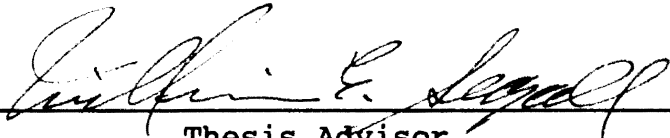



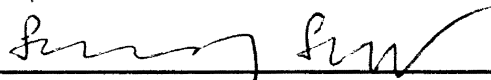
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STUDY "THE EFFECT OF CENSORSHIP ON THE
QUALITY OF HIGH SCHOOL PLAYS"

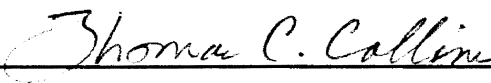
Thesis Approved:



Thesis Advisor







Dean of the Graduate College

PREFACE

A study was done to investigate the effect censorship has on the quality of high school plays. A questionnaire was sent to the theater or speech department at colleges and universities in seven states. The questionnaire was designed to elicit feedback from those person charged with sponsoring high school play contests. Ten Pulitzer prize winning plays were summarized and critiqued by the researcher according to the standards imposed by the colleges and universities. The data collected during the course of the study was analyzed to provide information regarding the extent college and university sponsored play contests censor high school plays. Surveys revealed that few colleges and universities actually imposed censorship of high school plays at their contests.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to those individuals who assisted me in this endeavor and during my course work at Oklahoma State University. In particular I wish to thank my major adviser, Dr. William E. Segall, for his guidance and patience during the writing of this thesis. I am also grateful to Dr. Russell Dobson and Dr. Leonard Leff for their time and advisement.

A special thanks to the individuals who took the time to complete the survey and make the invaluable and useful comments which add color and dimension to this paper.

My sincere and heartfelt appreciation to my family and friends, who offered encouragement and ideas when I had lost my energy. My deepest appreciation goes to my husband, Philip, who without the prodding and constant "cheerleading" I would never have undertaken the task.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Censorship affects everyone. History books and periodicals are filled with examples of written or spoken language being edited at the discretion of an individual or group. Our judicial system is overburdened with trials determined to settle the matter. The idea of censorship is as old as government itself. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines it as, "the institution, system, or practice of censoring or censors". Censors are defined, in the same source as "one of two magistrates of early Rome acting as census takers, assessors, and *inspectors of morals and conduct*" (emphasis added). Even today society is bound by certain groups given the authority to deem materials acceptable for the public. School systems vacillate between the appropriateness or inappropriateness of texts for the classroom while teachers instruct with fear and trepidation that the novel or short story will offend someone. The high school drama instructor is no exception, not only will his or her material be critiqued by class members but also by parents, administrators and the community in general. With this strong tradition of scrutiny present, one begins to ask a series of questions: How far is censorship taken? To what extent does censorship

effect the selection of high school plays? Are high school plays more or less censored when sponsored by a university contest? What is the source of the censorship? To what extent is the censorship imposed by the colleges and universities who sponsor high school contests, the director of the participating school, or secondary school state or local policy? Does censorship imposed at university sponsored contests inherently effect the quality of plays performed? This study will attempt to explore these questions and create a better understanding of the effect of censorship on the quality of high school productions.

Background of Problem

At the beginning of each school year high school directors begin the search for plays to fill their dramatic season. Although there is a plethora of material from which to choose, much of it lacks substance. The qualities that set great plays apart from mediocre ones include problems with character development, plot structure, and universal appeal. While most directors of high school productions have some training in distinguishing quality literature from that which lacks merit, their hands are tied by the belief that many plays are not suitable for high school actors or audiences because of adult themes and/or vulgar language. For that very reason, sometimes plays are chosen for their adherence to community standards rather than their ability to function as a tool to teach great literature.

In 1964 Marie Ann Ross addressed the issue of censorship in her thesis "The Effect of Censorship on the Quality of High School Plays". In her study she gathered data from fifty major universities inquiring as to their standards for entry of high schools into their play contests. Her study also included interviews with administrators, ministers, and professors of psychology and philosophy regarding their perceptions of community attitudes toward portrayal of "controversial" situations in high school plays. This information was used to determine whether ten current Pulitzer Prize Winning plays could have been produced at the average high school in the Oklahoma City area. Through this study she determined that over half of these award-winning plays would not be deemed appropriate in the high school setting of that period. Since the Ross study no similar investigation has been made in the area of censorship on the high school stage.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Because of the general lack of material on this specific subject, much of the review of the effect censorship has on high school productions was drawn from the questionnaire responses.

Following are two articles that do seem relevant when examining censorship on the secondary school level. The first article addresses censorship of Shakespeare's classic, Romeo and Juliet. The second article deals with the controversial production of a play entitled Sometimes I Wake Up in the Middle of the Night.

In her article "Star-Crossed Platonic Lovers, or Bowdler Redux" discussing the problems in classroom text abridgements of Romeo and Juliet, Maureen F. Logan contends students suffer from the arbitrary editing of Shakespeare's greatest tragedy. The Harcourt Brace and World Adventures in Reading is the anthology studied in this article. In a disclaimer in the teacher's manual the publisher states, "This version omits trivial or ribald wordplay and especially difficult, static passages of poetry." Throughout the article Logan defends passages omitted in the anthology in the name of important plot and character development. Ninth-graders, the students "protected" from

the inappropriate use of language, suffer because of their lack of understanding of important thematic aspects of the play. Much of the humor and passion of the play is lost in the name of censorship. Because of censorship the quality of instruction suffers.

