

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 24

DO POSITIVE RESULTS OF DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS OUTWEIGH THE NEGATIVE RESULTS?

A paper presented to the
Committee for Guidelines for Competitive Activities and Drama
Washington, D.C.
January 28 to 31, 1974
by
Josephine Benton

The material for this paper has been informally collected, primarily by interview, from participants in and viewers and producers of dramatic programs at Seventh-day Adventist colleges. What is said is the result of practical experience. There is no aim to be extensive nor exhaustive. Rather than to supply an answer for the question in the title, this paper will suggest a method for arriving at an answer in the context of a specific situation.

But first the comments collected will be reported. While they do not in every case tally with the views of the author of the paper, there seemed to be no reason to edit them out for that reason. The persons whose thoughts are reported here are considered by the writer to be Adventists of exemplary character, and thinking people. They include college students; teachers of science, sociology, religion, psychology, history, English, and speech; producers of plays; viewers from outside the college community. Their comments are reported here, with the simple organization of positive factors juxtaposed against negative in four categories, indicating to whom the factors are positive or negative: participants, viewers, producers, or all three. Sources will be indicated in parentheses following the statement.

FOR PARTICIPANTS

POSITIVE FACTORS:

The **DISCIPLINE** aspect for the students involved. (teacher)

The **ENTHUSIASM**—wish you could come into our department and generate the energy they produce for drama! (teacher)

The joy of producing something **CREATIVE**. (producer)

Sometimes they are learning something **BEAUTIFULLY EXPRESSED**. (teacher)

The encounter with inspiring and **GOOD LITERATURE**—memorizing large segments, savoring the language, the wit, the wisdom. (producer)

Develops **PERSONALITY**. (teacher)

The student **LEARNS HE HAS GIFTS** he never knew he had. (teacher)

Students develop their abilities in **EXPRESSION OF THOUGHT**. Acting a particular part helps them learn to express themselves—brings out latent abilities. (teacher)

SELF-RESPECT is developed. A person discovers worth that neither he nor others realized he had. (teacher) We gain poise. (student)

The person comes out more **CHARMING** and **POISED**. (teacher)

In drama a person exercises the ability to take and appreciate the role of someone else, to be able to

PROJECT ONESELF INTO ANOTHER SITUATION and act appropriately. To know you are still yourself, and yet be able to project yourself into a temporary new identity—role-acting, taking a different position—is a way of developing adaptability. If a person is characterized by rigidity, he will **BECOME MORE FLEXIBLE**, to the extent that he is able to do this. (teacher)

Students are given a chance to interact, to participate in **TEAMWORK**. (teacher)

Drama offers one of the few opportunities we find in college to become close to other people, **LIKE A FAMILY**. (Student)

An advantage is the obvious taste they get of the **MEANS OF DRAMATIZATION** as a mode of communication. They could learn how to do small dramatizations for various aspects of church work—they wouldn't need to do the massive productions done at college. (community viewer)

NEGATIVE FACTORS:

Can't quite rationalize using up people's **TIME** so extensively among their other studies. (teacher)

The tremendous amount of **TIME** it costs the participant seems to me disproportionate to the total amount of time they have for their studies. Per credit hour, they spend most for the credit in drama. Also, the kind of time they have to spend—late at night, for instance—must be considered. (community viewer)

Robbed of **TIME** for study. A high school football team may be picked carefully for ability to keep up with studies, whereas just anyone (scholastically speaking) with talent may be chosen for drama. (teacher)

Massive segments of **TIME** demanded. (student)

The **TIME** involved is so extensive, perhaps with little future benefit. (teacher)

Other **GRADES** sometimes suffer. (student; parent; teacher)

Physical **HEALTH** may not be considered. Drama projects encourage students to drive themselves mercilessly. (teacher)

Sometimes individuals develop a certain **EGOTISM** with regard to their role. That egotism stays with them, and they never get back to their unaffected, happy-go-lucky selves. (teacher)

