

SCHOOL

THE LANDFILL MUTANT

VS. {INSERT YOUR SCHOOL HERE}

*by Gwendolyn Collins, Spenser Payne
and Alissa Watson*

**DIRECTOR'S
GUIDE**

The Landfill Mutant vs. <Insert Your School Here>

by Gwendolyn Collins, Spenser Payne and Alissa Watson

Director's Guide for Teachers

-

This Director's Guide was developed in 2020 and 2021 with the following team:

Writers	Erin McGrath Spenser Payne
Illustrator	Aileen Audette
Editor	Daina Leitold
Consultants	Melanie Dean Michael Hancharyk Loc Lu Brian Richardson
Accessibility Consultant	Hannah Foulger



Prairie Dawn Foundation



Table of Contents

Welcome	4
Rehearsal Room Eco Pledge	5
Director's Checklist	6
Pre-Production	
About the Program	7
Venue and Staging	7
Scheduling	8
<Insert Your Personalization Here>	8
Mutant Tracker	8
Reading The Play	9
Casting The Show / Assigning Jobs	10
How to Work with the Design Team	11
How to Work the Cast	
Warm Up Games	12
Acting Exercises	14
Blocking	17
Creating Movement	18
Scheduling and Line Learning	19
Useful Terms To Know	20

WELCOME TEACHER / DIRECTOR!

The Landfill Mutant vs. <Insert Your School Here> is a large project, but it was created with teachers and students in mind! Your job is to be in charge of the creative vision of this play and bring it to life with actors by telling the story in a compelling way. This guide will help you break the script down, delegate jobs, and provide exercises, tips and inspiration along the way.

Often money is the limiting factor when it comes to having all the production value you'd like. In this case, we're making our environment the limiting factor. Our challenge to you for this production is that you do it with as little cost to our planet as possible.

Green Kids' staff are also excited to mentor you and your students. Feel free to send us an email or reach out to us with questions anytime, and we'll be quick to respond.

Thank you for all your hard work, have fun, and enjoy the ride!

Sincerely,

Green Kids Inc.

REHEARSAL ROOM ECO PLEDGE

We, the Director, Performers, Stage Management and anyone else involved in rehearsals for *The Landfill Mutant vs.* _____, will do our best to be sure the production of this show has very little negative effect on our environment.

We agree to:

- **Keep the Rehearsal and Production Spaces eco-friendly.** We will consider the kinds of waste we bring into, and create at, a noon rehearsal or work session (litterless lunches on those days, please!), and use scrap paper when possible for notes.
- **Use and Re-Use what you already have.** We will only use items that are already at school or are borrowed from members of The Company. Nothing needs to be purchased to create any of the production elements.
- **Leave No Trace.** We will take care of all set, prop, costume and sound pieces, making sure we do not lose or have to rebuild them. We will return all set, prop, costume and sound-making items to their proper places at the end of rehearsal, and their respective homes at the end of the production.

Yes! We'll do this!

Signed,

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

DIRECTOR'S CHECKLIST

Follow these steps in order and you will find success!

- **Pre-Production.** Get to know the program and make a plan.
- **Read the play as a group.** Before deciding who will be actors or designers.
- **Cast the show and assign jobs.** Decide on Cast, Design Team and other roles.
- **First read-thru.** The cast members read the play while the Director and Design Team listen and find inspiration.
- **Production Meeting #1.** Meet with Design Team to discuss visions. Note their impressions and any specific hopes and ideas they have for design elements. Tell them your ideas to date. Discuss some possibilities for Set, Props, Costumes and Sound. Make a timeline – you'll want to know what your set will look like before you get too far into rehearsals.
- **First Rehearsals.**
- **Production Meeting #2.** Each Design Department presents their pitches to the director. Discuss pros and cons of all design options, on their own and in relation to other departments. Come up with a plan for the set design, ideally by choosing the options from each department's pitch that create the most cohesive overall design. By the end of this meeting, let the designers know which of the options (with, perhaps, some alterations or additions) you'd like to go with.
- **More Rehearsals.**
- **Production Meeting #3.** Each department presents their final designs.
- **Design Presentation.** Each design department presents their designs to the full company. This is an important part of the process as it lets everyone hear the same explanation of the designs and understand what to expect when all is done.
- **Rehearsals incorporating props and sounds.**
- **Technical Rehearsals.** All set, prop and sound design elements are worked into the show. Designers watch and stay on hand for last-minute changes or repairs.
- **Dress Rehearsals.** The show is run with all design elements, just like it will be with an audience.
- **Showtime!** Sit back and enjoy your hard work!