One of the greatest playwrights of all time is edited because some language is found unacceptable by the publisher. An agent of the publisher when asked the reasoning behind this censorship claimed, " Most teachers...were pleased with the new edition...." This is a blatant example of the effect censorship has in the classroom. Because this is a play often produced , one can see how it would seriously effect the quality of the high school play. If this type of censorship is allowed and even encouraged in the study of a play in the classroom, imagine how much farther it could be taken in the censorship of a stage production.

In the article "Young Adult Drama: Characters, Actors, and Audience" Linda Johnson recounts the reception of a rather controversial play, Sometimes I Wake Up in the Middle of the Night. In this article we see the reactions of students, audience, and cast members toward the play. Because of the frankness of subject matter and harsh language many were hesitant to allow the production of this play. Some students after reading the play declined the opportunity to audition. School administrators were understandably concerned, "...the principal talked to me...and I assured him that the production would be morally

sound and not exceed the boundaries of good taste." The play was performed and well received. This drama coach took a risk and did not sacrifice the quality of the production.

Both of these articles address the issues and problems in selecting plays suitable for high school audiences. In one case an undisputed classic is edited to the point of sacrificing important elements of the play, in the other real-life situations are handled with real-life language and feelings. Both plays illustrate the problems teachers and administrators find in selecting high school plays of redeeming quality that have not been censored to the point of ruination. If these professionals must constantly worry about the language and theme of plays such as these, how can they consider the production of contemporary classics which strive for realism in dialogue and social context.

Where does censorship begin? Not an easy question to answer. Perhaps it is better to narrow it and ask where do secondary schools see censorship of their productions? Now colleges become the focus. Most secondary schools look to colleges and universities as a higher authority. What these institutions say is acceptable for production at their host-contests often becomes the standard by which high schools measure all their productions. If a play is not acceptable at a university sponsored contest, it is unlikely the high school would choose to produce it for a community audience. "The secondary schools are much more conservative than the colleges, I believe, in choice of material and in cutting the material" (Monty Prock). Therefore a study of the

standards set by colleges and universities is in order to determine what type and amounts of censorship they exercise over high school theater.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which censorship effects the selection of plays performed by high school students at university sponsored contests and the source of that censorship. With the completion of the study conclusions were made concerning censorship in high school theater. This study was a replication of part of an investigation conducted by Marie Ann Ross (1964). The 1992 study did not do personal interviews with administrators, professors, and clergymen as Ross did in 1964. As in a part of the Ross study, however, Pulitzer Prize winning plays were analyzed to determine their appropriateness for the high school stage vis-a-vis the standards established for their performance at university sponsored contests.

Significance of Study

Over the last twenty-five years the world has gone through many changes and the American high school has changed with it. Teachers and students have seen the advent of the sexual revolution, the AIDS epidemic, the "Just Say No" drug abuse policy of the federal government, and the explosion of permissive use of colorful language, explicit sex, and graphic violence in cinema. What effect have these

phenomenon had on the tolerance of issues in high school play productions?

This study is a descriptive examination of how censorship effects the quality of high school plays performed at university contests. If it is recognized that students are deprived the opportunity to study and perform what are recognized as outstanding works of literature, standards of censorship can be reassessed and the effect they have on the quality of high school plays. If a standard is set by communities, then directors should be made aware of high school limits. If the community is made aware of the harm of imposing these standards and the potential missed by not allowing students to study these plays, perhaps censorship will no longer be an issue for the high school stage.

Research Questions

1. Do teachers and or directors restrict high school students from performing published material in university sponsored contests?
2. What censoring restrictions do college theaters hosting play contests place on high school competitors?
3. What contemporary Pulitzer Prize winning plays would be deemed inappropriate for high school productions by standards imposed by college and university sponsored contests?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Research Design

The research is a partial replication of a previously conducted study. The researcher reviewed the study conducted by Ross in 1964 "The Effect of Censorship on the Quality of High School Plays". In this original study Ross constructed a questionnaire to "obtain pertinent information concerning state- or university-sponsored play contests. Fifty questionnaires were dispersed throughout the United States. Ross also interviewed six school administrators, three clergymen, one professor of psychology and one professor of philosophy. From the responses of the questionnaires and the interviews she was able to determine which plays could potentially be performed on the high school stage. The 1192 study was similar in purpose; determining which if any current Pulitzer prize winning plays could be performed at the high school level. Using the Ross study as a model, a questionnaire was developed and sent to 134 four-year colleges and universities in seven states; Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. This questionnaire gathered information regarding university policies for selecting appropriate plays for secondary

school competition. Then, as in the Ross study, ten of the preceding twenty years of Pulitzer Prize winning plays were reviewed with regard to their adherence to the standards imposed by the college hosted play contests. The method varied from the Ross study in that individual interviews were not conducted, but instead the 1992 study focused on determining the parties responsible for censorship in university sponsored contests.

