

# Arts Instruction: Theatre



## HISD Fine Arts Operational Framework



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***Theatre was my first love. I can't take the theatre out of me.  
And I wouldn't want to. To me, it's home.***

**- Jim Parsons**

## Aspects of a Quality Theatre Program

Quality theatre education at any age helps develop skills that students will use again and again throughout their entire lives. Taking theatre in school inherently provides experience working in groups, listening, empathizing, working to a deadline, learning how to create and operate under a budget, speaking in front of an audience, expanding vocabulary, overcome nerves, reflection, evaluation, and countless other skills.

To ensure students are getting a quality theatre experience in school, students need properly certified instructors, a safe space of appropriate size where they can feel comfortable and occasionally be alone to reflect, adequate materials, clear objectives, and ongoing support from administration.

In this chapter, you'll discover more specifics about what is needed for theatre in school.

A school-based Theatre Program requires:

### Performance Space

This can be a flexible-seating or a fixed-seating theatre space/complete theatre facility.

In Houston ISD secondary schools (middle and high) our buildings should have *one of each*. In Houston ISD elementary schools, buildings should have *one or the other*.

#### Flexible Theatre Space (Black Box Theatre)

"A large room with a high ceiling for rehearsals, laboratory scenes, and small-scale productions. This setting provides intimacy between performers and the audience, limited scenery needs, and flexibility in arranging platforms and lighting. Alternative flexible theatre spaces allow students to build different theatres by restructuring the room into various configurations. A small performance space can also challenge and enrich theatre education and enable the staging of little-known plays that attract smaller audiences."<sup>83</sup>

#### Fixed-Seating Theatre Space (Complete Theatre Facility)

"Theatre seating for 500, which is preferable to a multipurpose auditorium that seats 1,000 or more."<sup>84</sup> The stage should have a soft wood floor so that student technicians may secure set pieces using drills. "The most common configuration is the proscenium stage, though other configurations include the thrust, arena, and open stages. The traditional proscenium theatre provides space for shows with large casts and large audiences. Complex scenic and lighting equipment allow for instruction in the TEKS of technical theatre. Careful attention and maintenance can provide a safe learning environment. Flexible theatrical lighting and sound equipment, a box office and lobby, scenery and properties shop, costume shop, makeup and dressing rooms, and secure storage areas are essential parts of the facility. Numerous large storage areas protect the theatre department's scenery, properties, costumes, makeup, lighting and sound equipment, tools, and raw materials. Secure storage space reduces the possibility that supplies will be lost or damaged."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Center for Educator Development in Fine Arts (CEDFA), *Fine Arts Programs in High Schools*.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

## Classroom Space

A classroom with movable desks or tables and chairs that can provide space for instruction and rehearsals.<sup>86</sup>

A black box theatre can serve as a classroom. However, many of the programs in Houston ISD's secondary schools have enough student involvement to justify a school having a black box, an auditorium, and a traditional classroom.

## High-Quality Materials and Supplies

### Scripts and theatre textbooks

All schools with a theatre program should provide an annual budget for scripts for perusal and for classroom use.<sup>87</sup>

All schools should have adequate hard copies of (or digital access to) all appropriate adopted theatre textbooks and/or adopted theatre resources.

### Costumes

All schools should provide an annual budget for costume purchase and rental.<sup>88</sup> Every theatre department in secondary school should have the following materials for costumes:

Numerous rolling portable costume racks

(1) Commercial Iron

(1) Commercial Ironing Board

Secondary schools with classes in technical theatre will need at least

(1) sewing machine for costume repair.

Building and repairing costumes is an essential part of the learning in technical theatre.

### Makeup

This is an essential tool which helps actors to experience transformation into a character. Students in a production class or in the cast of any play or musical should have their own basic theatrical makeup kit. Sharing makeup is discouraged for health and safety reasons.

### Sets

Every theatre program in Texas should have a full thirty-two (32) piece U.I.L. One Act Play unit set (painted gray). The pieces in the One Act Play unit set can serve the needs of a set for years on end.

<sup>86</sup> Center for Educator Development in Fine Arts (CEDFA), *Fine Arts Programs in High Schools*.

<sup>87</sup> See "Theatre Addendum A: Budgets and Lists of Equipment and Supplies," 161.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

In secondary schools with technical theatre classes, there should be an annual budget for lumber (and/or steel) so that students can experience building sets. Adequate tools should be provided as well.<sup>89</sup>

### Hand Props

The use of hand props enhances imagination and improves the heightened pretending required for theatre.

Each theatre program should have an annual budget for purchase of and maintenance for all hand props.<sup>90</sup>

## **Properly Certified Theatre Teacher**

The better the training the theatre teacher has had, the better the experience the students will have. Texas certification in theatre is required in HISD. Every theatre teacher teaching in secondary schools must have proper certification for their students to earn credit in a theatre course, per the Texas Education Code.

HISD schools will hire theatre teachers whose teaching style, expertise, and vision fit with the school's needs and long-term goals.

In most current situations in HISD (particularly in elementary and in middle school, and in some high schools), the theatre teacher is the only person in the building who teaches their subject. Therefore, the theatre teacher must have the full support of the campus' leadership team (most especially the principal), the HISD Fine Arts Department, and the school community. It's too easy for a "singleton" teacher to feel alone. All entities who can offer support and help should do so.

A theatre teacher should be proactive; proactive in approaching productions, proactive in seeking professional development, appraiser feedback, etc. A theatre teacher should set high expectations in their classroom, constantly observing their students, giving appropriate (especially positive) feedback in order to improve a student's process. A theatre teacher should utilize a variety of instructional strategies and developmentally appropriate activities, warm-ups, and exercises. A successful theatre class is one that students find challenging yet feel excited to come back to. A theatre classroom is a student's safe place.

