

# WISCONSIN HIGH SCHOOL FORENSIC ASSOCIATION NEWS LETTER

DRAMATIC ISSUE

Vol. I.

MADISON, WISCONSIN, NOVEMBER, 1929

No. 2

Additional copies available to member schools at five cents each.  
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## SCHEDULE FOR DEBATE CONTEST, 1930:

Dec. 14—last date for entering debate league.  
Feb. 8—last date for first round of district debates.  
Feb. 15—last date for second round of district debates.  
Mar. 1—last date for sub-sectional debates.  
March 22—last date for sectional debate.  
March 28—date for state debate.

## FOR OTHER FORENSIC AND DRAMATIC CONTESTS.

March 1—last date for entering league.  
April 26—last date for league contests.  
May 10—last date for district contests (including dramatic).  
May 17—last date for sectional dramatic contest.  
May 22 and 23—state contest.

## DRAMATICS

At the time of the reorganization of the High School Forensic Association it was planned by the committee in charge of the reorganization to add two events, debating and dramatics. Since both of these events were to be experiments and would require much thought and planning it was decided to try one at a time. The debate event was chosen to be worked out first. Our debate work is now in such a settled and satisfactory state that we may now introduce the dramatic event and during two or three years of experimentation work out a satisfactory plan to conduct it. The board has been working with the advice of Miss Rockwell, of the Wisconsin Dramatic Guild, on rules, regulations, and policies of procedure for this event. This information is published in this number of the News Letter and will be used to direct our experiment in dramatic contest work during 1929-30.

The Forensic Association is indebted to Miss Rockwell for the splendid Suggestions on Producing a Play, also published in this News Letter. The article will prove especially helpful and should be carefully studied and applied.

## WISCONSIN HIGH SCHOOL FORENSIC ASSOCIATION

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Shop, Berkeley, California.

Selden, Samuel. **Scenery & Lighting.** 50c. Excellent and practical guide for schools. Bureau of Community Drama, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C.

Smith, Andre. **The Scenewright.** \$2.00. Macmillan Co., 60 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Smith, Milton. **The Book of Play Production.** \$3.00. D. Appleton & Co., 35 W. 32d St., New York City.

Woolbert & Weaver. **Better Speech.** \$1.52. Harcourt, Brace & Co., 383 Madison Avenue, New York City.

## NEWS ITEMS

**Constitutional Amendments.** The amendments favorably acted upon by referendum were unanimously adopted at the annual meeting. The graduated fee cannot be operative until 1930. In addition to the amendments which simply clarified and renumbered the constitutional provisions as printed in the Year Book of 1928, and in the September News Letter, the following is effective:

### Article VIII—Rule 3:

In a triangular debate the number of judges shall be decided by the majority vote of the schools debating in the triangle. In a dual debate, if the schools disagree on the number of judges, the chairman of the district shall decide.

**Practice Debates with Non-Member Schools.** By motion at the annual meeting, November, 1929, non-member schools shall be interpreted to mean only those schools that are eligible to membership, but do not join the Association. This action affords an opportunity for member schools to debate or have dramatic or other contests with ineligible schools such as academies and sectarian high schools.

**Scouting.** The term "scouting" shall be construed to mean the act, on the part of any school or individual, of getting, directly or indirectly, from an actual debate, any information relative to material or presentation of material by an opposing team.

2. In picking up your cues, you can help to bring the attention of the audience to you by changing your position, making a gesture, or turning your body. Make all such necessary movements and gestures during your own speeches when you have the floor.

3. In delivering a speech try to assume either a front or profile position, so that the audience will get what you are saying. Very rarely should you speak with your back to the audience or your face hidden. Nevertheless, your speeches should be directed to the people on the stage, not to the audience. A good profile position may be secured by keeping forward the foot which is the further from the audience. In kneeling, rest on the down stage knee next to the audience.

4. Stand on the balls of your feet with the body well poised, one foot slightly in advance, so that you can easily turn right or left.

5. Make all turns frontward toward the audience rather than backward, which is awkward and causes the audience to lose your speeches.

6. When two or more actors enter together, the speaker enters last, thereby throwing the voice and carrying the action forward.

7. Stand still, unless the part requires motion or business. Don't fidget nervously about as if you didn't know what to do next.

