

2021-2022 Orange County Cappies Critic Manual

Table of Contents

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My Cappies Calendar pg 2 2. Assigned Shows and Reviews <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Volunteered Shows and Reviews b. Important Dates: c. Important Contact Information 3. Welcome Cappies Critics! pg 3 4. Registering pg 3 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Turning in Your Parental Authorization Form b. Connecting with Cappies Information Services (CIS) 5. Your Show Schedule pg 4 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The Shows You Will Review b. Handling Schedule Changes 6. Preparing to Attend a Show pg 5 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Equipping Yourself b. Arranging Transportation 7. Your Critic Integrity pg 7 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Displaying Objectivity b. Saving Your Opinions for Your Review c. Keeping Critics' Confidentiality d. Scoring Privately e. Writing Carefully 8. Critic Discussions and Scoring pg 8 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The Opening Discussion b. Post-Show Discussions c. Making Critics' Choices d. Scoring 9. Submitting Your Review pg 10 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Meeting Your Deadline b. Formatting Your Review c. Counting Your Words d. Sending It In Via CIS e. Fixing Submission Errors f. If CIS Is Down g. Getting Read At The Host School Or In The Media 10. Voting for Awards pg 12 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Preparing For Voting Day b. The Voting Process c. The Awards Gala <p>Awards Eligibility pg 13</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marketing and Publicity 2. Sound 3. Lighting 4. Sets 5. Costumes 6. Make-Up 7. Props 8. Special Effects and/or Technologies 9. Stage Management 10. Stage Crew 11. Orchestra 12. Choreography 13. Creativity <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Musicianship B. Composing C. Lyric Writing D. Play Writing E. Directing 14. Ensemble (Play / Musical) 15. Cameo (Actress/Actor) 16. Featured (Actress/Actor) 17. Dancer (Female / Male) 18. Vocalist (Female / Male) 19. Comic (Actress / Actor — Play / Musical) 20. Supporting (Actress / Actor — Play / Musical) 21. Lead (Actress / Actor — Play / Musical) 22. Song 23. Play 24. Musical <p>11. Writing Your Review pg 38</p>
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My Cappies Calendar

A place to keep track of your Cappies activities

Assigned Shows and Reviews

Show Date & Time	School	Name of Play/Musical	Review Due Date & Time

Volunteered Shows and Reviews

Show Date & Time	School	Name of Play/Musical	Review Due Date & Time

Important Dates:

- Training Day: October 2; Location: University High School
- Voting Day: May 3; Location: TBD
- Reception: May 12, 2022; Location: TBD
- Gala: May 22, 2022; The National Grove of Anaheim @ 6pm

Important Contact Information:

- Program Director: Lisa Goins; Lisa.Goins@cappies.com
- Program Chair: Samantha Sanford; samantha.sanford@cappies.com
- Cappies Advisor:

- Lead Critic:
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2. Welcome Cappies Critics!

You are in for a wonderful experience! We are the only high-school theatre, peer-evaluated organization in North America, perhaps even in the world. Bill Strauss, Cappies co-founder, always stressed that the Critics were/are the heart of the program. Our program is driven by students and monitored by adult volunteers.

We are immensely proud of what everyone has accomplished since we began in 1999 – from the excitement of Cappies shows, to the student-critic bylines in major newspapers, to the drama and glamour of Cappies galas.

The materials in this binder reflect our on-going commitment to provide a learning program that encourages excellence in theatre and in writing.

Thank you, in advance, for helping make this our best year yet.

Katie Prieur & Alecia Lewkowich, Cappies International Program Co-Directors
Janie Strauss, Cappies International Program Chair

4. Registering

a. Turning in Your Parental Authorization Form

The first thing to do to be a Cappies Critic is to get your signed Parental Authorization Form to your Cappies Advisor. PARENTAL AUTHORIZATION IS MANDATORY. No student may attend a Cappies show as a Critic unless the Program Director has received a signed Parental Authorization Form. No EXCEPTIONS.

b. Connecting with Cappies Information Services (CIS)

→ Receiving e-mails.

Throughout the year, you will receive e-mails about your upcoming shows and other Cappies news. To make sure you receive these, please see that your spam filter allows e-mail from cappies.com. Then, check for Cappies e-mail at least every other day so you know what's going on.

→ Activating Your Account.

When you become a Critic, you'll be registered on Cappies Information Services (CIS) – the part of the Cappies website where, among other things, you can see your show schedule and submit your reviews. You will receive an e-mail from cappies.com telling you your username and password. To be officially added to the roster of Cappies Critics, you must activate your CIS account by logging in. To log in, go to cappies.com/cis and enter your username and password. Then select the region code for your Cappies chapter from the scroll down menu, and click "Log in". CIS

can also be reached by clicking on "CIS Login", located at the top of the www.cappies.com home page.

→ **Logging In.**

You will need your username and password every time you log in to CIS, so, after you log in, you may wish to change your password to something that's easier for you to remember. To do so, click on the "Change your password" page and fill in the form. Your password must be at least eight letters or numbers, in any combination, including capital letters. CIS will not allow you to choose common or easy-to-guess passwords (such as "password"). If CIS doesn't accept your new password, it will tell you. Try something else until CIS accepts your password.