## **Appropriate Time for Theatre Classes**

Per Texas Administrative Code: School districts must ensure that sufficient time is provided for teachers to teach and for students to learn fine arts during regular school hours, not after school.<sup>91</sup>

In elementary schools, students should have a *minimum* of 45 minutes a week to take a theatre class. For theatre in middle and high school, a class period every day (or a double-period every other day in cases of blocked scheduling) should be built into the master schedule. Theatre teachers in elementary and in secondary schools should have one planning/conference period per day, regardless of the school using a traditional or block schedule.

<sup>89</sup> See "Theatre Addendum A: Budgets and Lists of Equipment and Supplies," 161.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Texas Administrative Code. 19 Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 74, Subchapter A, *Curriculum Requirements*.

## Connections to Educational Theatre in Texas and Beyond

### Texas Educational Theatre Association and Texas Thespians

The Texas Educational Theatre Association (TxETA) and Texas Thespians (which operates as Texas' branch of International Thespians and the Educational Theatre Association) host annual conferences for students and theatre faculty. Both organizations make it possible for students to meet with and audition for university programs and gain scholarships to college.

### U.I.L.

"The University Interscholastic League (U.I.L) One-Act Play Contest, founded in 1927, is the largest high school play production contest or play festival in the world. More than 14,000 Texas high school students in more than 1,200 plays participate in 300 plus contests, which take place from the beginning of March through the three-day, 48-production State Meet One-Act Play Contest. The One-Act Play Contest is supported by more than 300 members of the Texas Theatre Adjudicator and Officials Organization. The League's theatre program is considered by historians to be the foundation of educational and community theatre in Texas. It continues to be a major factor motivating increasing numbers of schools to offer theatre arts as an academic subject."<sup>92</sup>

U.I.L. also hosts contests in theatrical design and in film. U.I.L One Act Play contests also exist for Middle School; Middle School contests are growing and thriving in Texas school districts.

The HISD Fine Arts department annually hosts a One Act Play Festival for Elementary students in the winter.

### Houston's Professional Theatre Community

As would be expected of the fourth largest city in the United States, Houston's theatre scene grows larger every year. Many of our professional theatre companies house education programs who partner with schools and school districts. Houston ISD's theatre teachers have a long history of bringing artists from professional theatre companies to their buildings and taking students to performances. Continuing this practice will only deepen and enhance the quality of the educational experience for our students.

## Funding from the District, from the Community, and from Outside Sources

Some communities in Houston ISD are better able to fund their fine arts programs than others. Looking at arts programs school by school, it is truly a case of the "haves" and the "have nots." Given that campus budgets are decentralized, campus principals are, in effect, allowed to fund what they deem to be a priority. Those who have seen the power of the arts and truly support them find ways to get money for theatre, music, dance, and visual arts. Those principals who choose to prioritize other things leave their fine arts teachers largely on their own.

Regardless of administrative support, most fine arts teachers in Houston ISD must fundraise; ticket sales and concessions at performances can help theatre programs to an extent, but in most cases ticket sales don't come near covering the cost of the expenses required year-to-year. This means fine arts teachers must find more and more ways to raise money. Grant writing, car washes, show shirt sales, ad sales in programs, bake sales, and entertainment book

<sup>92</sup> University Interscholastic League. *Theatre and Film*.

sales are just a few examples of ways that theatre teachers in Houston ISD have worked to raise money to keep their programs going.

In addition to overseeing and executing fundraising, theatre teachers are required to create lesson plans, maximize instructional time, create assessments, get their grades in on time, attend faculty meetings (just like all other teachers on a campus) rehearse for plays and musicals, and have a professional and positive attitude at while at work.

The fundraising piece is overwhelming in many of our schools. Looking at the school districts surrounding Houston ISD, one will notice that most districts provide a given amount money per school for theatre every year. This isn't something the principal can move around and spend on something else; that budget is *earmarked* for theatre. Supplemental fundraising can and should happen to increase funds, but at least every school starts with an equitable amount of financial capital for theatre.

Of course, existing booster programs should continue fundraising and advocating for the arts. More parents district-wide should receive training on starting booster clubs for the fine arts. However, if Houston ISD wants to raise attendance *as a district*, and raise student achievement *as a district*, they need to have more than adequate funding for the arts across the board so that more of our schools can experience the positive impact of the arts.

**“We do on stage things that are supposed to happen off.  
Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on  
every exit as being an entrance somewhere else.”**

**— Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead***



## Effective Strategies for Theatre Teachers

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### ***Be Organized and Be Ready***

When it comes to actual lessons, you only have so much time with students. Every minute in a lesson counts and any minute wasted is a minute that student (and you) will never get back. Your lessons must be planned and ready.

There are lots of dates and times and names and things to remember when you teach theatre in a school. Numerous things are going to be swimming around in your head (this is especially true when you have a show or a conference coming up). Write down deadlines, dates, times, and find a way to record things. Get those things out of your head and onto paper (or those things will keep you awake at night). Find an organizational system that works for you.

When designing and developing a theatre curriculum, a theatre teacher should never forget that theatre is an art form. Through checking for understanding, observing and effective listening, a theatre teacher is able to diagnose a student's ability to master content. Furthermore, a theatre teacher needs to be able to offer adequate instruction, demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy. A competent theatre teacher should set appropriate instructional expectations and goals, always encouraging critical analysis during performances in and outside of the classroom. A qualified theatre teacher will utilize coherent instruction and differentiate instruction based on students interests and readiness while respecting multicultural perspectives; A well-informed teacher seeks adequate curriculum material through a myriad of resources and develops a theatre curriculum based on the established TEKS and the HISD K-12 Scope and Sequences, Vertically Aligned Matrixes, and Planning Guides for theatre.

### ***Create Clear Classroom Procedures, Rules, Expectations, and Communication***

Know that you're working with children. They are going to need you to tell them what you expect. You need to set the structure of your classroom. Make your rules and procedures clear. Take the first week (or two) of classes to set your rules and procedures. Make kids practice the way you want them to come into the room, the way you want them to ask questions, the way you want them to go about borrowing a script, etc.

