

A vicious

For as long as you've been teaching, you've had in your mind that perfect play to direct—a Shakespearean tragedy, say. Maybe *Romeo and Juliet*. Now you have the actors who can carry it. The administration is behind you. Your students are thrilled.

There's just one problem. Almost before you can bite your thumb, there's a brawl with naked blades in Act I, scene one. The year might be right for Shakespeare, but you have better things to do than face disastrous injury and potential lawsuits.

Stage combat in high school productions is a challenge, but it's not insurmountable. In fact, if you approach stage violence properly, it can be an exciting, safe, and fulfilling experience for your students and audiences.

Teaching Theatre talked to a number of educators and fight choreographers in the United States and Canada to see how they work with students and stage combat. All of them have tricks, tips, and methods they've developed over the years to make stage violence a positive part of their teaching repertoire.

Bringing in the pros

Some teachers stage fights themselves; others rely on professional choreographers. Ultimately, the decision comes down to the teacher's level of comfort with leading her students in potentially dangerous activities.

There are pros and cons to both options. Professional stage choreographers tend to charge by the hour, and for the budget of a high school drama department, it isn't cheap. Also, schools in smaller or remote areas may not have easy access to people with the necessary experience.

On the other hand, qualified professional fight choreographers will know how to stage a fight and teach

the students to be safe. They'll know how to make it a part of the show, rather than a fight that interrupts the acting. They can teach the students things the teacher might not know.

"We don't teach you how to fight. We teach you how to act with violence. You want to learn how to fight, you can go watch wrestling," says New York-based fight director Michael Chin, who recently earned the title of fight master from the Society of American Fight Directors. (He's one of only eleven fight masters in the U.S.)

Ben Martin at Lee's Summit West High School in Lee's Summit, Missouri, has brought fight choreographer Richard Buswell in to work with his students, and says that it has improved his own understanding of how to teach simpler elements like slaps. "I think I do it better now, having worked with Richard," he says. "I have a more complete grasp of it now, almost more of a three-dimensional approach."

Margo Rodgers, the drama teacher at Anderson Collegiate Vocational Institute in Whitby, Ontario, has worked several times with Peter Hurley, a fight director with Fight Directors Canada, since 1995. She says that he's taught her and her students aspects of fighting that people don't usually consider, like how to drop a knife so that it doesn't bounce. "These are all the tricks of combat. It's the sound," she says. "It's the noise the kids make. It's a kind of vicious ballet."

It's also true that not every teacher needs to hire an expert. Phil Moss, drama teacher at University Liggett School in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, has never brought in an outside choreographer, and has staged injury-free productions of shows including *The Company of Wayward Saints*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *West Side Story*, and *I Hate Hamlet*.

Moss has training in fencing and stage combat, and he regularly attends workshops to keep his skills sharp. "For me," he says, "the reality of being in a small school where you're a one-stop shop anyway is when I have money, I would rather spend it on an expertise I don't have myself."

Both Martin and Rodgers hire choreographers, but they've also gained enough experience to teach or choreograph some of the basics without outside help.

In deciding whether to stage fights themselves or not, teachers need to be sure they aren't overestimating their own abilities. Just like the overeager student who can barely do a summersault but swears she can do a back flip every night in the play, a fight choreographer without the necessary background may be courting disaster.

"A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing," says Hurley. "But knowing enough to know your limitations is a good thing."

Chin takes a harder line. "I know sometimes there are budget handcuffs, but if you can't get a fight choreographer, don't do the fights," he says.

For teachers who choose to seek outside help, the SAFD in the U.S. and Fight Directors Canada are two organizations which have established credentials and documentation of training. They also have or can provide member contacts so teachers and directors can find someone near them. Not every qualified fight choreographer is a member of these organizations, but the groups are a good place to start looking.

Balancing safety and quality

All of the fight choreographers interviewed emphasized that safety always comes first when teaching actors of any age how to fight. However, they also stress that safety doesn't need to get in the way of staging a thrilling fight scene that supports the whole production.

ballet

Teaching stage violence to student actors

BY ELIZABETH COBBE

Ideally, a well-choreographed fight will blend in with the rest of the plays' action. Everyone can think of at least one show they've seen in which the actors seemed to halt their performance so they could whack some swords together. Skilled fight choreography, on the other hand, will protect

the safety of the actors *and* add to their performances. After all, many professional fight choreographers are also working actors.

