique and/or performance skill, detracting from the show.

VOCALIST IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE

A Vocalist is a performer in a lead or supporting role who is a principal soloist in at least two songs. A vocalist will be evaluated for tone, pitch, authority, phrasing, characterization, and presentation. The quality of the performer's acting (other than in songs), dancing, and the qualities of the song composition, accompaniment, and sound or other tech work during the performer's vocals, are not required factors. To be eligible, vocalists must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

If a vocalist presents a range of musical genres, and has an effective vocal styling, those should be considered positive aspects, as well. First and foremost, ask: Is the vocalist's voice strong, is it on pitch, and does it have good tone? Then ask about articulation, projection, range, character, breath control, vibrato, difficulty of the music, and other factors. As with orchestra, this may be a good category to evaluate by (briefly) closing your eyes and concentrating on listening to the voice.

In any show, for either gender, if any vocalist has a principal solo in at least two songs, then rate at least one vocalist of that gender.

Look and listen for:

Tone and intonation. Does the vocalist have a voice that sounds good, and holds pitch, throughout the vocal range?

Articulation and projection. Can the lyrics be understood easily? Does the vocalist have a strong voice that projects well? If a microphone is used, does the performer handle it well, or cause the sound to be uneven or unwanted sounds to come from the microphone?

Phrasing. Does the vocalist communicating the intent of the lyrics, and the believability of the character, within a song?

Range. Does the vocalist not strain their voice at the top of the vocal range, or lack breath support at the bottom of the vocal range?

Breath control and vibrato. Does the vocalist sing full phrases and not break them up at odd places? Does the vocalist have good control of vibrato – smooth, consistent, not too much (especially in the higher range), and not overpowering the sound of the voice itself.

Character. Does the vocalist sing in character, and change no aspect of that character when singing? Does the vocalist convey that the character believes what is being sung?

Theatre. Is the vocalist enjoyable to watch when singing?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The vocalist shows superior technique and performance with challenging score, significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The vocalist shows excellent technique and performance with challenging score, enhancing the show.

5 or 6: The vocalist shows good technique and/or performance with less challenging score, enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The vocalist shows some good technique and/or performance.

1 or 2: The vocalist shows a lack of technique and/or performance skill, detracting from the show.

COMIC (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE — PLAY / MUSICAL)

A Comic actor encompasses a role "reasonably" intended by the playwright to be comedic and will be evaluated for character, movement, expression, and timing. The comic performer should hold a significant presence in at least one scene. Any smaller presence, such as, but not limited to a "one-liner" walk-on role should not be considered adequate for qualification. A role that qualifies for lead or supporting is automatically considered large enough to qualify for comic. Critics should keep in mind that it is more difficult to maintain comedy for multiple acts than for a few moments. Examples would include Leaf Coneybear in "Putnam County Spelling Bee", Agatha in "The Children's Hour", Eulalie Shinn in "The Music Man", and Eugene in "Grease". Examples of characters that would not qualify include Giles Cory in "The Crucible", Bum in "Hairspray", and Grocery Boy in "The Children's Hour". In a Musical, the performer may have, but need not have, vocal lines in any songs. Some plays may not have a significantly comic character. To be eligible comic performers must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

A comic performer must hold a significant presence in at least one scene. In a musical, a comic actor need not be a vocalist in any song. If a comic performer sings or dances, only the comedic aspects of that song or dance should be considered. Comedy can be verbal or physical, wry or slapstick, solo or group. Tech work (sound, costume, make-up, props) can contribute significantly to a comic sequence – in which case, the credit should go there, and comic performers should be credited only with their own humorous persona and antics. Also, do not score on the humor in the script, but rather on the performer's own comedic touches. Originality and creativity deserve extra weight, since those are very important underpinnings for good humor. Don't measure the difficulty. Just measure the laugh.

The bottom line, for comedy, is whether it's funny and makes people laugh. If it makes others laugh, but not you, remember that what you're evaluating is comedic performance as theatre, not as a good fit with your own sense of humor. Be alert to when a comic performer distracts from a story line, draws too much focus from others, or goes "over the top" with humor that seems forced and awkward. Also note, if a role is not intended to be humorous, as written or as interpreted by the director, then a performer should not be selected for this category.

Look and listen for:

Character and story. Does the comic performer create a vivid and amusing character with a distinct identity? Does that identity serve the purposes of any scenes, or of the story?

Style and period. Does the comic performer's humor fit within the style and period of the story?

Delivery and timing. Does the comic performer get maximum impact from humorous lines or scenes?

Voice, face, and body. Does the comic actor use voice, face, and body in humorous ways?

Energy and measure. Does the comic performer bring useful energy to scenes – and give a measured performance, not going "over the top" and providing too much of a good thing?

Focus. Does the comic performer lend comedic focus to other performers (making them funny too)? When humor is not appropriate for a scene, does the comic performer give proper focus to other performers?

Audience response. Does the comic performer make the audience laugh?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The comic performer creates an engaging humorous character with distinct qualities and superior execution while making a very vivid impression – and significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The comic performer creates a dynamic humorous character with distinct qualities and excellent execution, bringing energy, making a solid impression – and nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The comic performer creates an interesting humorous character, making an impression – and slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The comic performer creates a somewhat interesting character – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The comic performer creates a flat, uninteresting character that detracts from the show.

SUPPORTING (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE — PLAY / MUSICAL)

A Supporting Actor performs in a supporting, but not lead, role with significant stage time, character presentation, and involvement in the story line. A role that is too large to qualify as Featured will qualify as supporting. In a Musical, a Supporting performer may or may not be a principal soloist in at least one song - or not sing at all. To be eligible Supporting performers must be in grades 9 through 12." Examples would be the King in "Once Upon a Mattress" and the Wicked Witch of the West in "The Wizard of Oz".