→ **Checking Your Contact Information.**

To use CIS, and for program officials to reach you (or your family, in an emergency), the Cappies must have accurate contact information for you, including your home phone and cell phone numbers. This information is kept confidential and is accessible only to program officials. Please check to be sure this information is correct at the "View your personal information" page at www.cappies.com/cis. If corrections are necessary or if you change your e-mail address or phone number during the year, go to the "Correct your personal information" page at CIS.

5. Your Show Schedule

a. The Shows You Will Review

→ **Your Team's Show Assignments**

You and your Critics' Team will see and submit reviews for a minimum of six shows over the course of the year. To see a list of your assigned shows go to the "View your schedule" page at www.cappies.com/cis.

→ **Volunteering For Additional Shows**

You will also volunteer to review additional shows beyond those assigned to your team. The only limitation is that you may not review the same play or musical at another school that your school performed last year or this year; regardless of whether you were in the show or were even a student at the school when they performed the show! To volunteer to review more shows, go to the "Volunteer for a non-assigned show" page at www.cappies.com/cis, check the "Volunteer?" box next to the show(s) you wish to review, and then click "Save changes" at the bottom of the page.

→ **Only Seeing Shows with The Cappies**

If you want to review a show, you have to attend the Cappies performance with the other Critics. You cannot see the show at another time and review it. Also, you can only see a show once, so that your end-of-year score is based only on the Cappies performance and not mixed up with a second performance that may have been better or worse.

b. Handling Schedule Changes

→ **Coordinating With Your Lead Critic**

If you can't make an assigned show, let your Lead Critic know right away (and adjust your schedule on CIS as directed below), as this may affect your team's schedule. At least half of your team must attend an assigned show to make it count as fulfilling one of your team's minimum. If not, an additional show may be assigned to your whole team to make up for it. So make sure you let your Lead Critic know right away if one of your team's assigned shows conflicts with something already on your calendar. If a show assignment turns out to be a conflict for most of the Critics on your team – for instance, if your prom gets scheduled on one of your assigned dates – your Lead Critic can ask if a switch is possible.

→ **CIS Email**

To contact (or send files to) your Lead Critic through e-mail via CIS, go to the "Send an e-mail to lead critic" page at www.cappies.com/cis and follow the directions. Your e-mail will be sent to your Lead Critic and a copy will be e-mailed to you as well. Keep in mind that all e-mails sent through CIS can be seen by Cappies officials. Please keep your e-mails respectable and Cappies related.

→ **Adjusting Your Schedule On CIS**

If you can't make it to one of your team's assigned shows, in addition to letting your Lead Critic know, you must decline the show on CIS at least 48 hours before the scheduled show and volunteer to review a different show to make up for it and reach your individual minimum to be able to vote for awards at the end of the year. If you have volunteered for shows in addition to your team's assigned shows and you can't make it to one of them, it is not necessary to let your Lead Critic know or volunteer for another one, but you must still decline it on CIS.

→ **Declining A Show**

To decline a show, go to the "View your schedule" page at www.cappies.com/cis and check the "Decline?" box opposite the pertinent show, and then click "Save changes" at the bottom of the page. To volunteer for another show, click the go to "the volunteering page" link at the bottom of the page. Then check the "Volunteer?" box opposite the show you want to review, and click "Save changes" at the bottom of the page.

→ **Meeting Eligibility**

If you have to decline a show, do so as soon as possible so you have time to volunteer for a make-up show, if necessary – while there are still shows left in the year to see that have enough room for you to attend. If you must decline a show close to its date, do it at least 48 hours before the show's start so the final attendance list won't have your name on it. A Critic who is on the attendance list, but doesn't show up, will be asked to pay a fine for the ticket the host school set aside for them, **and their Cappies Advisor will be notified of their absence.**

→ **Emergency Cancellations**

If, due to illness or personal emergency, you must decline a show closer to its start time than 48 hours ahead, still decline through CIS **and notify your Lead Critic.** If, due to illness, personal emergency, **or transportation problems,** you are unable to attend a Cappies show and cannot decline through CIS before the show's scheduled start time, then e-mail (or ask a family member to do so) your chapter's Program Director (Lisa.Goins@cappies.com).

6. Preparing to Attend a Show

a. Equipping Yourself

→ **As a Critic**

Be Familiar with your Cappies training and this guide to know what to "Keep in mind" and what to "Look and listen for" in a Cappies show. You may find it helpful to review it before each show. The better you know and understand what's in the Theatre Evaluation Guide, the more you'll enjoy watching shows, the better you'll be as a Critic, and the more you'll learn from the whole experience. The cast and crew of the show you're scoring may have looked through these guidelines, too, so they'll know what they need to do to excel.

→ **Learn About the Show**

You may do a little background research on the play/musical to help you appreciate what you are going to see. For instance, what's the show about? What's the style or tradition of the show?