"Stage combat without technique is dangerous. Acting without technique is boring," explains Chin. "You need to combine both."

"The same way you teach an actor to cross to stage left with motivation," says Buswell, "I talk about motivation and subtext. I talk about what is the character trying to do? How good a fighter is the character? Why are you going for the arm instead of the leg?"

Danforth Comins and James Newcomb battle it out in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival production of *Richard III*. Fight choreography by John Sipes.

DAVID COOPER



Every teacher and fight choreographer interviewed has their own way of teaching and staging violence to keep the students safe as they improve their craft. Here are some of the strategies they shared.

Fighting in slow-mo

Whether they're staging a fight for a production or teaching a few moves in class, the teachers and fight choreographers suggest running the moves at a pace that's slower than how the fight will run in performance, while maintaining the same spacing between partners. This helps the combatants gain precision and technique in their moves, and it removes adrenaline from the equation. That, plus repetition, also helps the actors ingrain the choreography in their muscle memory.

Margo Rodgers uses a metronome with her students so that their rhythm stays constant, no matter at what speed they run the fight. Other teachers use music to pace their students. However they enforce the speed, though, they come back to the slow-motion fight rehearsal repeatedly throughout the rehearsals and performance run.

"If you can do it at tai chi speed perfectly," says Hurley, "I'm not worried. I can walk away."

Similarly, Buswell sometimes has students rehearse a sword fight without blades, simply using their index fingers, pointing in the direction of the blade. The students keep the same spacing they use when they're holding actual weapons. These types of teaching strategies may look or feel less glamorous than the actual fight, but they go a long way toward indoctrinating students in the practice of safe stage combat.

Fight call

Actor's Equity Association requires fight rehearsals before every performance, and there's no reason why high school companies shouldn't hold the same standards. That means running through the fights at every rehearsal to which those actors are called and before every performance, even if it's as simple as a single slap on the cheek or tripping on some stairs.



A student tries out his sword skills during a 2005 Thespian Festival workshop.

"You don't have to run through full-speed every day, but you do need to make sure they know what they're doing," suggests Chin.

Some teachers and choreographers choose to designate a fight captain from among the students—usually an actor with a smaller role who has shown a talent for stage combat. The fight captain can be responsible for leading the fight rehearsal, or fight call, and ensure that the combatants are maintaining the correct spacing and speed.

In other cases, the stage manager may lead the fight call, or the teacher may prefer to do it rather than leave the job to a student. The important thing, the fight choreographers stress, is that fight call happens before each and every rehearsal and performance.

'Puppy training'

In any group of students, there invariably will be a range of abilities when learning about stage violence. Teachers also encounter the overeager students who won't go at rehearsal speed or follow proper safety practices with weapons.

"One of the problems I have is kids see *Kill Bill*, a movie that has lots of fighting, and they think, 'Oh, I can do that!'" remarks Moss.

The teachers and choreographers say that they make the less responsible students sit out and watch the other students work. It's discipline, but it also puts the student in a position to see how the other actors are working, and why it's better to do it the right way.

"It's like puppy training," says Rodgers. If they don't figure it out after watching once, then have them sit out again until the lesson sinks in.

"The kid who is gung-ho is physically out of control," Martin explains. "We

preach safety first, and if they're being unsafe, they sit out and watch." Most of the time, he says, once is enough to convince them.

What's more, the teacher needs to take safety seriously enough that if the students are not performing the choreography safely, she must be willing to cut the fight altogether. "In the final week of production," says Hurley, "you need to [be able to] say, 'We're not doing the sword fight.'"

The gung-ho student may also try to overextend his abilities. An actor might be able to fall safely to the floor from a six-foot platform once, but can he do it safely every single night?

"The hardest thing about high school students is they are full of ego, and they have to throw their egos out the window," Buswell remarks.

Keeping the excited students in line doesn't mean that they can't contribute ideas, though. Let the students "audition" their idea to see if it's safe and if it fits the play.

"I let the kids have tons of input," says Rodgers. "Very often, they're tons braver and more creative than I would ever be. They're more willing to put themselves in the line of a fist."

For example, Rodgers recently directed the play *As Fate Would Have It*, with fight choreography from Hurley using dowels. One of the combatants broke a finger in an incident not related to the play and couldn't perform all of the choreography, so he offered some replacement ideas for a few moves.