Keep in mind:

A supporting performer does not carry the story, but lends vital support to the story—hence the term "supporting" – and can carry an interesting sub-plot. A supporting performer usually (but not always) has less stage time and character development, and (in a Musical) fewer songs than the leads. The standard should be high. A supporting performance should be persuasive and compelling. All four factors are important. A supporting role may or may not have character arc and require a range of expression. In some shows, a supporting role may be the most creative or difficult role.

Look and listen for:

Character. Does the supporting performer create and hold a believable character? Does that character support plausibly develop, or change, over the course of the story?

Story. Does the supporting performer support the story, and help propel it to a resolution?

Style, period, and age. Does the supporting performer embody the style and period of the story—and the age, ethnicity, nationality, social status, and other elements of the role?

Intensity and nuance. Does the supporting performer have sufficient intensity—and, where required, subtlety and nuance?

Monologue and dialogue. Does the supporting performer deliver lines crisply, audibly, and persuasively—when alone, and when with other performers?

Emotion and physicality. Does the supporting performer use face, gesture, and body, along with the spoken line, to convey emotions effectively?

Comedy, vocals, and dance. When appropriate, is the supporting performer funny? If this is a Musical, does the supporting performer sing and dance at the level required for the role?

Technical aspects. Does the supporting performer use technical aspects well—handling microphones adeptly, standing in the light, wearing costumes comfortably, making full use of the sets, using props effectively, making well-timed entrances and exits?

Focus. Does the supporting performer lend focus to other performers, as required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The supporting performer creates an engaging character with distinct qualities and superior execution while making a very vivid impression – and (if a Musical) sings and dances with superior technique – significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The supporting performer creates a dynamic character with distinct qualities and excellent execution, bringing energy, making a solid impression – and (if a Musical) sings and dances with excellent technique – enhancing the show.

5 or 6: The supporting performer creates a believable character that supports the story, and (if a Musical) sings and dances well, slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The supporting performer creates a fairly believable character that supports the story somewhat, and (if a Musical) sings and dances fairly well – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The supporting performer does not create a believable character that supports the story, and (if a Musical) does not sing and dance as well as the role requires – detracting from the show.

LEAD (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE — PLAY / MUSICAL)

A Lead Actor performs in a leading role, with substantial stage time, character development, and centrality to the story line. In a Musical, the performer must be a principal vocalist in at least two songs. To be eligible, Lead performers must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

A lead performer stands at the center of the story, and show, with the most stage time, character development, and songs (in a Musical). The standard should be very high. A Lead performance should be provocative and powerful. All four factors are important. In most shows, a Lead role usually shows the arc of the character, reveals the greatest range of expression. In many (but not all) shows, a Lead role is the most creative and difficult role.

In a show consisting of a series of vignettes, with no clear Lead character of a particular gender, the dominant performer of that gender may qualify. Every show should have at least one Lead performer.

Look and listen for:

Character. Does the lead performer create and hold a believable character? Does that character plausibly develop, or change, over the course of the story?

Story. Does the lead performer draw you into the story, and then propel the story to a resolution?

Style, period, and age. Does the lead performer embody the style and period of the story – and the age, ethnicity, nationality, social status, and other elements of the role?

Authority, intensity, and nuance. Does the lead performer command the stage with authority, intensity – and, where required, subtlety and nuance?

Monologue and dialogue. Does the lead performer deliver lines crisply, audibly, and persuasively – when alone, and when with other performers?

Emotion and physicality. Does the lead performer use face, gesture, and body, along with the spoken line, to convey emotions effectively?

Comedy, vocals, and dance. When appropriate, is the lead performer funny? If this is a Musical, does the lead performer sing and dance at the level required for the role?

Technical aspects. Does the lead performer use technical aspects well – handling microphones adeptly, standing in the light, wearing costumes comfortably, making full use of the sets, using props effectively, making well-timed entrances and exits?

Focus. Does the lead performer lend focus to other performers, as required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The lead performer creates and holds a very provocative and powerful character with distinct qualities and superior execution that propels the story, has strong command of the stage all the time, with real intensity and strong emotional content, and (if a Musical) sings and dances with superior technique – significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The lead performer creates a dynamic character with distinct qualities and excellent execution that carries the story, has solid command of the stage nearly all the time, with intensity and emotional content, and (if a Musical) sings and dances with excellent technique – nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The lead performer creates a believable character with distinct qualities and excellent execution that carries the story, has solid command of the stage nearly all the time, with intensity and emotional content, and (if a Musical) sings and dances with good technique – slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The lead performer creates a fairly believable character that carries the story somewhat, and (if a Musical) sings and dances fairly well – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The lead performer does not create a believable character, has weak command of the stage, and (if a Musical) does not sing and dance as well as the role requires – detracting from the show.

SONG

The Song is the best-performed song in a Musical. A song will be evaluated purely on the basis of its presentation by a cast, crew, and orchestra, including voice, dance, acting, staging, sound and other tech work, accompaniment, and any other elements of the song's presentation. The quality of the composition, lyrics, and adaptation (even if student-done), the extent of student participation in the orchestra, and the quality of any other presentation of the same song (earlier or later in the Musical), are not factors. To be eligible, a song must be in a Musical, and must not include any solo lines by an adult. A majority of the performers with solo lines in the song, and a majority of all performers in the song, must be students in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

The task here is to select and evaluate the best-performed song in the Musical. That may or may not be the best song, nor the largest, showiest, most amusing, or most famous song. It must be the best-executed song, considering all aspects of performance – including tech and orchestra work. In many Cappies programs, the Song nominees (or Critics' Choice Songs for Musical nominees) will be invited to perform at the Gala. This fact can be a source of inspiration for making a selection, but it should not alter the basic choice among songs, nor how any song is evaluated.

