

GLOSSARY OF THEATRE TERMS

Excerpted from these books:
High School Theatre Operations
The High School Theatre Lighting Rep Plot
High School Theatre Lighting for Architects

Other books available:
High School Theatre Safety Manual
High School Theatre Signs and Documents

You can find these books at:
<http://www.presett.org/helpful-books.html>

* indicates that the definition of this term can be found in the Glossary.

Spelling: you will see hyphens and spaces and compound words used interchangeably. For example: off-stage, off stage, offstage or stage-right, stage right or stageright.

APRON

The part of the stage deck* that is downstage* of the proscenium*.

APRON STRIP LIGHTS

This is a band of lights – usually blue - that goes from one side of the stage to the other, just upstage of the stage deck that covers the pit, so that when the pit is open they warn a performer (who can be blinded by the production lights shining in their eyes) where the edge of the stage is. Some apron strip lights have a small red light in the middle, which dancers can use for spotting, and to let all performers know where the center stage line is.

ARBOR

The framework that holds the pig irons* that counter balance the weight of anything hung on the battens* in the counterweight system*.

ARM

The strip of stage deck* that protrudes out along the wall of the house* alongside the front part of the seating.

BACKSTAGE

The area of the stage deck* that is hidden from the audience's view, either by drapes* or set pieces.

BATTENS or PIPES

The pipes that hang above the stage and hold lights, mics and scenery. The pipes that hold the lights are called Electrics* and the pipes available for scenery hanging are called GPs*. Another common pipe is the Cloud Truss*.

BEAMS or CATWALKS

The beams or catwalks are the area above the house* where lighting instruments are hung, and sometimes followspots* are located. The term "beam" actually refers to a closed space built above the ceiling of the house, while the term "catwalk" actually refers to a metal walkway structure that hangs below the ceiling of the house. However, in the industry, the terms are loosely interchanged.

BLACK BOX

Short for "Black Box Theatre", which is a small theatre that is usually just one large, windowless room. The walls are painted black and the drapes are black, hence the name. The audience is usually set up on risers, which allows for different configurations for the stage space – proscenium*, thrust* or theatre-in-the-round. The backstage space is created with drapes or flats*.

BLACK MASKING

When the "Black Masking" is referred to it is specifically indicating the black masking* that hangs upstage and covers the length of the stage. It usually hangs just in front of or just behind the cyc*.

BLACKOUT

This is the term for when all of the stage lights are turned out at one time. It usually depicts the end of a scene or a dance.

BLACKS

Technicians* working backstage must wear dark or black clothing, so that if they happen to move within sight of the audience they will be less noticeable than a flash of white or light color clothing. The general term for their dark clothing is "blacks", as in "Don't forget to wear your blacks, it's opening night."

BLOCKING

Blocking is the term for where the actors move. Setting the blocking is like choreographing a dance. Actors have to learn their blocking as well as their lines.

BOOMS or BOX BOOMS

This is a lighting position, typically recessed into the side walls of the house* near the stage, which typically run vertical. The booms can either be accessed from the front from a ladder set in the house, or from behind via a walkway.

BOOTH

The term "Booth", when used alone, refers to the small room at the back of the House* where some of the Technicians* sit during a rehearsal or show. It usually consists of a light board, sometimes the Followspot * can be in there, a projector, and a place for the Stage Manager* to sit. The sound board is typically (or should be!) in the House*. Not to be confused with the term Ticket Booth*.

CABLE

A cable is a conduit that houses sound or lighting wiring. In the theatre they are almost always black. They are not, as in the 'outside world', referred to as "extension cords".

CAST

A collective term for the people who are performing – it may be a play or a ballet. Musicians are usually referred to as "performers", however in general the cast refers to the group of performers you see on the stage, as opposed to the crew* who work backstage and run equipment, who you don't see.

CATWALKS or BEAMS

The catwalks or beams are the area above the house* where lighting instruments are hung, and sometimes followspots* are located. The term "beam" actually refers to a closed space built above the ceiling of the house, while the term "catwalk" actually refers to a metal walkway structure that hangs below the ceiling of the house. However, in the industry, the terms are sometimes loosely interchanged. The catwalks are also referred to as the "cats".