PRE-PRODUCTION

An introduction to the program, and what to plan for

About the Program

We have designed this program for grade 5-7 students to perform for their school and community. It can be done as a class project, or with two classes combined, or by a drama club. (In this guide, we will refer to the group of student participants as a class.)

Everyone in the class will have a job, from actor to designer to your personal crew of assistants. Hopefully they are not all three, but, hey if that's the case, we roll with it! Ideally, you'll split your class in two groups. One group being the designers who will design and create the set, costumes, props and sound elements, while the other group will make up your actors.

The play *The Landfill Mutant vs. <Insert Your School Here>* is supported by a Study Guide for Teachers to help with science component of the project, a Research Manual for Students to make the science most accessible for Grades 5-7, a Designer's Guide for Students to take them through the Set, Props, Costume and Sound requirements of the show, and this Director's Guide. You may find some lists in these documents helpful.

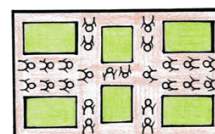
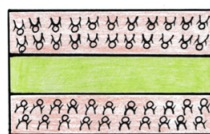
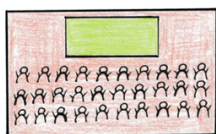
As the Director, you'll spend rehearsal time with the actors. The design team can be working quietly in the same room, or elsewhere during this time. The Designer's Guide offers some helpful "how to" info so that your students can work independently, allowing you to go back and forth, overseeing the progress of each department. In the Designer's Guide, you will notice separate workbooks for each design department. If students follow all directions and complete the exercises in order, everything you need should arrive.

Venue and Staging

This play can be performed ANYWHERE! What works best is a stage in your school, the school gym, or even an alternative space outside of school you can perform in. All you really need is a bench, a small desk, a garbage bin, a recycling bin and maybe a chair or a stool. We are giving you the freedom to make this play come to life the way it suits you best! What won't work is your crowded storage room, or the front office. You need to give yourself some space to move; there is, after all, a giant monster in the play.

How large an audience are you trying to accommodate? (*We recommend a smaller audience and more performances; this allows the design to be better seen and the actors to be better heard.*) Please keep in mind that your audience comes in all abilities. Accommodate space for them too!

Your Design Team has a unit on locations – venues and types of staging, so they will have some ideas here, too.



Scheduling

Ideally, this project requires 40-60 hours rehearsal with the actors. Actors will need to spend time outside rehearsal memorizing their lines, as well.

The work of the Design Team can be accomplished in 20-60 hours, depending on how large the team is and how detailed or large the design is.

This work covers science, language arts, drama and art curriculums and so could be a cross-class project. Maybe you can schedule rehearsal and design time over these periods.

<Insert Your Personalization Here>

We encourage you to make this play personal! While it's important the science portions of the script stay as written, you and your students are encouraged to take us up on offers to <Insert Your Personalization> throughout.

If you work at Osborne School, the play is now called "The Landfill Mutant vs. Osborne School".

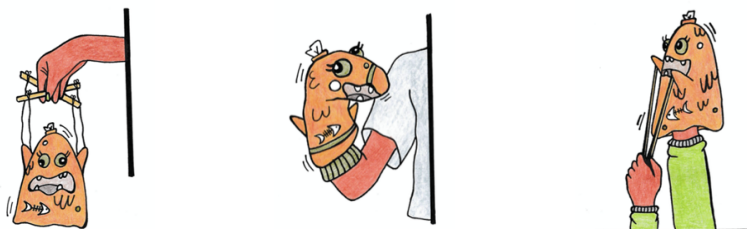
When the cafeteria daily specials say (insert your own cheese dish), that's exactly what you do.

Care to name the teachers in the script after actual teachers in your school – please do.

Mutant Tracker

There is a big monster mutant that keeps growing in the play, eating teachers and students along the way. This may sound confusing, so let's clear some things up right now:

1. In the beginning, the Mutant is Mo's science fair project. It can look very "sciencey", but can really be just a pile of things from your recycling, or empty containers from home. It does, however, need to move. This can be by a puppeteer, or perhaps it has some string that you can pull to make it move.
2. By Tuesday afternoon, the Mutant has more than doubled in size, and will only keep growing. As the mutant eats the teachers, they become part of the monster as well. They swallow them up, and they either hide in the costume, or become part of the monster.
3. Between you and your design team you will decide how this looks and works best for you



And now you're ready to get the class together and read *The Landfill Mutant vs. <Insert Your School Here>*.