Listen carefully to vocal qualities (tone, pitch, phrasing, vibrato), and watch dance elements just as closely. Listen and look for a song done very well – and, when scoring it, give major consideration to the difficulty in the vocals, dance, orchestration, or technical aspects. Many songs will have little range of expression, and if that appears intended by the composer and lyricist, that is fine. A difficult song that is extremely well presented, but not original in concept, may be selected and scored high. Do not be swayed by audience response. A very amusing ensemble song may be a literal "show stopper," even if it's very easy and done in a sloppy manner, while a brilliantly performed, very difficult dramatic solo or duet may receive far less audience response. Faced with that choice; select the latter.

Look and listen for:

Vocals. Is the song performed well by the soloists? Is it performed well by the ensemble chorus? Can you understand the lyrics well?

Characterizations. Do the soloists and ensemble members sing in character?

Orchestration. Is the song performed well by the orchestra? (See the Orchestra category.)

Dance. If dance is part of the song, is that performed well? Is it sung in character?

Energy. Is the energy level of performers appropriate for the song?

Sound. Is the quality of sound uniformly good through the song?

Other technical aspects. Does lighting, sets, costumes, or other tech work enhance the song?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The song is challenging and performed with superior vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song.

7 or 8: The song is challenging and performed with excellent vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song or is less challenging and performed with superior vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song.

5 or 6: The song is less challenging, but performed with good vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song.

3 or 4: The song is performed with some good vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography or technical elements.

1 or 2: The song is uneven with weak vocal, characterization, orchestration and/or technical elements that detract from the show.

PLAY

Play refers to the performance as an entirety. It will be evaluated as a production, and the quality of the published work (that is, the work of the playwright) is not a factor. It will be evaluated as a whole, including all on- and off-stage elements. It may not have an adult in any supporting or lead role, and the extent of adult participation in off-stage roles is a factor.

Keep in mind:

You are not in any way judging the playwright's work, nor are you recognizing the success of a well-known play. You are simply judging the quality of this production, measured against the standard of what you might expect of a first-rate high-school production of that play. You may consider any special interpretation of a well-known play – whether the creative choices enhanced or detracted from its overall impact of a show. The four evaluation factors are all important here.

Plays vary somewhat in degree of difficulty, but not as much as musicals. Some involve more difficult character, ensemble, or tech work. Plays that are new or not well-known can be more difficult to do than those that are very well-known, but this is not as important a difference as with musicals. If a play has been made into a rentable movie, it's reasonable to assume that many in the cast and crew have seen that movie and have had a chance to gain pointers from it. In such a case, look for original, creative touches.

Judge the play as a whole: lead and supporting performers, minor characters, ensembles, and all aspects of tech work. Dialogue and character development are more substantial aspects in a play than in a musical, because more time is spent on them, and they are usually more central to the story (and quality of the production). Anything that happens on stage can and should be considered, whether or not student done – but the greater the student work, the more credit should be given. Be careful not to pay too much attention to ovations or other audience response. Good audience energy can reflect a strong show, but not necessarily – and Critics need to look beyond that.

Look and listen for:

Impact. How well does the play work?

Lead performers. How strong and believable are they? Do they command the stage?

Supporting and minor performers. How good are they? Do they support the story well?

Ensembles. How good are they? Do they provide energy and definition to the story?

Drama and humor. How well is the story presented? How persuasive are emotional scenes? If the show has humor, how well does it succeed?

Technical work. How good are all the technical aspects – sound, lighting, sets, costumes, make-up, props, effects, and crew work?

Direction. How effective are the creative choices, casting, blocking, character work, musical direction, dance choreography, integration of tech work, and overall pace of the show?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The play is challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements

7 or 8: The play is challenging with excellent performances, direction and technical elements or less challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements.

5 or 6: The play is less challenging with good performances, direction and technical elements.

3 or 4: The play is presented with some good performances, direction and technical elements.

1 or 2: The play is uneven with weak performances, direction and/or technical elements

MUSICAL

Musical refers to the performance as an entirety. Live accompaniment is not required. It will be evaluated as a production, and the quality of the published work (that is, the work of the playwright) is not a factor. It will be evaluated as a whole, including all on- and off-stage elements. It may not have an adult in any supporting or lead role, and the extent of adult participation in off-stage roles is a factor.

Keep in mind:

You are not in any way judging the book, lyrics, or compositions, nor are you recognizing the success of a well-known show. You are simply judging the quality of this production, measured against the standard of what you might expect of a first-rate high-school production of that show. You may consider any special interpretation of a well-known musical – whether the creative choices enhanced or detracted from its overall impact. All four evaluation factors are important here.

Musicals vary in degree of difficulty. Some involve more difficult music than others – or character, ensemble, or tech work.

Usually, musicals that are new or not well-known are more difficult to do than those that are very well-known, in part because the cast and crew will not be working off pre-existing models. If a musical has been made into a rentable movie, or has an easily acquired CD, it's reasonable to assume that many in the cast and crew have seen that movie and heard that CD, and have had a chance to gain pointers from them. In such a case, look for original, creative touches.

Judge the Musical as a whole: lead and supporting performers, minor characters, vocalists, dancers, ensembles, orchestra, and all aspects of tech work. Anything that happens on stage can and should be considered, whether or not student led – but the greater the student work, the more credit should be given. Be careful not to pay too much attention to ovations or other audience response. Good audience energy can reflect a strong show, but not necessarily – and Critics need to look beyond that.

Look and listen for:

Impact. How well does the musical work?

Lead performers. How strong and believable are they? Do they command the stage?

Supporting and minor performers. How good are they? Do they support the story well?

Ensembles. How good are they? Do they provide energy and definition to the story?

Music, vocals, and dance. How consistently good are all these core components of a musical?

Drama. How well is the story presented? How persuasive are emotional scenes?