Sample

The population consisted of all four-year colleges and universities in Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. A random sample of 134 schools (50% of the population) were sent the questionnaire.

The questionnaire included the Likert scale as shown in Table I as an instrument for the responders to measure their approval or disapproval of a play. The Pulitzer prize winning plays span the years 1969-1989.

TABLE I

LIKERT SCALE

| | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| very strongly disapprove | mildly disapprove | very mildly approve | strongly approve | |
| 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10 | | | | |
| very strongly disapprove | disapprove | very mildly disapprove | mildly approve | strongly approve |

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Response of questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent to 134 colleges and universities in Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. See Appendix A. 71 questionnaires were returned with 27 affirmative responses to the first question regarding whether the university hosts a high school contest. Those 27 returned surveys were studied. The conclusions derived from the study of the surveys are addressed later.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first five questions were designed to elicit responses regarding population of the hosting community, distinguish between types of contests, and determine responsibility for the rules governing the contests. The information gathered from the first part of the questionnaire is presented below in the following tables.

Table II shows the community population in which the university or college resides. The random sampling shows that virtually all sizes of communities were well represented in the survey. Findings show that community size seemed to have little influence on a university censorship policy. Only those universities that affiliate themselves

TABLE II
POPULATION

| | | |
|----------|---------|---|
| under | 20,000 | 6 |
| 20,000 - | 50,000 | 7 |
| 50,000 - | 100,000 | 5 |
| 100,000- | 150,000 | 4 |
| 150,000- | 250,000 | 1 |
| over | 250,000 | 4 |

with a religion or denomination deviated from this. In fact, smaller communities seem more likely to allow a state activity association to determine standards for play approval.

TABLE III
CONTEST TYPE

| | |
|-------------|----|
| play only | 8 |
| speech only | 6 |
| both | 13 |

Table III shows the type of contests that the university or college hosts. The differences between a play contest and a speech contest are varied. For purposes of these findings the most significant difference is in the discretion used in choosing material. Play contests are ensemble productions of plays directed by a teacher. The

teacher historically has full responsibility as the director in choosing the play. Speech contests are performances given by individual students, often with more freedom on the students part for interpretation and material selection.

TABLE IV
GOVERNING RULES

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| no indication | 1 |
| self imposed | 4 |
| state secondary rules | 22 |

Table IV shows the responsible party for rules imposed on the university hosted contests. Of the twenty-two noted adhering to state secondary rules, eight of those specifically named the University Interscholastic League. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) is the governing secondary association in Texas. It is the policy of this organization to publish a list of plays to be used at the play contests hosted by colleges and universities. In the survey, they were the only secondary association to publish a list of accepted plays.

TABLE V
MATERIAL SELECTION

| | |
|---|----|
| discretion of participating schools with no UNIVERSITY censorship | 16 |
| UIL approved list | 8 |
| discretion of participating schools with knowledge it is a Christian university | 3 |

Table V shows the party responsible for rules restricting play selection at university hosted contests. As shown the censorship is generally left to the policies of the participating schools. Again the UIL appears as the governing body for a portion of the survey schools. As stated before, their policy is to make up a list of approved plays, if the plays are not on the list the secondary school, as well as the university, is not expected to enter the play in the contest.

TABLE VI
RESPONDER'S CENSORSHIP POLICY

| | |
|--|----|
| no censorship policy; left rules to the state secondary activities association | 14 |
| adherence to the University Interscholastic League policy | 8 |
| censor according to a world Christian or church view and are governed by their own rules | 3 |
| university had no censorship policies and imposed its own rules to govern contests | 1 |
| university retained the right to censor at their own discretion while under state secondary activity rules | 1 |

The first part of the survey is culminated in Table VI and shows that overall, state activities associations do set standards. Colleges and universities have little or no official voice except in those cases in which they are affiliated with a church or religious group. The most active body involved in censoring is each state's secondary activities association. Most of the college sponsored contests are subject to the rules provided by this organization. Actually these are not college or university sponsored, they are merely hosts. The activities association is the true sponsor.

This information is not new to the teachers of these high school theater groups. Activities manuals are sent to all speech teachers throughout their respective states as

well as each secondary schools activities director. These manuals outline the rules for extra-curricular contests including speech tournaments and one-act play contests. Included with the rules of eligibility, time limits, etc., often times guidelines are given to indicate the approval or disapproval of material for high school students. These guidelines range from vague indications that vulgar language and gestures should be deleted, (often contradicting itself in other sections insisting on adherence to author's intent) to actual lists of plays pre-approved by the association. The University Interscholastic League as discussed previously is an example of an organization that chooses to offer a list.

The second part of the survey asked for specific information regarding censorship imposed on high school productions at university sponsored contests. It has already been established that the university has little say in the matter. Although they host the contests they are not in a position to allow or strike a play for reasons of censorship in most cases. Many of the university respondents in fact wrote comments declaring their aversion toward censorship and abhorrence when they find it in any form.