"Rob [the student] had to show me how it would work by doing it safely and slowly so that I could see the 'misdirection' and that he wasn't taking a high-speed whack to the arm," says Rodgers. "It worked and we went with it. Even when his finger healed and our show advanced to the next level of competition, we kept his new version since it was the one most firmly embedded in his muscle memory."

Fight master Michael Chin explains an aspect of fight choreography during a workshop.



SUSAN DOREMUS

Shrinking violets

Teachers may also have students who are reluctant to perform any stage violence at all. These actors also need attention, not only for their own sake, but because a hesitant combatant can prove to be just as dangerous as someone is too aggressive.

"There's a lot of kids who you can see are afraid of it," acknowledges Moss. "It's okay. You never push them."

With the reluctant students, Rodgers says, "I treat it more like ballet and talk about it as movement."

With these students, she compares a move like dragging one's partner to other types of acting skills like puppetry. She also breaks down the technique to show who does what. Rodgers says she introduces stage fighting with the scene from *Star Wars IV: A New Hope* in which Darth Vader "strangles" an imperial officer with the Force, because it clearly shows that the victim is the one who does all the work.

Martin encourages his cautious students to try the stage violence, but he sets up tests so they don't feel forced out of their comfort zone. In a unit on movement, he allows them to choose three movements to perform for a grade; stage violence can be one of those elements but isn't required.

Hurley once had a student who balked at practicing falls. So he devised a way of teaching falls by starting out lying on the ground and performing the moves in reverse order. "It made everyone laugh," he says, "but it worked for that actress."

In performance, choreographers must remain sensitive to the student's comfort levels, always leaving them the option to say no. "This is not an excuse to say no just for the hell of it," explains Buswell. "It's if your safety is at risk. If you don't feel comfortable

with it [but I think it's safe], then I may ask you to try it."

A safe environment

Another aspect of safe stage combat, and one that many people don't think about, is making sure the playing area is safe. It's one thing if Cyrano and Valvert have rehearsed their duel responsibly and are excellent fighters. It's another if they discover that another actor's blocking has suddenly changed, putting him in the way of the fight.

"The worst thing to do is choreograph a sword fight and the director has cued a strobe or a smoke effect," says Chin.

Consider where the actors will fight. Are there levels? Is the stage raked? What will the lighting be like? Are there other actors nearby who could get in the way? What kind of shoes will the combatants wear? Will their costumes interfere?

Experienced fight choreographers will know to ask these questions. Directors should also give them enough time to work, and refrain from introducing production elements after the fight has been staged, unless they work it out with the choreographer.

Weapons safety and maintenance

Safe handling and maintenance of weapons is an important subject that deserves significant attention. If readers have any questions, they should consult a qualified fight director, bearing in mind that not every person who picks up a sword at a Renaissance festival will be an authority on weaponry or other aspects of combat in performance.

Blades

Fencing and other blade work is something you can only learn by doing; reading an article just won't cut it. However, there are specific tips to keep in mind so that those with less experience can avoid injury to themselves or others.

Many of the tips mentioned throughout this article apply especially to fighting with swords and knives. Maintaining the appropriate distance and speed in a fight is crucial. When backstage,

always carry the weapon with the point down. "Getting poked in the foot is better than getting poked in the face," observes Robb Hunter, who is a certified teacher with SAFD and the owner of

Preferred Arms, a theatrical weapons rental business in Washington, D.C.

Preferred Arms is one of several North American retailers that provide weapons for stage use. Teachers look-

ing to stock their prop closets with the right kind of weapons should look to these suppliers; contact one of the national fight societies if you're unsure about a particular vendor.

University Liggett School Players Weapon and Pyrotechnical Effects Protocol

This is the handout that Phil Moss distributes to his theatre students.

- Weapons are not toys. The director, stage manager, or actors who use them in the show for official purposes handle firearms. No unauthorized personnel should ever touch a weapon.

- Use non-firing simulated dummy weapons when possible.

- Treat all guns as if they are loaded and deadly.

- Unless performing or rehearsing all weapons must be secured by the director of theatre.

- Careful training is required for all use of weapons; do not overstate your knowledge about the weapons to be used; do not hesitate to communicate your level of comfort with the weapons to be used.

- Never engage in any horseplay with weapons. Do not let others handle weapons for any reason.