→ **Print Forms as Needed**

You'll need a Notes page, an Award Category Eligibility form, and a Critics' Choices page for each play or musical you attend. Even though some of the host schools may give these to you at the show; it is each Critic's responsibility to have their own available in their binder. To get the forms, go to www.cappies.com/occ for the forms specific to the Orange County Cappies chapter.

→ **Bring Your Binder and a Pen**

Bring this Critic binder with you to each show so you can refer to this guide during discussions and scoring. Be sure to have something to write with as well. There is no writing during the show and there is no technology in the Cappies room (including laptops and iPads!)

→ **Dress the Part**

You are going to the show as a Critic, a position of trust. The people at the host school need to see that you take this seriously so they can have confidence in your opinions. How you carry yourself, including what you wear, helps with this – especially since you and your fellow Critics will be seen as you all walk into the show together. Critics should be wearing appropriate attire to all Cappies events.

b. Arranging Transportation

→ **Getting Directions to the Show**

To see where a show is being held (It's not always at the host school.) and to find directions to it, go to the "View your schedule" page at www.cappies.com/cis and click on the name of the play or musical. A small window will then pop up with the address and a link to a map so you can get directions.

→ **Planning to Arrive Before, and Stay After, the Show**

There are pre-show and post-show Critic discussions, so, when scheduling your transportation, plan to arrive 45 minutes before the opening curtain and stay about 45 minutes after the show. Depending on where you're going and the time of day, you may want to allow some extra time for in case you get temporarily lost or stuck in traffic.

→ **Before the Show**

When you get to the show's Cappies room on time, you'll have a chance, before the discussion begins, to linger at the food table and to chat with the other Critics. A Critic who arrives late might miss the opening discussion from the director with key information about the production. If a critic misses this discussion, they will be asked to leave and the show will not count towards their required amount for eligibility. (This pre-show discussion is usually 15-20 minutes before curtain.)

→ **Determining How You'll Get There**

Work out with your parents how you're going to get to and from shows.

If your plan is to have somebody drop you off at, and pick you up from, the show, make sure they will be there about forty five minutes after the show is over and that they know they may have to wait for you. If the school is close enough that they can get there within forty five minutes after bows, you can call them on your way back to the Cappies room to let them know about when you'll be ready. (Bring your cell phone or arrange to use somebody else's to call them.) If for any reason your ride is late, make sure you find and tell a Mentor. The Editor Mentor must stay until the last Critic has been picked up. This way no one is left standing alone, late at night, at a place they don't know.

If your parents are going to drive you, they may want to stay for the show. If so, make sure they know they can't go in the Cappies room at any time (even before the show), and they can't sit with you. They'll need to come as early as you do (45 minutes before the show) and stay as late as you do (45 minutes after the show, or maybe later, if it takes longer). Also, they'll have to buy their own tickets – preferably in advance, so they're sure to get a seat. Call the school's theatre department to make reservations.

If you want to carpool with other Critics, first make sure you have your parents' permission and that your plans comply with the laws about teenagers driving teenagers. The reminder e-mails you will receive before each show will include an attendance list which may be used to arrange carpooling. Evening Cappies shows are to end by 10:30 p.m., and there's discussion after that, so there may be times when you won't be leaving for home until after 11:00 p.m. Add in the time it will take to get home to make sure you have plenty of time to make it before any curfew.

7. Your Critic Integrity

a. Displaying Objectivity

For the Cappies awards and your feedback on shows to be meaningful, people must know that your evaluation is objective – that it is based solely on your knowledge of theatre and what you observed in the show – without any outside influence. Therefore, when working as a Critic at a show, it's best to socialize only with fellow Critics. Even waving at a friend you have at the host school may be interpreted by others as bias toward the school's show. So, to preserve your integrity as a Critic, keep with your fellow Critics. Your friend(s) will understand. For the same reason (and the sake of your relationship), if you have a really close friend on the cast or crew, it's best not to even review their show. That's what professional theatre critics do in the same situation.

b. Saving Your Opinions for Your Review

The cast and crew of the show and their family and friends (and anyone who knows someone who knows someone who goes to the host school) will be very eager to hear what you think about the show. To save yourself from awkward moments or rumors (misguided or true) about your point of view (and thus your credibility as a Critic), it is best for you to only divulge your opinions in your review. Even if you loved the show, it's best to say nothing. For if you talk about this show, people may expect you to also talk about other shows, about which you may not have many positive things to say – and if you decline to talk then, suspicions will be raised. The safest course of action to take is that of professional critics – maintain a strict policy of saying nothing at all, to anyone, about the show. Ask them all to read your thoughts in your review, where you can't be misquoted or pressed to say more.

→ **Here are some tips to help you at a show to save your opinions for your review:**

- ◆ While watching the show, go ahead and laugh and clap as you see fit, but don't discuss your opinions – even in a whisper. You never know whose mom is sitting right behind you, reading your lips for her theatre-booster phone tree.
- ◆ During bows, do pretty much what the rest of the audience is doing. Don't start a standing ovation – let the parents of the performers do that – but if you liked the show, it's fine to stand, too. If nearly everybody in the audience is standing, and you thought a show was only so-so, go ahead and stand anyway so as to not give your thoughts away. (If it's closing night, and the school is giving special acknowledgements at the end of the show, the school is to let you leave the theatre before that. There's

supposed to be an announcement excusing the Critics, but, if there isn't, the Mentor will gesture to you all to stand and exit the theatre as quietly as you can.)