CLEAR!

A word called out when someone on stage is responding to a warning that a pipe* or batten* is about to fly in or out. Clear should not be called until the person on stage has ascertained that the area is actually clear.

CLOUDS

Clouds are hard shells that are usually permanently hung from a batten*. They hang vertically, but once flown in to the appropriate height they open up to hang horizontally. They create a "ceiling" above a band or orchestra that bounces the sound into the audience. Some clouds have lights installed in them and some hang between light battens*, in both cases to provide down light for musicians to see their music.

CLOUD TRUSS

This is the batten* on which the clouds* are hung. This batten is different in that it usually consists of three pipes* hung in a triangular formation, which can better carry the heavy weight of the clouds*.

CONCESSIONS

This term refers to the food and drinks which are sold at a performance, typically during intermission, however some places sell concessions before and after a performance as well.

COSTUME SHOP

This is the room backstage where the costumes are created, sewn, fitted and stored.

COUNTERWEIGHT SYSTEM or FLY SYSTEM or RIGGING

This is the system of ropes that you typically see back stage in a theatre. The term "counterweight" comes from the fact that the scenery* or lighting instruments* are in some way counter weighted so that the weights on one end of the ropes weigh as much as the scenery* or lighting instruments* on the pipes, so that they are easy for one person to move in and out. These days it's most common to find pig irons* providing the counterweights, however some theatres still use sand bags. Some rigging systems use winches, which can adjust to the weight of the scenery* or lighting instruments*, and do not require physical re-weighting by technicians*.

CREW

A collective term for the people who work backstage and run the equipment needed for a show. In order to avoid confusion, in a high school, the crew usually refers to the students, while the technicians* usually refers to the district employees that staff the theatres.

CUE

This is the term for the action a technician* takes when executing their job and usually denotes a change of some sort. For instance: a lighting cue can be a change in the lighting "look" or intensity; a sound cue can be a change in volume; a set cue can be where the set crew moves out one or more set pieces and moves in one or more others.

CYC

The cyc is the large piece of white (or off-white) material that is hung towards the back of the stage (upstage*). The full term is "cyclorama", and it is so named because the single piece of material used to circle the sides and back of the stage – you still sometimes see this in film. The cyc costs as much as a car. This is because it is one seamless piece of material which can have dimensions as long as 40' or more. As of this writing, there are only 3 places in the world that manufacture cycs. The cyc is used to project colored and/or patterned lights on, in order to create mood, or to depict time of day, or location. Such as a dark blue cyc is a sky at night, a green cyc might depict a forest. An amber cyc might be used for an up-beat jazzy piece of music and a lavender cyc might be used for a mellow jazz piece.

DECK

This is the common term for the floor surface of the stage.

DOWNSTAGE

Most people have no trouble remembering stage left* and stage right* as being from the actor's perspective, however remembering which is upstage* and downstage is harder. Downstage is towards the audience and upstage is towards the back wall of the stage. Here's how to remember: These days our stages are usually, mostly level, while the house* is raked*. In Shakespearean times the floor where the audience stood or sat was level, while the stage was raked. So when the actors walked towards the audience, they were literally walking down hill (down the stage) and when the actors walked away from the audience, towards the back wall of the stage, they were literally walking up hill (up the stage). Hence the terms upstage and downstage.

DRAPES

Short for draperies. Sometimes called the "soft goods*". This usually refers to any permanently hung pieces of material, such as the legs*, the mid-traveler*, the masking* and the cyc*.

DRESS REHEARSAL

This is the final rehearsal (or sometimes two) before opening night. The actors are in full costume and make-up and know all their lines and blocking*, the technicians* and/or crew* wear their blacks* and know all their cues*. The dress rehearsal is traditionally run without stopping in order to simulate a real performance. If someone makes a mistake it is dealt with as if an audience were watching.

DROP

A drop or "backdrop" is a painted piece of material that is hung across the stage. It usually depicts a location of the whole play or of a specific scene.

EDISON or STAGE PIN or THREE PRONG TWIST

These are the three most common types of lighting instrument* plugs and outlets that you will find in the theatre. Edison refers to your standard household plug. Stage pin also has three pins or prongs, but they are in alignment. Three prong twist has three pins or prongs that form a circle, one prong has a tab and once the plug is inserted into the outlet it is twisted to secure it.