- The director of theatre must do all loading of firearms.

- Never point a firearm or weapon at anyone, including yourself. Always cheat the shot by aiming to the right or left of the target character.

- If you are the intended target of a gunshot, make sure that the person firing at you has followed all safety procedures.

- Use protective shields for all off-stage cast within close proximity to any shots fired.

- Check the firearm every time you take possession of it. Before each use, make sure the gun has been test-fired off stage. Check the cylinders and barrel to be sure no

foreign object or dummy bullet has become lodged inside.

- Blanks are extremely dangerous. Even though a gun loaded with blanks does not fire bullets out of the barrel, it still has a powerful blast that can maim or kill.

- If you are asked to put the gun down, place the piece gently on the ground with the barrel pointing in a safe direction, and step back quickly.

- Never attempt to adjust, modify, or repair a firearm yourself. If a weapon jams or malfunctions, only a qualified person shall make corrections.

- When a scene is completed, the director of theatre shall unload the firearms. All weapons must be cleaned, checked and inventoried after each performance.

- Live ammunition or real firearms **are never permitted on school property.**

- State and federal laws must be obeyed at all times.

Procedures

- All weapons and pyrotechnical effects are to be locked up at all times when not in direct use for an official function.

- Weapons and pyrotechnical effects are to be touched by the director of theatre, SFX manager, and actor for official use only.

- SFX manager checks effects or weapons out from the director.

- SFX manager safety-checks the equipment under direct supervision of the director.

- SFX manager signs off on the "SFX Safety Pre-Show Check Sheet"

- SFX manager controls the equipment until its time of use.

- SFX manager takes back the equipment after its use and checks and cleans the equipment as necessary.

- SFX manager completes the "SFX Safety Post-Show Check Sheet"

- SFX manager returns the equipment to director, and locks and secures the equipment.

- The weapon or effect should be checked four times during each performance.

- First check: on first call the SFX manager checks, cleans, and tests as directed by the director any effect to be used. Effects are to be secured until "prop check call."

- Second check: at the forty-five minute to show mark the director or stage manager will call "prop check." At this time the SFX manager, under supervision of the director, will check out the equipment to the actor. The actor will review the equipment, check it, then return it to the SFX Manager.

- Third check: SFX manager will hand the equipment to the actor backstage just before the actor makes the entrance.

- Fourth check: Immediately after use, the SFX manager will complete the post-show form and return the weapon to its lock-up position.

Failure to follow these rules and warnings will result in immediate disciplinary action. All infractions will be treated with the utmost seriousness.

Swords intended for stage use will have steel blades designed to withstand repeated blows if handled correctly. The hilt ought to be secure and in good condition.

Professional sword cutlers craft these blades by hand. Don't confuse stageworthy swords with so-called "battle-ready" swords, which are made of softer steel and may have edges that have not been rounded down. Repeated blows with battle-ready swords will create nicks in the blade that can also cause injury.

Hunter advises teachers to start their weapons closet with pieces that will work for a broad range of plays.

Broadswords, which have a long, straight, double-edged blade, are generally suitable for plays set from 800 to around 1500. After that, rapiers tend to be a better fit. Rapiers have a more slender blade and a more elaborate guard for the hand than broadswords; they're used more often for stabbing than cutting.

Additionally, short swords are weapons best suited for Restoration drama or a *Three Musketeers* adaptation. However, if teachers have a limited budget, Hunter suggests simply ordering the proper hilt (the handle) and screwing in the blade from a rapier.

Knives, on the other hand, are simpler. Although there are more options available than with swords, fights rarely call for knives to strike each other, so durability is less of a concern.

Teachers can purchase regular steel hunting knives, as long as they work with an expert to dull the edges and point. Also, training knives with aluminum blades are widely available. The teachers interviewed here generally agreed that if the vendor cannot answer immediately whether a knife is appropriate for stage use, do not buy it.

Maintaining steel blades is important to getting the most out of your investment. Theatrical blades, especially swords, should be locked in a dry place to avoid rust, which can weaken the steel even when removed. Oil from skin is also corrosive, so wipe the blades with an oiled rag after each use.

Hunter recommends polishing steel blades with wax before storing them.

Most paste wax intended for use on cars will work on steel blades.

Firearms

Even a single gunshot in a play means that students and teachers are assuming extra risk and responsibility. Many people believe that simply borrowing a starter pistol from the track coach is enough to do the job, but in fact, a lot more goes into staging even a single gunshot.

