

WEAVING TOGETHER THE CURRICULUM  
THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF DRAMA IN THE CLASSROOM:  
PRESENTING *SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY*

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# CHAPTER I

## BEGINNING THE PROJECT

### Introduction

Teaching is often considered a repetitive journey of discovery. Each year brings some of the same sights, stops, and excursions, yet every so often, just as you turn the corner, there is something you never expected to see or experience. The changes that come with every successive new school year make the journey interesting and make teachers more creative in the classroom. After seventeen years in education, I felt I had turned many corners. I had worked for four different school districts in two different parts of the state, taught approximately twenty different courses in three different subject areas, and advised numerous school activities. Surprising as it seems, my biggest change (and challenge) as an educator was just around the next corner.

After teaching at Jackson High School for three years, serving as a Speech, Theatre, and English teacher, while directing the speech and debate program, I was asked to consider an opportunity: retire from coaching speech and debate after sixteen years and take over the theatre program in our Jackson School for the Arts (JSA). Although I had taught an elective introductory course in theatre for several years and had directed musicals and plays in the past, this was a completely new adventure to navigate. After months of weighing the factors, I told my administration that I would agree to take over the helm of the theatre program with some changes. These changes

or, goals would lead me to pursue the project of directing the Edgar Lee Masters' classic poetry collection, *Spoon River Anthology*, as a stage production.

### The State of Arts Education Today

Integrating arts into the regular school curriculum can appear to be a very daunting task. Academic pressures, along with administrative woes, have been eating away at the inclusion of the arts in education for years. Gone are the days when all schools provided time for basic arts education. Schools deal with meeting state standards, achieving at high levels on standardized tests, and finding the funds to make all of this education happen. Teachers struggle to find the time to cover the depth of material that must somehow fit into a short class period. Many of the teachers I have taught with over the last two decades express frustration at some point during each school year due to the vast quantity of concepts that must be taught. Arts in the classroom seem like the last area a teacher has the ability to add into the typical school day.

It is not unrealistic for educators to avoid or even fear the integration of the arts into their educational plans. There are several reasons for this source of frustration. The number of students per classroom in America's schools is growing due to budgetary cuts. The 2009-2010 school year will find the Seattle Public Schools with 172 less teachers and certified staff as noted in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Although the school district is large, this major reduction, which was forced on the school district due to cutbacks, is drastic. Seattle Public is only one example of the growing number of educational staff cut backs in the country. Staff reductions will ultimately lead to more students per teacher in America's classrooms. This increase in the number of students may leave teachers asking "How can I possibly meet the needs of all of these students?"

Large classes take a toll on the teacher's ability to manage time, requiring more time to be devoted to instructions, task management and behavioral management, thus leaving less time for actual instruction"(Benbow, et al). The stakes are high for both students and teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom.

Many schools find that when time and money are short, arts are the first courses to be pared down or eliminated. Often when school districts feel the budget cuts, they are pushed to cut the arts first, since they are not state tested subjects like math and science (Hurley). In the state of Massachusetts, the Boston Foundation found that as students progress into the higher grades in 143 of the Boston area schools they lose more access to arts courses (Aucoin). Despite the benefits of an arts education, many districts have simply chosen to say no to the arts. The Ohio Arts Council (OAC) discovered in a survey of Ohio schools that those schools with larger student populations have more funding and more student arts programs available. This would seem promising, however of the 849 schools in the survey, 344 have no theatre programs and 229 schools only have one theatre course available. With only one-third of Ohio's schools having substantial theatre programs, there is definitely a cause for concern. Although the study found that the majority of the high school arts fieldtrips were to see plays, attending plays once or twice during one's high school career is not a significant arts education.

Arts programs are being cut to increase academic time. However, arts, too, are academic, despite the fact that no standardized tests are given to score achievement. Students who participate in arts programs are "four times more likely to win" scholastic



honors in their school, to compete in math and/or science fairs, or to win an award for essay or poetry writing. They are “three times as often” elected to a school leadership position and achieve noteworthy school attendance (Heath). When schools cut arts programs, they are cutting away opportunities for not only achievement in the arts, but opportunities that build skills necessary to be successful and achieve in many other areas that are important to academic success.