ELECTRIC

The electric is a term that collectively refers to the pipe* on which the lighting instruments* are hung along with the raceway* into which the lighting instruments* are plugged.

FLAT

This refers to the wall of a set*. It is made of a wooden framework in the back, and is either covered with muslin (a "Broadway flat") or luaun plywood (a "Hollywood flat").

FLOOR POCKET

This is a square hole in a stage deck* that is covered with a trap door. The floor pockets can be backstage – these usually contain outlets for lighting instruments – or on the stage – these usually contain outlets for sound equipment. Both typically also contain an Edison* outlet.

FLOWN vs. TRAVELED

The terms traveling and flying usually pertain to a drape* that goes across the full stage, such as the main* or the mid-traveler*. Most of these drapes hang from a pipe, and also have curtain pulls like a curtain in your home. So, when the pipe is lifted vertically this is called flying, or that the drape or set piece is flown. When the curtain is flown in such that the bottom is touching the stage deck* then when you pull the curtain ropes to open the curtain horizontally, half to the left, half to the right, then this is known as traveling.

FLYING

You may think of Peter Pan when you think of "flying", however in the case of technical theatre "flying" is what the flyman* does. It refers to moving the hung scenery* and lighting instruments* in* and out* of the stage space. A crew member may be told to "fly* in* that flat**".

FLYMAN

This term refers to the person (male or female) who operates the fly system*/counterweight system*/rigging* during a show.

FLY RAIL or LOCKING RAIL or RAIL

The fly rail/locking rail/rail is generally referred to as the area where the ropes of a fly system*/counterweight system*/rigging* are located. A flyman* is said to be "working on the rail". Specifically it refers to the length of metal railing where the rope locks are affixed.

FLY ROPE

This is the actual rope used in a fly system*/counterweight system*/rigging* system. It has properties that allow it to carry hundreds of pounds of weight. It is the part of the system that the flyman* pulls in order to move the scenery*.

FLY SYSTEM or COUNTERWEIGHT SYSTEM or RIGGING

This is the system of ropes that you typically see back stage in a theatre. The term "counterweight" comes from the fact that the scenery* or lighting instruments* are in some way counter weighted so that the weights on one end of the ropes weigh as much as the scenery* or lighting instruments* on the pipes, so that they are easy for one person to move in* and out*. These days it's most common to find pig irons* providing the counterweights, however some theatres still use sand bags. Some rigging systems use winches, which can adjust to the weight of the scenery* or lighting instruments*, and do not require physical re-weighting by technicians*.

FLY TOWER

This is the tallest part of your theatre building. It houses the counterweight* system, and allows lighting instruments* and scenery* to be pulled up out of sight of the audience. Many high schools opt to have a ¾ fly tower. This not only saves money in construction materials, but in a ¾ fly tower the proscenium* opening is smaller and therefore a fire curtain is not required. The curse of a ¾ fly tower is that the scenery cannot fully be pulled out of sight of the audience and there is usually a few inches that hang down below the sight lines, and when the scenery is flown in often times the pipe it is hanging from is visible. Another drawback to a ¾ fly is that the grid is flush up against the ceiling, instead of being about 6' below it, so access to the cables of the counterweight* system is limited in case a repair is needed.

FOCUS

Focusing the lights is the process whereby the lighting technicians* aim the lighting instruments* in the correct position and in the correct format as decided by the lighting designer, in order for them to fulfill the purpose for which they were intended.

FOLLOWSPOT

The followspot, or spot light as some Muggles* call it, is a large lighting instrument* usually mounted on a pole at chest-height, that can be moved around by an operator. The purpose of the followspot is to highlight a specific performer, usually a main character during a song of a musical or possibly a stand-up comedian alone on the stage. Because the performer moves around the stage the followspot operator can "follow" the movement and "spot" the performer with the light*.

GAFF TAPE

This tape is as wide as duct tape and is usually black (it comes in other colors, but black is the most practical for the theatre). It is used in the theatre for all sorts of uses, including securing items and cables. This tapes lifts off fairly easily and doesn't leave a sticky mess. NEVER use duct tape in the theatre.

