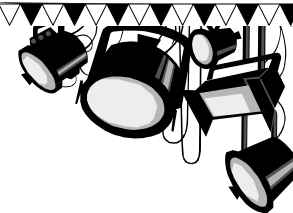


Local History: LIVE at Your Library!

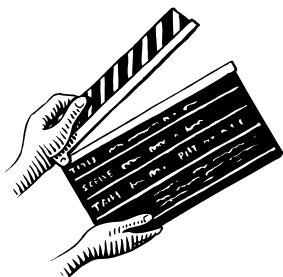


Starring

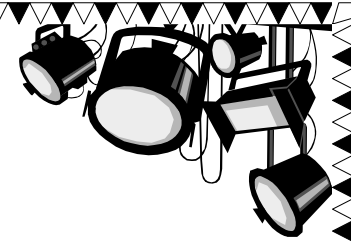
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Supporting Roles: Sources for Writers, Actors, Musicians and More!

You don't need to be an expert in the area of theatre to create a local history "edutainment" event. Sometimes resources to help with your project may be as close as the other Library staff you work with. For example: the Morse Institute Library we are fortunate enough to have a professional seamstress on staff. But if you are not as fortunate, try these resources.



- **Your staff—**
It's amazing the response you will get from people you work with each day. Every staff is a wealth of hidden talent!
- **Area High schools—**
Writing, theatre, music and/or home economics programs are all great places to find teachers looking for opportunities for their students
- **Local college or university writing, theatre and/or music programs—**
Many colleges are looking for internship opportunities for their students. Many colleges also have volunteer or service clubs.
- **Local amateur theatre groups—**
Always a great place to look for props, actors and someone who can direct the performance you are creating. Sometimes the local community theatre can be the right place to have your performance as well.
- **Your local business community—**
there are many companies that are often looking for ways their employees can volunteer to work on a non-profit project.



Act 1: Where to Find the Your Town's Stories

Your Local History collection is “home” to the many “stories” for your town. The next time you look at a late 19th century list of your town’s residents and their occupations—notice the occupation and let yourself ask “what was it like to be a shoemaker in 1889?” You will be surprised to find that sometimes, someone may answer you! Here are a few suggestions on where to look for stories.

- Town records: annual reports, resident lists, vital records, business directories or old phone books
- Town newspapers and Cemetery records
- Historical directories for your state or a specific subject directory that might have a regional approach. (example: A Directory of Massachusetts Photographers, 1839-1900. Edited by Chris Steele and Ronald Polito. Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1993.
 - Focus groups of patrons who were living at the time of a particular town event or time period such as the Great Depression.
 - Oral history collections are a great place to find stories. You can often find them at historical societies, or in a local library or university library catalog. (example “Winnie the Welder” transcripts at Harvard. These were oral histories taken from women who worked at the Quincy shipyards during WW2.)
 - Your local Senior Center is a happening place full of people who have stories to tell. Why not try a “Memory Chat” session around a particular event in your town’s history. Use the stories to create your theatre piece.
 - Most libraries and historical societies have ephemera such as clippings, photos, old invitations, HS yearbooks, church histories, scrapbooks, etc. Each piece of ephemera is an opportunity!



Act 2: How to Tell the Story and Bring it to Life

Stories are fun and often educational to listen to. But sometimes the hardest part is getting someone—in this case your town—to tell the story. Here are a few ideas for town stories, and suggestions for ways to bring those stories to life.

- A Reporter interviews “A Man on the Street” (aka “characters” or “famous” people from your town’s past)
- Town centennials or other anniversaries are wonderful “reasons why” to write a play.
- People make a town! Who are the people in your town? Are they: famous, inventors, immigrants, Veterans— what role did they play in your town?
- Your town’s response to National events and how they were handled in a local way: anything from the Suffragettes to the 1918 influenza epidemic to Home Front WW2 to more recent events
- Private Investigators – use a private investigator character to do a program on “how to find out the history of your home”
- **Use a letter:** have your character either writing or reading a letter that talks about a specific town event, or that features places in town such as a business, a school, a street, etc.