There is hope for the arts despite the fact that many students are missing arts opportunities in their schools. With arts being on the “chopping block”, there are still school districts that have decided, despite the time and finance crunch, that the arts will be given their due in their schools. Schools are finding other ways to make the arts happen. Organizations like the county arts organization, Arts in Stark, strive to provide funds for schools committed to arts education. Jackson Local Schools, the school district where I am employed, was fortunate to receive a grant from Arts in Stark, a SmARTS grant, for three years beginning with the 2008-2009 school year, the year I took on the new role of Theatre Director at Jackson High School.

#### The State of the Jackson Theatre Program

Established in 2001, JSA is an integrated arts program that exposes 9th-12th grade students to visual art, theatre, dance, and instrumental and vocal music. Students in the JSA participate in an extended school day in order to meet both the graduation requirements of Jackson High School and to receive an arts education. This dual program is accomplished through integration of the arts with core academic subjects. Students have the opportunity to participate in the extracurricular activities of Jackson

High School and still fulfill their extra coursework by starting their school day 50 minutes earlier than the rest of the student body.

The freshmen in the program take a minimum of one class in each area of the arts: music, theatre/dance (combined as one course), and visual art, as well as a course known as Arts Foundation. Arts Foundation weaves the arts with the history and language arts requirements of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Sophomore students have the opportunity to specialize more in the area of the arts they wish to pursue in more depth. Sophomore students continue to take a JSA English class that strives to connect the humanities as part of the curriculum. The Visual Arts curriculum contains focus courses that students can study: Drawing, Jewelry, Photography, Sculpture, and Painting. In the Music department, students can find opportunities in several choruses, show choir, music theory, marching, concert, and jazz bands, and work with private instructors available to tutor during the school day.

As students advance in the Theatre/Dance area, they may choose to continue in one or both areas as juniors. The junior theatre class is a production course. Prior to my appointment to the position of Director of Theatre, students in this course worked on a childrens' production they wrote that was about 10-15 minutes in length. The production was taken to elementary schools in the district each December for presentation. The students also presented two to four one-act plays on the evening of the Arts Extravaganza. These presentations comprised the theatre productions at Jackson High School, along with the musical produced by the Vocal Music department each fall. Only the students in Theatre III could be in the childrens' show while the one acts were limited to about 10-15 students from the entire school. Junior students in the

arts school, no matter what they choose to focus on in the program, all participate in a bi-monthly Junior Seminar where they listen to speakers from all the areas of the arts who are working or studying in those areas. These engaging presentations provide the students with insight into various careers they may pursue in the arts and also illustrate how the arts are connected to one another. These connections assist the theatre program so that all the students understand how each area of the arts and the academic curriculum has applications in theatre. These lectures or speakers also assist students as they make their choices for courses and alternative learning opportunities in their senior year.

Currently, no fourth year course in Theatre or Dance exists, although there are courses for all other arts areas at the senior level. To complete the JSA program, senior students participate in a rigorous internship in the arts. They have the opportunity to study in one or several areas of the arts in the community. They meet weekly with the director of the arts school and discuss their experiences. It is a fantastic exploration of the arts and their impact on the community. It also exposes students to the variety of career opportunities that exist in the arts.

The JSA has grown dramatically in the last eight years. When the program started in 2001, some theatre courses had as few as six students enrolled. During the 2008-2009 school year, the freshmen level Theatre/Dance course had nearly 40 students enrolled. During the 2009-2010 school year, JSA expects a larger entry level class. This growth is only possible due to the support of the Jackson Local School District administration and the voters in the district. Many programs were in danger of

being eliminated over the past five years when the school district lost some of the funding they received from the state of Ohio and school levies repeatedly failed. The Jackson Local community recognized the impact of the arts in the schools, voiced its opinion when funding was in jeopardy, and eventually passed a crucial school levy. The school district supported the program throughout the tough financial crunch. With the district's support, the arts school has grown both in enrollment and courses available. JSA has enrolled students for the 2009-2010 school year in Dance IV. The school district is also considering the addition of the International Baccalaureate (IB) course of Theatre. IB is a selective program of study that Jackson High School has been invited to participate in during the 2010-2011 school year. The arts are one of the components of the IB program. Dual credit in Theatre is also being pursued as a potential theatre course opportunity that would be an option for senior students who wish to earn college credit in high school.