READING THE PLAY

Read the play as a group BEFORE you cast the show. This is a great opportunity to create a sense of “BUY IN” from the entire group, whether they will be performing, or a part of the design team. Have different people read for each character throughout, you can assign readers scene by scene before you start or ask for volunteers at the top of each scene. Make sure *everyone* reads at some point, this will ensure they remain reasonably alert and connected to the story.

Follow up Discussion/Brainstorm

- Favourite parts and why?
- Things you don't like and why?
- Things you didn't understand.
- Potential problems to solve.

Character Discussion

Hang large sheets of paper around the room or scatter on the floor (can also be done on white boards or chalk boards but take pictures so you can keep the info), write one Character name per sheet. Create 3 columns IS/DOES/WANTS. Make sure each student has a marker or crayon and have them add something to a column for ALL the characters (no repeats on the lists). When everyone has made a contribution, go through them together. Encourage debate, make changes to the lists or additions if need be until the group feels like each character is complete. SAVE THESE LISTS.

EXAMPLE

Character: MO

IS	DOES	WANTS
Competitive Confident Smart Over-Confident	Really great science projects Makes the Mutant	To win at the science fair To change the world for the better with their invention

CASTING THE SHOW / ASSIGNING JOBS

Have a discussion about the jobs involved with this project.

Actors

An *actor's* job is to:

- Represent their character/s they are playing to the best of their abilities
- Memorize their lines by the date agreed upon
- Memorize their *blocking* on stage
- Show up on time and attend every rehearsal

Design Team

The *design team* includes:

- Set department: Design, create, borrow and build the set
- Costume department: Design character looks and assemble needed pieces
- Props department: Design, borrow, and build all props
- Sound department: Design, edit and create all sounds

Stage Manager

If you have a student or two who are not interested in performance or design, taking on an or a Stage Manager or Assistant Stage Manager is never a bad idea. They can be a helpful hand for you, especially if they are organized and responsible. They become your assistant in this project, keeping people on track and writing down notes along the way. This job is not crucial but could be a big help for you in the long run.

Stage Management duties are:

- Being "*on book*", during the rehearsal period
- Writing down blocking notes while you rehearse so its not forgotten
- Writing down other notes, or asking questions to the design team
- Grabbing props/ set pieces to work with on stage
- Playing sound cues
- Relaying messages
- Whatever you need help with that day!



How to Assign Jobs

Having had the chance to discuss all the job options and character descriptions, your students will likely have a clearer idea of what excites them. Have each student submit their top 3 choices to you. This can include top three character choices as well as top three other creative jobs. With so many options to choose from you will typically be able to find at least one job on their list that suits them. This helps ease any possible disappointment. You can also ask them to nominate a student for a specific role or job. Keep these confidential and do your best, you will not always be able to satisfy everyone's request.

The students in the play are like the students in your classroom. They are the same age, any ability, and they look like them! Please feel free to change pronouns according to the actor's preference. Keep in mind that all characters can be played by any student no matter their gender or accessibility needs. If you have a student in a wheelchair who wants to play Sam, the dance captain, they would be an excellent choice!

We encourage you to cast students to play the teacher characters, because that is always hilarious. However, if you are a small class, or need extra help, feel free to ask teachers to play themselves in the play.

HOW TO WORK WITH THE DESIGN TEAM

The Design Team's work is laid out in the corresponding workbook for that job. Each workbook has three sections. We recommend you meet with the whole design team, before giving them their first section. After sections one and two, they must have a "*pitch*" meeting with you, so you are all on the same page. After you approve / discuss their pitches, they can start to gather and create.

As this is your classroom's project, we encourage you to post designs and character charts as art in your class. There are many steps involved in creating a piece of theatre, why not show it off!

Your Production Meetings are more formal opportunities to plan and check in with the Design Team. They have this checklist to help guide their process:

- Read or listen to the play.
- Design Team Meeting.
- Production Meeting #1.
- Get a feel for the play.
- Production Meeting #2.
- Create Visuals.
- Production Meeting #3.
- Design Presentation.
- Make your designs come to life.
- Technical Rehearsals.
- Dress Rehearsals.
- Showtime!