Although this is perhaps beside the point, I am an advocate of the first amendment and especially in schools. By grade ten there is nothing most students haven't at least heard of and repression only leads to distortion and exacerbation of deeper issues (alienation, poverty, race and class questions, etc.)
(Douglas L. Patterson)

Other concerns of the university responders were cases in which examples of censorship seemed arbitrary or inconsistent. In the following case there did not seem to be a pattern or guideline to follow as to what should be censored, but simply the whim of the governing body.

Nebraska higher education has no direct lines of communication or authority with NSAA. We (the college/university "judge") get all sorts of feedback from high school "drama coaches." The most classic example was the Franklin E-Free Church's objection to The Odd Couple because it was written by a Jew... Deletion of swearing, smoking, and drinking are common — and accepted. The larger the high school and the community, the more tolerant the administration. The sponsoring location (college/university) does not dictate policy..." (Jack Garrison)

Some respondents noted that censorship takes care of itself, either by virtue of the conservative nature of secondary schools as shown before or the judges' conservative nature. "We do not censor directly- ratings and rankings can reflect judges own views". (Dr. Herman)

Finally the church affiliated schools point out that because of the nature of their contests they seldom worry about censorship. "Our own productions are selected (not censored) according to a Christian worldview. Unnecessarily explicit language is 'edited' from plays. We would convey this information to contest applicants". (Patrick Dorn)

Looking at the variety of responses, it is easy to see that the climate of colleges and universities allows for a great diversity of ideas. "Contest in question is provided for secondary students of churches which support the college. Material should be in keeping with standards of church - no foul language, sexual suggestiveness, etc."

(Cindy Peterson). Because of the great diversity in views among the responders from the colleges and universities is one reason why standards are set by a single state association. With only one censoring body in the state it is easier to maintain consistency throughout contests.

Regardless of who sets the standards there is censorship. Because there is evidence of censorship, it is now appropriate to determine to what extent it might effect the quality of high school play production. If censorship is evident, to what degree does it disallow recognized modern classics? The final question from the survey reveals the Likert rating of the Pulitzer plays. The last part of the survey allowed responders to rate the plays according to their approval or disapproval for high school production and to offer comments on the appropriateness of the plays. The results of the Likert scale follows. The plays are listed in order of most approval to least approval.

TABLE VII
RESULTS OF LIKERT SCALE

| | |
|------|---|
| 8.5 | <u>Fences</u> by August Wilson |
| 8.43 | <u>The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds</u> by Paul Zindel |
| 8.36 | <u>Crimes of the Heart</u> by Beth Henley |
| 8.23 | <u>The Heidi Chronicles</u> by Wendy Wasserstein |
| 8.08 | <u>The Shadow Box</u> by Michael Cristofer |
| 7.85 | <u>'Night Mother</u> by Marsha Norman |
| 7.7 | <u>Sunday in the Park with George</u> by Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine |
| 7.38 | <u>Seascape</u> by Edward Albee |
| 6.89 | <u>Buried Child</u> by Sam Shepard |
| 6.4 | <u>That Championship Season</u> by Jason Miller |

Many of these plays might be restrictive to the high school audience not necessarily because of adult situations and vulgar language but simply because the theme is beyond the grasp of the typical high school student. Appendix B gives a thorough examination of all of the plays including a synopsis and review of objectionable material. All of these plays have been recognized for their achievement in the world of drama. Does this in and of itself make them acceptable for production on the high school stage? None of these plays received a STRONG recommendation for production

on the secondary level, while at the same time the lowest rating still indicated a mild approval. Those that did receive lower ratings were usually the plays in which language played an important factor in advancing plot and developing characterization.

According to the standards of university and college directors and departments, nine of the ten plays could be produced. The only play that uses explicit language so extensively throughout the play that the context would suffer from editing is That Championship Season. This probably explains why that play is located at the bottom of the scale provided to the universities and colleges.

The original 1964 Ross study found that at least half of the studied Pulitzer prize winning plays would not be produced on the high school stage. The study twenty-five years later found only one play. The reason for that is because the decision of whether the plays would be produced is ultimately left to the teacher or director as long as he or she stays within the rules set forth by the state secondary school activities association of her state. It is the interpretation of these rules that would determine whether individually these Pulitzer prize winning plays would ever be produced on the high school stage.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

University and college sponsored contests must adhere to the rules of the secondary school associations. The teachers, students, and administrators are still responsible to the community morays and school boards. That is the intention of the secondary school activities associations. Whether the more liberal college community would allow questionable language or gestures has little to do with the standards each school applies to its own play. As long as high school students are involved, secondary associations will be at the forefront of decisions made about materials appropriate for them.

Roman government dictated who censors were and what their capacity was within the city structure. Still today censorship and censors continue to inspect morals and conduct, whether it is within a group of individuals or the words of a playwright. The idea of censorship has never changed.

Conclusion

From her 1964 study on censorship in high school plays, Ross concluded that most of the Pulitzer prize winning plays would not be deemed appropriate for the high school theater.