### Some Good Books on Play Production for the School Library.

Andrews and Weirick. **Acting & Play Production.** \$2.25. Longmans, Green & Co., 55 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Gall and Carter. **Modern Make-Up.** \$1.25. A new text that bases its directions on the Max Factor Make-Up materials which are new and very excellent and may be obtained by writing to Max Factor & Co., Hollywood, Calif., or from The Menges Pharmacy, 26 West Mifflin St., Madison, Wisconsin. Book is published by Banner Publishing Co., San Francisco, Calif.

Lutz, Florence. **The Technique of Pantomime.** \$2.25. Sathergate Book

## REGULATIONS FOR THE PLAY TOURNAMENT FOR 1930

### Selection of Plays.

Any approved one-act play of not more than forty minutes' duration may be selected, but the same play may not be entered in the contest by two schools in the same district. If the play selected is not on the approved list, the play must be sent to the secretary, who will submit such play to a play technician for decision. The secretary shall report such findings to the school that submitted the play. The right to present any given play shall rest with the group making the first registration for that play with the district chairman. The registration shall then be mailed to the secretary of the Forensic Association. Upon request, suggestive lists of plays will be sent by the secretary to member schools.

### Judges.

The decision in the preliminary contests shall be made by one, three or five judges. The number of judges shall be decided by the majority vote of the schools contesting. In a dual contest, if the schools disagree on the number of judges, the chairman of the district shall decide.

Each and every one of these judges must be agreed upon by the participating schools, prior to the production of the plays. Every judge should have, at least, some technical knowledge of play production. A copy of the particulars to be considered in rendering a decision must be placed in the hands of each judge by the business manager before the contest starts.

In rendering their decision the judges should attach the greatest importance to the acting, which includes both diction and pantomime; next, they should consider the stage-craft, which includes stage-setting, lighting, costuming, and properties; and lastly, the choice of the play. As an aid in rating, the following are suggested: acting, 60%; stage-craft, 25%; choice of play, 15%.

All markings shall be on the scale of one hundred per cent. No grade shall be lower than seventy, and no

judge shall mark any two contestants alike. Each judge shall rank the contestants 1, 2, 3, etc., according to the percentages given each speaker. At the close of the contest, the presiding officer shall appoint some one person to collect the ballots of the judges. The ballots shall be opened in the presence of the coaches or principals of the schools represented. The contestant ranked first by a majority of the judges shall be awarded first honor. If no contestant is thus ranked first, the contestant, the sum of whose ranks is least, shall be awarded first honor. The first honor having been awarded, the grades of the remaining contestants shall again be ranked 1, 2, 3, etc., and the second honor determined in the same manner as the first, and so on. In case of a tie, the contestant whose sum of the percentages is the highest shall receive first. In case any two shall have the same percentages, that one, the sum of the squares of whose percentage is the greater, shall be awarded the honor.

The judges for the final contest shall be selected by the State Board of the Wisconsin High School Forensic Association.

### Business Manager.

The principal of the school at which the contest is held shall be the business manager of the contest. It shall be the duty of the business manager to make all necessary arrangements, engage the hall, advertise the performance, and manage the ticket sales. He shall confer with the principals of the competing schools in making such arrangements. He shall also place instructions and ballot forms in the hands of the judges before the contest begins. He shall have charge of all money collected, settle all legitimate expenses, and divide the net proceeds. He shall then make a complete report and send it with the signed ballots to the league chairman, to the district chairman, or to the secretary of the Forensic Association.

### Scenery.

For all sectional and state contests, and as far as possible for all contests, schools shall use a neutral toned

cycloramic curtain. When desired, a school may provide its own lighting effects and its own plastic pieces (that is, doors, windows, fire-places, trees, rocks) which may be inserted in the cycloramic background or used with it. Suggestions for making a cycloramic curtain will be sent by the secretary, on request, to all member schools.

### Expenses.

Each school shall be responsible for its own production and for the traveling expenses incident to its participation in the contest. The net profits of the preliminary contests shall be equally divided among the participating groups. In the final state contest each school is required to pay its own expenses. In case of a deficit in league, district, and sectional contests the hostess school shall be responsible for the deficit.

Legitimate expenses for the contest shall be hall rental, management expenses, judges' expenses, advertising, and publicity. Whenever possible, no expense for hall rental shall be incurred. There shall be no charge for school auditoriums.

It is recommended that the school at which the contest is held entertain the visiting players.

The school at which the tournament is held shall be notified at least five days before the date of production as to heavy properties needed (that is, tables, chairs, davenport, stoves, etc.) Each school shall furnish its own hand properties.

