

A Fresh Look At Nebraska



-Isms

By LuAnn Schindler

"I thought drama was when actors cried. But drama is when the audience cries," according to film director Frank Capra.

Capra was on to something.

For Nebraska schools, drama season is nearing its pinnacle. District competition begins next week. All roads lead to the State One-Act competition in Kearney.

Some people may believe high school is filled with an overabundance of drama. Who needs to participate in a play to add more commotion to an already over-stressed schedule?

Individuals who believe that obviously haven't attended a high school play lately. Today's productions don't resemble the plays your grandparents or parents performed.

No. Some high school drama productions rival amateur or community playhouse offerings.

Productions feature elaborate costumes, spectacular lighting cues, multi-tiered sets and impressive sound effects.

And, the acting is superb!

Unfortunately, the drama department doesn't always gain the respect or attention drawn by its athletic counterparts.

Unfortunately, family members may be the only citizens of the community who attend a public performance.

Unfortunately, many are missing a truly entertaining event.

In ninth grade, I tried out for the play, but I hadn't mastered an English accent yet, and my dad wisely did not cast me. That was tough for a budding drama queen to handle!

But I didn't give up. The next year, only five roles were available. I tried but still didn't get a part; instead, I helped gather a few props. The play qualified for State and earned a runner-up trophy, the only State Play Production trophy my high school will ever earn. They merge with a neighboring school in June.

For the past 20 years, I've directed memorable characters: Puck and his band of sprites, Lulu Barnes along a perilous journey, a woman who discovers the ghost of a childhood friend she accidentally locked in a trunk, Nick and Betty who formed a conglomerate, Buddy Lehman and C.C. Showers, and Nora, a 75-year-old woman who suffers from Alzheimer's Disease and wanders away from the nursing center.

Most importantly, I've witnessed unassuming students morph into confident young adults who turn into believable personalities on stage.

One-act students are a dedicated group. A one-act team is a compilation of dedication, versatility and teamwork; a skillfully-mastered unit of six or 37 or 55 students who work toward a common goal.

Either they gather for 6:30 a.m. practices, eyes barely opened, or stay after athletic practice and leave the stage when the lights dim into the black-night sky.

They wield power tools and paint brushes to construct sets. They lug heavy-duty backdrops to cattle trailers, where they're loaded for the trip to the competition site.

They memorize a 30-minute script in its entirety and step up to take a teammate's role when one is home with a 102 degree fever the day of the conference meet.

They may be required to cry on cue, and when necessary, they produce tears.

They take a director's vision and turn it into an artistic masterpiece.

Then, they make the judges – and the audience – cry.