HOW TO WORK WITH THE CAST

Warm-up Games

To help you and your students get accustomed to some general terminology, here are a couple games you can play. These are great warm-ups for everyone (cast and designers) to do together in the first 10 minutes of the session, before going off to their respective tasks.

UPSTAGE / DOWNSTAGE

All students are “on stage”. One person (this could be the teacher) is the “Caller”. It is the Caller’s job to call out a stage direction; actors must run to that area of the stage as fast as they can. Decide on how you are going to orient yourselves in the room (where is the audience?) and begin!

This chart shows the areas on the stage:

UPSTAGE RIGHT	UPSTAGE CENTER	UPSTAGE LEFT
CENTER RIGHT	CENTER STAGE	CENTER LEFT
DOWNSTAGE RIGHT	DOWNSTAGE CENTER	DOWNSTAGE LEFT

AUDIENCE

Once everyone gets a hang of the placements on the stage, add in some other fun *tableaus* or *mimes* indicating other jobs involved in the theatre.

Here are a few examples:

- Audience: Actors run “offstage” to where the audience would be, and applaud the stage.
- Actor: Actors strike a dramatic pose and say, “To be or not to be!”.
- Stage Manager: Strike an important pose and say “Thank you, take 5!”.
- Death Scene: Actors mime a dramatic death scene and fall to the stage.



What other jobs can your class think of? Anything is possible as long as the group decides together what pose and/or saying they should say. This is also an excellent time to introduce the concept of the *Design Team*: “They want me to make a whaaaa?”.

To make the game more fun, add in elimination. Whomever arrives last, or whoever goes to the wrong spot is OUT! Last one standing on stage wins!

STAGE DIRECTION OBSTACLE COURSE

1. You'll need a fairly large, empty space. It will be “the stage”.
2. Decide on how you are going to orient yourselves: where is Upstage and Downstage?
3. Everyone places one obstacle on “the stage”. These could be smaller pieces of furniture or a binder, a shoe, or even a collection of items from the recycling bin spread out on the floor. The goal is to create a course, so planning amongst those laying down their obstacles could be a good strategy.
4. Create teams (how many and how large is completely up to you!).
5. Decide on a meandering course through the obstacles, that crosses the stage.
6. Teams chose 1 team member to walk the course. This team member will close their eyes or be blindfolded. It is up to their teammates to verbally guide them through the course using STAGE DIRECTIONS ONLY ie. “move slowly down stage, now take three steps Stage Left” until they have reached the finish line. They will quickly learn all shouting at once won't work.
7. Timing each team will give you a means to determine a winner if you would like to add that element.

VARIATION - have two teams go simultaneous starting at opposite ends. Whichever team gets to their finish line first wins.

Acting Exercises

Children are much better at imaginative play than we are, but sometimes need encouragement or permission to offer up ideas that are silly and physical. The following exercises will help open up that kind of mindset.

WHY ARE YOU LATE?

A structured improvisation for 4 students at a time.

- 1 Student who is Late for school
- 1 Teacher
- 2 Students in the classroom

- The Teacher is teaching a lesson to the 2 Students in the classroom (any subject of their choice ie: the real existence of fairies and unicorns) when suddenly the late student runs on.
- The Teacher must turn completely around so the classroom students are BEHIND them.
- The student who is late must now speak to the teacher explaining why they are late HOWEVER *they* do not make up the reason... the two students who are now behind the teacher must act out (silently) silly/wild/terrifying/dramatic reasons why. Ie: 1 mimes running while 2 suddenly pretends to be a bear. "I was rushing to get to school when suddenly a bear started chasing me!" If the student who is late has NO idea what they are doing, they must make their best guess - ultimate charades.
- The teacher is encouraged to ask questions. "Where were you if you saw a bear?"
- The two students who are miming must now answer *that* question. Ie. Mimes trees. "I was in a forest".
- The student in the teacher role can decide when they have heard a reasonable explanation (or you can wrap it up if it's becoming a marathon).



STAGE PICTURES

A full-group exploration of body language and physical spacing.