Intermission: Suggestions for the Writer

Taking something from your town's history and making it LIVE through performance takes a good story—and one that can be written and scripted into action. Here are a few suggestions to think about as you start to write your script.

- **Physical description** of character & setting: visual in setting and physical through the actors narration of event. Use simple props (chair, light, teacup, book, etc.) to create a “setting:” a sense of place. Using music from the time period you are working in is also an excellent way to establish time and place.
- **Time/Length or presentation:** Short: a 20 minute performance featuring one actor; longer: features several “acts” and can feature several characters.
- **Use humor when you can**, but not to much—it can get in the way.
- **Don't be afraid to use silence;** a good script with serious points will demand that the actor make adjustments (physiological change that occurs because of emotional impact).
- **Communicate:** the writer, director, actor – must talk to each other. Also, be sure that the actor keeps reading the script aloud so that you can **hear** it.



Act 3: Questions to Ask the Writer, Director & Actor Along the Way

During the process of writing and eventually rehearsals, it can be easy to get caught up in everything that needs to be done. Communication with others, especially people you are new to working with—can also be difficult. Its important to remind your self about the “who, what, when and why” of what you are doing. Remember to laugh, breathe, listen and talk with the others involved in your project. Here are a few questions and things to think about along the way; ask and think often!

- What's the point?
- Why am I writing this particular piece?
- What are you visualizing; what do you see happening—what do you need to hear, or see?
- Are you getting the sense of scene, character, and/or the emotional impact that you want?
- The actor you select must be someone who can and will articulate how to make the piece active, make suggestions in terms of the play's action. They should be someone who is able to develop character business but knows the difference between business and action. The emotional line is always going forward even if the character or the situation is regressing.
- Is the information clearly presented without being didactic?
- What do I want the audience to take away with them, and why?
- **AND...are WE having fun? And more important still — WILL THE AUDIENCE?**



Epilogue—One Person Shows

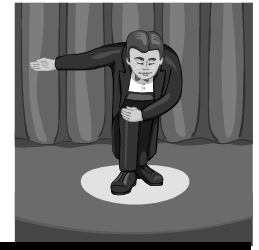
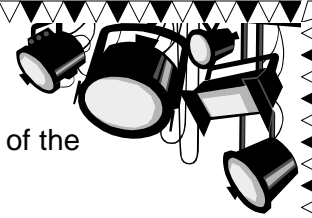
There are quite a few one person shows and monologues out there. These suggestions may help you gain ideas of the freedom offered you in writing drama. Check-out what others have done! A few examples:

Samples of One Person Shows

- The Belle of Amherst by William Luce
- Clarence Darrow by David W. Rintels
- Rose by Martin Sherman.

Samples of Monologues

- The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe by Jane Wagner
- Talking With by Jane Martin
- Fires in the Mirror by Anna Deveare Smith.



The Green Room—Books

- Bridal, Tessa. Exploring Museum Theatre. Walnut Creek, CA: AltraMira Press, 2004.
- Hughes, Catherine. Museum Theatre: Communicating with Visitors through Drama. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.
- McGraw, Charles., and Larry D. Clark. Acting Is Believing: A Basic Method. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, College Publishers, - any edition.
- Roth, Stacy .F. Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Young, Jordan R. Acting Solo: The Art of One-Man Shows, Beverly Hills, CA: Moonstone Press, 1989.
- “From Page to Stage – A Very Funky Journey.” (Colorado Springs Library staffers deliver fairytale messages to local schools, the community, and their peers.) By Stacy L. Smith. *American Libraries*, January 2005; p. 56-57. The author of this article has given her permission to be contacted as a resource for any Library staff who is interested in how the “Funky Fairytales” program works.

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