Some students might feel themselves successful, and be **DRAWN TOWARD A HOLLYWOOD CAREER**. (teacher)

Caution needs to be exercised in selecting students for acting roles. Some after projecting into a play role might **NEVER COME FULLY BACK**, until after therapy. (teacher)

When a play involves a **CRIME** (as *Murder in the Cathedral*), I don't want to emphasize that aspect of life. Or in *Christmas Carol*, I'd hate to be a Scrooge. A person is **LEARNING TO BE NASTY, ARROGANT**. This is being impressed on his mind and character. (teacher) There is **HYPOCRISY** involved when a person acts a praying scene. I know that's my prejudice showing through. (teacher)

VIEWERS

POSITIVE FACTORS:

Some **GOOD LESSONS** are taught in plays. (teacher)

Drama is a way to **LEARN** about the past. However, you have to be careful, as in *1776*, to assess how accurate the facts are. (teacher)

I like drama for **ENTERTAINMENT**. (teacher)

To justify a good comedy, I recall that a **MERRY HEART** does good like a medicine! (producer)

I **ENJOY** going to a good play. (teacher)

It's **RECREATIONAL**. (teacher)

It **HAS A PLACE**—but I'm not sure just how much. The preacher in the pulpit uses a little drama to get his point across.

NEGATIVE FACTORS:

If a person has developed a taste for the theater, it has a TREMENDOUS PULL. People who want to keep their minds on spiritual themes just avoid this—they may even go overboard on it. (community viewer)

For a person who has been into drama, even a good production can produce all kinds of FANTASIES in the thinking. (community viewer)

PRODUCERS**POSITIVE FACTORS:**

Possibly mission stories, where you have God's deliverance—perhaps many ASPECTS OF GOD'S WORK COULD BE DRAMATIZED. (teacher)

Producing a play can be part of A MINISTRY. For instance, *Christmas Carol* was produced at the Gate, and the participants felt they got a spiritual lift from doing this. A great deal apparently depends on the director, the environment, and the motivation—sense of ministry. (producer)

A director can GIVE AN EXPERIENCE WITH GOOD LITERATURE to people, both participants and viewers—a thing of beauty, fun, and interest, of pathos and understanding. (producer)

A play can be a tool to IMPRESS THE MIND—some people remember a play they have seen and the lesson it taught for many years. (producer)

At its best play production is an art form of RE-CREATION. (Compare what the college choir director or orchestra or band leader does, making a music score come alive.) It is in many ways a stimulating experience to work with a piece of great literature, interpreting it, finding new nuances of meaning right up to the dress rehearsals! (producer)

NEGATIVE FACTORS:

Sometimes one is faced with PROBLEMS with which one simply cannot cope, under the circumstances given. For instance, producing a play in an auditorium that seats 2,000 [and] no way to handle the sound problems except to convert to pantomime.

Working in a building in which one is not allowed to erect a set and leave it standing even for one week!

Personnel mainly interested in acting rather than technical aspects of production. Problems in equipment and personnel for sound combined can mean a delayed sound effect that destroys the effect of a crucial climax. (producer)

The tremendous investment of TIME. Is it worth it? I don't know. If it were part of my work load, it might be different—but over and above it... (producer)

The investment of TIME is a critical factor, not only in amount, but also in the context of other worthy projects with which the drama production comes in conflict. This was especially true with me in the case of Mission 72, and I made up my mind that Mission 73 would not find me tied up three nights a week during that event. (producer)

The director of the play needs to be aware that he is dealing with explosive and critical HUMAN RELATIONS when he brings together a drama cast. There is a tendency for cast members to idolize and fall in love with other cast members, even ones that are ineligible (engaged, etc.). A wise director can do much to avert this hazard; but it does exist. (producer)