GALLERY

This is a recessed walkway along the side of a house* that allows for lighting instruments* to be hung, which are easily accessible. There can be one, two or three levels. It's also a favorite place for directors to want to place performers.

GARAGE DOOR

As the name suggest – unlike most things in a theatre – a garage door is like a garage door; just not in a garage. It is a large roll-up door, usually made of metal, that is tall enough and wide enough to move large pieces of scenery* through. There is usually a garage door from the scene shop* to the loading dock of the theatre, and another garage door from the scene shop to the backstage hallway, and then another garage door from the backstage hallway to backstage. Some theatres which have their scene shop directly behind the backstage wall (not recommended!) have the garage door leading directly from the scene shop to backstage.

GEL

This is the colored filter that is put in front of a lighting instrument and held in place by a gel frame*. Gels actually used to be made of gelatin, which is how they got their name. They held up ok under the hot lighting instruments*, but if you put them in water they were reduced to a soggy mess. These days gels are synthetically made of a type of polyester. There are hundreds and hundreds of gel colors, each one varying slightly from the next – and yet Lighting Designers complain there are never enough colors.

GEL FRAME

This is the metal frame that holds a square of gel* in place in front of the lighting instrument*. There is a slot in the front of the lighting instrument* where the gel frame slides into.

GENIE

Not the kind that comes out of a lamp or bottle. If there were that kind of genies in theatres, technicians' jobs would be obsolete. So we don't allow them. But we welcome "genie lifts", which are scissor, or vertical mast lifts that allows a technician to work high in the air – usually above 20' in order to work on a set* piece or to focus lighting instruments*. "Genie" is actually a brand name, but in the theatre "genie" has become a common term for any lift, much like a "Kleenex" can refer to any tissue.

GHOST LIGHT or NIGHT LIGHT

This is the light that is typically left on when a theatre is unoccupied. It is so that the first person next entering the theatre can see in order to reach the switches for the worklights. The theatre is a very dangerous place, and not somewhere that someone should be walking around in in the pitch black. Night lights are sometimes traditionally called ghosts lights, so that there is some light left of for the traditional theatre ghost to see by. The night light can be just a lamp on a stand that is wheeled out to center-stage and plugged in, or it can be a fixture hardwired into a lighting system and usually situated in the beams* or catwalks*

GLOW TAPE

When activated by bright light, this tape glows in the dark. It is primarily used backstage* (sometimes on stage) at the edge of platforms, stairs, etc, so that actors, crew* and techs* can see the edge and don't trip and fall during a black out. Glow tape is very expensive and should be used sparingly.

GOBO

This refers to a pattern that is inserted into a lighting instrument*. It can be made of metal, glass or can be a photographic image much like a slide. Metal gobos can be "break up patterns" which looks like dappled light coming through trees, to more specific shapes such as a window, a castle, snowflakes, and so on. Glass gobos can be used to create fire and water effects.

GP

GP stands for General Purpose, and is a pipe* that is not designated to hold lighting instruments* or clouds*. GPs are typically used for hanging scenery* on.

GRAND or MAIN

This is the large curtain that hangs just upstage* of the proscenium arch*. It is the curtain that separates the stage from the house*, the actor from the audience. It is commonly referred to as just the "main" or the "grand".

HANDHELD

This is a shortened term for a handheld wireless microphone*.

HANG AND FOCUS

This is the term used for the process whereby the technicians* hang the lighting instruments* in the positions where the lighting designer determines where they need to go, patches* where the lights are plugged in into the light board and then focuses* the instruments* for the correct function.

HEADSET

You will hear of two types of headsets spoken about around a theatre. One type belongs to the theatre's communication system that the crew uses and the other kind are mics* that performers wear. Usually if you just hear the term "headset" used by itself we are talking about the communication system. Also, you will hear the whole arrangement, which includes the headset, backpack and cables referred to as "the headset". Technically the backpack carries the power and the headset itself is plugged into it, but we call the whole thing "the headset". When a Stage Manager tells her crew to "set up the headsets" she means to plug in or put in place the headsets, cables and backpacks.