### Contests.

The chairman of each district shall group the schools of the district for the first preliminaries in the dramatic contest. He shall plan for all necessary succeeding contests until all but one contesting group in each district is eliminated. The sectional and state contests shall be conducted in the same manner as other contests.

### Awards.

Awards in the state dramatic contest shall be the same as in other speech contests.

## SUGGESTIONS ON PRODUCING A PLAY

By Ethel Theodora Rockwell,

Chief of the Bureau of Dramatic Activities of the University Extension Division and Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech.

First of all, why do educators, social workers, and those who love the drama advocate a school theatre and the regular production of plays? Observation and experience have led them to champion plays for high schools because of the results that are certain to evolve when the work has been properly directed and the right sort of plays have been produced. Therefore, the objectives of high school dramatics may be thus summarized:

1. To vitalize the work in literature, history, languages, civics, and other subjects.

2. To give practice in Speech, since in play rehearsals time is taken to teach pupils to speak pure, distinct English, to soften harsh tones, to enunciate clearly, to pronounce with fine attention to correctness, and to shade meanings by right emphasis and inflection.

3. To develop the character of the individual through the disciplinary training of rehearsal; for success in dramatic work requires vigorous, sustained effort and demands concentration and the development of self-control.

4. To develop the co-operative spirit. Dramatic work is a great socializing influence. Each member of the cast is a part of the whole—every part must work in harmony with every other part; that is, unselfish teamwork is as essential in dramatics as in athletics.

5. To bring young people into actual imaginative touch with the great reservoirs of human experience; to lead them to experience vicariously the emotional life of others and thus to develop within their own minds and hearts a sympathetic appreciation and understanding of the problems of others and a real comprehension of life's values.

6. To create a better taste for the right sort of plays and literature and thus to train better future audiences for the worth-while in the professional drama.

7. To encourage a more worthy and truly recreational use of leisure time through participation in dramatic activities.

8. To give worth-while entertainment to the schools as a whole and to the patrons.

9. To overcome the "sitting-looking" complex that affects so large a part of the population by giving opportunities for self-expression, whether in giving an artistic interpretation of a character, in the writing of original plays, or in creating a scenic or lighting effect, a costume or a property.

10. To develop a well-poised personality. This final objective is a resultant summary of all the other objectives.

#### Plan of Organization of a Dramatic Group.

Dramatic work in a school should be the concern of every department and should be the result of a fine co-operation. The following plan for the division of labor is suggested:

I. **DIRECTOR** (Head of all committees, general supervisor, and final voice in all matters concerning the organization.) It is desirable that this director be a person of some technical training in Speech, Dramatics, and English.

II. **BUSINESS MANAGER** (Manager of all business details, such as admissions, publicity, expenditures, etc.) Work that might be supervised by the Commercial Department.

III. **PRODUCTION STAFF**, composed of the following:

1. **STAGE-CRAFT DIRECTOR** (Designer and maker of scenery and stage effects, and manager of the production.) Manual Training and Art Departments.

2. **LIGHTING DIRECTOR** (Technician who plans, installs, and manipulates the fixtures for the lighting effects.) Physics and Art Departments.

3. **PROPERTY DIRECTOR** (One who designs, collects, buys, or makes the necessary properties, and supervises the setting of the stage during the production.) Manual Training Department.

4. **COSTUME DIRECTOR** (One who designs and supervises the making of the costumes or rents them for the play.) Home Economics and Art Departments.

5. **MUSIC DIRECTOR** (One who arranges suitable music before and between the acts, and within the play when called for.) Music Department.

6. **MAKE-UP DIRECTOR** (One who studies and practices the art of character portraiture for theatrical make-up.) Any group interested.

IV. Play Reading Committee.

V. Casting Committee.

VI. Prompter or Director's Assistant.

#### Selection of Plays.

Considerations to keep in mind:

1. **Age and Ability of Cast.** For high school young people, plays should be chosen having characters and ideas within the range of their ability to present.

2. **Audience before Whom Play is to be Presented.** In considering the audience, one should not make the mistake of thinking that he has an audience that must be played down to. Most people respond to the best.

3. **Stage and Equipment Possibilities.** If the stage is small and the equipment meager, plays with one simple set should be chosen.

4. **Cost of Play.** Royalty, cost of costumes, properties, and settings must be considered.

5. **Occasion.** When and for what reason the play is to be produced, as, special holiday, worthy money-making cause, etc.