Humor. If the show has humor, how well does it succeed?

Technical work. How good are all the technical aspects – sound, lighting, sets, costumes, make-up, props, effects, and crew work?

Direction. How effective are the creative choices, casting, blocking, character work, musical direction, dance choreography, integration of tech work, and overall pace of the show?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The musical is challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements

7 or 8: The musical is challenging with excellent performances, direction and technical elements or less challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements.

5 or 6: The musical is less challenging with good performances, direction and technical elements.

3 or 4: The musical is presented with some good performances, direction and technical elements.

1 or 2: The musical is uneven with weak performances, direction and technical elements

Cappies of Greater Cincinnati determines whether a show is a play or a musical based on how it is billed by its licensing company. If a show is billed as "a play with music," it is treated as a play for all Cappies purposes and category eligibility.

CRITICS' CHOICES: Q & A'S

Q: Are Critics' Choices "nominations"? *No. You are selecting who will be on the awards ballot—in other words, who will be eligible for nominations and awards.*

Q: How do we determine if we should “spread the wealth” or choose one performer for more than one category? *Your Critics' Choice in every category should always be the performer you would score the highest in that category. If you select someone else, the result might be to deny the most deserving performer his/her best chance at a nomination in any category.*

Q: What do we do if a role is too big to be a Featured but too small to be Supporting? *By definition, any role too large to be a Featured qualifies as Supporting—and any role too small to be Supporting qualifies as Featured*

Q: What do we do if a show doesn't have a "Lead" role? *If you wish, you can select the most dominant performer of that gender. When scoring that person, however, keep in mind the range and degree of difficulty of the role—which may be less than in performances where the Lead has a more significant role.*

Q: Do we have to select someone for every category, even if we didn't think anyone was good enough to deserve a nomination? *If any cast or crew member is eligible for a category, you must select whichever person you would score highest as a Critics' Choice for that category, with one exception: You should not select a Comic role if no one is in a role intended by the playwright or director to be comedic. In all other cases, you must select a Critics' Choice, even if you feel the work was not very good, in which case you should express yourself through the score you give.*

Q: What do we do if we don't think a show qualifies for a non-performing category (like Sets or Costumes) but the show's theater director says it does? *Seek verification in reference to the show eligibility form. Obtain a final say from the Board member and Mentor.*

Q: How are we supposed to take account of a small budget, an acoustically poor theater, or a shorter-than- usual time for rehearsal, or some other issue that is beyond the control of the cast or crew? *Those are appropriate issues to consider in your scores as you apply the "originality and creativity" and "degree of difficulty" factors. It is far more difficult to have eye-catching costumes if the costumer has a very small costume budget, or to have good sound if the theater has acoustic problems, or to put on a good show if a storm closed the school during the final week of rehearsals.*

Q: What if I totally disagree with a Critics' Choice? *You have to accept the decision and score whoever it is. At the end of the year, that name will be on the ballot, and you will be required to give it a score.*

Q: What if I want to change my scores later? *The scores you mark after a show are not intended to be final. They are just a way to record your initial impressions about each Critics' Choices. When you vote for awards at the end of the year, you will be given your forms back, and you can make any changes you wish to your scores.*

Q: What if I forget to hand in my form before I go home? *Bring it to the next show and give it to a mentor or program official when other forms are turned in for that show. Clip on a note as a reminder that it's for an earlier show. If this happens at your last show, just bring the form with you when you vote.*

CRITIC DIRECTIONS- WRITING REVIEWS

What To Include in Your Review

The purpose of your review is to let the public know what high-schoolers are accomplishing in theatre and to let the cast and crew know how well they did.

It needs to include:

- the name of the play or musical,
- the name of school producing it,
- some background on the play/musical,
- a brief set-up of the plot, and
- an evaluative description of the performances and non-performing elements you saw in the show, including examples of what went well and mentions of what did not.

Your own theatre experience, the information in the Theatre Evaluation Guide, and what you learn in Critic discussions will help you show your readers how the several aspects of the production contributed to its level of success.

Presenting It to Your Readers

How you present the above information will affect whether your readers continue to read past your opening line and how much respect they have for your opinions. It will also determine whether the Mentors select your review for publication. Specifically, the Mentors will look for how well you:

- **Criticize Appropriately.** Give honest descriptions of what happened on stage, proportionate praise and criticism within the range of fair comment, and solid analysis of theatre.
- **Give Accurate Praise.** Reflect the overall Critic opinion of a Cappies show, and various aspects of that show, as expressed during discussions.
- **Engage Your Readers.** Write with an engaging and creative style, and make your review of interest to readers who did, and those who did not, see the Cappies show.
- **Spell Names Correctly, Etc.** Correctly spell all cast, crew, character, and other names, and use correct grammar and punctuation.

Criticizing Appropriately

While a core purpose of the Cappies is to promote and celebrate high-school theatre, the critical reviews must have integrity, fairness, and accuracy. Most shows have aspects that could have been better – and, therefore, most reviews should include some criticisms. However, when making criticisms, remember that you are not evaluating experienced professionals, but students who are learning about theatre arts. This may be the first time they have ever been in a reviewed show. The following methods will help you give an honest description of what happened on stage while protecting the feelings of the students involved with the show.

Critique the Work Of High-School Students Only

Cappies is a program for high-school students, so only work by high-school students may be criticized (or praised). If the show includes performers younger than high-school age, they are to be praised or not mentioned. Adult participants are not to be praised or criticized. Neither is the script (unless student-written) up for evaluation, just the production of it.

Only Mention Names for Praise

When giving praise, you may refer to students by their name or their character name. However, when making a criticism, no individual student may be referred to by their name, character name, or role. Instead, if a singer was off-key, for instance, you may say, "Some singers were off-key." Or, if you criticize the sound in the review, don't mention the name of the sound person anywhere in the review. This is so the cast and crew can benefit from your honest and informed opinion without being embarrassed.