Because of problems with language, adult situations, and subject matter the majority of these plays would never find their way to production in any high school auditorium. Over twenty-five years later a similar study found only one play. By looking at the responses on the Likert scale, it appears that all of these ten Pulitzer Prize plays have at least some approval from colleges and universities for production on the high school stage. What has become apparent in this study is that this approval is really not important. Acceptance from colleges and universities is not what determines which plays will be produced by high school students. In the 1992 study the first research question asked whether teachers and or directors restrict high school students from performing published material in university sponsored contests. The study shows that they do restrict but under the influence of the state activity associations. The standards imposed by most of these associations would impede those Pulitzer Prize winning plays which contain profane language, vulgar gestures, nudity, or obscene scenes from being produced. The second research question asks what censoring restrictions do college theaters hosting play contests place on high school competitors. The study shows that university sponsors would not have objected to hosting these plays, but as already stated they have little influence on the plays that will be performed at their contests. The final research question asks what contemporary Pulitzer Prize winning plays would be deemed inappropriate for high school productions by standards

imposed by college and university sponsored contests. The study once again shows that it is the state secondary schools associations that impose the rules. The secondary schools are vague in their condemnation of specific works with the exception of the University Interscholastic League in Texas, which does offer a list of acceptable plays. Omission of a title from this list would indicate lack of approval from this state secondary body. Plays that did not violate the standards as set forth by the secondary associations could be produced at the secondary level.

In summary the fact that censorship does exist on the high school stage cannot be denied. In the interest of "protecting" students restrictions are placed on the choices directors can make in their productions. What makes this censorship so interesting is not the fact that it does indeed exist but the people who are censoring are those individuals who are far removed from the creative process. Censorship by anyone is offensive but the censorship by a group that otherwise does not involve itself in the production of these plays is abhorable. The researcher feels that crucial to this study would be a follow-up of interviews with secondary school personnel from teachers, to administrators, to members of the activity boards to evaluate their perceptions of what is appropriate for the high school theater. With this insight, some very surprising conclusions might be drawn concerning the plays which would actually be produced on the high school stage.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE

September 3, 1990

Dear Theater or Speech Department Head:

I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University in Language Arts. The enclosed survey is part of my master's thesis on the effects of community values on the quality of high school plays.

As an educator I am concerned about the effect community values have on all aspects on the classroom. My study is a replication of an investigation done by Marie Ann Ross at the University of Oklahoma in 1964. My purpose is to investigate how colleges impact secondary schools in relation to college sponsored contests. I also will evaluate the changes in community values and stage production during the past twenty-five years on selected plays.

Improving the quality of plays produced in the high school can only be achieved through understanding current trends. My study is intended to highlight those trends. I can only do this with your help. Please take the time to fill out the enclosed questionnaire or deliver it to the individual who directs high school contests. I have included a stamped self-addressed envelope for your convenience. At the conclusion of my study I will happily share my results with you and your colleagues.

Please return this questionnaire by **SEPTEMBER 14**. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

William E. Segall, Professor
Committee Chairperson

Linda Outhier
Graduate Student

UNIVERSITY _____**NAME AND TITLE OF PERSON** _____**COMPLETING QUESTIONNAIRE** _____**DATE** _____

Please answer the following questions as completely and accurately as possible. (Note the questions on the back) Thank you for your cooperation.

1. Does your college or university host a play or speech contest for secondary schools?

yes _____

no _____

(If you do not host a speech or play contest please sign and date this form now and return it.)

2. How large is the community in which your college or university is located?

| | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| under 20,000 | _____ | 100,000 - 150,000 | _____ |
| 20,000 - 50,000 | _____ | 150,000 - 250,000 | _____ |
| 50,000 - 100,000 | _____ | over 250,000 | _____ |

3. Which type of contest do you host?

play only _____

speech only _____

both _____

4. What rules govern your contest? (i.e. State Secondary School rules, self-imposed rules, national tournament rules, etc.)

5. How is material selected for your contest?

a) Entirely discretion of participating schools _____

b) Provided list of acceptable literature supplied by host university _____

c) Situation and language censorship of material _____

d) Other _____

6. Please expand on your answer in number five to provide pertinent information concerning censorship policies of your contests. (Feel free to use additional paper or send a copy of the rules and regulations of your contest that specify this.)

7. The following is a list of 10 of the past 16 Pulitzer Prize winning plays from 1971-1989. Please indicate your approval or disapproval of a secondary school performance of each of these plays in your college or university sponsored contest.

MEASURING SCALE

Please use the following Likert scale to indicate your thoughts.*

LIKERT SCALE

| | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| very strongly disapprove | mildly disapprove | very mildly approve | strongly approve | |
| 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10 | | | | |
| very strongly disapprove | disapprove | very mildly disapprove | mildly approve | strongly approve |

- _____ The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon
Marigold by Paul Zindel
- _____ That Championship Season by Jason Miller
- _____ Seascape by Edward Albee
- _____ The Shadow Box by Michael Cristofer
- _____ Buried Child by Sam Shepard
- _____ Crimes of the Heart by Beth Henley
- _____ 'Night Mother by Marsha Norman
- _____ Sunday in the Park with George by Stephen Sondheim
and James Lapine
- _____ Fences by August Wilson
- _____ The Heidi Chronicles by Wendy Wasserstein

*N - Not enough information about the play to make a decision

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY AND SURVEY OF TEN PULITZER PRIZE WINNING PLAYS

The following is a brief synopsis of each of the 10 Pulitzer Prize winning plays utilized for the purpose of this study. In addition, an acknowledgement of the language and situations which may result in censorship in high school theater is included. In most cases each play's position on the Likert scale is due to the language or situation within the play. Comments from the individuals completing the survey have been included. The plays are listed in descending order from those with greatest approval to those with the least approval.