One of the foremost rules is that students and teachers should treat *any* firearm as if it were loaded at all times. Actors at any level must respect firearms and their potential for injury.

Jerry Vest, owner of Have Guns Will Rent Costume and Prop Rental in Kansas City, Kansas, emphasizes that directors should never fire blanks from a real gun. He says that once he was working with a theatre company who wanted to use a blank in a real gun, so he demonstrated the gun by firing a blank at an empty soda can. The blank blasted the can into two pieces.

Use a non-firing prop gun whenever possible, but if the play calls for a gunshot, then make sure the barrel is completely and securely plugged. Guns with a plugged barrel will have a vent to allow the pressure to escape, a slit that's usually an eighth of an inch.

The placement of the slit is very important. The slit on a revolver is on the side; on an automatic pistol, it's typically on top. Even a prop gun that fires will have an explosion when it fires blanks, so if the slit is on top, for example, do not hold the gun against another actor's chest.

Vest shares the story that once, in his store, he was distracted, and he had his hand on top of an automatic gun when it fired a blank. The hot gases that escaped from the gun's vent burned a hole in Vest's hand. He had to have surgery to repair the injury.

Just as with swords and blades, teachers should create a detailed and specific procedure with which students "check out" their firearms and return them later. (The weaponry protocol list that Moss distributes to each of his theatre students is on page xx.)

Know who is handling the weapon at all times, and like any other prop, only those who work with that prop in the show should handle it offstage. Teachers must keep all prop firearms locked in a secure location to remove the possibility of theft or accident.

If the gun fires in performance, consider the volume of the discharge. If the audience is to believe in the gunshot, then it needs to be louder than a simple clap of the hands, but the sound can also be too loud. Consider the space; a prop gun that was suitable for the auditorium may be too loud for the basement black box.

Quieter half-loads are available for some prop revolvers; automatics, however, require a certain amount of powder to prevent jamming. So consider what type of gun to use, and work with an expert if the sound is too loud. The actors can wear earplugs, which will help those closest to the discharge.

"You could probably do better by just shutting down the volume [on the actors' mics] before shooting the blanks," Vest says. Also, remember that a shot fired in an empty house is louder than one fired in a theatre with a few hundred audience members.

For other questions on general firearm safety, many (but not all) professional fight choreographers will have the necessary expertise. "If nothing else, everybody knows a police officer," suggests Vest, who teaches gun safety himself.

Accidents happen

Of course, no one can predict when a glass will be accidentally dropped before a fight, or if an actor will slip and twist an ankle on the steps backstage. Stage choreographers don't usually broadcast the accidents that happen in shows they work on, but they do admit that even the best choreographer can't eliminate all risk from live theatre.

Chin says that fortunately, his actors have never suffered worse than bruises. He knows a colleague who was called in to testify for the prosecution after a poorly designed knife fight resulted in puncturing an actor's lung in a production of *Dracula*. In that case, the company used a real knife, and despite

Stage weaponry retailers

The following is by no means a complete list of every legitimate retailer in North America, but it can offer a good starting place to teachers who want to begin building a stash. Some of the companies listed below are run by cutlers, or craftsmen who make swords; others rent or sell pieces from their stock. If teachers have any concerns about a particular vendor, contact a member of Society of American Fight Directors or Fight Directors Canada..

American Fencers Supply Company, San Francisco, (415) 863-7911, www.amfence.com. AFS does not specialize in stage weaponry

but does have some pieces that will work for stage use.

Atlanta Stage Combat Studio, (601) 466-2352, ww.stagecombat.com. This organization rents only to groups who work “under the direction of an experienced fight director.”

Baltimore Knife & Sword Company, information@baltimoreknife.com, www.baltimoreknife.com.

Fiocchi Sword, Athens, Ohio, (740) 593-4263, www.fiocchisword.com.

Forte Stage Combat, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, (630) 942-9102, www.fortecombat.com.

Have Guns Will Rent Costume and Prop Rental, Kansas City, (913) 321-4867, www.havegunswillrent.com.

Legendary Arms, Inc., Califon, New

Jersey, (800) 528-2767, www.legendaryarms.com.

Preferred Arms, Fairfax, Virginia, (917) 604-3008, www.preferredarms.com.