Include Observations On A Variety of Elements

Share your observations about both the performing and the tech elements of the show, and about the leads and the supporting cast. Also, remember all four of the evaluation factors – difficulty, range, originality, and presentation – and describe events for your readers using this perspective. For instance, it's a lot harder to do sound for a full-scale musical than for a black-box play, and your words of praise or criticism should reflect this.

Describe the Behavior

Avoid words that declare themselves to be praise (commendable, praiseworthy) or criticism (unfortunate, detracted, marred, and

plagued). Instead, just describe what you saw. For instance, "The production was unfortunately marred by several microphone problems," grinds in a valid criticism too much. It's enough to say, "At times, the microphones didn't work". In addition, don't guess at what caused the problem; just remark on what you actually saw. For instance, saying, "A few characters could have used more time to learn their dances correctly," addresses the rehearsal process as opposed to what happened on stage. Instead, the observation could be made that
"A few characters did not execute their dances properly."

Balance It with Praise

Whenever possible, combine your criticism with a favorable remark such as,
"Although there were lines lost from actors speaking too quickly or the orchestra overpowering them, the performers kept their energy constant and strong."

Criticize By Omission

At times, the most appropriate way to state a criticism is to say nothing at all. For instance, if you say nothing about the lead performers but broadly praise supporting characters or ensemble members, that will make your point. Or it could be that all you say about the lead actor is that she/he showed tremendous poise, and then, later in the review, you say that some performers in the show fell out of character.

Position Criticisms near the End

Place criticism near the end of your review, after many positive observations – but not in the last paragraph where it would be emphasized. It also helps to put it near the end of a paragraph, but not in the last clause.
Giving Accurate Praise

Differentiate Levels of Success

Only write rave reviews for rave-worthy shows (as determined by Critic consensus in the Cappies room). Reviews for shows of different calibers should reflect those differences. Between an outstanding show and a disappointing one, the gradations may seem difficult to express. Below are some examples to help you.

Corresponding paragraphs are given from reviews for four fictitious productions of *South Pacific*: a weak show that would score a 2 or 3, a so-so show that would score a 4 or 5, a pretty good show that would score a 6 or 7, and an outstanding show that would score an 8 or 9. Compare the slightly varying treatment of the same show elements to get an idea of how to reflect the varying levels of success of shows you review.

Lead In

The following lead-in paragraph is for the production that earned a score of 2 or 3.

"Use a paradise location to describe the most un-paradisiacal of situations, and you've got *South Pacific*, an epic tale of love, prejudice, and palm trees performed last weekend by Little Valley High School. This Rodgers & Hammerstein musical won nine Tonys in 1950, and ran for over 2000 performances on Broadway before hitting the screen in 1958."

For the better shows, the word "performed" was followed by "solidly" (4 or 5), "with aplomb" (6 or 7), or "brilliantly" (8 or 9).

Remark on Individual Actors

The excerpts in this section are in order from describing the weakest performance (2 or 3) to the strongest (8 or 9).

"As Bloody Mary, Jane Thomas brought an eye-opening, tongue-in-cheek charm to the production. On songs like "Happy Talk," where she playfully mocked the lovers Cable and Liat, Thomas displayed enthusiasm and energy for the role."

"With both cheekiness and tongue-in-cheek, Jane Thomas brought charm to the role of Bloody Mary. On songs like "Happy Talk," Thomas playfully mocked the lovers Cable and Liat without losing the grace or humor of her character."

"With a mix of playful mock and big-boned jolliness, Jane Thomas crafted a full-fledged comic foil as Bloody Mary, evident in songs like the anthem-like 'Bloody Mary' and the ticklish 'Happy Talk.'"

"With a mix of playful mock and big-boned jolliness, Jane Thomas provided a full-fledged comic foil as Bloody Mary, with entrances that made the audience roar."

Describe the Acting in General

In the following paragraphs, you can see how praise and criticism are combined for each of the different levels of performance.

2 or 3: "The big-boned Seabee Luther Billis was nicely played by the comically-adroit Matt Baker. Though other ensemble numbers lacked crispness and energy, Baker, along with his ruffian crew of sailors, used a grab-bag of swaggering, womanizing antics to make "There's Nothing Like a Dame" an audience favorite. In his amusing solo performance on the cross-dressing

"Honey Bun," Baker demonstrated his jiggling coconut bra. Articulation was a problem in many scenes, and a number of songs had pitch errors, but the performers did nicely to stay in character."

4 or 5: "The big-boned Seabee Luther Billis was enjoyably played by the comically-adroit Matt Baker. Though other numbers seemed to lack impact, Baker, along with his ruffian crew of sailors, used a grab-bag of swaggering, womanizing antics to make "There's Nothing Like a Dame" an audience favorite. Baker's solo performance on the cross-dressing "Honey Bun" was very amusing, as he demonstrated his mastery of a jiggling coconut bra. Articulation was a problem from time to time, and some vocalists strained to hit notes, but the performers always kept their characters clearly in focus."

6 or 7: "The commitment and energy of the entire 41-person ensemble carried this production. The energy on big dance numbers like "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair" more than make up for any other injustice. Swaggering sailor tunes like "There's Nothing Like a Dame" had a chipper air that seemed to come at least as much from the chumminess of the cast members as from Rodgers' libretto. While a few lines were hard to hear, the vocalists did fine work with some difficult music, and did very well in keeping their songs tightly in character."

8 or 9: "Matt Baker's Luther Billis and his ruffian crew of Seabees added their own puckish twist to the script's comic relief. "There's Nothing Like a Dame" has a bombastic chipper to it seemingly unwritten in the script; while Baker's solo performance on "Honey Bun" drew huge laughs with his stunning mastery of a jiggling coconut bra. Throughout the cast, line articulation was outstanding, and vocalists showed superb range and styling with very difficult music. Every song conveyed exactly the attitude required for the character and story."