The benefits of having a three-tier Theatre curriculum include having students at the highest level who have experience in a variety of theatre positions, both on and off stage. Students in Theatre III had previously been expected to select, cast, direct, and provide technical support for a small production each school year. Due to the smaller number of students that had previously been enrolled in Theatre/Dance II and Theatre III, all students who were enrolled in the program had a fairly large part (if they wished or were required to by the course) in the production. With the growth of JSA, and with the increased enrollment in the higher level courses, the choral department sponsored musical and one additional theatrical production were insufficient at meeting the needs of the large student body. Selecting a full-length drama production would provide more

opportunities for students. The students in higher level theatre courses could design and build more elaborate scenery, create lighting designs for productions, direct dramatic literature that could include large casts, engage student artists to use scenic painting skills, and supervise the producer responsibilities of the productions. This kind of involvement will be essential for students opportunities by the 2010-2011 school year, with 24 students interested in enrolling in the Theatre III course.

Jackson High School has paid stage crew positions for almost all events held in the Center for the Performing Arts. These crew positions are available to any student who volunteers to help construct and run the fall musical production. Ironically, only a few of the stage crew members are in the JSA. All students in the JSA already have a requirement to be involved in the fall musical. These requirements include opportunities to perform in the actual production: acting or playing an instrument in the pit. Younger students have requirements that can be as simple as ushering, selling tickets, or helping with the distribution of posters for advertising. Advanced students have the opportunity to organize costumes, apply makeup, or assist with hair styling during the show.

The faculty and staff of the JSA provide a wealth of experience and expertise for the productions presented each year. This expertise includes a technical director, a costumer, a producer, a program designer, a musical director, and a stage director for the musical. The Theatre Program has been designed to include a combined entry year of introductory acting and dance, a second year of technical theatre and dance, and finally a production course. However, classroom experience and “book learning” can only take instruction so far. Theatre is about doing. I believe that students should

experience all aspects of producing a play and I made this a goal for the theatre program when I took over the director position.

It seemed necessary, first of all, to revisit the goals of the courses in the theatre curriculum. Shouldn't the students in JSA be taught to design and construct a set? With that in mind, shouldn't the students who have learned about costume design in a higher level theatre course be in charge of researching, designing, constructing, and organizing the costumes for a production, and be responsible for designing and constructing the set for a show they produce? I envisioned a theatre program that was hands on and not simply a study of theatre without any application of skills.

In my first year as Director of Theatre at Jackson High School and JSA, I had several goals. Each goal was something that I felt was achievable through selecting the appropriate production for my first full-length production at Jackson High School. One immediate goal was to develop an audience base. In order to accomplish an increase in our audience, I would also need to work toward an additional goal. I would need to find a way of making theatre important to staff and students. I would need to integrate theatre more into the core academics of the high school. Growing the theatre program through cross-curricular integration would make theatre more valuable to the staff and assist in meeting state standards in the various curricular areas. Cross-curricular integration would make students see theatre as a means to an end.

In addition to theatre, I also teach English. For the past eight years I have taught 9<sup>th</sup> and/or 10<sup>th</sup> grade English. During the first two years of high school English, teachers work to prepare students for the Ohio Graduation Test. It is considered a staff responsibility to work toward student success on these tests. Since state funding,

district ranking, and teacher employment are all affected by these test scores, teachers take the charge of improving student tests scores very seriously. Time is limited to complete the study of curriculum at each grade level in all of the core academic areas. In the area of English, students must prepare for two Ohio Graduation Tests: Writing and Reading. This preparation must be accomplished in the same amount of time that other core academic areas, Social Studies, Math, and Science, have to prepare for only one test. All of the English teachers in Jackson High School, particularly the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, are charged with getting students ready for these high stakes tests a priority. The test score expectations of the high school were a consideration in my choices of literature to produce as a theatre director.

Trying to accomplish so many goals in the first year as Director seemed very daunting. I had to find a way to manage it along with five preparations and six courses that I was now teaching. Looking at all of the pieces in the puzzle, I realized there was a way to connect the various aspects of theatre, enlarge the scope of the picture for the students and still factor in the goals of the other departments of the school community. I went on to share my “vision” with members of the school administration who were extremely supportive of the goals I had articulated for the project and encouraged me to implement my plan during the 2008-2009 school year. This became possible with funding through the county arts organization, Arts in Stark, in the form of a SmARTs grant.

The JSA/JHS theatre program is comprised of three levels. The students in the third or highest level of theatre, which is a production course, are required both by the State of Ohio and the Jackson High School curriculums to direct peers in a production.