6. **Standard of Play.** This, to many, is the most difficult of questions. What constitutes a good play? Why is this play good and another one not? Is there an infallible measuring rod? No one should set himself up as an unerring critic, but the best test to apply

to all plays is to ask: Is it real? Does it present real human beings in a plausible, real-life, dramatic situation? Is the working out of the situation and its denouement plausible? Does the play as a whole ring true? The test of reality and of truth does not rule out plays commonly classified as fantasies, for the fantasy, the poetic drama, or the symbolic drama deals with the things of the spirit and the imagination and presents the greatest and deepest truths.

#### Casting a Play.

1. **Casting Committee**—which knows types of characters needed, and takes into account voice, personality, physical appearance, and acting ability of candidates.

2. Everyone in school should be given opportunity to try for a place on the various school programs.

3. Open tryouts should be held by allowing candidates to hold conferences with the director and casting committee, and permitting them to read or recite either a part of the play or to otherwise demonstrate their ability for a particular part.

#### Suggestions for Rehearsals.

##### General Suggestions:

1. Study the play thoroughly before you begin, and cast it carefully. Hold try-outs and interviews with possible players, and choose those who will best fit the parts. Try to get good contrasting types.

2. Work out a floor plan for necessary furniture and properties, and determine location of doors and windows. If rehearsals are not on the stage on which the play is to be presented, mark off its size and entrances and exits on the floor.

3. In working out a play one is like an artist designing a picture. Therefore one should visualize the setting, the costumes, the lighting, the groupings. A stage model and puppets help in doing this. Remember a well-grouped picture must have a center of interest, and one center only.

4. Have groups of actors rehearse by themselves, speaking their parts aloud and studying their movements before a mirror.

5. Also give each actor as much individual training as possible, so that his errors can be corrected privately, rather than embarrassing him and taking up the time of all the others on the stage in regular rehearsals.

6. Appoint a prompter who will always follow the play at rehearsals, learn the action, and know where pauses come so that he can prompt efficiently.

7. Secure all hand properties early, so that the actors will become accustomed to them.

8. Carrying a stick or a fan, holding some needlework, reading the newspaper, etc., give an actor something to do and help in overcoming self-consciousness and should be allowed.

9. Actors must not drop out of character when their speeches are finished. Every character acts every minute he is on the stage and even when he is off awaiting his entrance cue, if he is a good actor.

10. Don't carry love scenes, tragic scenes, and other difficult parts too far in general rehearsals. Rehearse them privately until final touches and teamwork are to be developed.

11. At least one complete dress rehearsal should be held, to test make-up, costuming, scenery, and lighting. All properties should be in use.

12. A director's copy of the play should be prepared with all bells, changes in lights, etc., carefully indicated.

#### Distinct Steps in Rehearsal.

1. First, rehearsals are to enable the actors to become familiar with the idea of the play.

(a) Each actor should study his part individually.

(b) The director may give a first reading and interpretation of the play with the actors sitting about him.

(c) It is probably best, however, to start with each actor reading his own part.

2. Next, the movement of the play is worked out, that is, the entrances, exits, and changes in position.

(a) Care should be taken in ar-

ranging these movements so that the most important figure in the scene has the most conspicuous position on the stage, usually the center, and that he make a good entrance, usually center back or up-stage L. or R.

(b) The conflict in a play should be well balanced between the opposing forces.

3. Then, all the details of characterization are studied and learned.

(a) Here the actor must feel what his character would do and say under the given circumstances. He must become submerged in his part.

(b) All memory work must be accomplished.

(c) Correct vocalization must be attained. Good breath control and correct enunciation will obtain a correct vocalization.

(d) Lines must be given a meaning and a naturalness of expression and inflection.

(e) A feeling for the right pauses must be developed.

(f) What is called stage business must be made to fit with the saying of the lines. This covers the pantomimic action and facial expression such as we note in the interpretation of a play by moving pictures.

4. Lastly, players work together for finish and unity of performance.

(a) The actor should be taught to develop an emotional understanding of his character, and he must use his intelligence in using all the devices and effects that he and the director can invent to win the attention and sympathy of the audience.

(b) The atmosphere or general tone of the play must be determined and acquired. Do you want a light, happy tone, or a heavy, gloomy one? Is the play realistic, fantastic, or tragic? Do you want a bright, beautiful, cheerful scene, or a dull, ugly, unhappy one?