Reflect on the Technical Elements

Here, the technical elements of the different productions are explored.

2 or 3: "Jill Benning's sets reflected the story's tropical atmosphere, with basic backdrops and suggestions of green flora around the stage frame. Martha Cunningham's costumes were simple but effective, using a mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks. Many scene changes were heavily drawn out, even when little amelioration was made to the set. Muffled and faulty microphones challenged the production throughout, but the cast and crew admirably trekked on through every difficulty."

4 or 5: "Jill Benning's sets, with cool blue backdrops and luscious green flora, nicely captured the show's tropical atmosphere – as did Martha Cunningham's costumes, a mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks. At times, major scene changes were heavily drawn out. Microphones were occasionally muffled, but the cast and crew never lost focus and adjusted well."

6 or 7: "Jill Benning's sets, with their use of cool blue backdrops and luscious green flora, effectively captured the show's tropical atmosphere – as did Martha Cunningham's inventive costumes, a simple but effective mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks. Most scene changes were swiftly made. For a show with this many vocalists using mics, the sound was quite good. Even when small microphone problems arose, the cast and crew adjusted very skillfully and could be heard clearly."

8 or 9: "Justin Bonner's stage crew kept the show running smoothly at all times. The sound was nearly flawless – no small feat for a show with this many vocalists using microphones. Among the many other superb technical aspects were Jill Benning's sets, with their use of cool blue backdrops and luscious green flora to capture the show's tropical atmosphere, and Martha Cunningham's costumes, a simple but effective mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks."

Sum It Up

Following are the closing paragraphs from the four reviews.

2 or 3: "Clocking in at three hours, *South Pacific* is truly a difficult production for a high school to tackle, but Little Valley took to the task admirably."

4 or 5: "Clocking in at three hours, *South Pacific* is a challenging production for a high school to tackle, but Little Valley gave it a good effort, in a show well-received by the audience."

6 or 7: "Clocking in at three hours, *South Pacific* is truly a difficult production for a high school to tackle, but Little Valley turned in a very fine show."

8 or 9: "For an exciting production with near-professional polish, Little Valley deserves many rounds of applause, as this "enchanted evening" proved nothing short of spectacular."

Engaging Your Readers

Before you begin writing, have in mind what you want to say. Take notes during the show to help you remember elements which stood out as you watched. Write a catchy phrase or two right after the show to sum up your impression of the production while it's fresh in your mind. Use these to help you decide what to put in your review. For instance, which performances or performers do you want to mention? Which technical elements do you want to highlight?

Then, think about your readers. How will they best be able to understand and enjoy what you have to say? The following practices will help you create a well-written and interesting review that will grab your readers' attention and keep them absorbed in what you have to say all the way to the end.

Arrange Your Thoughts

Arrange your thoughts so your readers can easily follow along as you move from discussing one element of the show to another. Here's one way to do this; it's called the seven-paragraph plan. Each of seven paragraphs is dedicated, as follows, to one purpose, and together they offer a logical flow of information.

Paragraph 1: The Lead-In. Grab your readers' attention. A good hook should not start with a direct quote from the show, or a question to the reader in the very first sentence. Reviews that start this way will not be ranked in the top ten. Rhetorical questions are permissible in the first paragraph, but should not be the very first sentence of your review.

Paragraph 2: The Story. Help your readers relate to the play or musical you are reviewing. If you haven't already, tell them the name of the play/musical (and the name of the performing school). Keep in mind that some of your readers will be familiar with this show and others will not. Interest both types of readers with a brief plot set-up and some interesting background on the show. For instance:

When was it written and by whom?

Where and when does the story take place?

Is the story well-known or lesser so?

Is there something noteworthy in its performance history?

Does its theme address important issues today?

Note: When using information you have found on the plot or background of a show, remember to put it in your own words for your review (so as not to commit plagiarism).

Paragraph 3: The Production Overall. Make some broad observations about the show as a whole. What production element anchored the show? An inventive or unusual concept? The cast's energy? The choreography? Technical elements or effects? A specific actor or ensemble? Write two or three sentences about this, but only if you considered the show to be a success. For instance,

"Quentin Tarantino High school's production was anchored by the exceptional talent and versatility of the ensemble. Every member of the 38-person cast helped convey the riveting truth behind the intricate script, making each of the characters clear-cut, complex, and captivating."

If the show fell short in key areas, describe it without praising it much. If there were major problems, don't put them here. Instead, include them further down, or merge them with another paragraph.

Paragraph 4: The Lead Actors. Describe highlights of what the lead actors did well. Put any criticisms of their work later in the review, where you can state it in an indirect manner. If you think their work was particularly weak, don't mention them at all – and talk about other actors here instead.

Paragraph 5: The Supporting Cast. Describe highlights from featured actors, stand-out vocalists or dancers, ensembles, etc. In addition, criticisms about all aspects of performance – including the leads – are appropriate here. Do not hesitate to criticize performers, when warranted, but justify all criticisms with specific and persuasive examples.

Paragraph 6: The Technical Aspects. Sets. Costumes. Lights. Sound. Props. Effects. Stage Crew. Makeup. Pick two or three technical elements which were most integral to the level of success of the production. Describe their major facets (for example, what costumes were most notable), and explain how they were successful (or problematic).

Paragraph 7: The Closer. Sum it all up.

Follow A Theme

Start by writing an up-beat, one-sentence description of the show overall. Think of it as the last sentence of your review (your closer). It may, for instance, commend the performing school on successfully tackling a particularly emotional script, or use references from the show to create a pun. Try to create a punchy ending, or tagline, your readers will remember. Have fun with it – and your readers are likely to also.