Although the students in Theatre III would direct peers in small acting productions, the students did not have a true directing experience. The productions were typically done on an empty stage with almost no scenery, technical or scenic elements. I realized that I had the opportunity to continue meeting the requirements of the state and local curriculums and also to assist students in achieving at a higher level while aiding other departments in meeting their academic standards. I also hoped to improve the production experience of the Theatre III students. I knew these changes would require financial support from the School for the Arts.

#### The SmARTs Grant

The SmARTs grant was awarded to Jackson Local Schools for three years. The grant was for \$10,000 each school year, for a total of \$30,000. The ultimate goal of the grant was to integrate the arts into the curriculum. The grant's purpose was to use the exhibit at the Canton Museum of Art entitled *Kimono as Art: The Landscapes of Itchiku Kubota* as a catalyst for arts inspired activities in both core academic and arts courses. This monumental exhibit would only be on view in two locations in the United States.

This rare opportunity to see Kubota's lifework was definitely a worthwhile experience for the JSA students, but the exhibit could also be used as a catalyst for other learning experiences. The theme for the grant was entitled "Life is a Tapestry." The primary focus of the grant was to look at the way art weaves its way into one's life through a multitude of experiences (see Appendix E). Simply put: Life is art.

Using funding from the SmARTs grant and the theme of "Life is a Tapestry," I knew that the opportunity was available to produce a larger theatre production that



could assist in achieving some of the goals for the Jackson theatre program. The work of literature I selected for this endeavor was Edgar Lee Masters' poetry collection, *Spoon River Anthology*. This classic collection of poetry functions in a similar fashion to a tapestry, consisting of many threads woven together. Each of the poems represents a citizen of the fictitious town of Spoon River. The stories, filled with tragedy, joy, and history, are woven together to create another form of fabric art-- a patchwork quilt. A scrap or patchwork quilt has many different pieces of fabric. Some pieces are shiny from a fancy gown and others are rough after being cut from an old calico dress or work shirt. When sewn together, the fabric represents the variety of people whose lives make up a community.

#### Theatre Philosophy

There are different philosophies about how to organize and conduct a theatre program. Although I enjoy having successful productions, in terms of ticket sales and public opinion, educational theatre cannot really make box office revenues the goal. Educators have a responsibility to provide students with a variety of educational and performance opportunities. Students should be exposed to both contemporary and classic literature, large and small cast productions, as well as acting and technical opportunities. Finally, Theatre should be something which engages the entire school, not just the arts school. Theatre should not segregate students, but instead, bring them together. Theatre involves every area of the curriculum. All students should get to see how their favorite subjects can be used to make Theatre happen.

### Importance of the Study

The Kimono project, as the grant study became known, was a way of uniting the JSA staff in a common purpose: focusing each teacher's efforts to tell a common story. Jackson High School is so large that it is unlikely for students and staff to have meaningful interactions with many of the other people in the building. Rather than working and learning in a community setting, it often seems that the staff is operating in a fragmented space. The English teachers may only know what goes on in their own classrooms or perhaps that of their fellow department members. The teachers in the Social Studies department may not see a relation between what they are teaching and what the English department is teaching. Making a connection between the academic disciplines is not always possible, but to make these connections feasible, an effort has to be made by the staff to collaborate. Collaboration, however, takes time and planning. Little time is available in a regular school day for this type of team planning to occur.

It seemed as though the staff would be most interested in the proposed collaboration if it assisted them in the areas of their curriculum that already had a connection to other curricular areas. A common thread for all core academic areas is the Ohio Graduation Test.

The project was also important for the theatre program itself. The theatre program was growing, but little had changed in terms of what the theatre program offered the students in terms of performance opportunities. Theatre seemed to be the uniting factor. Provide integration of curriculum with the theatre production, produce a large drama, make it an opportunity for more students to be involved, and finally unite the production with the SmARTs grant's goals.

## Goals of the Project

With the selection of *Spoon River Anthology*, the following goals were articulated to be accomplished:

1. The students in theatre will create a script for a large cast from the 244 poetic monologues in the collection. This will enable many younger students to take part in the play as actors (see Appendix D).
2. Curriculum units will be created for the high school English teachers to tie the selected poems into their preparation of students for the OGT.
3. With a work of literature that covers decades of American history, teachers and students in the American History classes will benefit from the production.
4. By making the school staff and the student body find connections in *Spoon River Anthology*, opportunities will be created for various curriculum areas to participate in theatre.
5. Students in the theatre program will be involved in directing, acting, and technical aspects of the production in their classes and in an extracurricular capacity.
6. Jackson High School will produce a full-length drama after a long absence from the school arts program.