- ◆ When you walk between the theatre and the Cappies room – during intermission or after the show – don't say anything about the show, even to another Critic. You never know who may be a few feet away overhearing. If someone from the host school asks what you thought of the show, it's best to say that you're a Critic and not permitted to talk about the show.

C. Keeping Critics' Confidentiality

Because Cappies is a learning program, there is one exception to saving your opinions just for your review. That is, talking with your fellow Critics in the Cappies room at the show. In the Cappies room, you and your fellow Critics may freely discuss the show to compare observations and information and to make Critics' Choices. However, everything that is said in the Cappies room is to be kept in confidence – forever. What goes on in the Cappies room must stay in the Cappies room. Just as you save your own opinions for print, let your fellow Critics save their opinions for print – or not – as they see fit, and let your Program Director announce the Critics' Choices when the time is right. All of this protects the integrity of each individual Critic and of the Cappies program now and in the future – and makes it possible for everyone to speak candidly in the Cappies room.

d. Scoring Privately

Your Critics' Choices scores and award votes are even more private than the opinions you save to put in your review. They are not even to be shared with other Critics, not even the ones on your team. The results (names of award winners) will be divulged at the Cappies gala, but the scores are not revealed at any time so peoples' feelings are not hurt and you are not put in the awkward position of having to defend your score.

e. Writing Carefully

While the cast and crew of the show are eager to hear what you thought of their work, your opinions must be presented carefully to give a balanced evaluation of the whole production – and to prevent hurting their feelings. After all, these students are amateurs like you, just learning their craft. Your participation in

training will show you how to appropriately present your evaluation of these students' work.

8. Critic Discussions and Scoring

a. The Opening Discussion

→ Checking in with the Editor Mentor.

When you get to a Cappies show, go right to the Cappies room. Look around; there should be signs leading you there. If not, people at the ticket window should be able to help you find it. When you get to the Cappies room, check in with the Editor Mentor (usually a teacher), who will mark you present on the attendance list, indicating that you are eligible to review the show.

After you're signed in, you can spend some time having refreshments (provided by the parent Boosters of the host school), looking through the show program, the Tech Showcase Eligibility forms, and other materials the school has provided, and talking with friends (or making some new ones) until the discussion begins.

→ Finding Out What's Particular about This Show.

About twenty minutes before show time, the Director will start a discussion about the show and particular things to watch for in this production of it – in addition to what's in your training guide, "Keep in mind" and "Look and listen for". A few minutes before curtain, the usher will come get everybody from the Cappies room. Make sure your cell phone is turned off if you choose to take your bag into the theater.

b. Post-Show Discussions

→ Sharing Opinions and Learning about Theatre.

At intermission and again at the end of the show, you'll return to the Cappies room to discuss what you thought about the show per the four evaluation factors for each category in the Theatre Evaluation Guide. This sharing of opinions brings out observations and information that help everyone learn more about theatre, and, thus, write thoughtful reviews and give knowledgeable scores. For instance, you may be wondering what positive aspects you can use in your review to balance the criticism you have for a show, when a fellow Critic notes the difficulty level of the lighting, making you realize how well the lighting was done under the circumstances. Or you may think those simple-looking jeans involved little

costuming ability until a fellow Critic points out details showing how cleverly they were designed.

→ **Keeping the Discussion Moving.**

The discussion after the show is supposed to take about 45 minutes. To keep it moving along so everyone can go home in a timely manner, please take turns speaking, state your opinion briefly when you're called on, and then listen quietly while other Critics give theirs.

C. Making Critics' Choices

After the post-show discussion, you and your fellow Critics, as a group (by majority rule), will select a Critics' Choice in each category for which the show is eligible.

→ **Choosing the Best.**

You're picking the best-in-show for each category. If the lead actor is also the best vocalist, comic actor, and dancer, then that's who your Critics' Choice will be for each of those categories. (That doesn't happen much, but it's often true that you'll want to pick one person in two categories.) Remember, you are picking the best compared only with the others (if there is more than one) in that category in this show. (How well they did in comparison with how well it can be done will be reflected in your scoring.)

→ **Determining Eligibility.**

The Theatre Evaluation Guide defines what's eligible for each category. In addition, the Show Director provides an Award Category Eligibility form listing particulars for this show. If a show doesn't have a Lead role, you may select the most dominant performer of that gender for the category of Lead. 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.