FENCES

by August Wilson
8.5 Likert scale

Troy Maxson is a 53 year old black man trying to eke out a living in an industrialized city in the late 1950's. As most black people of the time, Troy must do the work of 10 white men just to keep his job. His wife of 17 years, Rose, stands beside him through years of hard work for little pay. Now it seems that they are beginning to make a comfortable living. But as time has been passing him by, Troy has been harboring a deep resentment of those things

that he has given up. He missed his opportunity at what seemed to be a brilliant career in baseball because of his race and age. He feels that he has fought for everything he has, including his life, and the world owes him something. Rose has always tried to understand and forgive this volatile man but is finally unable to when he brings home his bastard child for Rose to raise as her own. Although Rose agrees to raise the child, her relationship with Troy is ruined forever. When Troy finally dies, he has alienated his friends and his family in his ongoing effort to beat death.

Violence is depicted on stage. Some vulgar language and talk suggestive of explicit sexual behavior is present, as well as adult situations and extra-marital affairs.

This play received the highest approval rating. The characters are strong and the situation of people trapped by poverty is timeless. Language is not an issue in this play because it does not overshadow the theme. The adult situations that are present are handled as a fact of life.

THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN IN THE MOON MARIGOLDS

by Paul Zindel

8.43 Likert scale

This is the story of a lower income family, a mother and her two daughters living in a converted vegetable store in unclean and unkept surroundings. Both daughters attend the same high school from which their mother graduated. Ruth, the older daughter, is a compulsive liar who has recently recovered from a mental breakdown and still suffers

from seizures. Tillie, the younger, is quiet and studious. As the star pupil of the science teacher her only way out of the cycle of poverty will be through education and her love for science. As she moves in this positive direction, Beatrice, the mother, becomes more resentful of her own unfulfilled life. The paranoia she feels is a reaction to the eccentric behavior of her own family.

This is a play concerning domestic upheaval. It demonstrates how the family unit can destroy the individual rather than nurture her. This play offers little in the way of hope, and what is offered comes only through Tillie in her victory at the science fair and her tenacity at the end, as she continues to look to science for answers and a means of escape.

The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds contains no vulgar language or situations. Characters within the play drink and smoke heavily including underaged individuals. The play provides a realistic portrayal of lower-income lifestyle and attitudes. Some scenes depict cruelty and mental abuse to the elderly as well as family members.

Once again this play rates higher on the scale possibly because there is no vulgar language or adult situations. It is a study of the effect of a family. There are no explicit situations or language.

CRIMES OF THE HEART

by Beth Henley

8.36 Likert scale

This is a play involving three sisters in a small Mississippi town. Lenny, Meg, and Babe are all together again in their family home where Lenny now lives alone. They have returned because Babe has been arrested for shooting her own husband. As Lenny and Meg try to unravel the shooting of Zackery, the family history unfolds and the pains that each of these women has suffered. Lenny, the oldest, has been left an old maid to take care of their dying grandfather. Her one chance at love ended because she couldn't have children and was ashamed to tell the only lover she has ever had. Meg has been away from home for several years supposedly establishing a singing career. She returns with no career and deep regret toward the man she once cared for, Doc, who is now crippled as a result of her carelessness. Babe is trapped in a marriage with a man she doesn't love and sought comfort in a teenage black boy; a scandalous situation in Mississippi. The girls have no father and their mother committed suicide some 15 years earlier. Together they work through their problems and each of them, in her own way, finds a solution.

Drinking and smoking are prevalent on stage. There is some foul language. Adult situations are discussed, including an interracial, underage, adulterous relationship.

Language once again is not a problem within this play because it could be substituted or cut. The most controversial matter is Babe's extramarital affair with a fifteen

year old black boy. This adult situation within the play and the flippancy with which much of the theme is handled could explain why this black comedy did not rate higher on the scale provided by the college sponsors.

THE HEIDI CHRONICLES
by Wendy Wasserstein
8.23 Likert scale

This is an episodic play chronicling the life of Heidi Holland as well as the women's movement from 1965 through 1989. The play unfolds as Heidi meets the people who will forever impact her life, the two men she will forever be attracted to; Scoop a hopeless male chauvinist who loves Heidi but recognizes that she is a stronger woman than what he desires, and Peter the gentle doctor who is committed to his gay lifestyle. The play is centered around her reaction to some of the more liberal women's movement participants. Within the time span of the play Heidi changes as well as the people around her. Issues are discussed openly and unashamedly in a variety of settings. Throughout the play Heidi seems to be searching for what she really wants in life. By the end of the play perhaps she has not found it, but she is pleased with her journey and looks forward to the rest of her life.

Vulgar language is used. Drinking and smoking are depicted on stage. References to adult situations are made. Gay and lesbian relationships are discussed.