CHAPTER II  
APPROACHING THE CURRICULUM THROUGH  
*SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY*

*Choosing Spoon River Anthology*

Growth was the key consideration in all facets of choosing *Spoon River Anthology* for the spring production in 2009. With the growth of the Theatre program in the past several school years, the ability to cast a large number of student actors in the production was a primary concern in the selection of a play.

The publishing company was a factor in producing a play for the school as well. Most publishers have very tight constraints on the flexibility a director has with the script of the play itself. By choosing a collection of narrative poems, the Theatre III students were able to organize poems by theme and “family trees” into interesting vignettes, each serving as its own Act. There would be a total of five Acts.

There are 244 poems in Edgar Lee Master’s collection. The Theatre III class was divided into five directing teams. Prior to the auditions, each directing team was asked to choose twenty to twenty-five poems they would like to use for their act. It was inevitable that directing teams would want to include common groups of monologues. There was definitely some conflict at first between some of the directors. Many of the students felt a sense of ownership when it came to the poems. Student directors had their favorite poems and they each wanted to have the opportunity to present all of their

favorites. The process to divide the poems for each directing team took a great deal of time and discussion. In the students' preliminary research and readings of the text, they spent several hours after school one day selecting the monologues. The directing team had a script and was ready to move forward with the next phase of the production--auditions.

### Involving the High School Staff and Their Classrooms

Producing a theatrical event at a high school involves many considerations. I knew that I had two main objectives for the student body at Jackson High School. First, I wanted to provide the opportunity for as many students as possible to be involved in the production of the play. According to Nellie McCaslin, the author of *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*, "Drama is participant centered whereas theatre is audience centered" (7). Since both participant and audience participation is necessary in high school theatre, in my opinion, it seemed crucial to meet BOTH aspects of McCaslin's concept in *Spoon River Anthology*. This was accomplished easily with the selection of *Spoon River Anthology*. There was the potential to include many curriculum areas. The production could involve students in technical and acting positions. The original goal of the project was to use a dramatic work of literature to collaborate with multiple areas of the school curriculum. A secondary goal I wanted to achieve was to make the play production accessible to as many students as possible. Cecily O'Neill and Alan Lambert, in their book *Drama Structures*, take the concept of accessibility a degree farther. "Drama... works from the strength of the group. It draws on a common stock of experiences and in turn enriches the minds and feelings of individuals within

the group” (13). This really was a major component of the production: to draw on the strengths of the group, their common experiences, but also their individual experiences. This started by making the production “open” to other departments in the high school. The staff involvement began with planning in the spring of 2008 with the JSA staff. The JSA staff knew that they wanted to make this production fit the parameters of the SmArts grant, but they also wanted to incorporate the play into their classes’ curriculum for the year as well. Involving the remainder of the high school staff began with announcements I made at staff and department meetings in the fall. These announcements were followed up with e-mails directed to the entire staff. The departments most interested in this cooperative learning experience were diverse and the number exceeded my expectations.

The English department and the Social Studies departments both expressed interest in participating in the production by incorporating it into department classrooms. These were the curricular areas that I thought were obvious, but when I opened the production up to other areas of the curriculum, I was surprised by the departments that wanted to be involved. By the weekend of the production, the English department, the Social Studies department, the Media Center department, the Visual Arts department, the Instrumental Music department, the Business and Computer department, the Family and Consumer Science department, and the Career and Tech department were all involved in the production in some capacity.

The high school had a large number of new staff members with little or no teaching experience. I had hoped to connect with these staff members for the opportunity to collaborate. Unfortunately, only a few of them were teaching ninth and

tenth grade students, although they were almost all in the English and Social Studies departments.

When asking staff members to participate in this collaboration, many felt they did not have the time to dedicate to it, despite my intent to make it fit their curriculum. Also, to deviate from the typical way they taught made some uneasy. The project involved experimenting with teaching techniques and student experiences not commonly used. Also, staff members also felt that collaborating on this production would take up too much classroom time. I understood the dilemma, yet felt frustrated by the lack of true interest. I had to broaden the scope of how I would involve other departments.