Be sure that your grading policies and your grading rubric are clear. Students and parents need to understand this. Have parents sign a copy of your grading rubric, and post your rubric and all homework on a blog. Make it easy for students to access the instructions to all homework on your blog.

### ***Use Physical and Vocal Warm-ups***

Theatre classes use muscles in the mouth and in the entire body. Incorporating a daily warm-up not only readies the body and the mind to learn, it helps students to be more comfortable with their peers (which only serves to increase all-important trust needed in an effective ensemble). Warm-ups are an opportunity to allow students to take leadership; as the year progresses, experiment with allowing and encouraging students to bring in tongue-twisters and warm-up games.

### ***Teach Students to Be Good Audience Members and Take Students to See Live Theatre Performances***

More of your students will have seen videos on YouTube than will have sat through an entire play. It is very likely that students in your classes will have seen plenty of films, but not a lot of live theatre (if any). They will

need to know expectations when watching theatre. After you are certain that your students know to stay in their seats for the duration of a performance, help them to build their ability to reflect on what they experience as an audience member.

When students watch one another's work in class, ask for audience reflections on what they've seen. "It was good" or "it was funny" is just the very beginning of deeper reflection. Challenge students to say why they enjoyed something. Urge them to be specific of recalling what they felt.

Houston has plenty of opportunities for students to see plays and musicals. Create opportunities for students to share reflections after partner organizations bring performances to their school and after field trips to see theatre. Vocalizing their thoughts after viewing a performance will train students' critical eye.

### ***Develop Relationships with Parents, and Enlist Their Help***

Show me a successful theatre program and I will show you supportive and involved parents who will go to bat for that teacher. Many theatre teachers tend to resist delegating a task to a parent for fear that whatever they give over to someone else won't work out the way they envisioned.

There is a myriad of things parents can be trusted to do. Parents can bring (or simply help serve) food for students before a performance. Parents can sell or take tickets before a show. Parents can serve as chaperones on field trips. Parents can design and/or print a playbill, or posters advertising a play. Parents can help direct traffic at a car wash. Parents can donate (or sew) costumes. Parents can repair props or set pieces.

Theatre is a social art. It takes a community of people larger than the company of actors and technicians to get off the ground. The more parents help and feel like they are part of the theatre community (and feel appreciated for it), the more enriched your school's theatre program will be.

### ***Go Out and See Theatre***

Take yourself to live productions of plays and musicals. Renew your inspiration to do this work! Feed your inner artist.

### ***Be Good to Yourself***

Theatre teachers share a piece of their soul with their students every day. This work truly *matters* to theatre teachers. We are passionate creatures and it's easy to let a bad moment (such as a phone call from an angry parent, a colleague making a dismissive comment about the subject you teach, or a student testing your patience) ruin a whole day. Find and celebrate the good moments. Not everyone will understand how important theatre in school is. In most cases, they simply have not been reached. Remember that the importance of theatre had yet to reach you too once upon a time.

Give yourself license to try things and embrace failure. We often find ourselves encouraging our students to try their ideas and to embrace it when the idea does not work. After all that is one of the best ways to learn. Theatre teachers need to take that same advice. Not every brilliant idea is going to be so wonderful when it comes to fruition. Own those moments and learn from them. You are a learner too.

When you are rehearsing for a show, avoid scheduling rehearsals every day after school. Build no-rehearsal days into the schedule and stick to them. Doing so is good for morale of the ensemble, and it gives you needed breaks.

Make time for and have a personal life outside of your job. See friends. Spend time with those people that you love. Engage yourself in hobbies beyond work. It is unhealthy when your job becomes so all-encompassing that you can never do anything outside of only school and sleep. Your brain needs a break from your job once in a while.

### ***Be Sure that You and Your Appraiser Are on the Same Page When It Comes to How Your Work Will Be Evaluated***

Houston ISD's Fine Arts Department has developed a TADS-based guide for appraisers of theatre teachers. The intention behind this document is to help appraisers see what aspects of the TADS looks like in a theatre classroom. This is a document which is meant to help those appraisers who are not trained in theatre (which includes most campus administrators). Theatre teachers should have this on hand (as should their appraiser); this is a document that can keep the teacher and the appraiser on the same page.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Utilize the Knowledge of a Mentor or Be a Mentor***

Every first-year teacher that is new to the profession or to the district will attend a new teacher training in the beginning of the year that will guide them through the expectations of their instruction and provide them with pertinent information regarding theatre. New teachers will also be assigned a mentor teacher that is located at a campus in the general proximity of their campus. This union is created to provide new instructors a valuable support system that can aide them through the plethora of new information and expectations placed on them by the vocation. Mentor teachers will also serve as a liaison between their mentee and curriculum specialist to ensure that the specialist is providing adequate support to the first-year teacher. Mentors and mentees will attend at least, one meeting to be held at the beginning of both the fall and spring semesters. These meetings will be led by instructional specialist and used to ensure that guidelines and expectations are reviewed with both mentor and mentee together.

### ***On-Campus Appraisal***

The HISD Fine Arts Department has created a walkthrough guide and a rubric for observing theatre teachers to assist appraisers in the process of evaluating the work of theatre teachers.

**“I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms,  
the most immediate way in which a human being can  
share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being.”**

**— Thornton Wilder**

<sup>93</sup> See “Theatre Addendum B: Supplemental Guidelines for Appraisers of Theatre,” 169.

## Development of the Emerging Artist in Theatre

More students take Theatre as a class in high school in Texas than in any other state in the country. Texas is one of very few states to have state-level curriculum standards for Theatre. State curriculum in Texas is divided into pieces of what our state education agency (T.E.A.) calls “T.E.K.S” (which stands for “Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills”). Houston ISD has established its own TEKS-based curriculum for theatre. This curriculum consists of planning guides for teachers, scopes and sequences, and a K-12 vertical alignment matrix (VAM).

### *Igniting Creativity: The Emerging Artist in Elementary*

The theatre curriculum for students in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade is designed with the expectation that students will have theatre for forty-five (45) minutes per week in a year-long course.