Next, write a strong, interesting opening sentence (your lead-in) that will command your readers' attention and set them up for a review that will culminate in that last sentence you just wrote. Two ways to go about this are with a zinger or a dramatic description.

The zinger is a catchy, one-sentence grabber that plays off the production or content of the script. This type of lead has lots of

room for creativity; however, it must be extremely clear and extremely concise; keep it to one sentence. Here's an example:

"Nikki's parents ran away, Luis's hooked on cocaine, Jackie's a child prostitute – and you thought your neighborhood had issues! Last weekend, Pauly Shore High School paid tribute to the abandoned children of America's ghettos in their production of *Runaways*."

If a show has a captivating opening moment, or one that is perhaps definitive of the play/musical (for instance, the ballet fight-dancing which opens *West Side Story*), the dramatic description works well, particularly for shows with a serious theme. An example follows. Before moving on, fill out the first and last paragraphs. (See the above examples.). Try to make these paragraphs no longer than three long sentences or four short ones.

"A procession of silhouetted actors filed listlessly through the auditorium, as projectors and television screens displayed slide after slide of familiar images – protesters, candlelight vigils, men in orange jumpsuits, and the voices of newscasters repeating the name "Matthew Shepard." So began Harold & Kumar High School's recent production of *The Laramie Project* ..."

Writing the beginning and the end first, and then filling in the middle, helps focus your thinking so you end up with a cohesive review.

Give Examples

Show, don't tell, your readers how the production reached its level of success. Give examples of what you saw and heard to make your point. For instance, instead of saying, "He gave an energetic performance," describe his specific movements – perhaps like this:

"He bounced about the stage as if he had springs under his feet."

If you use the audience to reflect how well the performers did, don't say how the audience felt; just say what they did. For instance, "The audience roared with laughter." In addition, don't put yourself in the review (I, we, this critic). Only describe what happened on stage.

Create Mental Images

Make your review interesting for readers who saw – or didn't see – the show. Describe in rich detail the colors and textures on stage. Put images in their mind's eye – again or for the first time. Consider the different pictures created in your mind between reading, "The costumes were whimsical," and reading,

"Some of the characters wore khaki shorts with brightly striped suspenders, accompanied by orange, argyle knee-highs and propeller beanies."

Help your readers see what you saw. Make them feel like they were at the show (or bring a special moment back to mind) by using vivid nouns and strong verbs (ahead of adjectives and adverbs) as you describe what happened.

Use Flavorful Words

Keep It Fresh. Use a variety of words in your review to keep each sentence fresh, and therefore interesting, for your reader. For instance, instead of repeatedly using the word "walked" to describe how each actor moved, use a variety of synonyms such as sauntered, strolled, traipsed, trooped, stepped, or hoofed it.

Use a thesaurus to find words other than those that first come to mind, but make sure they mean exactly what you intend to say – and that you understand how to use them correctly.

Say What You Do Mean. Choose the words that most fully say what you mean. For instance, instead of using the tentative, double-negative phrase, "it did not disappoint," say that "it delighted".

Make It Lively. Keep to a minimum your use of linking verbs (is, are, was, were), especially when used with flavorless nouns (there, that, this, it). Instead, restructure the sentence to describe an action using a lively verb. For instance, instead of "There were balloons everywhere," say "Balloons hung everywhere."

Be Clear and Concise

Keep your sentences clear (versus convoluted) by putting subjects close enough to the main verbs that your readers don't get lost mid-sentence. Use punctuation smartly, to help make your prose more readable. For instance, limit your use of colons and semi-colons. They slow readers down. In addition, limit each of your paragraphs to about four sentences. Alternate between short and long sentences, and use varying sentence structures, to create flow.

"Boil down" your writing to eliminate redundancy, "throat clearing," and other fluff. Look at each sentence, and see if you can cut it by a third or a half and still say the same thing, in more concentrated prose. Do that through a whole piece that you've written, and you'll be surprised how much sharper it will read.

Spelling Names Correctly, Etc.

The best reviews are usually about 400-500 words long. (Your word-processing program most likely has a word-counting tool that can quickly count the words for you.) Reviews that are close to 600 may be accepted, but are unlikely to be

selected for publication. Reviews that are close to 300 words are unlikely to be selected and reviews of fewer than 300 words may not count as a submitted review.

What To Always Include In Your Review:

1. Catchy opening sentence/Good "Hook"
2. Name of the performing school
3. Title of the show
4. History of the show
5. Short synopsis of the plot
6. Evaluative description of performance and non-performing elements
7. Mention at least 3 Actors by name
8. Mention at least 2 Techs by name

AWARD VOTING

The Cappies digital voting system enables high school-age student Critics to serve as judges in a theater awards program in which (1) no Critic has seen all the shows being judged, (2) different numbers of Critics are judging each show, and (3) Critics are not eligible to judge their own school's shows as a part of the competition). These conditions require a voting system that provides the maximum possible fairness, objectivity, and integrity.

The Cappies voting system provided fairness, objectivity, and integrity by requiring all Critics to vote on the same day, at on-line computers, seated apart from other Critics from their own school, through a carefully designed set of checks and balances, reinforced by a mechanism for vote-by-vote review by program officials and auditors.

Through this process:

- 1) Critics score in ways that provide a fair evaluation for every show, even though each show is scored by a different set of Critics.
- 2) No advantage goes to any show that was reviewed by a large (or small) number of Critics, or whose own school's Critics reviewed a large (or small) number of shows.
- 3) Any possible outcome-swaying "gaming" or "strategic voting" by Critics is observable in the results, with program officials retaining the authority to disqualify any votes that they, the auditor, and an international Cappies official conclude were not cast objectively.

This voting system is part of the Cappies Information Services (C.I.S.), designed in 2002 by students at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Annandale, Virginia. It is maintained by a team of students at that school, led by its original designers, Jeff Arnold (now at M.I.T.) and Samarth Keshava (now at Yale).