As you begin blocking your show it will be important to remember and remind your cast that groups of young people NEVER stand in a straight line talking to each other. As a fun exercise give them a 2 minute free moment to go and chat with each other - let them scatter around the room. When they are comfortable, call out FREEZE. Choose two or three students who ended up in interesting positions. Ask them to maintain that freeze and call the other students around to join you. Tell them we are going to create a fictional story based just on how they are positioned together.

- What's their relationship? ("They look like sisters") – Why do you think that?
- Where could they be? ("It looks like they could be in a park") – Why?
- How are they feeling ("Sad, maybe they just had a fight") - Why?
- Asking "why" will get them paying attention to how important body language is. A character who is hunched or whose head is down might feel low status or sad, whereas a character standing tall with their shoulders back demonstrates confidence, etc.
- Carry on for as long as you like.

As you are having this discussion they will ultimately settle into new positions. Surprise them by calling out FREEZE again and choosing new people for a picture. Repeat the process. Have fun with distance. You can choose people who are far apart from each other as well. Continue to remind them that these are fictional stories, that if we say they look like boyfriend and girlfriend we DO NOT mean in real life. These reminders are important so they feel safe and free to participate and hopefully aiding their self-conscious tendencies.

You can repeat this process as often as you like.

SIT/STAND/LIE DOWN

A physical improv for 3 students.

This game will continue to encourage participants to find interesting ways of moving during a scene or finding unique positions throughout and avoiding those straight lines! As you move into blocking the play you can remind them of this game and even apply it to specific scenes to help discover possibilities.

- Three actors take the stage.
- Ask the class to provide the 3 performers with a topic they are “experts” on.
- Performers do their best to keep up a conversation or debate about this subject. It can be fiction and their knowledge can and should be 100% made up, ie: experts on time travel.
- At any given moment 1 student must be sitting, 1 student must be standing, 1 student must be lying down.
- They should change positions as often as they can during the debate, AND the other two have to be ready so they can adjust - there MUST always be someone SITTING, STANDING and LYING DOWN.
- You can enlist an audience member to referee, making sure there is always someone sitting, standing and kneeling.



Blocking

Blocking is the movement of the actors on the stage for the performance of the play. This is every movement an actor makes, including the movement of set pieces to change scenes, falls under the term of blocking.

Blocking should:

- Reflect the authentic movements of the actors/ characters.
- Reflect the relationships of the characters
- Give focus to characters at the appropriate moments
- Create effective stage pictures
- Allow the audience to see what is on stage.
- Make effective use of the set

You are welcome to “pre- block” the scenes, mapping out the movement of the characters on stage, or you may also choose to have your actors come up with their own in rehearsal. We would suggest reminding them of Stage Pictures, have a quick conversation about what the scene is about and also play a few of the acting exercises in the scenes (like sit/ stand/lie down) to keep them moving (no straight lines!). You may be surprised what they discover! Having them take the lead will also allow you time to check in with your design team.

Things to keep in mind when blocking:

- Lines across the stage are easy, but no one talks in real life in a line. Keep it interesting with levels, and space. (Try out the games listed above.)
- Depending on the venue you will be performing in, you might have a few sightline issues. Is there a giant pole blocking some of the audience's view? If the audience is sitting on the floor, can they see the actor sitting in the chair? Walking and sitting in different areas in the audience in the rehearsal process, will help you track this problem.
- The stage directions written in the script are there to help you out, however you may also make adjustments to suit your needs.
- Help them discover and make choices based on what the character wants (check your character charts!). Avoid phrases like “try saying your line like this” and instead offer “Your character seems to feel really badly, could you try that line like you are apologizing?”
- Decide where you want your audience to sit, especially in a gym setting! Will they be in chairs or on the floor? How close do you want the first row to be to your stage? It can be beneficial to give yourself extra space, to allow for excited audience members creeping closer or to provide additional space for mobility needs.

Once a scene has been blocked, the actors should write down in their scripts where they moved, so they will not forget! Write these notes in pencil, as blocking might need to be changed as the rehearsal progresses. Refer back to their notes, and remind them part of learning their lines, is also learning the blocking.

If you are working with a stage manager, get them to jot down blocking notes as a backup.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, remember that Green Kids is here to mentor you. Send us an email and we will help you out!

Creating Movement

If you find yourself with a group that struggles with the dance section the following exercise can help you guide them to generate some fun moves. A similar process can also be used to create some signature movements for The Mutant.