The elementary curriculum consists of units on introduction to theatre, self-awareness, role-playing and dramatic play, creating Theatre and characterization, and creative expression through production. Listed below are just some of the learning activities that students will engage in while taking theatre classes in elementary school in Houston ISD:

The emerging artist will:

- Learn and discuss procedures, rules and regulations of the theatre classroom
- Learn and demonstrate safe use of movement and voice
- Explore space using expressive movement
- Imitate sounds, imitate and recreate objects, and create playing space using common objects, such as tables or chairs
- Identify the characteristics of dramatic play
- Participate in dramatic play, discuss dramatic activities
- Create costumes using simple materials
- Assume roles through imitation and recreation
- Rehearse and perform real and imaginative situations of family cultures and from American History
- Learn to react and respond to music and sounds using creative movement
- Adapt their environment using common objects and props
- Imitate life experiences and the environment
- Dramatize poems, songs, fables, myths and fairytales
- Participate in dramatic play using cultural and historical experiences, planning, cooperating, interacting, reacting, discussing
- Analyze and apply appropriate audience behavior
- Demonstrate safe use of the voice and body
- Develop characterization using sensory and emotional recall
- Create movements and portray a character using dialogue appropriately
- Demonstrate character, environment, action, and theme using props, costumes, and visual elements
- Alter space appropriately to create a suitable performance environment for playmaking
- Describe characters, their relationships, and their surroundings in detail
- Portray environment, character, and actions Express emotions and relate ideas using interpretive and planned movement and dialogue
- Create simple stories collaboratively through imaginative play, improvisations, and story dramatizations, demonstrating a logical connection of events and describing the characters, their relationships, and their surroundings

Theatre teachers in elementary school are encouraged to find opportunities for their students to see theatre in the Houston area (performed by professional companies, middle, high school and college students, and by their peers in other elementary schools). Furthermore, it is highly suggested for theatre programs in Houston ISD elementary schools to take advantage of the chance to participate in festivals (such as district sponsored mini play festivals, Shakespeare festivals, the Texas Renaissance Fair, and festivals sponsored by partner organizations).

### ***Inspiring Imagination: The Emerging Artist in Middle School***

Texas Administrative Code and Houston ISD guidelines require that students in middle school have one full year of a fine arts course taught by a certified teacher.

The Houston ISD Fine Arts Department's curriculum for theatre is written with the expectation that 6, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders taking theatre will have the class for the entire school year, and that this class will meet for a minimum of 45 minutes every day, or 90 minutes every other day (235 minutes a week).

The middle school curriculum consists of units on devised theatre, study of a contemporary practitioner of theatre, auditioning, Shakespeare, improvisation, theatre games, rehearsal in preparation for public performance, (this class is often used to prepare for U.I.L. One Act Play which is in November for middle school).

Listed below are just some of the learning activities that emerging theatre artist will engage in while taking theatre classes in middle school in Houston ISD:

The emerging artist will:

- Write scripts based on improvisation
- Use and develop listening skills
- Learn basic blocking
- Learn the importance of audience awareness in rehearsal.
- Experience the power of letting the audience imagine an event
- Learn to take and to give constructive criticism
- Learn about the work of a theatre professional who is either alive today or has died within the last ten years
- Learn that theatre *needs* very little design/technology to exist and that theatre doesn't need an auditorium to exist, because it can happen in ANY space
- Learn that theatre can be used to teach kinesthetically/by participation.
- Learn the importance of listening and responding
- Gain exposure to changing their physicality and voice for finding a character
- Gain confidence through performance in front of their peers
- Learn how behave as audience members
- Learn how to reflect on their own performance and the work of others

Theatre teachers in middle school are encouraged to find opportunities for their students to see theatre in the Houston area (performed by professional companies, college and high school students, and by their peers in other middle schools). Furthermore, it is highly suggested for theatre programs in Houston ISD middle schools to take advantage of the chance to participate in the district's U.I.L. One Act Play contest in November. Performance opportunities in programs such as those offered by the Texas Renaissance Fair, and festivals sponsored by partner organizations are also highly encouraged. Texas Thespians sponsors a regional Junior Thespian Day during their annual conference in either October or November. Junior Thespian Day is filled with workshops for middle school and performances by middle school students from across

Texas. The International Thespian Festival is held annually in Omaha, Nebraska; this is a “is a weeklong immersion in the theatre arts specially for high-achieving middle and high school drama students and their teachers.” (EDTA. 2017)

## ***Designing the Future: The Emerging Artist in High School***

In Houston ISD’s high schools, theatre is taught (mostly) in full class periods, and students see their theatre teacher every school day. Some schools have “block” schedules (four 90-minute periods per day) which means theatre students see their teacher every other school day for 90 minutes.

High School is where the state curriculum divides into different tracks: traditional theatre, musical theatre, and technical theatre.

Many high schools in Houston ISD have theatre production classes for advanced students; these classes are by audition and the purpose of these courses is to produce theatre productions for public performance. As of the 2013 update to the TEKS, TEA has created TEKS for a Musical Theatre track.

The Houston ISD Fine Arts Department recommends that all high schools offer at least Theatre I-IV, Technical Theatre I-IV, and Theatre Production I-IV; Admission to theatre production courses should be via audition.

Campuses may also offer a musical theatre track (Musical Theatre I-IV); Musical theatre classes need to have a certified theatre teacher as the teacher of record and, ideally should be co-taught by a theatre teacher and one or both of a dance teacher and a vocal music teacher, but a certified theatre teacher must be the teacher of record per TEA. Whether or not to offer Musical Theatre is a campus-based decision.

The high school curriculum includes (but is not limited to) units on warm up techniques, creative expression, script analysis, rehearsal, theatre history, Shakespeare, contemporary theatre, criticism, set design, costume design, lighting design, and sound design.