HOUSE

The house is where the audience sits.

HOUSELIGHTS

These are the fixtures that light up the house*. In a full theatre they are on dimmers so that they can be adjusted slowly or partially.

IN, OUT, ON, OFF

In the theatre you fly pipes* "in" (down) and "out" (up), and you move scenery or actors "on" (into the view of the audience) and "off" (away from the view of the audience).

INSTRUMENTS

This primarily refers to the lighting instruments. Instruments are movable – usually installed on a pipe* with a C-Clamp. As opposed to fixtures which are the lighting fixtures you would find in your house or office – these are hardwired in or "fixed".

LADDERS

In this case the ladders don't refer to the things you climb, but the lighting pipes and raceways that hang on either side of the stage in more recently built theatres. These allow for side lighting, especially important in dance (in order to light the whole body, not just the face). Most theatres that have light ladders have one upstage* of each leg*, and there are usually 3 or 6 instruments on each ladder.

LAMP

"It's called a *lamp!*" is a favorite theatre cry. Never a "light bulb". The "bulb" is just the glass part. A "lamp" is made of the bulb, a filament, the gas and a base.

LLAMA

An example of live animals that are often not permitted in theatres. Not only do live animals draw attention away from the actors, but their behavior can be unpredictable. They can poop, throw up and spit. If you have a tens of thousands of dollars of drapes on your stage, you may wish to consider animals carefully. Animals can also "freak out" and run or fall into the audience, risking harming themselves and the audience. Allow the use of llamas or any live animals at your peril.

LEGS

These are the narrow (usually black) drapes that hang on either side of the stage. They are usually parallel to the front edge of the stage, sometimes they are angled slightly. These serve to hide the view of backstage* from the audience, yet allow performers to enter and exit the stage at various places. They also allow set pieces to be moved on and off stage, without the audience seeing them being stored off-stage*, and also allow for the stage to be lit from the side.

LIGHT

The stuff that comes out of a lamp.

LOBBY

The area where the audience waits to be let into the house*. Concessions* are usually sold in the lobby.

LOCKING RAIL or FLY RAIL or RAIL

The fly rail/locking rail/rail is generally referred to as the area where the ropes of a fly system*/counterweight system*/rigging* are located. A flyman* is said to be "working on the rail". Specifically it refers to the length of metal railing where the rope locks are affixed.

MAIN or GRAND

This is the large curtain that hangs just upstage* of the proscenium arch*. It is the curtain that separates the stage from the house*, the actor from the audience. It is commonly referred to as just the "main" or the "grand".

MAINSTAGE

In a performing arts center that has more than one theatre, the main stage refers to the largest theatre. The main stage is usually a proscenium* theatre, while a second theatre is usually black box* theatre.

MARLEY

This is a "rubber"-like floor that is laid down over the stage deck* for dancers. It usually comes in long strips about 6' x 40'. The strips are taped together with marley tape.

MASKING

The masking refers to a drape* - usually a black drape* - that masks the audience's view to the backstage* area. This is usually the legs*, mid-traveler*, side masking and upstage* masking.

MIC

Short for microphone. There are several types of mics, the most common being the vocal mic, the instrument mic, the condenser mic, the floor or plate mic, the wireless handheld mic. Each type of mic has a different polar pattern*.

MID-TRAVELER

The mid-traveler, as the name suggests is a drape that usually hangs in the middle of the stage*, and travels* open and closed, although it can also be flown*.

MONITOR (SOUND)

When a part of a sound system, this refers to a speaker that is placed on stage or in the pit so that the performers can hear music or other performers that are usually hard to hear from where you are. For instance, dancers on a stage find it hard to hear music coming from speakers that are only in the house*, and orchestra members in the pit* find it hard to hear the actors' lines from up on the stage. Usually just the word "monitor" is used and the specific item is inferred from the context of the conversation.

MONITOR (A/V)

When backstage* this refers to a video screen in a dressing room or classroom that is hooked up to a camera in the house* that is aimed at the stage. This is so that performers can be watching what is going on on stage, so that they know when to enter, without being in the way backstage*. Usually just the word "monitor" is used and the specific item is inferred from the context of the conversation.