(c) The tempo or the speed of the playing must be worked out. Usually the tempo of a comedy is fast and of a tragedy slow, but

there must be well-developed gradations and variations to achieve an artistic effect, just as we find in music.

(d) The emphasis and climax must be brought out. Not all parts of a play are of equal importance. The high lights must be determined before a correct placing of emphasis can be secured.

(e) Perfect teamwork must be achieved. If there is one who cannot accord this co-operation and take the director's suggestions, he should be dropped.

(f) In the last stages of the rehearsals, the director should avoid as much as possible the interrupting of the playing, for actors cannot get into their parts and sustain their action if they are constantly brought back to themselves and thrown out of character. The director can conduct a rehearsal as does a conductor an orchestra by quietly indicating acceleration, retardation, pauses, change of position, emphasis, speed in picking up cues, etc.

(g) Warn players about places where they will probably get laughter or applause, and teach them to hold the scene until this is over, so that the audience will not lose any lines or business.

(h) In the last rehearsals pull the play together by working for a continuous and confident performance.

**Note:** Of course all of these steps in rehearsal will more or less overlap, but each succeeding rehearsal will be accumulative of more and more finished effects; there should be a gradual acceleration of tempo and a fitting of the actors to their parts.

#### Suggestions for Actors.

1. Be able to adapt yourself completely to the character you are to portray. Your own personality must be completely submerged into what you feel is the personality of your character part. There is no place for self-consciousness on the stage. You do not exist.

2. An actor should have a flexible body, a good voice, a sympathetic

heart, strong imagination, and an ability to submerge his own personality into the personality of another.

(a) To develop a good body for acting one should strive for easy control of every muscle that will give him grace and poise.

(b) To attain a good voice four things should be kept in mind; breath control, relaxation, form, and placement.

3. To develop and interpret a character in a play, the actor must understand his part by studying the author's description, the stage directions, the actions of the character, the reactions of the other people in the drama, the character's lines, and by observations of life.

4. To express emotion, the actor should actually feel it keenly, but he should never let it control him. He should always be conscious of his actions.

#### Suggestions on Saying One's Lines.

1. Make your diction as pleasant and distinct and audible as possible by articulating and enunciating clearly.

2. Do not let your voice gradually dwindle off toward the end of a speech. Instead, increase in strength and audibility so that you challenge the speech of the next actor, for often the entity of thought is composed of the last part of your speech and the first of the next, and they should therefore be bound together so that the drama will move along smoothly.

3. **Pick up your cues!** Bind your speeches to those preceding by swiftly reacting to what has gone before. The most faulty mark of the amateur is usually a slow and halting beginning of his speeches which makes the whole drama a wearisome drag. Don't hurry over your speeches once you are started, but start ahead of time. **Pick up your cues!**

4. Don't seem to talk to your audience. Appear unaware that there is an audience. Direct your speeches toward the other actors.

5. Watch the tempo and rhythm of your lines. Sometimes a sustained pulsing pause is the most important part of your speech. Some speeches

should have a swift, accelerating movement; some a slow cadence. Study the most effective method of expressing your feelings and lines by becoming sensitive to the tempo of your delivery, then learn to utter them rhythmically with a cadence and movement as if you were saying them to music. If you are representing a rough inharmonious character, then the sharp and unrhythmical delivery will only make your discordance all the more effective.

#### Suggestions on Acting.

1. Every movement you make on the stage should convey some meaning, that is, have a purpose in interpreting your character and his reactions to the situation.

2. Make your acting synchronize and harmonize with that of all other characters in the play; that is, have teamwork. Each actor must respond to and support every other actor on the stage.

3. Develop a sensitiveness to the tempo and rhythm of your acting. Sometimes you must be swift, sometimes deliberate. Unless you are supposed to be an awkward or a discordant character, move with a graceful rhythm as though to music.

4. Usually you should let any necessary business slightly precede the saying of the accompanying lines, for the eye catches things more quickly than does the ear.

5. Use your eyes in expressing all of your stage reactions, for they are the most effective instruments in expressing both emotion and character.

#### Position and Movement on the Stage.

1. You are not the whole show. Give other characters a chance by listening attentively to their lines, by not moving about on their lines unless the part actually requires it, and by letting the audience practically forget you while it is concentrating its attention on the actor whose turn it is to speak or act. This does not mean that you should for a moment get out of character. Your listening, aware attitude, and the gradations of facial expression that you assume, only help to concentrate the audience's attention on the actor who for the moment has the floor.