Listed below are just some of the learning activities that emerging theatre artists will engage in while taking theatre classes in high school in Houston ISD:

The emerging artist will:

- Learn about Greek Tragedies, Medieval History and Commedia dell’ Arte
- Identify different theatrical styles and genres
- Compare the conventions of theatre with those of film and television, and Then analyze the influence of television on contemporary society
- Receive instruction on each of the main branches of technical Theatre: Setting, lights, sound, properties, and costumes
- Explore the process of stagecraft from design to production, while Deepening their understanding of technical Theatre vocabulary
- Learn how to analyze a play for technical elements
- Learn how to create a makeup design board based on a play
- Learn how to create a lighting plot for a play setting
- Learn how to create a sound cue sheet and sound cd for a play
- Review principles of Shakespearean Theatre
- Analyze a contemporary version of a Shakespearean play and articulate how history and culture have influenced its current conception

Theatre teachers in high school are encouraged to find opportunities for their students to see theatre in the Houston area (performed by professional companies, college students, and by their peers in other high

schools). Performance opportunities in programs such as those offered by the Texas Renaissance Fair, and festivals sponsored by partner organizations are also highly encouraged.

**“I received from my experience in Japan an incredible sense of respect for the art of creating, not just the creative product. We’re all about the product. To me, the process was also an incredibly important aspect of the total form.”**

**— Julie Taymor**



# Houston ISD Theatre Curriculum

The HISD Fine Arts Department provides professional development and curriculum support to all HISD theatre teachers. Additionally, the Fine Arts Department is dedicated to supporting student performances, artistic experiences, and evaluation for the sake of growth and development.

Contained in the framework section of this document, the reader will find a vertical alignment matrix, a sample walkthrough form for appraisers, samples scopes and sequences, and samples of planning guides for units of work for elementary, middle, and high school theatre curriculum written for the Houston Independent School District. The content in these documents was contributed by current Houston ISD theatre instructors' own lesson plans in shaped by the theatre curriculum specialist to become the district's published curriculum.

## Theatre TEKS

As of the update to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (adopted 2013), Texas' standards for theatre in schools (elementary through high school) are divided into the following five (5) strands:

### Foundations: inquiry and understanding.

The student develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment using elements of drama and conventions of theatre.

**Creative expression: performance.** The student interprets characters using the voice and body expressively and creates dramatizations.

**Creative expression: production.** The student applies design, directing, and theatre production concepts and skills.

**Historical and cultural relevance.** The student relates theatre to history, society, and culture.

**Critical evaluation and response.** The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

(Texas Education Agency. 2013. 19 TAC §117.104, 107, 110, 113, 116, 119, 211-213, 315-326.)

**"I was repeatedly told that there isn't an African American woman who can open a show on Broadway. I said, 'Well, how do we know? How do we know if we don't do it?' I said, 'I think you're wrong.'"**

**— Lynn Nottage**

## HISD Secondary Curriculum and Development

ALLEN, ADVANCE, ENGAGE  
2018-2019 Planning Guide  
Theatre – Middle School, Level 2  
3rd Cycle – Unit 3

• Practicing scansion	• Speaking in verse	• Speaking in Prose
<b>Academic Vocabulary</b>		
• Verse	• Iambic Pentameter	• Scansion
• Prose	• Line number	• Side
<b>Essential Understandings/Guiding Questions</b>		
William Shakespeare's plays were meant to be performed		
Shakespeare's language is much more accessible than most people think.		
1. Why read Shakespeare's plays?		
2. Why watch a Shakespeare play?		
3. Why would a character speak in Verse?		
4. Why would a character speak in Prose?		
5. Who was the audience Shakespeare was writing for?		
6. Are there moments in a Shakespeare play that could happen in our world today?		
<b>Assessment Connections</b>		
<b>Performance Expectation</b>		
TSW be able to recognize verse and prose easily.		
TSW demonstrate the ability to use scansion		
TSW rehearse and perform a scene or monologue from a Shakespeare play		
<b>Instructional Considerations</b>		
<b>Prerequisites and/or Background Knowledge for Students</b>		
Students should be able to use vocabulary learned in last year's Shakespeare unit; knowledge of verse/prose/scansion/iambic pentameter should be reviewed. Students should be more aware of ensemble, empathy, characterization.		
<b>Background Knowledge for Teacher</b>		
Teacher should have read the Shakespeare play they will use to teach the unit		
Teacher should carefully watch the video of the Shakespeare performance(s) they will use as part of the teaching materials ahead of time.		
<b>Instructional Strategies/Activities</b>		
Step 1: Putting aside natural frustrations		
-Teacher writes the word "Shakespeare" on the board.		
-Teacher allows and encourages students to voice their reservations, fears, etc.		
Step 2: showing students Shakespeare language that they already know		
-Teacher hands out "You are quoting Shakespeare" sheet to students:		
<a href="http://www.folger.edu/documents/You%20Are%20Quoting%20Shakespeare.pdf">http://www.folger.edu/documents/You%20Are%20Quoting%20Shakespeare.pdf</a>		
-Students read as a group.		
Step 3: Identifying Verse and Prose		
-Teacher shows students examples of Verse and Prose, leads a discussion of why a character would speak in either.		
Step 4: Reading Shakespeare the "wrong" way		
-Teacher hands out a speech from a Shakespeare play that is in verse (teacher has the same speech on the board).		

### GLOBAL GRADUATE



State Process Standard

Aligned to Upcoming State Readiness Standard

State Readiness Standard

State Supporting Standard

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## Evaluation and Assessment of HISD Theatre Programs

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, theatre teachers in HISD are encouraged to involve their students in various contests, conferences, and other performance opportunities. Through these avenues, students (and by and large the theatre programs themselves) gain constructive feedback which serves to improve theatre programs in HISD as a whole.