MUGGLE

What's a Muggle? According to Dictionary.com, a "muggle" is a term originating from around the 1920's to describe a person "who is ignorant or has no skills". Oxforddictionaries.com defines a Muggle as "A person who is not conversant with a particular activity or skill". Both refer to the meaning popularized in the Harry Potter series: "a person without magical powers". In the theatre, where we create the "magic", a Muggle good-naturedly refers to a non-'theatre person' who does not have a knowledge of what goes on behind the scenes in order to make the "magic of theatre" happen.

NIGHT LIGHT or GHOST LIGHT

This is the light that is typically left on when a theatre is unoccupied. It is so that the first person next entering the theatre can see in order to reach the switches for the worklights. The theatre is a very dangerous place, and not somewhere that someone should be walking around in in the pitch black. Night lights are sometimes traditionally called ghosts lights, so that there is some light left of for the traditional theatre ghost to see by. The night light can be just a lamp on a stand that is wheeled out to center-stage and plugged in, or it can be a fixture hardwired into a lighting system and usually situated in the beams* or catwalks*

OFF-STAGE

This refers to the part of the stage deck* that is hidden behind the drapes* or masking* - the part that the audience can't see. It is also a directional command – the actor walks "off-stage".

PAC

Performing Arts Center. This term interchangeably refers to the whole building housing the theatre (house* and stage) and classrooms, or just the theatre itself. The meaning can be found in the context of the conversation.

PATCH

Patching is a lighting and a sound term. Instead of the first fader on the light or sound board, for instance, controlling the first circuit where the lighting instrument* or mic* is plugged in, the technician may prefer for the first fader to control a lighting instrument* or mic* that is operating in a certain area of the stage. So the technician will patch the appropriate instrument* or mic* into an appropriate fader. A similar concept to old patch boards that telephone operators used to control.

PIG IRONS

Pig irons are the metal weights that are used to counter balance the scenery* or lighting pipes* so that they can easily be flown in* or out*. There are three general sizes (or weights), the larger is fondly called a Pig, the next is called a Half-pig, and the smallest are called Piglets. Some people call them "bricks" instead, as they look somewhat like bricks.

PIPES or BATTENS

The pipes that hang above the stage and hold lights, mics and scenery. The pipes that hold the lights are called Electrics* and the pipes available for scenery hanging are called GPs*. Another common pipe is the Cloud Truss*.

PIT

The pit refers to the orchestra pit, which is a large space in front of the stage and usually about 8 or so feet below the stage deck* level. This is so that the orchestra can play and be heard, but not block the view of the stage from the house*. During shows when there is no orchestra, the pit is usually covered up with a pit cover, which looks like an extension of the stage deck*.

POLAR PATTERN

This refers to the direction from a mic* picks up sound. Some pick up sound from only one direction (uni-directional) and some pick up sound from more than one direction (bi-directional).

PRODUCTION LIGHTS

Production lights refer to what most people think of as "stage lights". They are the lights that are used during a performance. As opposed to work lights* which are used for rehearsals, classes and for technical purposes.

PROP

This is any item that a performer carries on stage with them. Anything else – such as a chair or picture frame – is considered a set* piece.

PROSCENIUM or PROSCENIUM ARCH

The proscenium arch is the opening in the front wall of the house*, which frames the stage.

RACEWAY

This is the long 'box' with circuits that runs along a lighting pipe or electric*, into which the lighting instruments are plugged.

RAIL or LOCKING RAIL or FLY RAIL

The fly rail/locking rail/rail is generally referred to as the area where the ropes of a fly system*/counterweight system*/rigging* are located. A flyman* is said to be "working on the rail". Specifically it refers to the length of metal railing where the rope locks are affixed.

RAKE STAGE or RAKED STAGE

A raked stage is a stage that is angled. The front of the stage (literally downstage*) is lower than the back of the stage (literally upstage*).

RE-WEIGHTING

This is the process whereby the weights on a counterweight system* are either added or removed in order to match the weight of the scenery* or lighting instruments* added or removed from a batten*.

RIDER

This is a document from an event coming into the theatre that instructs the theatre technicians* what technical requirements they will have for the event.

