

Help! I've got a PERFORMANCE TO DO!



Lights, camera, argh! If this describes your reaction to school plays, **Peter Greaves** is waiting in the wings to lend a hand...

Preparing a performance to parents is, hopefully, one responsibility you will find to be consistent in any school in which you teach. I say hopefully because performances to parents and the wider community make a school a better place. The teamwork; the opportunity for talent outside of academic subjects to shine; the chance for parents to see their child as part of a larger grouping; the sheer pleasure and enjoyment that it gives those performing – all of these things contribute to that holy grail of community cohesion. More importantly, they provide an excellent context for our young people to be... kids!

However, with all these benefits come worries and anxieties, so here are some suggestions to help. Whether you are organising a large-scale production or simply leading an assembly with your class, the principles remain the same.

The biggest burden that can hang around a teacher's neck is the 'star' problem. Within our classes there are always going to be a limited number of pupils who are able to remember a certain number of lines or carry a tune. This can mean we see the same pupils doing the main roles each year with everyone else reduced to supporting roles, sometimes leading to resentment in both pupils and parents. The best way to deal with this is to simply not have any stars. Carve large parts into lots of smaller ones. If pupils can't remember words, give them lines that they can read out without it mattering. Get small groups to sing the solo songs intended for characters, or have different pupils doing the speaking and singing for one character.



The most important principle to remember is that the success of a performance will depend on how involved each individual feels

This can be a particular issue with pre-packaged productions featuring scripts and backing tracks – that many schools are now using. These can be excellent servants but are very poor masters. We know how different each

school community is, so off-the-peg solutions will need to be adjusted if they are to be a good fit for you.

Trust your gut reactions when you first look at a script. Is a song boring? Cut it out. Does a song go on too long? Fade out after the first verse. Is the play too long? Only do the first half and then sum up what happens with a narrator.

Contemporary songs that fit into storylines are often more fun to sing and backing tracks are readily downloadable as karaoke tracks. Don't be afraid to take charge of the production and make it your own.

The most important principle to remember though, is that the success of a performance will depend on how involved each individual feels. You can tell the 85% that are in the choir/chorus that they are important as much as you like, but unless they have something special to do, they won't feel it and you won't get the best out of them. Look for any opportunity – each sound effect can be made by a different pupil, each picture held up by someone else. Do a titles sequence at the beginning of the performance with all the credits painted on to big pieces of card, giving loads of pupils the chance to be on stage and have their moment. Small contributions like this mean the world to those pupils and their family and the children will give you much more in the ensemble elements of the performance as a result.

Last of all, remember that pupils always rise to the occasion.

You ask anyone what they remember from their time at primary school and they will talk about the trips and the performances. This is where memories are made and the more pupils have a reason to remember it, the more successful it is likely to be.