A school-based theatre programs goals should be clearly communicated to students, administrators, and parents. A theatre teacher should make it very clear how students' work will be assessed (as mentioned earlier, grading rubrics should be posted on a blog and shared with students and parents as often as possible). Theatre teachers should use all available methods to assess content mastery and track a student's growth as a theatre artist over time. In addition to summative and formative assessments in the classroom, a teacher should seek off campus opportunities such as theatre contests and conferences.

### ***U.I.L. Theatre Contests***

U.I.L. stands for University Interscholastic League. The University Interscholastic League exists to provide educational extracurricular academic, athletic, and music contests. The U.I.L. was created by The University of Texas at Austin in 1910 and has grown into the largest inter-school organization of its kind in the world." (U.I.L. 2017). Theatre falls under the *academic* area of U.I.L. contests. The One-Act Play contest and the theatrical design contests are both inherently tied to Texas' state curriculum for theatre. While successful theatre programs in Texas participate in at least one U.I.L. contest, U.I.L. does not support the idea of using contest results in an evaluation or appraisal of a teacher.

### ***U.I.L. One-Act Play***

"The U.I.L. One-Act Play contest is a competition where similarly sized Texas schools present an 18-40-minute play and may be adjudicated by a panel of three judges or a single judge. The contest is held on a single day and open to the public. There are six possible levels of competition: Zone, District, Bi-District, Area, Region, and State. At each level of competition, a judge awards individual acting awards as well as selecting three productions to advance to the next level of competition up to the Regional Level where only two will advance to the State Level. After the awards are announced a Judge gives an oral critique to each of the schools. Because of the wide participation and diversity of plays produced certain rules and guidelines have been adopted by the State One-Act Play Office. These rules are in place to ensure safety, allow for equity, satisfy legal standards, and make the running of the contest practical." (U.I.L. 2017)

U.I.L. One-Act Play is a key reason that many superintendents and campus principals continue to choose to establish theatre programs in their schools. It is highly suggested that theatre programs in HISD high schools to take advantage of the chance to participate in U.I.L. One-Act Play.

### ***Theatrical Design Contest***

"The purposes of the Theatrical Design Contest is to foster appreciation of good theatrical design, to increase the number of schools which have adapted technical theatre as an academic subject in school curricula, to learn to lose or win graciously, accepting with good sportsmanship the decision and critique with a view to improve future projects and to satisfy the competitive, artistic spirit with friendly rivalry among schools. Contest Format. Each school submits designs to the U.I.L. office as directed in the current Theatrical Design

Handbook. The designs are adjudicated and rated and advancing schools are announced. Schools receive a critique. Qualifiers at state are ranked first through sixth.”<sup>94</sup>

## ***Texas/International Thespians***

Texas Thespians sponsors an annual conference in November (this typically falls after Middle School U.I.L. One Act Play concludes). Texas Thespians is a conference filled with workshops for students and performances by high school students from across Texas.

“Texas Thespians is one of the largest chapters in the nation of the Educational Theatre Association which sponsors the International Thespian Society. As an educational honor society, we are dedicated to honoring excellence in theatre by encouraging and improving the skills of theatre students throughout Texas. A student can be inducted into a local Thespian troupe after earning points by working in school, community, and/or professional theatre both on and behind the stage. Any public or private school in Texas is invited to become a member troupe.”<sup>95</sup>

The International Thespian Festival is held annually in Omaha, Nebraska; this is a “is a weeklong immersion in the theatre arts specially for high-achieving middle and high school drama students and their teachers.” (EDTA, 2017). High School students who attend the International Thespians Festival “can meet with recruiters from dozens of top college and university theatre programs from across the country to interview and audition for admission and for thousands of dollars in scholarships.”<sup>96</sup>

## ***Tommy Tune Awards***

“The Tommy Tune Awards are named for Houston native and Lamar High School alumnus, Tommy Tune. A performer, director and choreographer with more than 50 years of stage experience, Tune received nine Tony Awards® for his work in the following productions: *Seesaw*, *My One and Only*, *A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine*, *Nine*, *Grand Hotel* and *The Will Rogers Follies*. He was also awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2003 by President George W. Bush.”<sup>97</sup>

“The Tommy Tune Awards Program celebrates the educational value, artistry, and community of high school musical theatre in the Greater Houston area. *Education*: No matter your role in the creative process, experiences in the arts cultivate confidence, spark creative thinking, and inspire life-long learning.

*Artistry*: The arts are a safe haven for exploration, reflection, and innovation. The Tommy Tune Awards is an opportunity for students and educators to share their creative accomplishments as individuals, as collaborators, and as members of the greater Houston community.

*Community*: We believe in the power of learning, collaborating, and growing together. As we celebrate our shared experience of musical theatre, we as an artistic and educational community, enhance the future of our students, our art, and our city.”<sup>98</sup>

“The Tommy Tune Judges are an approved panel of qualified performing arts professionals that is assembled to adjudicate the 45 high schools participating in the TTA. Judges are selected that have extensive backgrounds in professional theatre and performance in the capacity of directing, choreography, acting,

<sup>94</sup> University Interscholastic League. *2017-2018 U.I.L. Theatrical Design Handbook and Prompt*.

<sup>95</sup> Texas Thespians.

<sup>96</sup> Educational Theatre Association.

<sup>97</sup> The Katy News, April 21, 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Theatre Under the Stars. *Tommy Tune Awards*.

musical directing, design, dramaturgy, arts administration, technical theatre, arts education, theatre production, etc.”<sup>99</sup>

“Tommy Tune Judges are evaluating the show in front of them, focusing on each element of the production. Judges are not comparing one school to another, but rather are challenging schools to create the best possible work they can within their unique circumstances.”<sup>100</sup>

“TUTS’ Tommy Tune Awards are designed not only to acknowledge remarkable musical theatre talent at the high school level, but also to encourage future artistic development. In addition to the awards, TUTS also gives out scholarships annually to a number of deserving students. These include the Ruth Denney Scholarship, named in honor of Tune’s mentor and legendary Lamar High School drama teacher.” (The Katy News, 2017) In 2017, TUTS added “a new scholarship created in memory of Sean Rudolph, who was a successful business owner in Houston, a devoted patron of the arts and a Broadway producer. Over the past 14 years, TUTS has awarded 115 college scholarships totaling \$316,000 to Tommy Tune students.”<sup>101</sup>

Students who win “Best Leading Actor” and “Best Leading Actress” at the Tommy Tune Awards go on to compete at the national level for the Jimmy Award at the National High School Musical Theatre Awards, held annually during the month of June in New York City. The Jimmy Awards were established in 2009; they are named after legendary Broadway theatre owner and producer, James M. Nederlander.