Rogue Steel, Brookfield, Illinois, (708) 485-2089, <http://roguesteel.com>
Starfire Swords, Ltd., Spencer, New York, (607) 589-7244, www.starfireswords.com.

Valentine Armouries, Calgary, Alberta, (403) 243-8662 or (800) 268-0064, www.varmouries.com/index.html.

Weapons of Choice/Swordcrafters, Napa, California, (707) 226-2845, www.weaponsofchoicetheatrical.com.

Western Stage Props, Las Vegas, Nevada, (702) 873-1100 or (800) 858-5568, www.westernstageprops.com.

—E.C.

padding on the actor's torso, the adrenaline of performance was enough to cause a serious injury.

Hurley once choreographed a fight in *Romeo and Juliet* in which someone threw confetti on the stage as a last minute addition from the director. An actor slipped during a sword fight; luckily, he was only nicked.

In one of Buswell's own fights at a Renaissance festival, his partner's nine-year-old son got onstage behind his father just when he had just completed a belly swipe and was swinging his sword behind him. Buswell couldn't do anything but yell; his partner froze, missing his own son's face by mere inches.

He now uses the story in workshops to communicate to students the need to take safety seriously. “That's a point I make to students: you never know,” he says.

Recently, Rodgers and her students took an original show to the Regional Sears Drama Festival. The crew whose show ran immediately before theirs failed to clean some straw off the stage. During a stick fight, one of the students slipped and had a fist connect with her nose. The combatants continued, but they had to con-

tend with a bloody and cracked proboscis.

“My lesson: instruct the stage managers to check the stage, check the stage, check the stage,” Rodgers reflects.

All of these instances make for great war stories, but they also serve as a reminder that accidents do happen. Given the nature of stage combat, one can only eliminate as many risks as possible and plan what to do in case of injury.

Getting the school on your side

In an age of real violence in schools and in society, some communities and schools may be less open to the idea of swordplay or gunshots on their stage. Some schools prohibit guns of any kind, including prop weapons, on school property, or they may have liability concerns.

Rodgers has built up her program over the past ten years, and she's also gained the trust of her school and the parents. If they want, though, parents can observe rehearsals, provided they let her know first.

When directing *Grapes of Wrath*, Martin says that he brought up the issue of the gunshot far in advance and avoided trouble: “The key to doing that show was being very proactive with the administration ahead of time.”

He also says that having Buswell as a consultant helped convince his principal that the students could handle the sword fighting in *Rashomon*.

Moss's school includes students from the primary grades through high school. Sometimes the younger students will watch rehearsal. “There's lots of content issues,” he says, “and that's where education comes in.”

Some teachers may find it helpful to provide audience talkbacks and explore other ways of addressing the issues of the play with their community. “The way we handle it, as opposed to running from it, is to confront it with the audience,” explains Moss.

Stage violence can even offer students a way to address specific issues more effectively, such as bullying. “Give them the tools to show the audience the horror of that violence, instead of the audience giggling,” suggests Hurley.

Some people may argue that it's inappropriate to have high school students performing violence, but choreographers point out that a thorough study can actually deepen an actor's understanding of how violence works in performance and in life. Instead of repeated Hollywood-style blows to the face with a naked fist, students can

consider the reaction to a punch and understand the real consequences.

Hurley also points out that if you break down the specific moves that make up any given fight, the stunts can actually seem quite harmless. “Once you learn the trick, then every scene of violence you’ll see on TV is ruined.”

The ways that stage combat can benefit acting skills should also be mentioned. Moss says that he was originally attracted to stage fighting because it offered him a way to be athletic *and* artistic. He sees the same thing in some of his students, who appreciate the opportunity to be physical.

What students derive from stage fighting can be valuable. “Absolutely discipline and control,” says Rodgers. “And a tremendous sense of pride.”

In her school, some grade eleven and twelve boys learned a fight so well that she allowed them to teach the choreography to the grade nine students. Some of the younger students began meeting at lunch and after school to practice, and the older students took a real leadership role in teaching them not just the technique, but also the safety.

Students who learn stage fighting from a qualified and responsible teacher will also have another way to improve as actors.

“Fight choreography is a mixture of dance and illusion,” explains Buswell. “To create a successful fight requires cooperation between people... Understanding that mistakes will happen and being willing to forgive each other when they do happen. Maintaining physical and mental control.”

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