#### English and Social Studies Departments

Sophomore students at Jackson High School are required to take both a course in American History and a course in American Literature. This appears to be the most natural integration of humanities courses in the four years of high school. With the implementation of the Ohio Graduation Test and the creation of common Ohio State Educational Standards, teachers and administrators are on the lookout for ways to meet these assessments at the highest level (see Appendix F).

The curriculum and the production seemed woven together, as the SmARTs grant so aptly aimed to illustrate. I started to review the ninth and tenth grade Ohio Academic Standards for Social Studies and Language Arts. A connection I had overlooked is how precisely the time period of *Spoon River Anthology* connected to the time period of American History that the sophomore Social Studies classes studied.

The *Academic Content Standards K-12 Social Studies* focuses the tenth grade content on the United States during the time period from 1877 to the present (Ohio Department of Education, Social Studies 11). The time period of *Spoon River Anthology* spans from the end of the Civil War into the early part of the twentieth century.

In the dramaturgy work, the themes of *Spoon River Anthology* were a significant part of American society and the changes it was experiencing during the time period noted above. More history courses seemed to be delving into diaries, personal experiences, and the plight of the average man. *Spoon River Anthology* seemed to share the inner struggle of the common man and this is where the Social Studies courses could benefit from studying *Spoon River Anthology*. History textbooks chronicle numerous examples of mankind's struggles for freedom, employment and financial security. A particular demographic mentioned in Masters' work were the immigrants and their search for identity in the United States. The state standard for tenth grade that examines "People in Societies" looks at the issues of immigration in the United States (168). One of the critical aspects of studying immigration is to learn how the immigrants lived and found employment once in the country. Immigrant women were in the middle of this struggle for income and social recognition. Masters' shares controversial issues of the immigrant plight, specifically the women of Spoon River who seemed to struggle more in the workforce of the time period.

"Working class women were forced to move frequently...they made less money for the same job and often worked themselves to exhaustion" (Lears 76). Immigrant women often felt the sting of this role in the world of labor. The poem "Elsa Workmen" illustrates the plight of working women, specifically the immigrant women



(Masters 110). She “was a peasant girl from Germany, blue-eyed, rosy, happy and strong.” (110). Her name, Workmen, is ironic since the world of work was controlled by men. In her world, where she was tied to her job for security, everything changed when her employer took advantage of her. In her precarious state, she had nowhere to go, so her employer’s wife agreed to take her child and pretend it was her own. As the poem implies, Workmen had no choice but to turn away from her child for survival. A poem like “Elsa Workmen” provides a perfect connection to the tenth grade Social Studies Academic Standards. It opens the door for research into working conditions, the plight of the immigrant, and women’s rights.

“Nancy Knapp” shows the plight of the American farmer and family (Masters 77). Knapp is struggling with her husband to buy land, farm it, and make a living for their family. Poor crops, natural disasters, and health issues destroyed the family’s dreams and their farm. The poem opened discussions regarding the struggle of the American farmer, the role of women in rural America, financial struggles and woes of the time period, and even the importance of geography and how it affects farming.

Racism before, during, and after the Civil War was something that continued to plague African-Americans. The epitaph, “Shack Dye” exemplifies the stereotypes that existed in Dye’s time and how he attempted to counteract the racism through humor (Masters 175). Editorial cartoons that promoted racial stereotypes and racism from the Civil War through the Jim Crow laws of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were shared with the cast. Students were also shown minstrel show videos to help illustrate the perpetuation of racism through entertainment.

Although *Spoon River Anthology* is a work of fiction, there are ties to real life events. Present Abraham Lincoln is mentioned several times in the text. In the poem entitled “Hannah Armstrong”, the speaker mentions her former relationship with Lincoln and how she used it to secure her son’s release from the Army (Masters 215). Although Lincoln did know Hannah Armstrong, the details of the relationship were slightly different. According to writer John Hollander in his introduction to *Spoon River Anthology*, Lincoln did discharge Armstrong’s son, but with far more involvement from other people and without a trip to Washington D.C. on her part (Masters xxvii). Armstrong’s “story” in poetry form is enough to intrigue a novice historian to do research regarding the saga of families who had loved ones serving in the Civil War.

Continuing the study of the Civil War, the epitaph of “Jacob Goodpasture” examined the experiences of a father who lost his son in the war at the battle of Fort Sumter (Masters 46). This poem was a fairly accurate account of families that dealt with the loss of loved ones due to war. Modern poetry inspired by the war in the Iraq was provided to students in the cast for comparison.

