

The Theatre Dictionary

Have you ever wondered what some theatre terms mean? We thought we'd help you and your students understand theatre terminology and clear up some of the confusion. Use it for either reference or just to learn the definitions. Enjoy!

PEOPLE

Assistant Stage Manager - person who is hired to help the Stage Manager

Box Office Manager - the person who is in charge of ticket reservations and ticketing

Cast - the people who perform in a show

Choreographer - the person who creates dances and arranges movements for a musical

Chorus -1) in a musical the company of dancers and singers 2) the dancing, singing or songs performed by that company

Company - the cast and crew of a show and any other staff who work on the show

Costumer - the person in charge of the costumes for a show

Crew - all the people who work together on a show except the cast

Director - the person who provides the vision of how a show should be presented, who works with the actors on their roles, develops the blocking, and is in charge of the rehearsals

Dramatist - a person who writes plays

Dressers - people who help the actors get into and out of their costumes

Ensemble - a group of actors, singers or dancers who perform together on stage

Equity - trade union formed to protect those who work in the theater by helping to regulate pay and working conditions

Front of House - a term used to describe all of the people in a theater who deal with the audience including the people who sell tickets and the ushers, and any other people who deal with the public (also see listing under PLACES)

House Manager - the person in charge of the theater auditorium and anything to do with the audience

Lighting Designer - the person who designs the lighting for a show and works with the director to get desired effects

Musical Director - the person who works with the director, actors and orchestra to get the desired musical effects for a show

Prop Mistress/Master - the person in charge of all the props and who usually works with them during a show

Set Designer - the person who designs the sets for a show...in smaller theaters this person also builds the sets

Sound Designer - the person who designs the sound direction for the show

Stage Manager - the person who runs the show from opening curtain to closing curtain and is in charge of everything on the stage and in the back of the stage

Technical Director - the person who supervises the construction of a set and any rigging that needs to be done, such as hanging scenery

Troupe - a group of actors that form a company

Wrangler - a person hired to take care of the younger members of a cast

PLACES

Aisle - a walkway which goes through two areas of seats.

Backstage - the part of a theater which is not seen by the audience, including the dressing rooms, wings and the green room

Black Box - a type of theater usually surrounded by black curtains where the audience and actors are in the same room

Box Office - the place that sells tickets to a performance

Broadway - the largest and most famous theatrical district in New York City

Callboard - the place backstage where the Stage Manager puts up important information for the cast and crew

Catwalk - a narrow walkway suspended from the ceiling of a theater from which sometimes lights and scenery are hung

Control Booth - the place in a theater from which all the sound and lights are controlled

Downstage - the part of the stage which is closest to the audience

Dressing Rooms - rooms in a theater provided for the actors in which they change costumes and apply make-up

Front of House - the part of the theater known as the auditorium where the audience is seated, the lobby and the box office...(also see listing under PEOPLE)

Green Room - a place for the performers to relax while waiting to go on stage

House - used to describe the audience or as a short way of saying "Front of House"

Offstage - the area of the stage which the audience cannot see

Off Broadway - theaters in New York City which are not located on or near Broadway

Orchestra Pit - an area at the front of house, usually sunken, where the musicians and conductor work during a show

Proscenium - the arch that frames the front of a stage

Rear of House - the areas in the back of the stage and those places used for storage

Repertory Theater - a theater group that prepares several plays that they can perform over time... not just one

Riser - a platform placed on the stage to create different levels

Set - the setting of the stage for each act and all the physical things that are used to change the stage for the performance

Stage Left - (these left/right directions are seen from the ACTORS point of view on the stage) this is when the actor standing in the center of the stage moves to his left

Stage Right - (these left/right directions are seen from the ACTORS point of view on the stage) this is when the actor standing in the center of the stage moves to his right

Summer Stock - a type of Repertory Theater which produces its shows during the summer season

Trap - an opening in the floor of a stage where a performer or prop can disappear (trap doors in the floor)

Upstage - 1) the area of the stage that is the farthest away from the audience 2) when one actor moves to the back of the stage and causes another actor to turn away from the audience...This is called "Upstaging" 3) when an actor draws attention to himself and away from the main action of a play

Wings - the areas of the stage that are to the sides of the acting area and are out of view. These areas are usually masked by curtains.

