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## Some students just can't help acting up

SARAH HEDGCOCK Satellite Correspondent

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Playwright Edward Bond once said, "I think there is no world without theater."

Many local teens would probably agree with him.

Youth theater is a growing pastime among high school students. Some kids just do it for fun, while others are in it for a little something more.

"I do theater because it's a chance to escape from the hardships of the day," said Maggie Larkin, a senior at Booker T. Washington High School. "No matter how many people annoyed me that day, I can slip into a costume and some makeup, and forget about it for a couple of hours."

Larkin, like many involved drama students, does theater both in and outside of school.

"I'm involved with both, but I've acted more with community theater companies, namely American Theatre Company. I love working with both."

Some students, however, prefer to stick to the community theater circuit.

"I do community theater because it doesn't feel like I'm competing with my peers at school," said Jerib Kaiser, a Memorial High School sophomore. "I like having friends outside of school."

Another aspect of this is kids who don't have a drama program at their school or are homeschooled.

Clayton Bradshaw, a 13-year-old homeschooler, said he has been acting since the age of 4.

"My parents took me to see 'The Sound of Music' when I was 3 years old. That's what got me interested in acting, but I was too young to actually do anything. A year later, we went to see another show. My mom and I talked to the director afterward and I got an audition."

The rest is history.

A great outlet for kids and teens interested in drama is Clark Theatre, a strictly youth-oriented company that does youth shows, musicals, plays written for adults and even Shakespeare.

The program draws more and more students every year, Kaiser and Bradshaw among them.

Julie Tattershall, who runs the program at Clark, said that she loves working with kids.

"They like to play more than adults, and most of them are taller than me."

She said she thinks that the theater affects kids and adults the same way -- by fostering emotional awareness.

"When you're an actor, you're putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Theater teaches tolerance. It's a great way to create empathy."

Of course, Clark isn't the only youth drama company. There also are Youth Onstage, Spotlight Theatre, the Youth Services of Tulsa drama troupe and Actors' and Children's Theatre.

Clark, however, is the only company that is strictly kid-oriented *and* has its own building/performance space.

Becca Blackmore, a freshman theater major at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and a former "Clarkie," agreed.

"An actor doesn't act. Instead, they feel. They emote.

It's very real and very . . . raw," Blackmore said. "Unlike 2-D art or music, an actor doesn't have an instrument to work with.

They don't have a paintbrush. They have only what they were born with: They have their voice, their body, and their mind."

So do these teens act for fun, or are they considering it as a serious career?

Some have big Broadway dreams, Larkin, Blackmore, and Kaiser among them. Said Blackmore, "I've always considered acting for my career. For some there is medicine, for some there is teaching, for me there is acting."

Others simply do it because they enjoy it.

Bradshaw, for instance, though quite involved in various various theaters around town, would like to be an attorney when he grows up.

Amber Harrington, a drama teacher at Edison Preparatory Academy, said she thinks that most students are probably in it for fun, but that she doesn't "think kids are aware that Tulsa has a great theater scene and there are numerous opportunities to get involved."

Do drama kids hang out in exclusive groups? It depends on who you ask.

Kaiser said, yes, drama kids have a clique, because "they feel more comfortable around each other than others."

Bradshaw disagreed, saying that he hangs out much more with kids outside of the theater. Larkin finds herself in the middle: "We definitely hang out together, but it's nothing like clique. I feel like clique is negative connotation. It's just not like that. We don't shun people who are different, we just happen to be friends because we spend so much time together."

All in all, theater is a great way for teens (and adults) to both be someone else for while and tap into their own emotions. Of course, if you don't like to be onstage, you could always go see a show instead, like Clark's production of "Fools," starting at 7:30 p.m. Friday.

**Sarah Hedgecock 581-8336**

Edison sophomore  
[satellite@tulsaworld.com](mailto:satellite@tulsaworld.com)

### Related Photos & Graphics



Rebecca Blackmore played Squeaky Fromme in "Assassins" at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center in October 2005.

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Booker T. Washington High School theater students Julia Mills (top) and Dionnne Buxton improvise a scene during a drama class at the school.

GRACIE BORN / Satellite Correspondent



Jerib Kaiser (top), Alexandra Poole and Jay Exon rehearse a scene from “The Fantasticks” in November 2005.

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