“While in New York, Jimmy Award participants will have the opportunity to participate in rehearsals and master classes, receive one-on-one coaching from theatre professionals, be seen by casting agents, meet and converse with Broadway actors and compete for scholarships and other prizes. The week’s events will culminate in a live-awards show where the Jimmy Awards for Best Performance by an Actor and Best Performance by an Actress will be presented.”<sup>102</sup>

## ***ComedySportz: High School League***

A decent portion of the theatre curriculum in HISD trains the emerging artist to use improvisation; that is, working without a script and making the words and the story up as you go. This is an area of theatre that gives the student an opportunity to think on their feet and to hone their listening skills. Improvisation also serves as a chance to take a risk and learn from it in a safe environment.

ComedySportz “is an interactive and improvised comedy show that pits two teams of improvisors against each other in a hilarious battle of wits. Using audience suggestion and willing volunteers, CSz Houston professionals create short games, scenes and songs on the spot! One team wins and the other gets second place, but everyone leaves a winner after a hysterical and fun night at ComedySportz!”<sup>103</sup>

ComedySportz has a league for high school students to participate in. Houston ISD schools who have chosen to participate in ComedySportz: High School League have reported very positive feedback from the experience. This is yet another opportunity for students to see the work and ability of their peers from other schools, and to come away with a deeper appreciation for theatre.

“The High School League® empowers students to create their own theatre and nourishes their communication skills through improvisational theatre workshops and performances. It encourages their individuality and provides the forum to succeed or fail in a safe environment that combines showmanship and sportsmanship.

<sup>99</sup> Theatre Under the Stars. *Tommy Tune Awards*.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> The Katy News, April 21, 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Comedysportz.

The League provides an extracurricular activity that goes beyond stage work into everyday situations. And the students just think they're having fun!"<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Comedysportz.

## **HISD Fine Arts Partnerships and Collaboration**

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Houston has a vibrant and alive theatre community. Those of us who call Houston home have more opportunity to see live theatre than we can possibly take in. Houston ISD is incredibly lucky to have the following organizations as theatre partners: The Alley Theatre, The Arts Access Initiative, The Ensemble Theatre, The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, Houston Arts Partners, Houston Grand Opera, Main Street Theater, Miller Outdoor Theatre, Stages Repertory Theatre, The Society for the Performing Arts, The University of Houston School of Theatre and Dance, Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS), and Young Audiences of Houston.

The theatre partnerships Houston ISD has developed take many forms; student matinees, teaching artists visiting schools, and teachers receiving professional development are a few examples of planned partnerships reaching fruition.

Year after year HISD students attend matinees. These enriching field trips bring many children to the theatre who would not have otherwise had the chance.

Every summer, HISD students who participate in camps through The Alley Theatre, Stages, TUTS, and Main Street Theater grow as artists and deepen appreciation for theatre while forging friendships with their peers who attend other schools. Teaching artists who come into schools to offer supplemental lessons on auditioning, Shakespeare, stage combat, and lighting design help students to further solidify content mastery gained in regular theatre classes.

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# Theatre Addendum B: Supplemental Guidelines for Appraisers of Theatre

## HISD | Fine Arts Department

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### Supplemental Guidelines for Theatre Teacher's Appraisers

Planning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PL-1 <i>Develops student learning goals:</i> a theatre teacher creates a rubric which shows that students' grades will reflect student mastery., communicating with students using art terminology successful completion of work, ready for display, capturing the essence of creativity through art, connections made through artists throughout history and understanding cultural significance.</li> <li>PL-2 <i>Collects, tracks and uses student data to drive instruction:</i> administering diagnostic tests, assigning skill levels, administering pre-and post-tests, troubleshooting and chiming in during groupwork, and utilizing theatre rubric(s).</li> <li>PL-3 <i>Designs effective lesson plans, units, and assessments:</i> the teacher creates theatre lessons with a clear objective, leaves time in within a lesson plan check for understanding during groupwork or a rehearsal.</li> </ul>	
Instruction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I-1 <i>Designs effective lesson plans, units, and assessments:</i> the teacher creates theatre lessons with a clear objective, leaves time in within a lesson plan check for understanding during groupwork or a rehearsal.</li> <li>I-2 <i>Checks for students' understanding and responds to students misunderstanding:</i> teacher monitoring participation, providing feedback, evaluating performance and growth constantly.</li> <li>I-3 <i>Differentiates instruction for student needs by employing a variety of instructional strategies:</i> when a student shows that they do not understand a theatre term or concept, the teacher explains it a different way or shows it to the student in a way the student can understand.</li> <li>I-4 <i>Engages students in work that develops higher-level thinking skills:</i> learning how to achieve the heightened pretending theatre requires takes practice, risk, failure, and discovery. Appraisers might see any of the following in a theatre lesson: during groupwork a theatre student might make an audible noise indicating that he or she has made a discovery about how to play a character/pronounce a word/find a moment of empathy, etc. A theatre student might generate in their mind and ask a question rooted in the lesson of a fellow student or the teacher.</li> <li>I-5 <i>Maximizes instructional time:</i> the appraiser is able to ask any single student what they are working on during any particular moment during the lesson and get a clear answer that reflects the student working toward that class period's learning objective.</li> <li>I-6 <i>Communicates content and concepts to students:</i> content covered is accurate and fulfills necessary theatre TEKS; the teacher might use technology to show examples from television, film, or a recorded theatrical production in order to teach content. In an effort to model a skill that students often learn in their theatre class and will find useful throughout their lives, the teacher uses an audible level of volume and diction so that they can easily be heard and understood from all parts of the room when speaking to the class as a whole.</li> <li>I-7 <i>Promotes high academic expectations for students:</i> providing positive constructive feedback, teacher modeling, students critiquing other's work and taking feedback without disagreeing, fostering self-discovery and growth.</li> <li>I-8 <i>Students actively participating in lesson activities:</i> Students volunteer suggestions in both small or larger group settings. Students demonstrate a willingness to try.</li> <li>I-9 <i>Sets and implements discipline management procedures:</i> the theatre teacher establishes a specific and clear daily routine in student-friendly language from the outset. There is well-established classroom management and procedures, a demonstration of appropriate audience behavior (when applicable). The level of safety and the etiquette in the theatre classroom is a direct reflection of the time invested by the theatre teacher.</li> <li>I-10 <i>Builds a positive and respectful classroom environment:</i> The theatre teacher establishes a set of rules composed in student-friendly language. Students volunteer suggestions in both small or larger group settings.</li> </ul>	
Professionalism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PR-1 <i>Complies with policies and procedures at school and district.</i></li> <li>PR-2 <i>Treats colleagues with respect throughout all aspects of work.</i></li> <li>PR-3 <i>Complies with teacher attendance policies.</i></li> <li>PR-4 <i>Dresses professionally according to school policy.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PR-5 <i>Collaborates with colleagues at the school and district-wide.</i></li> <li>PR-6 <i>Implements school rules.</i></li> <li>PR-7 <i>Communicates with parents throughout the year.</i></li> <li>PR-8 <i>Seeks feedback in order to improve performance.</i></li> <li>PR-9 <i>Participates in professional development and applies learning.</i></li> </ul>

