

Read This About Casting

When things don't go as planned when you audition for a show, it's hard not to have hurt feelings, or wonder about the casting decisions that were made. Check out the following anecdotes and advice from teaching artists and artistic teacher leaders in the field of educational theatre. See if their words of wisdom provide you with a perspective you haven't yet considered.

"When a cast list is posted, give yourself at least a few days to think about your response before you act on it. Especially if that response is negative."

"Don't count your lines; make your lines count."

"A brilliant lead can't save a bad show, but a poor supporting performer can kill a good one."

"If you turn down a role, you're simply not an actor, you don't care about practicing your craft, and don't need to be part of the program since you're in it for the wrong reasons."

"Check out a copy of Neil Simon's biography *REWRITES* where he talks about the casting process for *THE ODD COUPLE*. Walter Matthau wanted to play Felix and the director told him that he was Oscar. Matthau replied that he could play Oscar in his sleep but Felix would be a real acting challenge. To which the director replied "Walter go act in someone else's play" Matthau later agreed and the rest is history. Even Broadway stars with a lot of experience and clout don't always get the part they want. It's the nature of the biz..."

"I had a boy who was talented but fairly inexperienced, and who, despite being only a sophomore, landed a pretty big supporting role in the fall play. He found he loved acting, but because of this early success he had his cap set on the lead in the spring musical. When he was cast in another supporting role, he was shocked (remember he'd only ever auditioned once for a play and he'd been cast in a nice medium size role.) Anyway, he ignored my comments on the audition form and came to me right away and said he was dropping the play. I knew his circumstances and told him I would not accept his resignation yet but that he needed to go home, read the show over the weekend and get back to me. If he still wanted to drop the show on Monday that was fine. I'd allow him to with no hard feelings. He said okay but he was sure he would still drop on Monday. Monday came and went and the boy decided to stick it out... begrudgingly. First read and rehearsals began. By the third week of rehearsal however the boy came to me and said 'This is the best part I've ever had! I love this role! Thank you so much for casting me and THANK YOU for not accepting my resignation!'"

"'Actors make terrible casting directors.' Students don't have the whole picture when looking at casting and people are often terrible when casting themselves. I use myself as an example. Often when I was acting I'd be cast in roles I didn't especially want to play that turned out to be some of the best roles (and some of the most interesting productions) I've ever been part of. Other times I've gotten leading roles that I knew I wanted, and that I campaigned hard for, and in the end, I found they were not as great or as fulfilling as I thought they'd be. My 'dream role' didn't live up to the image I'd created in my head." So try everything. You never know what is going to be the best experience and what is not.

"I had some very talented kids a few years who constantly got cast in lead roles. They were triple threats and no matter who the director was, they both usually got cast as the leads over and over again. I specifically picked a show where they were wrong for the leads in order to give some new kids a chance and my two "stars" ended up in the chorus. Not only were they cool with that, they were relieved, and in fact they really enjoyed it. They said 'one of the reasons you do theater in High

School is for the social aspect. The friends you make. The time you get to spend together putting on a show. When you're the lead, you don't get much of that. You're always learning lines or rehearsing staging. There's very little time to socialize or really get to know the people in your cast. It's lonely. And it's stressful.' They loved being part of the team as opposed to the "lead," for that production.

"I was a dwarf in 'The Hobbit.' I had 6 lines, but I was on stage all but 3 scenes. I had people come up to me afterwards and tell me that they couldn't take their eyes off me.

"I once blew an audition for a spin off of A Midsummer Night's Dream called The Donkey Show, which took place in a dance club. Part of the audition was club dancing in a group for 2 minutes. I went all out. I was confident, didn't hold back any moves and had as big of a personality as I could. I wasn't cast in the show. When I approached the director for feedback he simply told me- 'We were looking for dancers who really blended in with the crowd.' Turns out I didn't give the director what he wanted to see. It wasn't because I was a bad actor. It was just the wrong choice at the time."

"Imagine getting into groups of 3 or 4. Each group thinks of 3 people whom they enjoy watching as actors in our school, assume all those people are different. Then take those 9-12 people and decided who is going to be in Goldilocks & the 3 Bears. Only one per part. Now you see how even if you don't make it in one role of one show, it doesn't mean you aren't valued as a performer."

"The most dedicated/talented singer ever, who wanted the lead in Pippin... was a bass, and Pippin is a tenor; he was a big guy, and Pippin is pretty much a wimp; he exuded confidence, and Pippin questions everything; he's a great fit for the King, and most of the other guys are much smaller. If he's a senior should he still get the role he craves? Or should it go to the younger actor who really fits the part?"

"If you drop out of a show after being cast, you break your credibility about sticking with any future show; too big a risk for a director to take in the future."

"If you ever start to worry about how "good" your school musical or play is, just remember, professional actors have played the same role. Think about James Reynolds or Samuel Seabury, or Maria Reynolds in the show Hamilton. Would you turn down a chance to play that?"

"Teaching Artists and Theatre Educators know that every theatrical experience is a worthwhile experience that teaches life skills, leadership and communication skills and is wonderful for team building and confidence. People we like to work with are theatre people who are well rounded and seize the day to explore various roles on and off stage over the course of a theatre season. Those type of people are more hireable too, and more enjoyable to work with. Be that type of person."