

12 plays for your High School that are not *Our Town* **By Lauren Gorelov, Theatre Educator**

Any good theatre director knows that putting on a play takes an enormous amount of work-- Not just the work involved in rehearsal and performance, but the work involved in choosing the play to perform! As a high school theatre teacher, I'm constantly struggling with the dichotomy of choosing theatre that is relevant, engaging, and interesting for the "too cool" students of NYC, while at the same time keeping it age appropriate and innocent enough for semi-conservative parents. If theatre is boring, teenagers will not watch it. Plain and simple. If it's outdated or too safe, students will skip it and spend the evening at the basketball game or local Dunkin' Donuts.

Theatre is meant to challenge and excite. Theatre is meant to educate and empower. Good theatre must not only reflect the time in which it was written, but also when it is performed. So, what do teenagers in 2018 want? Sex! Drugs! Humor! Cursing! They want stories that relate to them. They want stories that make them change their minds about something. Stories that make them laugh out loud. Stories that make them think outside the box.

And we must also keep in mind the desires of the director. Theatre educators like myself have to adhere to certain limitations that directing at a High School level set upon them. Plays with two- or three-person cast can be inspiring, but it's exclusive and will leave the Parents' Association complaining. Directors also have to worry about budget and space. Plays can cost money that most public schools don't have (let alone give to the arts!), so easy, modern costumes and uncomplicated sets are a must.

Here is a list of plays that will keep teenagers interested in the theatre. They are all possible and provocative productions for your high school that have casts of five or more actors and simple setting and costumes. These plays *almost* cross the proverbial line, but don't.

1. *From Up Here* by Liz Flahive **4f, 4m / Dramatic Comedy**

Kenny Barrett did something that has everyone worried- he brought a gun to school, but it wasn't loaded! He wishes he could just make it through the rest of his senior year unnoticed, but that's going to be hard since he has to publicly apologize to his entire high school. At home, his mother is struggling with a rocky start to her second marriage and a surprise visit from her estranged sister. Funny and poignant and great female monologues.

Challenges—long scenes, risky subject

2. *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son **4f, 3m/ Drama**

Two young women in New York meet, talk about their boyfriends, feel a growing, unspoken attraction for each other, and finally kiss. And that one innocent kiss sets off a savage gay-bashing. But even as *Stop Kiss* confronts the reality of physical violence, Son's imaginative, moving, and surprising comedy brings audiences -- and her principal characters -- to unexpected places.

Challenges- quick scene changes, very strong and versatile actor needed for Callie

3. *Almost, Maine* by John Ciriani

2f, 2m, flexible casting- up to 18/ Romantic Comedy

Welcome to Almost, Maine, a place that's so far north, it's almost not in the United States. It's almost in Canada. And it's not quite a town, because its residents never got around to getting organized. So it almost doesn't exist. One cold, clear, winter night, as the northern lights hover in the star-filled sky above, the residents of Almost, Maine, find themselves falling in and out of love in unexpected and hilarious ways. Knees are bruised. Hearts are broken. But the bruises heal, and the hearts mend—almost—in this delightful midwinter night's dream.

Challenges- Comedic timing necessary, onstage PDA

4. *Boy's Life* by Howard Korder

5f, 4m/ Comedy

Told in a series of fast-paced, sharply etched scenes, the play traces the misadventures of three former college buddies now seeking to make their way in the big city. Moving along briskly, with its mood of satirical humor brilliantly sustained, the play dissects and anatomizes the male narcissism—and protracted adolescence—which characterizes its protagonists and, in the end, makes it hilariously clear that it is actually the women who possess the qualities of "manhood" and maturity which their deluded lovers so desperately lay claim to.

Challenges- dirty "frat boy" language

5. *Really Really* by Paul Downs Colaizzo

3f, 4m/Dramatic Comedy

Really Really is a startlingly funny, yet horrifying play about a group of 'Generation Me' college students in the aftermath of a wild campus party. When morning-after gossip about privileged Davis and ambitious Leigh turns ugly, self-interest collides with the truth and the resulting ambiguity makes it hard to discern just who's a victim and who's a predator.