→ **Resolving Disagreements.**

If disagreements arise about how to apply an eligibility rule, the following steps will be taken. First, the category definition will be read aloud. Then, the Discussion Mentor will consult with the Lead Critics (either with a vote or a brief meeting). Finally, the Discussion Mentor will conduct a vote. (If you think that decision doesn't follow the rules, when you get home send an e-mail to the chapter Program Director.) If you don't think a show qualifies for a non-performing category (like Sets or Costumes) but the Show Director says it does, go ahead and make it a Critics' Choice,

and score it. Then, make sure a Mentor and at least one Lead Critic notify the Program Director about the difference of opinion.

d. Scoring

After you and your fellow Critics make Critics' Choices, you will choose your own score for each one and the play/musical as a whole. These preliminary scores are to help you remember, at the end-of-year voting, what you thought about each of the shows you saw. The 8 point you'll use is explained at the bottom of the Critics' Choices form, and tips for scoring are given for each category in the Theatre Evaluation Guide. Take extra care to base your scores only on the production you are reviewing. Do not base them on a comparison with any other performances.

→ Fair Scoring

Across all the shows you see, and all of 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. If your mean evaluation score is below 5, maybe you're too "mean." If your average score is above 6, maybe you're a little too nice.

◆ **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.

→ Nomination and Award Notes

The Critics' Choices are the names that will appear on the ballot at the end of the year, that is, those that could be selected to receive Cappies nominations or awards. So, you may also wish to mark a few N's and A's next to the score of people you think might deserve nominations (N) or awards (A) – to help you remember what you thought when it comes time to vote at the end of the year.

→ Turning in Your Scoring Sheet

When you are done scoring and making whatever notes you want, sign your sheet and turn it in to the Mentors before you leave. It will be kept safe so you can see it on voting day. You will want to save all your show programs and notes to help with writing your reviews and to help on voting day.

9. Submitting Your Review

a. Meeting Your Deadline

After the show, write your review, letting the cast and crew, their family and friends, and the general public know how well you think it went. All reviews are due on the Sunday of the same week after a show. For most Cappies chapters, the deadlines for Critics' review submissions are:

If the show was on...	The deadline is...
Friday evening (or before)	10 AM Sunday
Saturday afternoon	12 PM Sunday
Saturday evening	2 PM Sunday
Sunday afternoon of the same day	9 PM Sunday

- **Reviews are submitted** through Cappies Information Services (CIS), which keeps precise time. Once you submit your review, you will receive an e-mail notifying you that your review was received – and that it was on time (or late). If you miss the deadline by even one second, your review will be marked late and it will not be eligible for publication.
- **If your review is not in 24 hours after the deadline**, e-mail reminders will be sent to you, your Lead Critic, and your Cappies Advisor. If your review is still not in 72 hours after the deadline: (1) you can't submit it any more; (2) your Lead Critic and Advisor will be notified; (3) you will not be allowed to evaluate that show in the award voting; and (4) your school's theatre program will be charged \$15 for the price of your ticket and refreshments. If this happens a second time, you will be removed from the roster.

b. Formatting Your Review

You'll be sending in your review electronically, so write it on your computer's word-processing program, where you can use spell-check or grammar-check, and save your work. Just write the text of your review (no title or byline), **use block paragraphing (no indenting), and skip a line between paragraphs.** (Your review will remain anonymous during the Mentors' selection process. If it is selected for publication, the media will receive your and your school's names as they appear on your "View your personal information" page.)

c. Counting Your Words

The best reviews are usually about 350 to 400 words long. (Your word-processing program most likely has a word-counting tool that can quickly count the words for you.) Reviews under 300 words long can be submitted but will not count towards your overall review total. An email will be sent to your advisor that you submitted a review under 300 words in length and may be in danger of not meeting eligibility requirements.

d. Sending It In Via CIS

To submit a review, first copy it from your word-processing program. Then, go to the "Submit a review" page at www.cappies.com/cis, and click on the name of the show for which you wish to submit a review. Paste your review in the text box, and click "Preview Review." Here, make sure you have completed all tasks and check them off on the checklist. If you wish to make any changes, click on "Edit Review," make your changes, and click again on "Preview Review." (The word count is listed at the top of the "Preview Review" page, so you can track it as you edit your review.) You may want to copy your revised review back to your computer program to save it. Once you are completely satisfied with what you are submitting, click "Submit Review."

e. Fixing Submission Errors

Suppose you discover, after you've submitted your review, that you've made a major error. For example, suppose you reviewed two shows over a weekend and submitted the wrong one for a particular show. If this (or something comparable) happens, please send an e-mail to your chapter's Program Director and/or Web Coordinator, requesting that your review be deleted. When they have done this – which may or may not be prior to the review deadline – you can submit the correct review instead.

f. If CIS Is Down

The "Current CIS Status" is listed on the Cappies home page at www.cappies.com. If it says "Online", your review must be submitted through CIS as directed above in order to count. However, if CIS is "Offline", submit your review via e-mail to AdminOCC@cappies.com. From here, it will be forwarded to the Mentors. Please keep a digital copy on your computer as you may be requested to resubmit your review on CIS.

g. Getting Read At The Host School Or In The Media

After you click "Submit Review", your review will be forwarded, along with all of the others, to the Discussion and Editor Mentors who will look them over before they are sent to your readers at the host school or the media. The Mentors will edit out any unfair criticism and spot check for plagiarism before the cast and crew read them. A review found to have substantially violated the rules of criticism may be withheld from the host school and a notice sent to the Critic and/or their Advisor. A Critic found, in any part of their review, to have plagiarized – that is, used someone else's words as their own – will be removed from Cappies for the remainder of the year. Additionally, their Advisor and Principal will be notified of the plagiarism and consequences at the school level may be enforced.

