Building Vintage’s Haunted House

Vintage Thespians (the Drama Club) begin preparing for Haunted House in September. Two chairpersons are elected to direct and oversee the process. Students brainstorm and select a theme (Haunted something that starts with an H). Then they brainstorm and choose which rooms will be in the Haunted House. Each room has a chairperson and a team of students who will create the room from idea to finished construction. Rooms are filled using set pieces and props from our inventory. Some of the people working on a room will also be acting in it. Others become tour guides and followers.

Rooms are created using stage draperies that are fireproof to separate the areas on the stage. In the classroom, wooden flats are use to create an exit hallway and enclosed entrance to the first room (usually the dressing room). A clear path is required in each room, so that footing is safe for guests and the room is accessible for wheelchairs. Exit locations are marked with signs in rooms without a view of the theater’s lit exit signs over the doors. The auditorium is used as one large room where the guests view the scene from the apron of the stage, although occasionally the guests go to sit in the front row and observe something scary on the stage apron. Doors to the auditorium are created through the sides of the stage main curtain. Any fabric “doorways” are marked with easily seen white markers. Lighting is provided by the stage lighting overhead and supplemented with lamps and spotlights in the rooms. All electric cords are run near the walls or overhead. If extension cords are required, outdoor heavy duty cords are used.

At all times, guests are accompanied by one or two cast members, the leader who is always with them and the follower who is the person to whom things happen in the rooms so needs to catch up to the group. The follower also makes sure everyone stays with the group. If there is a problem with guests, the follower backtracks or goes ahead to alert the teacher in charge.

How Haunted House Works

After over twenty years, we have this down!

Haunted House happens at lunch and after school in the week before Halloween. It is not open on Halloween, since students want to participate in the lunch-time Costume Contest and take part in after school Halloween festivities.

Students begin preparing several weeks before Haunted House. They elect chairmen, choose a theme, form room groups, plan and build their rooms, and then are the actors in the shows.

At a rehearsal every student hears “the speech.” It gives them procedures and prohibitions, the greatest is “no touching.”

**At Lunch**

Students performing in Haunted House arrive during the last ten minutes of 4th period. I send out a message to the teachers asking permission. If a student is not allowed to come early, they just have to hustle over and perhaps get part of their costume and/or makeup on at break. We start shortly after lunch begins.

Guests line up outside the door of TH2. I have a general idea of how many can get through in one day and tell those who I believe are too far back in line that they may wait, but I will not guarantee that they will get in. Anyone ahead of that point that does not get in, I give a card allowing them to come to the front of the line the next day, as long as they come at the beginning of lunch.

I speak periodically to the people in line. They are told that no one will touch them and they are not allowed to touch anyone. I speak personally with anyone who talks of punching or other inappropriate reactions. Students leave their backpacks outside on a carpet so that they will not bump into each other. They reclaim them when they exit.

Students are allowed in to TH2 in groups of four or less. Other than the first groups, groups wait until it is their turn and also let their eyes adjust to the darkness. Groups are led, one at a time, into the first room by a Tour Guide. Tour Guides have all done Haunted House previously. They narrate the story line which is picked up in each room by the actors in the room. All groups also have a Follower. The Follower is who things “happen” to, if there is a need for interaction in the room. The follower also has an important job. If any group misbehaves, the follower goes to find me outside and describe the group. If there is a big problem, everything stops while I go in and deal with it. Usually the problems are minor, and I catch the group on the way out, identify them, and reprimand them.

The setup is done so that it is wheelchair accessible, and emergency exits are marked. A few years, the fire marshal has come and checked us out.

**After School**

The afterschool shows are run the same way, except that we have signals so that groups with small children may choose the “unscary” tour. We also give children who are nervous a flashlight for courage. We occasionally do “lights on” tours, but that means we have to hold all the other guests.

We try to do one show that runs later so that the performer’s parents can see them in the Haunted House. Since we normally close before dark, many family members are still at work or commuting during our regular after-school hours.

Our prices for the lunchtime show have never changed. Tickets are $1 per person. After school, Children and students are still $1. We have raised our prices to, most recently $5 for adults, although we sometimes get a donation for a little more. This is basically a community service project and a fund-raiser. It gives about 40 kids a chance to earn Thespian points and provides a lunchtime activity for the campus.