THINGS

Act - 1) the main sections of a musical or play 2) the thing which actors can do

Ad Lib - to make up as you go without preparation

Aside - a quick remark made by a character in a play which is said to the audience

Audition - a time when an actor goes before a group of people who are casting a play to show those people what he can do

Belt - in Musical Theater, a style of singing which uses a loud, full tone

Black Out - the quick shutting off of all the stage lights

Blocking - the instructions that actors use to know exactly where they are supposed to be on stage at all times

Book - the script of a play...libretto of a musical

Break A Leg - something people tell actors to wish them "Good Luck" before a performance or audition

Call - the time that an actor must report to the theater for either a performance or rehearsal.

Callback - when an actor who has auditioned for a show is asked to come back for a second tryout

Casting - when the director chooses actors to be characters in a play or musical

Cold Reading - when an actor is asked to read from a script he hasn't rehearsed

Cue - signals that are given to both the actors, the crew, the musicians and any others working on a show

Curtain - the screen usually of cloth which separates the stage from the audience

Curtain call - the bows at the end of a performance

Dialogue - the words which are spoken in a play

Dress Rehearsal - a rehearsal, usually just before a show opens, to practice the show just how it will be on opening night, including costumes and make-up. A rehearsal for both cast and crew

Drop - a piece of fabric which is hung on stage and usually used in the scenery of a show

Exit - a stage direction telling an actor to leave the stage

Hand Props - those objects used to tell the story which are handled by actors in a production

House Lights - the lights that are used to light up the auditorium where the audience sits

Libretto - the term that describes the book or script of a musical or opera

Marking Out - when the stage is marked with tape to show where furniture and props should be placed during the performance

Matinee - an afternoon performance of a show

Monologue - a speech given by one actor

Notes - the meeting a director usually has after a rehearsal or performance to tell the cast and crew how he felt about their performance and to make any changes he may think are necessary

Off Book - when the director tells the cast (usually by a certain date) that they must memorize their lines and can no longer use their scripts in rehearsal

Overture - the beginning music in musical theater which usually gives the audience an idea of the music to come and gets them into the feeling of the show

Personal Props - props that are carried by an actor in his costume during a performance

Playbill - 1) a program (booklet) that contains information about a production 2) the posters used to advertise a production

Preset - when either a prop, costume or something else used in a production is placed in or around the stage before the start of a performance

Prompt - as actors move from using the script to no script (see off book), the prompter follows the play in a book and gives a portion of a line to an actor, if needed, to help them remember the line

Props - all the items used in a play to tell the story not including the scenery or costumes, the short forms of "Properties".

Rehearsal - the period of practice before the beginning of a show in which the actors and director work on the development of the show

Reprise - in musical theater, when either a whole song or part of a song is repeated

Run - the number of times a show is performed

Run-through - a rehearsal in which the actors perform the show from the very beginning to the very end... "Run the show" is another way of saying the same thing

Running-Time - the amount of time it takes to perform the play from beginning to end not including any intermissions...as theater is live performance, this can vary slightly for each performance

Scrim - a drop made of a special weaved material that is used for setting the scene of a play

Sides - an audition script

Sound Effects - the noises which are produced to accompany a scene in a show...these noises are mostly produced by a machine but can be produced by actors off stage

Spike - same as "Marking Out"

Stage Directions - when a script contains information for the actors giving them specific entrances and exits

Standby - a person who understudies a single role (or more) but is not part of the chorus or ensemble of a musical or play

Strike - to take the set apart when a show ends

Subtext - the feelings behind the words a character speaks

Technical Rehearsal - usually the first time a play is rehearsed in the place where it is going to be seen by the audience and in which the scenery, sound and lighting are used... this rehearsal can be done with or without costumes... "Tech" is the slang for this process

Timing - when an actor has the ability to say or do something at the best moment for the most effect

Swing - a performer in a musical who substitutes when chorus members are unable to perform

Understudy - an actor who studies the lines and blocking of a role, and is able to take over for the original cast member in a role

Wardrobe - the stock of costumes and accessories which are owned by a theater group