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. Please be aware that reviews selected for publication may be further edited by the media, and, if there are space limitations, may not actually get published. However, these reviews are posted under "Reviews" at your chapter's home page on www.cappies.com for everyone to see.

10. Voting for Awards

a. Preparing For Voting Day

At the end of the year, you and your fellow Critics will vote to determine who is nominated for and wins Cappies awards. You'll be presented with the Critic's Choices (by actor name, versus character name) in each category and asked to score them in three ways, as shown below. Keep in mind that if you are the Critics' Choice in any category for your school's show, you won't get to vote for anyone in that category.

Before voting day, you may want to refresh your memory about the shows you saw by looking over the programs, your notes, and your reviews. (To see your reviews as kept by CIS, go to the "View your submitted reviews" page at www.cappies.com/cis and click on the name of a show.) You may bring notes with you to the voting place. When you get there, you will also be able to see your Critics' Choices sheets with the notes you made at each show.

b. The Voting Process

On voting day, you'll check in, pick up your Critics' Choices sheets, receive voting instructions, and be directed to the in-house computers (or you may bring your own laptop/tablet). Please pay attention to the voting instructions as the process may take you between an hour and three hours. Communicate with your carpool or parents in advance because you will not be able to communicate or leave until you have completed voting.

c. The Awards Gala

At the end of the year, the nominees will be applauded and the Cappie awards will be given – in a style reminiscent of the Tonys – at the Cappies gala. This is the night where the talents of actors, dancers, singers, costumers, technicians, Critics, and so forth are acknowledged. It's everybody's turn to shine.

The gala is a formal event, so everybody's dressed up – which adds to the electric atmosphere. Schools cheer for their classmates and for the talents from other schools. Excerpts from some of the shows are presented. As a Critic, you helped make it all possible. Enjoy!

Aspects of Theatre / Award Categories

Here, presented in the same order as listed on the Critics' Choices – Post Show Evaluation form, are the aspects of each show that you are evaluating and writing about in your review (excluding Marketing and Publicity). These are also the Cappies award categories that you make Critics' Choices for and score. Mentors also use this Guide to determine eligibility for awards. Show Directors use it as well – to understand what information Critics need to have prior to a show, to establish eligibility in some categories, and, if they wish, to let the cast and crew members of their Cappies shows know what you (as a Critic) will be looking for.

→ The Four Evaluation Factors

The following four factors are the basis for evaluating each aspect of a show/award category. For a high overall rating, 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 a low score is warranted.

1) Presentation

Whatever the category – sound, orchestra, ensemble, dancer, lead, song – simply ask: How good was it? How effective? How entertaining? In technical 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-Critic opinion can help inform your own judgment.

2) Originality

How original and creative was it? Did the candidate 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 of 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, props, costumes, sets, lighting design, etc.)?

3) Range

What was the range of expression? Did the candidate attempt – and 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 touching ballad and an up-tempo number? 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?

4) Difficulty

What was the degree of difficulty? 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 microphones 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?

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
- 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:	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.
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.

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 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? For the equipment owned/rented, do they look as good on performers as possible? 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:	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.
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.

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**

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:	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.
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.

→ 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 to see 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:	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.
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 identified in the eligibility worksheet.

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:	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.
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 on the eligibility worksheet.

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 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:	The make-up 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.
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. This work must be specifically identified on the eligibility worksheet. 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. 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:	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.
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:	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.
2:	The effects do not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

Stage Management & 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.

Stage Crew

This category incorporates the effectiveness, smoothness and timing of scene and prop changes. In addition to the performance, the stage crew should be evaluated on the evidence provided in the Cappies Room e.g. shift plot, fly rails, tracks, special effects (confetti cannon). All work must be done by or under the direction of a student crew head or a student team, but adult guidance is permissible.

Orchestra

Orchestra refers to a group of musical accompanists that performs not less than six full songs, as accompaniment to vocalists, 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:	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.
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:	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.
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
- (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 student-playing of an instrument in solo segments, 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 creatively? Do the musical lines fit naturally? Are they well articulated? 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 they 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 play-writing 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 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:	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."
2:	The creative element is not well executed, and only a few of the above questions can be answered "yes."

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

Cameo (Actress/Actor)

A *cameo* performer creates a memorable character in a brief moment of acting which expresses cleverly and neatly the nature of a role.

A role that is too small to qualify as Featured **will qualify as Cameo**. Examples in a musical are: The Policeman in *Annie*, James in *High School Musical*, Purser in *Anything Goes*.