I offered to come to classrooms and present the material using Social Studies state academic standards. It seemed like an obvious time to review for the OGT since it would only be a few weeks after the production was staged. The Social Studies department was also offered lesson plans that they could use or modify for OGT review. Rather than do a complete unit on the poetry collection, Social Studies teachers recommended the play, discussed the era with their students, and one actually shared

several of the poems in class, pointing out the ones with historical figures and events (as noted above). The Social Studies teachers served as great publicists for a very historically relevant play. I also found that many of the staff in the Social Studies Department were available to consult with the student directors for advice about time period of the play and the dramaturgy that they were investigating.

The Jackson High School English department emphasized the importance of the play's production in their classroom. Teachers collaborated in varying degrees. For the sophomores in the JSA, the English teachers wanted to focus the collaboration to be poetry. The staff felt that that was a difficult area of literature on the Reading portion of the Ohio Graduation Test. As noted in the *Academic Content Standards K-12 English Language Arts*, Reading Applications, specifically those applied to the literary text are important at the sophomore level. Universal themes, point of view, irony, mood, tone, sound devices, and figurative language are essential terms to be able to apply to various works of literature (245).

Both freshmen and sophomore English teachers applied the curricular units for *Spoon River Anthology* in their classrooms. Nearly three-hundred students had exposure to the literature of *Spoon River Anthology* in an English class at Jackson High School prior to the school's production during the 2009- 2010 school year. Although this was by no means all of the ninth and tenth grade English students at Jackson High School, feedback from the students and staff was extremely rewarding and positive. Most students felt that they understood both the dramatic structures and poetic devices far more through experiencing them in the play than they do simply reading and listening to those topics in class (see Appendix E).

The English Department staff also functioned as an advisory board for the project. I did not have a great deal of experience in teaching American Literature, so several of the members of the English staff assisted me in answering questions about dramaturgy, and in particular, the connection between Edgar Lee Masters and other key literary figures of the time period. Many curriculum concerns and questions I had were discussed and clarified with these more experienced members of my department.

The English department was most interested in the integration of Master's poetry and the OGT. The JSA sophomore English teachers did the most to integrate the production into their classrooms. Students wrote play reviews, studied the poetry, and used the poetry of the play as a vehicle to review for the OGT. I had the majority of the sophomore JSA students in Theatre class, so I was a welcomed guest teacher in their classroom. Members of the cast dressed in character (the specific characters are noted under the Social Studies area above) and recited their "epitaphs." Students discussed theme, poetic devices, and character. The students then answered four point responses in the OGT format based on Masters' work.

When the OGT test results were released in June 2009, the sophomore JSA students all passed both of the English areas of the OGT. The majority of them passed at one of the higher two areas of accomplishment. According to Susan Gardner, Director of Alternative Programs for Jackson Local Schools, since the OGT and the JSA have both existed, no student has failed to pass the two English sections of the OGT. During the 2008-2009 school year, four students at Jackson High School passed all five areas of the tests on the OGT at the highest level, out of nearly 500 sophomore students. Of those four students, two were in the JSA. Although Jackson High School

continues to have high OGT scores, the students in JSA consistently score higher on the OGT than the rest of the student body. That fifty percent of the students who achieved at the highest level on the OGT, two from JSA, was the highest percent of JSA scoring at this level in the school's OGT history. This only further proves the importance of Arts Education and how it influences academic success.

#### The Media Center

The Media Center Specialist was invaluable in helping the Theatre III classes research the script, the geography, and the time period. Dramaturgy is a large component of any theatre production. The specialist also assisted in recommending websites that might hold information regarding music of the era and period clothing information. All of the sites recommended were used in the research of the play. The Media Center staff set up an area in the library with research books for the students in Theatre III, staff teaching lessons to collaborate or integrate with the play, and for the actors doing character analyses. The resources included maps, costume books, timeline books, poetry collections, and other novels that deal with similar themes, time periods, or the Midwestern region of the United States. The provided resource list also gave the students in the rest of the building the opportunity to see the connections that *Spoon River Anthology* had to so many other aspects of history, literature, and American culture.