The first three ranking higher on the Likert scale all dealt with the problems the individual faced with the

immediate world around them. The Heidi Chronicles encompass a much larger scope. World issues involving women, gays, lesbians, extra-marital affairs, AIDS, and other events of our time are examined from the viewpoint of an individual and the impact they have on her. This play is exactly what it says it is, a chronicle. The many adult themes and sensitive subjects found within this play make it easy to understand how it falls below the others in approval for high school production.

THE SHADOW BOX

by Michael Cristofer
8.08 Likert scale

The Shadow Box is a play which explores the lives of terminally ill patients in a hospice atmosphere. The audience is invited into the lives of three different patients and the family and friends which surround them. The first family consists of Joe, the patient, Maggie, his wife, and Steve, their son. Joe has come to terms with his inevitable death and has invited his wife and son to the hospice. Maggie will not accept Joe's fate and, in fact, denies that he is sick at all. She has refused to tell Steve the truth about his father's condition and resents Joe's insistence that it must be done.

The second family is a single middle-aged man, Brian, his young lover, Mark, and Brian's ex-wife Beverly. Through this "family" feelings of helplessness emerge. Brian is doing everything he can to enjoy life while Mark tries to protect him from unnecessary pain and embarrassment.

Although at first Beverly seems thoughtless and cavalier, she is indeed very compassionate and helps Mark come to terms with Brian's illness. The final family is Felicity and her single daughter, Agnes. Agnes has made a lifetime of caring for her aged mother. In her attempt to make her mother's last months on earth peaceful, she has given Felicity the hope that her long dead daughter, Claire is coming to visit. Although Felicity hangs on to life by a thread, she continues to live, much to the dismay of Agnes who comes to the realization that Felicity intends to survive until she sees Claire. Much of the feelings and concerns of the characters are brought forth in conversations with an unseen interviewer. This disembodied voice seems most interested in the emotional process of death and dying and acts on behalf of the audience in exploring the subject with members of the different families.

The subject matter of The Shadow Box is grim, none of these patients are given a happy ending but they all do exhibit hope. There is some vulgar language and some characters do elude to sexual acts. Brian and Mark are open homosexuals and their relationship is discussed.

Number five in the descending list of plays is one in which the very theme may be what would prohibit its production on the high school stage. Language is not a strong factor in this play and could easily be cut with little or no sacrifice to the author's intent. The subject matter itself is what may make it unappealing for the high school

stage. Most parents as well as teachers want to protect children from the unpleasant realities of life, and would rather not see them dramatize it on the stage. Because of the very heavy drama of this play, a high school production is not strongly favored by the college and university sponsors.

'NIGHT MOTHER
by Marsha Norman
7.85 Likert scale

The action of this play takes place in exactly the amount of time it takes to perform it. The play is set in the evening, and it is the last conversation between Jessie and her mother. It is the last conversation because when Jesse says good night she will go to her room and kill herself. Early in the play the audience learns of her intentions and the rest of the drama is Mama's plea for Jessie to reconsider. Jessie is not to be swayed. She explains to her mother that she is tired of life the way it is and it isn't going to get any better. "...Riding the bus and it's hot and bumpy and crowded and too noisy and more than anything in the world you want to get off and the only reason in the world you don't get off is it's still 50 blocks from where you're going? Well, I can get off right now if I want to, because even if I ride 50 more years and get off then, it's the same place when I step down to it. Whenever I feel like it, I can get off. As soon as I've had enough, it's my stop. I've had enough". At the end of the

play, Jessie does indeed go into her bedroom and end her life.

The topic of suicide is discussed openly and freely. There is smoking on stage. It is the very nature of the subject matter which makes the play intense.

Once again subject matter of the play seems to be the deciding factor in 'Night Mother's placement on the Likert scale. Virtually the whole play hinges on Hamlet's age-old question "To be or not to be". Language or other adult situations are not present in this play. The heavy drama of Jessie's eminent suicide is simply beyond the scope of the average high school student's experience. Some university sponsors feel that this might hamper productions of these types of plays. "Adult characters; themes I prefer not to have young people attempt heavy roles far beyond their experience" (Patrick Dorn).

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE
by Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine
7.7 Likert scale

This musical is split within two acts. Act I is set in the park on the Island of La Grande Jatte. The French artist, George Seurat's life in and around 1884 is laid open for the audience to view. The authors take "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte", Seurat's most famous painting, and create lives for many of the characters represented in the painting. Seurat's mistress, Dot, comes to the realization that she will never be more to George than a model in a painting. Life evolves around them and

while Dot is an active participant, George is content to record it on canvas. He is forever challenging himself and his art, much to the chagrin of his contemporaries. What George is able to see in paintings eludes the eye of almost everyone else. By the end of Act I George Seurat has died without selling a single painting in his lifetime.

Act II begins approximately 100 years later in an art museum in the United States. Seurat's great-grandson George, through a bastard child raised by Dot and her husband, is also an artist of sorts. Like his great-grandfather before him, George is interested in exploring new expressions in art and is committed to the use of light and color. Like Seurat, George he is ridiculed by his peers and begins to doubt his own vision. In the final scene he has returned to France where the original painting was inspired. Through the magic of the theater the 1984 George meets the 1884 Dot. Dot inspires George to follow his vision, not to be tied down by the ordinary and unchallenged. When she leaves George alone on stage, he is beginning to discover and enjoy the talent innate to him.