Examples in a play are: Delivery boy in *Children's Hour*, Woman in the Box in *Our Town*, Martha in *The Miracle Worker*. Gravedigger in *Hamlet*

Keep in mind:

A role cannot be too small – but can be too large – to qualify as Cameo. A Cameo performer can have a minor role in one or several scenes. More than that is too big to be considered Cameo. In a musical, a Cameo performer may have some solo lines, and may be in a small moment of a duet or ensemble. Originality and creativity in the crafting of a cameo role can often be the key factor here. If the same performer creates more than one different Cameo 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 Cameo role is in fact "memorable," none should be selected and scored.

Look and listen for:

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

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

Voice, physicality, and comedy. Does the Cameo performer have a distinctive voice and physical gestures?

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

Focus. Does the Cameo 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 Cameo 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 Cameo 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 Cameo performer creates an interesting character, making an impression – and slightly enhancing the show.

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

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

Featured (Actress/Actor)

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. A performer who is selected in a lead or supporting role may not be selected in a Featured role for any other character that character may have created in the same show. The same performer cannot be selected for comic and Featured for the same character role.

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

Dancer (Female / Male)

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

Vocalist (Female / Male)

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 communicate the intent of the lyrics, and the believability of the character, within a song?
- ◆ **Range.** Does the vocalist not strain 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:	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
2:	The vocalist shows a lack of technique and/or performance skill, detracting from the show.

Comic (Actress / Actor — Play / Musical)

A Comic actor or actress encompasses a role “reasonably” intended by the playwright to be comedic and will be evaluated for character, movement, expression, difficulty of role, 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. A role that qualifies for featured may/may not be 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", and Eulalie Shinn in "The Music Man", Eugene in "Grease". Examples of characters that would NOT qualify include Giles Corey in "The Crucible", Bum in "Hairspray", and Grocery Boy in "The Children’s Hour".

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

Supporting (Actress / Actor — Play / Musical)

A Supporting Actress/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: 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.

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.

15. Lead (Actress / Actor — Play / Musical)

A Lead Actress/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.

- 16. 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 has the most character arc, 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.

- 17. 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?

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

- 19. 9:** 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.

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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. 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?

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

24. 9: 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.

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

25. Play

Play refers to the performance as an entirety. To be eligible, a show must contain fewer than six musical numbers, sung by the performing cast. 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.

26. 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 enhance or detract 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 responses. Good audience energy can reflect a strong show, but not necessarily – and Critics need to look beyond that.

27. 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?

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

29. 9: 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.

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

30. **Musical**

Musical refers to the performance as an entirety. To be eligible, a show must contain six or more musical numbers sung by the performing cast. 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.

31. **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 enhance or detract 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 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 responses. Good audience energy can reflect a strong show, but not necessarily – and Critics need to look beyond that.

32. **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?

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

34. 9: 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.

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

35. Writing Your Review

36. What To Include In Your Review

37. ***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, your Cappies training, 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.

38. **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:

39. **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.

40. **Give Accurate Praise.** Reflect the overall Critic opinion of a Cappies show, and various aspects of that show, as expressed during discussions.
41. **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.
42. **Mechanics of Review.** Correctly spell all cast, crew, character, and other names, and use correct grammar and punctuation. Use present tense
43. **Specifically Describe Moments from the Show.** Avoid generalities, instead describe what you see to help your reader visualize.

Sample Review of a Play:

THESE ARE EXAMPLES OF STRONG WRITING. THEY ARE NOT PERFECT BUT THEY ARE WRITTEN IN THE STYLE THAT YOU SHOULD WRITE IN.

Salem Witches Invade San Juan Hills

Tribal drums and dancing open San Juan Hills High School's production of "The Crucible", the classic story of a small town overtaken by the suspicions of witchcraft.

John Proctor (Cole Henriksen) has a hard time combating his beliefs with those of the Salem townspeople. While being threatened by multiple people, Henriksen keeps his confidence and morals until the end when he gives his own life to not succumb to lies. Henriksen's clear diction and strong presence add to the character.

As the antagonist of the show, Abigail Williams (Amanda Rooker) creates mass hysteria and a web of lies in the town of Salem, Massachusetts. Rooker is capable of making a convincing and persuasive character without overacting. Rooker adds to the deceitful character by mastering the two sides of Abigail. One innocent side in love with John Proctor seems naive and harmless while the other demonic side controls the other young girls out of fear.

Contrasting the hysteria of the other characters are Elizabeth Proctor (Rachel Sandefur) and Reverend John Hale (Benjamin Rutkowski) who both use body language and calm, deliberate speech to portray their actions and emotions rather than running around the stage and yelling. Tituba (Madeline Blomdahl) is a house servant taken from her home in Barbados. Though not a main character, Blomdahl is truly memorable in her portrayal of the heathen servant from her wide eyes and maniacal laughter to her fear-induced hallucinations.

Bringing color and life to the show is the lighting designed by Reese Ravner. Designs such as a heartbeat on the wall or the transition from night to daybreak tie the transitions to the show in a very creative way.

Costuming designed by Lauren Leclair adds more depth to each of the possessed girls of the show. Each of the girls are branded with a color to represent one of the seven deadly sins: purple as pride, green as envy, yellow as gluttony, blue as sloth, light yellow as greed, and pink as lust. This idea draws the connection between the sinful sides of the girls compared to the mask of innocence their youth provides.