- As a group come up with a fun word that describes the dance scene or creature ie. PARTY or CELEBRATE, for the Mutant maybe a word like OOZE.
- Send them off on their own for no more than 2-5 minutes and ask them to create a three part gesture that feels like that word. Ie if the word is “party” my move might include 1) Lifting my hands above my head 2) Wiggling my fingers 3) Jumping in the air. (Remind them to keep them simple, especially if you have some dancers in the group. You want everyone to be able to succeed)
- Have them rehearse their 3 moves until they can repeat it with ease and could loop it over and over if they need to.
- Bring them back together and have them share their moves and teach them to the group. (If you have a lot of students break them into smaller groups for this section)
- Once everyone in their group can confidently do each move, have them work together to decide what order the moves work best in, can they do them in a sequence.
- What are different positions we can be in as a group and still perform the sequence? Circle, triangle, facing in, back to back? Have them try it at different paces, choose a piece of music to do it to. Be bold and silly. Once they are confident with the selected movements you can use them in any way to best suit your needs.
- If you are using this to create movement for the Mutant have them explore ways to do the movements in tight groupings. Add additional challenges like, can you all connect your elbows and move stage left 5 steps (some people maybe walking backwards) then pause and do a section of your movements.
- It’s important to remember there is no right or wrong way to utilize these actions. It’s merely a jumping off point.



Scheduling and Line-Learning

Ideally you will determine which scenes you are going to work on in advance of meeting for that rehearsal. That way you can establish what your expectations are for them in terms of knowing their lines and asking them to come prepared with some ideas about things their character could be doing.

Line learning is the hardest part. Breaking it into chunks and providing deadlines is helpful. As a general rule, once you have worked on a scene and have established the blocking, the next time you revisit it they should have their lines memorized. Carving out time for them during rehearsal to work on them is great - when cast members are not being used for the current scene you are working on, they should be scheduled to run their lines with a partner.

Regularly schedule line run reviews. Have yourself or a student be on book while the cast members quickly speak through their lines up to where you have rehearsed so far. As you get further along in the process you can have them do this on their feet. Very quickly just walk through their blocking while speaking their lines (it's great if this gets silly as long as they are getting their lines out). This is referred to as a "Walking Italian" and helps them cement lines and movement. This is also a great thing to do when your attention is needed elsewhere.

Prepare your performers to continue with their work regardless of audience reactions/ participation, to ensure that audience members with sensitivities or surprising reactions are welcome. This is a valuable lesson in working and enjoying live theatre.

USEFUL TERMS TO KNOW

Actor	The person playing the character on stage.
Blocking	The movement or basic road map of actors on the stage for the performance of the play.
The Company	Everyone working on the show, from the director, the actors and the other designers and assistants.
Costumes	The outfit the actor wears as their character on stage.
Design Team	The people who are designing the set, props, costumes and sound.
Director	The person in charge of overseeing the vision of the play. They oversee the design team and works with actors directly, guiding them to a performance that will best tell the story.
Dress Rehearsal	The rehearsal before the show is performed in front of an audience where actors practice the show in costumes, with all set pieces, props and sounds.
Fourth Wall	The imaginary wall between the actors and the audience. You as a director may choose to break the fourth and have the actors interact with the audience.
Line Run	Actors recite just the lines of the play, no movement involved. This should be done once the actors are off book.
Mime	Acting without any props or sounds.
Off Book	When actors have memorized their lines and no longer need to read their script, they are considered off book.
On Book	A person located off stage who follows along in the script, ready to chime in when an actor forgets their line is 'on book'.
Prop	An object used by an actor on stage.
Props Bin or Props Table	A place where a prop is stored when not in use on stage.
Rehearsal	The time spent practicing and creating the play with the actors.
Rehearsal Space or Room	A clear open space you can work in with set pieces and actors.
A Run	Doing the show from the beginning to the end.



Set	Everything that decorates the stage to create the location(s) in the story. It is the furniture, walls, doors, floor, fences, etc.
Sightlines	All of the angles from which the audience views the stage.
Sound Sting	A tiny snippet of music.
Stage	The place in a room where the action / acting takes place.
Stage Directions	A description or suggestion of movement written in the play.
Stage Manager	Organizes daily events and communicates between departments.
Stand-In	An item used to represent a prop before it's ready.
Tableau	A frozen picture on stage.
Technical Rehearsal	One of the final rehearsals where actors try all technical elements involved in the play like sounds, and lights.
Venue	The place where your performance takes place.