The Cappies digital voting system is a little complicated, here and there, but once you understand it, in the context of the goals of the Cappies program, you'll see how and why it makes sense.

HOW CRITICS VOTE

Critics vote by evaluation scores, by "tie-break" rankings, and by nomination and award points. Each of these methods reveals an important aspect of Critic opinion while providing a check-and-balance against the others, to provide fairness and integrity to the results.

Evaluation scores use the familiar Cappies scoring range of from 1 (poor) to 10 (professional quality). From these scores, CIS computes a "mean evaluation score" for each candidate, from all the numbers received from Critics. The Critics base these scores, at least in part, on the post-show scores they gave each candidate on this same scale. On their ballot, they can "ink in" these original scores, or raise them or lower them, as desired.

To ensure fairness and consistency among voting Critics, while giving each Critic reasonable latitude to score every show accurately, each Critic is (1) encouraged to maintain a mean score of between 5 and 6, and (2) required to have a mean score not lower than 4 nor greater than 7.

Tie-breaks are comparative rankings. On their ballots, Critics must rank every candidate, including those to whom they give the same evaluation score. If a Critic gives three candidates a score of 6, that Critic must designate them as 6A, 6B, and 6C, with the "A" score being higher than B, and B higher than C. These rankings can then be used to compare scores given any two candidates.

Nomination and award points enable Critics to express whom s/he thinks is worthy enough to be nominated or win a "Cappie" award. Each Critic receives her/his own number of points to allocate as they choose to any candidates on the ballot. A Critic receives five nomination points, and one award point, for every show that Critic reviewed, which means that a Critic who reviewed ten shows would have twice as many points to distribute as a Critic who reviewed five shows. Critics must give all their points, and they cannot give any candidate more than one of each kind of point. All ballot candidates have an equal chance of receiving points from all the Critics who evaluated them.

After voting is completed, C.I.S. calculates a "nomination point score" for each candidate, which is the number of nomination points s/he received, divided by the number of Critics who could have given them. It does the same for award points. A candidate who was seen by 20 Critics and given 8 nomination points and 2 award points will have a nomination point score of 0.40 and an award point score of 0.10.

HOW RESULTS ARE DECIDED

Here's how the C.I.S. digital voting system determines nominees and "Cappie" winners.

Each program's Steering Committee determines the maximum number of nominations that can be given in each category and the minimum "mean evaluation score" a candidate must receive to be nominated.

Under the rules, no one can be nominated twice for the same show in non-performing categories, or in performing categories.

When a candidate earns enough votes to merit more than one nomination, that candidate will be nominated in the more prestigious performing category—or, for tech, in any category where the candidate is listed alone.

The same thing is done for awards. If a candidate earns the votes to win two performing Cappies for the same show, he or she wins the award in the more prestigious category.

Because no one can win more than one Cappie award or be nominated in more than one performing or non-performing category, for any one Cappies Show, the C.I.S. computer must select the "Cappie" winner before it selects nominees. (The winner is, of course, a nominee.)

To select the "Cappie" winner, the C.I.S. computer finds the candidates with the highest mean evaluation score, and the candidate with the highest award point score.

If the same candidate scores highest in both areas, s/he wins the Cappie.

If one candidate has the highest mean evaluation score and another candidate the highest award point score, the C.I.S. computer checks for "tie-break" rankings. In effect, the computer takes a vote among all Critics who evaluated the two candidates, and whoever was ranked higher by a majority of candidates receives the award. If these "tie-breaks" fail to produce a result, the C.I.S. computer follows several other tie-breaking rules to produce the winner. (See the rules for a list of those.)

To select nominees, the C.I.S. computer nominates the award winner, and then nominates the candidates with the highest mean evaluation scores and nomination point scores, giving equal weight to both, applying tie-breaks where necessary.

The final nomination may come down to a choice between two candidates with (for example) the third-highest evaluation score and the third-highest nomination point score. To select this final nominee, the C.I.S. computer checks for "tie-break" rankings, and if these fail to produce a result, it follows other arithmetic rules to produce the final nominee.

HOW CRITICS AWARDS ARE DECIDED

Each Cappies program can decide how many and what kind of awards to give individual Critics. These nominations and awards are determined by an objective score that is based half on level of participation (number of shows reviewed) and half on number of reviews selected (with extra credit given selection for the major newspaper). Any ties are decided by comparing the average selectivity of each critic's review rankings—for example, giving an edge to someone whose selected reviews were on average ranked higher.

For the Critics Team Award, the scores of each school's six highest ranking Critics (including regional team Critics) are

tallied and compared. As with individual awards, these scores are half based on participation and half on number of review selections. Any ties are decided by comparing the scores of the top-scoring Critics of contending teams.

HOW RESULTS ARE AUDITED

The audit process is an important part of the C.I.S. digital voting system.

The results are reviewed by one or more designated trustees who are authorized by a program's steering committee to see the results, along with a local auditor, and one or more international Cappies officials. They inquire into close results, look for patterns, and conduct spot-checks of other categories. Each candidate's scores, and each critic's ballots, are separately reviewable, if any voting irregularities are suspected. Individual votes may not be changed, but a critic's complete set of ballots may be disqualified—only if a trustee, auditor, and international Cappies official all agree that a voting irregularity has taken place.

Nominations are announced only after an audit has been completed, and the trustee, auditor, and international Cappies official are satisfied that the results are fair and final.

If any person wishes to appeal a result, s/he may do so, within three days after nominations are announced or seven days after award winners are announced. In case of appeal, a program's steering committee will review results and make an initial finding, and the Governing Board will make a final decision, which may not be appealed.

All scores are kept confidential. Under the rules, raw ballot data is not provided to anyone who is not a Cappies official.