Through accusations and trials, San Juan Hills' cast shows that through the darkest of times it is better to stay true to your values than to succumb to the lies of others.

written by Heather Nielsen, a junior at St. Margaret's Episcopal School

Orange Lutheran's 'Tarzan' is a 'Swinging' Good Time

It's a jungle out there — especially for Tarzan, who must face the constant threat of encroaching hunters and a fierce jaguar. But this ape-man's story is not about survival of the fittest, it is about the survival of love and family. Orange Lutheran's production of "Tarzan" reverberates with this universal message of love that reaches beyond the human world and into the animal kingdom.

At the heart of this tale is the blossoming love between the primitive Tarzan and the prim-and-proper Jane. As their worlds collide, Tarzan must discover who he really is and where he truly belongs.

Mia Battaglia leaps, crawls and jumps as Young Tarzan, finding a youthful, boyish energy with her nimble movements and curious facial expressions. The transition from her character to the much older Tarzan (Anthony Skillman) appears effortless, facilitated by their shared ape-like mannerisms. Skillman subtly portrays Tarzan's shift from brutish to civilized, gradually standing taller and straighter in each and every scene.

However, Tarzan's greatest change is seen through his affections towards Jane (Audrey Bivens). His quick, animalistic movements turn tender and subdued whenever he is near her ever-present smile. Adding to their quirky dynamic, Bivens' consistent British accent humorously contrasts with Skillman's incoherent grunts. Yet, this unlikely duo proves to be harmonious in "For the First Time," in which Bivens' soaring soprano range perfectly complements Skillman's powerful vibrato.

Kala (Amanda Dayhoff) impresses too with her warm, silky tone in "You'll Be in My Heart." Her voice remains as unwavering as her maternal protection of Tarzan. Also protective of Tarzan is Terk (Jeremy Thulemeyer), who keeps every moment onstage lively and entertaining with his animated voice and buoyant physicality. Thulemeyer exhibits impressive stamina, never getting out of breath despite his continuous, energetic activity.

With cunning manipulation and booming commands, Clayton (Charlie Battaglia) earns his spot as the principal antagonist. Battaglia's cold, villainous stare reveals the true barbarity of this greedy character.

But the jungle would not be complete without its ensemble of apes and forest dancers, both of whom set the optimistic tone of the show with passionate spins and turns. These characters stay rhythmic and cohesive as they blend together in the finale, bringing Tarzan's "Two Worlds" together as one.

In this wildly successful production, Orange Lutheran's colorful cast of characters delight with an infectious charm, and of course, a little monkey business.

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. 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 Production 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. 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).

2 or 3: "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."

4 or 5: "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."

6 or 7: "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.'"

8 or 9: "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 that reflected some strong choices."

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 at intermission, after the show, and during discussion 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 the seven paragraphs is dedicated to one purpose and together they offer a logical flow of information.

Paragraph 1: *The Lead-In.* Grab your readers' attention.

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 consider 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 are 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 the group of performers, but justify all criticisms with warranted, 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.

"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.

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.

Proofreading Your Work

After you've written your review, proofread it. Proofread for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. (Remember, that the computer can't do it all; it won't flag "there" where you mean "their".) Also, re-check the show program to make sure you have the right name and spelling for the play or musical, the performing school, the characters, and the cast and crew. People like to have their names spelled correctly. Doing so shows your attentiveness to detail, which adds to your credibility as a Critic.

Lastly, proofread to make sure that you are happy with the review you are sending in. It's your work and you should feel proud of it. Just remember, though, it's your review, and all of the opinions and words are to be yours alone. Following is a checklist to help you edit your own review, making sure you have engaged your readers, criticized appropriately, and given fair and accurate praise.

The best reviews are usually about 350 to 400 words long. (Your word-processing program most likely has a word-counting tool that can quickly count the words for you.) Reviews of fewer than 300 words may not count as a submitted review.

Self-Editing Checklist

1. Does the entire review sound good when you read it aloud? Are all points clearly and simply made (vs. awkward or long-winded)? Is it as concise and sharp as it could be?
2. Is there an attention-grabbing opening?
3. Are the basic plot and some background of the play/musical given?
4. Does the review include comments on: the notable acting (leads and others); the technical aspects (accounting especially for difficulty level); and, perhaps, an overall element that anchored the show?
5. Is each opinion illustrated with a representative behavior (an example; nouns and verbs)?
6. Are all criticisms general (no names), brief, and followed by something positive?
7. Could someone who didn't see the show picture what you saw as you describe (with nouns and verbs) what happened on stage by the actors and technical crew?
8. Are a variety of words used (vs. redundancies)? Are any double-negatives that crept in changed instead to what did happen (vs. what did not not-happen)?
9. Does the review end with a sound-bite or tag-line type, catchy closing? Does the body of the review lead, logically, to the closing remark?
10. Does it sound like the production was as successful as (and not more than) the Critics as a whole said in the Cappies room?
11. Is it between 300 and 400 words? Did you include a title? Submit the finalized review before your deadline!