#### GLOBAL GRADUATE



NOTE: Complete instructional planning information and supports are in the HISD Curriculum documents (Unit Planning Guide, Unit Formative Assessment). This document does not replace the HISD Planning Guides.

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## Observing Theatre Teachers Rubric:

Should See	Might See	Shouldn't See
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students practicing safe use of body and voice</li> <li>Students performing preparation and warm-up techniques</li> <li>Development of effective voice and diction for performance</li> <li>Development of effective use of body and movement for performance</li> <li>Well-established classroom routines</li> <li>Director watching / monitoring class activity</li> <li>Engaged teaching</li> <li>Engaged learning</li> <li>Eye contact</li> <li>Students engaged in a variety of theatrical activities and genres</li> <li>Students engaged as actor, ensemble member, director, and/or audience member</li> <li>Students using appropriate theatre vocabulary</li> <li>Use of quality dramatic literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual / small group instruction</li> <li>Individual/group performance</li> <li>Group discussion</li> <li>Reading and analysis of scripts</li> <li>Creative participation</li> <li>Memorization techniques</li> <li>Rehearsal techniques</li> <li>Multiple activities occurring simultaneously</li> <li>Cooperative learning</li> <li>Scene / set / prop construction</li> <li>Teacher modeling</li> <li>Writing of original scripts</li> <li>Operation of lights and sound to support a theatre performance</li> <li>Wearing costumes to enhance performance</li> <li>Rehearsal and/or performance of scenes, monologues, or plays</li> <li>Operation of video equipment as a learning tool</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students using textbooks more than active participation</li> <li>Harsh criticism or ridiculing of student performance</li> <li>Students doing work for other classes</li> <li>Talking during teacher instruction</li> <li>Students isolating themselves from the group</li> <li>Unsafe use of theatre equipment</li> <li>Inappropriate language or subject matter (in class, script, or improvisation)</li> <li>Students watching videos / movies unrelated to curriculum</li> <li>Director not engaged in student activity</li> <li>Extended silent reading (more than 20 minutes)</li> <li>Extended written work on a daily basis</li> <li>Same expectations and genres at every level</li> </ul>

### GLOBAL GRADUATE



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## Theatre Addendum C: Theatre Course List

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### High School

The following is a list of TEA-approved theatre courses<sup>105</sup> that are available through the HISD Master Catalog:

#### Four-Year Courses

Theatre I-IV (Theatre III and IV can be offered with an emphasis in Playwriting or Directing)

Musical Theatre I-IV

Technical Theatre I-IV

Theatre Production I-IV

#### Two-Year Courses

IB Theatre Arts SL

IB Theatre Arts HL

#### Innovative Courses<sup>106</sup>

Acting Methods

Acting Styles: Greek, Shakespeare, Restoration, Commedia Dell'Arte and Melodrama (Grade 10-12)

Acting Styles: Theatrical Realism and Postwar Theatre (Grade 10-12)

Acting Styles: Improvisation and Monologue (Grade 10-12)

Integration of Abilities: Exercises for Creative Growth (Grade 11-12)

Movement for the Actor

Physical Theatre I

Physical Theatre II (Grade 10-12)

Theatre Management (Grade 10-12)

#### International Baccalaureate Courses

IB Theatre Standard Level

IB Theatre Higher Level

#### Multi-Disciplinary Courses (Co-Taught by a Theatre and either Dance or Vocal Teacher)

Musical Theatre I-IV

### Middle School

The following is a list of TEA-approved theatre courses that are available through the HISD Master Catalog:

Theatre, Middle School 1

Theatre, Middle School 2

Theatre, Middle School 3

HISD's Course Catalog has created courses for advanced theatre at level 2 and 3 in middle school

<sup>105</sup> Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), 2018-2019 Texas Education Data Standards.

<sup>106</sup> Texas Education Agency. *Innovative Courses--Enrichment*.

***Elementary School***

The following is a list of TEA-approved theatre courses that are available through the HISD Master Catalog:

- Theatre, Kindergarten
- Theatre, Grade 1
- Theatre, Grade 2
- Theatre, Grade 3
- Theatre, Grade 4
- Theatre, Grade 5