Challenges- Mature themes of date rape

6. *Significant Other* by Joshua Harmon

4f, 3m/ Comedy

This play concerns the lives of four friends in their late 20s and their search for relationships in 21st century New York City. Jordan is single, and finding Mr. Right is much easier said than done. While surrounding himself with his close group of girlfriends, it comes to pass that the only thing harder than looking for love is supporting the loved ones around him. Through the play, the audience also meets Jordan's grandmother, coworkers, potential lovers, and his friends' future husbands.

Challenges- absolute must to have a leading male with impeccable comedic timing and presence

7. *Women and Wallace* by Jonathan Marc Sherman

8f, 1m (flexible)/ Drama

This one-act play moves back in time to present memorable moments in the life of Wallace, now a handsome young man of eighteen, as he copes with growing up and trying to understand women after finding his mother dead from suicide while he was in second grade.

Challenges- mother commits suicide in opening scene

8. *Blood at the Root* by Dominique Morisseau

3f, 3m/ Drama

A striking ensemble drama based on the Jena Six; six Black students who were initially charged with attempted murder for a school fight after being provoked with nooses hanging from a tree on campus. This bold new play examines the miscarriage of justice, racial double standards, and the crises in relations between men and women of all classes and, as a result, the shattering state of Black family life.

Challenges—racial casting important

9. *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris

3f, 4m flexible, doubling/ Comedic Drama

Clybourne Park spans two generations fifty years apart. In 1959, Russ and Bev are selling their desirable two-bedroom at a bargain price, unknowingly bringing the first black family into the neighborhood (borrowing a plot line from Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*) and creating ripples of discontent among the cozy white residents of Clybourne Park. In 2009, the same property is being bought by a young white couple, whose plan to raze the house and start again is met with equal disapproval by the black residents of the soon-to-be-gentrified area. Are the issues festering beneath the floorboards actually the same, fifty years on?

On Broadway, the same set of actors play in both Acts. For a High School production no actors should be double cast, giving more actors opportunities to develop and become the characters.

Challenges: mature language, racial type casting

10. *Dog Sees God* by Bert V. Royal

4f, 4m/ Comedy

The play reimagines characters from the popular comic strip *Peanuts* as degenerate teenagers. Drug use, child sexual abuse, suicide, eating disorders, teen violence, rebellion, sexual relations and identity are among the issues covered in this parody of the works of Charles M. Schulz. The show cleverly disguises the identity of each character, so that the issues of the play draw more focus than attempting to guess "who's who". However, the use of these famous characters is what gives the show its emotional punch: even these beloved child characters must some day grow up and deal with a harsh reality as they find their place in the world.

Challenges: Suicide and gay themes

11. *She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen

6f, 3m/ Comedy

A comedic romp into the world of fantasy role-playing games, *She Kills Monsters* tells the story of Agnes Evans as she leaves her childhood home in Ohio following the the death of her teenage sister, Tilly. When Agnes finds Tilly's Dungeons and Dragons notebook, she stumbles into a journey of discovery and action-packed adventure in the imaginary world that was Tilly's refuge. In this high-octane dramatic comedy laden with fairies, nasty ogres, and 90s pop culture, acclaimed young playwright Qui Nguyen offers a heart-pounding homage to the geek and warrior within us all.

Challenges: Advanced technical theatre needed- lights/sound/set

12. *Good Boys and True* by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

3f, 3m/ Drama

Prep-school senior Brandon Hardy is brilliant, athletic, popular and charming—the kind of student that makes St. Joe's School for Boys proud to call its own. However, his privileged life threatens to collapse when a disturbing videotape is found on campus. As the resulting scandal takes unexpected turns, Brandon's mother Elizabeth must sort fact from fiction from family and confront unsettling truths about her son, herself, and their life.

Challenges: Strong leading lady, gay themes