PARTICIPANTS, VIEWERS, AND PRODUCERS**POSITIVE FACTORS:**

With careful selection of theme, drama can be AN ELEVATING EXPERIENCE. (teacher)

It's no question... anything dealing with language and metaphor, making us more able to use these tools by which God communicates with us, is **MAKING THE MIND EXPAND IN A METAPHORICAL SENSE**. God, you know, is portrayed as a Shepherd. The dramas chosen should make one feel closer to his fellow man. There are standards of love, beauty, and ethics. (teacher)

It's so interesting how as a church we use this form in M.V. and Sabbath School, but put it on a Saturday night, and then people ask questions. The Mormons have a summer musical which tells the history of their church. It's amusing, enjoyable, yet learning takes place. We could use drama to **TEACH ABOUT OUR CHURCH**. People are so accustomed to having everything presented visually on TV that they like to have things dramatized.

What you think about drama depends on how you define the term. **THE BIBLE CONTAINS SOME OF THE BEST DRAMA** in the world: for example, the stories of Esther and Joseph. (community viewer)

NEGATIVE FACTORS:

One needs to consider the moral implications—drama in terms of **FICTION**. Is this the same airy artificiality Ellen White speaks against? There can be harm in material that is not true-to-life. Does the drama have a negative or neutral effect upon act and audience, rather than uplifting? If this is the case, then it is probably out of place. (teacher)

MAKING THE DECISION

It is the impression of this former play producer that there cannot be a single and simple answer to the question, "Do positive results of dramatic productions outweigh the negative results?" However, that does not mean that no answer is possible! It may mean that, as one of my interviewees said, "you have to treat each instance separately."

The important decision concerning whether or not drama should be produced any given year on a particular campus can be made by the department to which the responsibility of production would fall, with especial attention to the thinking of the person or persons who would carry most of the responsibility, and in consultation with the school administration.

Factors to be considered would ordinarily include the following, it seems, and any others pertinent to the particular situation:

1. Review of the Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy instruction on the subject. Comparison of the proposed production with the guidelines there: i.e., is the production "theatrical," or is it relatively simple, with stress on meaning rather than spectacle?
2. Listing of the practical elements which need to be considered. These are exemplified in the main body of the paper, although by no means treated exhaustively. Sample items could be the following:
 - a. Do we have personnel who are willing and able to produce this play, do the acting, and handle the technical aspects?
 - b. What block of time will be involved? Does this seem the best use of this amount of time by these people at this period? Should any restrictions be placed on participation in terms of previously-demonstrated ability to maintain other obligations under a period of strain (as, grades; health)?
 - c. What benefits can we reasonably expect to come from this production—to the

participants, viewers, department, and institution? What harm, if any?

d. What is the quality of the play itself? Mention its assets and liabilities. Consider it in terms of a continuity of productions if plays are produced periodically. Is there language, theology, or any other element which is likely to offend? Can or should this be changed; or should the play be abandoned on this account; or is the material so completely acceptable to those taking responsibility for the production that they will risk the disapproval and consider this a matter of educating their public?

3. Prayerful and wise weighing of the factors, positive and negative. Some elements are absolute, so that a person simply would not produce some plays, no matter what the positive factors (as literary skill) involved. Others require a weighing and judgment which is of necessity somewhat subjective. For instance, one potential play director will decide that his time can be better spent with small spiritual groups on campus, and will pass up the option to produce a play. Another person will decide that the joy of a creative production outweighs, for him, all the negatives in sacrifice of time and comfort. Moreover, the writer has found that the decision can even vary from year to year, for the same person, because when people cannot do everything they enjoy doing in a single day, or year, or decade, they must space these activities out within their lifetimes.

This small paper ends as it began, without a pretense at supplying all the answers. But the author breathes a prayer that every person involved in decision-making about drama will above all desire to bring honor to his loving Father, from whom he inherited the enjoyment of creating, and from whom he must receive wisdom best to use the ability he has been given.