RIGGING or COUNTERWEIGHT SYSTEM or FLY SYSTEM

This is the system of ropes that you typically see back stage in a theatre. It is also called the counterweight system* or the fly system*.

RISERS

The steps that a choir stands on so that you can see all performers and so that all performers voices can be projected.

RUN THROUGH

A run through is when the cast rehearses the whole play in one go, instead of just focusing on particular scenes or acts.

RUNNING ORDER

This is a list of what happens when in a show – such as for a variety show, the Running Order might start: M.C. welcomes audience, dance #1, song #1, M.C. talks, dance #2, skit #1, and so on. All technicians* need to have a copy of the Running Order of a show that they are rehearsing so that they can make notes about what they need to do for the performance.

SCENE SHOP

This is the room backstage where the sets* are built, painted and stored.

SCENERY or SET

A piece of scenery or a set* piece refers to an item on stage that a performer does not carry or move – as opposed to a prop* - such as a wall, stairs, a tree and so on.

SET or SCENERY

A set piece or piece of scenery* refers to an item on stage that a performer does not carry or move – as opposed to a prop* - such as a wall, stairs, a tree and so on.

SHELLS

Shells are movable walls that can be placed behind musicians so that the sound is better bounced into the audience. It helps the audience better hear a group of instrumental or vocal musicians, while a mic* helps the audience hear a specific musician.

SHOP

A shop in the theatre is the place where items are built and stored.

STAGE MANAGER (SM)

The Stage Manager is the person in charge of the smooth running order* of a performance. While each technician* knows what their job is for any specific cue*, the SM makes sure that all of the cues* happen at the right time.

SOFT GOODS

This refers to any of the drapes* in a theatre.

SPIKE

To spike something means to place a small piece of spike tape* on the stage deck* to indicate where the item should be placed. For instance, during a set change a technician* may have to set a table exactly where a focused* lighting instrument* will hit it during a following scene. In order to be sure to place the table in the same location night after night the table is spiked. Another thing that is spiked can be the ropes of the counterweight* system. Often times a technician* pulling the ropes during a performance may not be able to see when to stop, so the rope is spiked at the location where the set* piece is in place. In either case, this is called being "on spike".

SPIKE TAPE

Spike tape is a special type of tape used to spike* the set or ropes. It is fairly thin, comes in a variety of colors and is easily removable once the show is done (almost nothing created in the theatre is permanent). The different colors are useful to spike* the set* pieces for different scenes – for instance, the furniture locations for scene one can be done in green spike tape and the furniture locations for the second scene can be done in orange spike tape, in order to not cause confusion as to what needs to be placed where and when.

STAGE LEFT

This is from the actor's perspective. If you are sitting in the house watching a show, stage left would be on your right.

STAGE PIN or THREE PRONG TWIST or EDISON

These are the three most common types of lighting instrument* plugs and outlets that you will find in the theatre. Edison refers to your standard household plug. Stage pin also has three pins or prongs, but they are in alignment. Three prong twist has three pins or prongs that form a circle, one prong has a tab and once the plug is inserted into the outlet it is twisted to secure it.

STAGE RIGHT

This is from the actor's perspective. If you are sitting in the house watching a show, stage right would be on your left.

STANDBY

When a Stage Manager* calls a standby it is to alert the technicians* that they have a cue* coming up. Typically once an SM* calls a standby no one must talk over the headsets* until the cue* is complete, because the timing of the cues* can be essential and the technicians* need to hear the SM say "Go."

STRIKE

This term refers to the taking down, dismantling disposing, and/or storage of the set, lights, sound equipment and costumes once a show is over. Some plays will strike after the closing night performance, which can take into the wee hours. In educational theatre, students aren't allowed to stay up that late, so some pieces may be struck on closing night, but the majority of the strike will happen the next day.

TECH REHEARSAL

This refers to the final rehearsals prior to opening night where the technical aspects are integrated into the show. Prior to tech rehearsals the actors will have been rehearsing with minimal costumes and props*, and perhaps just large blocks or classroom chairs as set pieces. They also do not have lighting cues* or use mics*. The tech rehearsals are for the actors to get used to working with all of the technical aspects of the show and for the technicians* to have a chance to "rehearse" their parts – such as when does a light cue happen and when does a set piece have to move. Tech rehearsals can be boring for the actors who have been used to running their show non-stop by that time, while the technicians* move at a slower pace as they record their cues*, sort out any problems and get used to their jobs.