The subject matter is difficult to follow because of the technical jargon used in discussing the art. Some adult situations and extra-marital affairs are inherent to the play.

This play is unusual in its subject matter. It is the choice of the individual to create something for art's sake. Typical of turn of the century France, most of the characters are bold in their lifestyles and sexuality is

taken for granted. Language and situation are no worse than the plays ranking higher, but the play does seem to be a more complicated piece. "My approval is not based on thematic matter or language but on how well, I believe a high school group could do these mostly difficult works. I am convinced for example that a youth production of Sunday in the Park would be a disaster"! (Dr. J.G. Severns).

SEASCAPE

by Edward Albee

7.38

This is a play about relationships within couples and relationships between other people and how they evolve. Charlie and Nancy are a middle-aged couple enjoying a vacation at the beach. Their conversation quickly turns to regrets in life; lost youth, lost chances, lost hope. Nancy still feels it can be captured, but Charlie is certain they are destined to a life of typical old age. Just when Nancy has resigned herself to the same fate, Leslie and Sarah approach. Leslie and Sarah are sea creatures from the depths of the ocean. Working through first Charlie's fear and mistrust and then Leslie's, the two couples discover the similarities and differences they share. By the end of the play Charlie and Nancy have found a new purpose in life, evolving Sarah and Nancy into the creatures they can be.

There is some discussion of extramarital affairs and some vulgar language and another difficult play to understand for the high school aged performer. This is probably, once again, why it ranks lower on the scale. There are no

inherent problems with vulgar language or situation, mention is made of extra-marital affairs, but it is passing and the play moves far beyond this. The unusual nature of the play and the representation of the sea creatures is probably why this play falls below some of the more traditional productions.

BURIED CHILD

by Sam Shepard

6.89

This play concerns a dysfunctional family. The elderly parents, Dodge and Halie, live in the home where they raised their children. Dodge is in terrible health and is resigned to lying on the couch all day allowing others to wait on him. Halie seems unaware of the situation around her and escapes by leaving the house for several days at a time. Tilden is their older son, a middle-aged man, who has returned from Mexico after getting into undisclosed trouble. Tilden seems unable to take care of himself and becomes easily confused at any confrontation. Bradley is the other son. A war veteran who lost a leg sometime after the war, Bradley is bitter and resentful because he has been left with the charge of his elderly father and inept brother. He cares for neither but takes satisfaction from bullying them into submission. The play revolves around the return of Tilden's son, Vincent. With his girl friend Shelly, Vincent has traveled across half the country on his way to Mexico to find his father. Whatever picture he had painted for Shelly about what his family was like and what they could expect to

find in no way prepared her for the utter sadness, loneliness and despair of this family. While Vincent is gone buying liquor, Shelly is left alone with the family and tries to understand them. As she waits for the return of Vincent, Shelly learns of the child years ago that was murdered by Dodge. It seems this act is what began the downfall of the family. When Vincent finally returns, he takes over as head of the household. Bradley leaves and Dodge has quietly died on the floor. Halie is upstairs calling down to Dodge just as she was in the beginning of the play. As the curtain closes Tilden is carrying the corpse of the buried child, murdered so long ago by Dodge up the stairs.

This play is full of adult themes and would probably be very difficult for a high school audience to understand. Drinking and smoking are prevalent on stage, as well as domestic violence and cruelty.

In the opinion of the researcher this is the darkest play on the list. All the other plays offer hope on some level or at least, understanding of the human condition. This play offers an endless cycle of abuse and hopelessness. The theme is too powerful for the average secondary school actor to portray.

THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

by Jason Miller

6.4 Likert scale

This is the story of five men who reunite every year to relive the championship season they enjoyed in high school

basketball. Their coach is present and still the leader and mentor of the group. Billed as winners they relive their glory days with the passion of men possessed. As the evening progresses, we see that twenty years have taken their toll. Three of the players live in their same hometown (as well as the coach) George is a failing politician who is in danger of losing his mayor post. Phil is a successful business man but is bitter at the town and distrustful of people using his money. James resents the responsibilities he has shouldered and what it has done to his life. Living away, Tom has returned to the team a cynical alcoholic. The evening gives way to backstabbing, name-calling and years of hatred boiling to the surface. Phil has had an affair with George's wife and holds the only source of money and hope for George's doomed campaign. James, after years in the background, would like to run in George's place. Tom looks on with the unique perspective of an outsider. Coach desperately tries to pull them together into the team they once were. The championship season is a lie in many different ways, but it is a lie they have lived with for so long they find it impossible to live without.

Throughout the play vulgar language is used. Excessive drinking, to the point of intoxication, and smoking are present. Adult situations are discussed in vulgar and graphic detail. Violence is portrayed on the stage.

Language is definitely an important factor in this play as these five men speak uninhibitedly of the events that have molded their lives. There are many adult themes

present and these factors combine to bring this play to the lowest rating on the Likert scale. "Self-censorship prevents doing [That Championship Season]. Anyone who says 'fuck' on the high school stage is damned forever. Language is essential to pull off this play". (Jack Garrison)

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