

Dear Student,

I hope that you are having a wonderful time preparing for this year's contest play. I can assure you that your director worked hard to find the right play and in making the best casting choices. Sometimes those choices are very hard and as theatre students we don't always understand how and why certain casting decisions and crew assignments are made. Trust your director and make sure that you deliver. They have the best intentions. Sitting around for six weeks feeling bad about the role you were assigned never helps your ensemble. Neither does boasting about the lead. Accept what you are given with humble appreciation and make the most of what you get. Give it your all in rehearsal and performance. The play's the thing!

Always come to rehearsal prepared to work. Park your problems and conflicts at the loading dock and enter the stage ready to create and commit to your characters and jobs. This is the time to immerse yourself in the creative process and get the job done. Above all take pride in your work and the work ethic that got you there.

Be a good member of your stage family and bring something to the table when you come to visit. Don't expect the director to provide everything and spoon feed you. Understand the play and your role in the play. A good theatre artist will share ideas for the common good of a production. You may know about a good piece of music, you may have the perfect prop sitting at your grandparents' house, you may have an eccentric uncle who is just like that character in play. Good directors are always willing to listen to ideas that cast and crew members have to offer. Always ask them when it is best to discuss it. Some of your directors want to hear it right then and there. Some do not want to be interrupted during rehearsal. Others like to talk during breaks or after rehearsal. Your director has taken on a tremendous responsibility when they elect to direct your contest play. They are responsible for knowing the rules, for directing the play and for your wellbeing. A good director will want to provide you with the best educational opportunity and will want to produce a quality play. Your director will want to see you grow as a theatre artist and, more important, as a human being. It is up to all of you to embrace excellence and not winning as your goal.

Before you get to contest I'm sure that your director will introduce you to your judge. Your judge is a member of a professional organization called the Texas Adjudicators and Officials Organization (TTAO). They have to meet strict educational standards and must attend certification workshops to initiate and renew their membership. These professionals take time off from their teaching or other professional duties to take part in an educational exchange. They do not travel to a contest to get rich, get back at someone or to advance their friends. They are there because they love theatre and because they believe in the One-Act Play Contest. They will do their best to make the right choice. Give their effort the respect that you expect them to give your effort. Everyone will do their best.

Make sure that you can walk away from a contest feeling that you did your best at every rehearsal and at this performance. The judge may want to advance all the schools at a

contest but the League won't let him. Only three schools will advance at the end of the day. Only two will advance at Region. That is a given. We sometimes want to know why we didn't advance. We want to be told that something was wrong. Keep in mind that "wrong" is not always the case. Fine differences can determine whether one show advances and another doesn't. Many times it's not a question of what was wrong but of what was better. Listen to your critiques and accept the judge's decision in the spirit of good sportsmanship.

I'm sure your family and friends are going to want to attend some of your contests. Take time to explain to them how the contest works and let them know a bit about your judge. Invite them to stay and listen to the critique. They will learn from them. Remind them that you and your friends and family will be representing your school and your community. It's important that they know that applause is the only acceptable form of recognition in the theatre. It is not a sporting event where whistling and yelling is acceptable. Remind them that the judge and contest manager are the officials at the contest and that unruly behavior can get the school in trouble. Make sure that no one is sneaking in cameras and that they do you a favor by turning off their cell phones.

Some of you will advance to the next level. Most of you won't. We will start the 2016-17 contest with 1240 schools. 576 will advance from district. 288 will advance from Bi-District. 144 will advance from area and 48 will advance from regional competition to perform on the state meet stage. That's about 3.9%.

The value of you will receive from this experience will far exceed any medals or plaques. You can't put a price on the problem solving skills and interpersonal communication skills that you will gain from this experience. What monetary value can you put on the friends you have made and laughs that you have shared? Can you put a tag on the confidence that you have gained? All of this is priceless.

The League wishes you and your director a fruitful experience.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Luis Muñoz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "M".

Luis Muñoz
State Theatre Director