TECHNICIAN, TECH, TECHIE or TECH CREW

A person who helps with the technical, non-acting, side of a show. Good technicians are never noticed by an audience.

THREE PRONG TWIST or EDISON or STAGE PIN

These are the three most common types of lighting instrument* plugs and outlets that you will find in the theatre. Edison refers to your standard household plug. Stage pin also has three pins or prongs, but they are in alignment. Three prong twist has three pins or prongs that form a circle, one prong has a tab and once the plug is inserted into the outlet it is twisted to secure it.

THRUST STAGE

A thrust stage is a stage with audience members on three sides – the stage "thrusts" into the audience.

THEATRE-IN-THE-ROUND

Where the audience surrounds the stage on all sides. Despite the name "round" this is usually a square stage.

TICKET BOOTH

Most people are familiar with this term because most people have been to a production or sporting event where they've had to purchase or pick up tickets from the ticket booth. Some theatres use their ticket booths solely for that reason, and some ticket booths also do double duty as an office. This is not to be confused with the term Booth*, which is used by itself.

TRAVELED vs. FLOWN

The terms traveling and flying usually pertain to a drape* that goes across the full stage, such as the main* or the mid-traveler*. Most of these drapes hang from a pipe, and also have curtain pulls like a curtain in your home. So, when the pipe is lifted vertically this is called flying, or that the drape or set piece is flown. When the curtain is flown in such that the bottom is touching the stage deck* then when you pull the curtain ropes to open the curtain horizontally, half to the left, half to the right, then this is known as traveling.

TWO-FERS

Two-fers are a Y shaped lighting cables that allow two instruments to be plugged into one outlet. Two "fer" one. Very useful in a theatre that doesn't have enough circuits.

UPSTAGE

Most people have no trouble remembering stage left* and stage right* as being from the actor's perspective, however remembering which is upstage and downstage* is harder. Downstage is towards the audience and upstage is towards the back wall of the stage. Here's how to remember: These days our stages are usually, mostly level, while the house* is raked*. In Shakespearean times the floor where the audience stood or sat was level, while the stage was raked. So when the actors walked towards the audience, they were literally walking down hill (down the stage) and when the actors walked away from the audience, towards the back wall of the stage, they were literally walking up hill (up the stage). Hence the terms upstage and downstage.

USHER

An usher is a person who takes tickets and helps audience members find their seats.

WINGS

This refers to the space backstage* from the legs* or masking* to the backstage* wall. The wings traditionally refers to just the sides of the backstage* space, hence the term "waiting in the wings".

WINCH

An electric winch can be used instead of a counterweight* system. Winches can automatically adjust to hundreds of pounds of weight without the need for the technician* to re-weight*. The pipes are then moved by pressing a button instead of pulling on a rope.

WIRELESS MIC

A mic that transmits a signal to a receiver which then relays the information to the sound board, as oppose to being wired into the system and then physically patched* into the sound board.

WORK LIGHTS

These are lights that are to be used anytime someone needs to be in the theatre for any reason, other than there being a show in progress. In that case, Production Lights* are used. Work Lights are always a white light, and are usually mounted on the electrics*, the beams* and/or the side walls of the stage.

A word about Work Lights. Some theatres have been known to use their Production Lights* because they have no Work Lights. Consider this – if all of the Production Lights are on, that adds up to about 120,000watts of power used, not to mention the replacement cost of the lamps and gels that are being burned through. LEDs are the best Work Lights because they are energy saving, have a long lamp life and turn on and off immediately. HIDs also save energy and have a long lamp life, but take about 10 minutes to warm up, and if you turn them off and then need them on again immediately they can take up to 20 minutes to warm back up again (this is another common reason for people turning on Production Lights – impatience). Fluorescents have a longer lamp life than Production Lights, but a much shorter lamp life than LEDs and HIDs. It is worth the money to get work lights installed if you don't have them, and worth your effort to insist they're used if you do have them.