



Directors The Casting Process

Professional & Academic
From the book *Play Director's Survival Kit*

"WHOM TO CAST?"

We'll start with the obvious. If you had an unlimited pool of actors, you'd want to cast those who looked, talked, and performed exactly like images you carry around in your head—images, probably, of a combination of Broadway, film, or television stars. Dream on."

Some Factors

- Availability (performances and 95% of rehearsals)
- Currently enrolled in WHS theatre course?
- Enrolled in WHS course in the past?
- Comfortable with the role's demands (kissing this person; the costume, or pretending to adore or detest this other person)

"Who best captures the spirit of the play?" One suggestion is to give strong consideration to those actors who seem to understand the play and read the script with some ease. Even though individuals may not exactly have the looks, the voice, or the personality you had in mind, if they are able to capture the spirit of the play, we have found that they at least have a fighting chance of making an audience believe in them."

"Whom will the audience most readily accept in the role?"

This may sound like a contradiction to the first suggestion, and to a certain extent it is. At least, it's a warning. A large majority of **high school and community theater audiences** know the true personalities of the performers you are considering. Therefore, if you are thinking of casting the class or neighborhood clown in a serious romantic role, or a shy, retiring girl as the brazen hussy because they read best for the roles, you need to consider potential audience reaction. You don't want to embarrass actors in front of their peers or jeopardize the success of the production. While it is honorable to cultivate talent, it is more important that each person cast has every opportunity to succeed. Your objective should be to build confidence and provide a positive learning experience so that your actors will want to audition again. For these reasons, don't give in to, but be sensitive to, the audience factor."

"Who complements and offers variety and contrast?" You don't want to cast a Romeo without thinking about his Juliet. The two actors need to complement each other, physically and vocally. Further, the rest of the players around them need to provide physical and vocal variety. It is important to consider a wide range of types, especially in large-cast productions."

"Who will fit best with the rest of the cast?" Here comes another contradiction. At the same time that you are looking for actors who complement each other and offer variety, you need to be aware of potential personality conflicts and the dynamics offstage relationships could have on the rehearsal process. For

example, it probably isn't a good idea to cast a couple that has just broken up as George and Emily in *Our Town*. Actors must be able to work effectively with each other. If they don't, it is obvious that their offstage conflicts can greatly interfere with your ability to mount a quality production."

From Raven: "At the high school level, it's even more complicated. Two students who are a couple might have great chemistry on stage playing the scripted couple, but as a director you take a great risk—what if they break-up during rehearsals? Or have a major blow out on a show night? For the same reason actors should resist the impulse to date someone in scenes with them until after the play has closed."

"Whom would I like to work with on this role?" If all else is equal, nothing is wrong with casting actors you feel you would enjoy working with. In fact, you are more likely to have success directing an actor you have a friendly and trusting relationship with, over another **who reads well but has an attitude problem**. Further, we need to pass on a warning about actors who read exceptionally well but have a reputation for being difficult. Often 'what you see is what you get'. In other words, because of their egos and their 'you can't tell me, I know it all' attitudes, they don't develop during the rehearsal process" ...[or they never quite bond and become an ensemble player with the rest of the cast]

From Raven: "This is why casting people that I have at least had in the classroom is so important; I already have an idea of their work ethic and their ability to be led by me. This is also the factor that I often struggle with the most. Sometimes the talent is worth a bit of the prima donna fits, as opposed to someone who would take 3 times as much time coaching. Of course, there occasionally are personalities and reputations that appear at auditions that I would never consider working with. After all, everyone is volunteering their time, including me, we might as well enjoy ourselves."

"Educationally, who would gain most from this experience?" Sometimes you need to consider other factors when casting a school production. Perhaps you have a senior who has been cast in other productions but has never had a major role, or maybe a freshman who shows great potential and might blossom if given an opportunity. These can be valid reasons for casting a less secure student over a more skilled one who has had a number of major roles. You don't want to get the reputation for running a closed shop."

"From Raven: one of the objectives is for the long-term health of the Troupe. A play with nothing but seniors is fun and easier to direct because of their experience, BUT that does not give sophomores, juniors some onstage experience, so in future years they are ready to accept the full weight of a leading role. Also, sometimes seniors take on too many projects, letting their nostalgia for the last year run-a-muck."

"Casting is a tie-dye process. There are many buckets to dip and rinse through." ~ Raven