#### Visual Arts Department

The students in Theatre III also got advice from the photography teacher to get the appropriate style for period photos. Photographs were taken of the students from

Theatre III in period costume in a historic cemetery in the county. The photography teacher offered guidance on lighting, style of photography during the era of the play, and color choices. The photographs taken were used as publicity photos for the production and also became keepsakes for the students involved in the production. One of the senior visual arts students used the costumes from the production to take photographs for her photography portfolio and, in turn, had JSA students model the costumes that were made by a senior Theatre student to use in her costume portfolio.

#### Music Department

Choosing period music to play during scene changes and to create mood was important for this production. The students struggled with locating sheet music and recordings for some time before finally consulting with the Instrumental Music department. The staff offered composers to investigate, websites to use, and even CDs from their private collections for students to consider. The students were able to also learn from the music staff about the symbolic meaning of many of the war, patriotic, and folk songs of the time period. A student from the music department was invited to participate in the production since he was an accomplished fiddler. He provided entertainment with period music before the show and during intermission.

#### Business/Computer Departments

Also assisting the Theatre III students in the production was the Business/Computer department. The school just added a Video Production course for the school year. The Theatre III students were intent on filming the introduction to their production, "The Hill", so they eagerly accepted the help of the Video Production class and teacher in editing their work. They worked to find the correct style wanted in the film. It was

truly an intriguing part of the final production and it captured the time period, as well as the theme quite well. The Video Production class also worked with the Theatre III class to create “commercials” to use on the morning video announcements to promote the production.

#### Family and Consumer Science Department

A historical play with a cast portraying nearly one-hundred characters means a large number of period costumes and was a major concern for the production staff. The Family and Consumer Science Department became a valuable resource for the production. The dynamic staff made themselves available for sewing advice and costuming guidance. Sewing machines were needed to repair, alter, and create costumes. The Family and Consumer Science staff offered their sewing lab when it was not in use to assist the production’s student costumers. This made alterations easier to manage at school, rather than having all of the costumes taken out of the building for repairs. Once repairs and construction were completed, the production staff was able to borrow ironing boards and steam irons to complete the costuming construction process. The Family and Consumer Science staff even mentioned that next year they would be willing to do more if they could start earlier in the school year, thus enabling the higher level sewing students to take part in the project.

The Family and Consumer Science staff did not really have an opportunity to integrate the production into their classes since it was at the beginning of a new semester, meaning new courses for them. Since they did not have students capable of working on the production yet, in terms of sewing, the staff welcomed the theatre students as their own. One of the senior theatre students designed costumes and,

created custom hats, fans, and military uniforms for the show. The staff in the Family and Consumer Science Department assisted her in this endeavor and they helped her create a working portfolio and a display of all of her costumes for the annual Arts Extravaganza. The senior intern discovered her most talented area of theatre due to the individualized help she received from both the Arts School and the Family and Consumer Science staff. Her costume portfolio, including many of the costumes from the production, led to a college scholarship in Theatre to in the fall of 2009.

#### Industrial Arts Department

The Industrial Arts teacher and his advanced class worked with the Theatre III class on several productions during the school year. The teacher was in his second year of teaching and enjoyed demonstrating to his students how to apply their skills in the “real” world. The students in Theatre III were surprised by and highly appreciative of the Industrial Arts students’ work. The students in Industrial Arts experienced another side of theatre. They went backstage and were amazed by the technical aspects of theatre. They toured the fly area and the control booth so they could see first hand the kinds of technology involved in putting on a theatrical production. The students cut wood for the production, created scenery, and helped to move large equipment used for the production.

Other members of the Career and Technical department offered support not only for this production, but future endeavors in the Theatre Department. Staff members discussed team teaching Technical Theatre with the CAD Drawing course in the future and the Building Trades students worked on repairs to the mini-stage in the blackbox theatre. Hopefully, the collaboration will continue so that both Theatre students and



those in the Career and Technical Department programs will benefit from seeing how there are opportunities for them to apply their skills in Theatre, perhaps as careers. I hope to continue to foster these teaching partnerships in the future for both the Theatre Department, but also the students who take courses within the Business/Computer, and Career and Technical Departments.

### The Theatre III Production Class

Theatre III is a production class. The goal of the course is to provide the advanced Theatre student with an opportunity to apply the acting and technical skills they have gained in previous Theatre courses and develop them further through creating theatrical productions. Students in the class are required to participate in two JSA organized productions: the Children's Show and the play associated with the Arts Extravaganza. Knowing that this would be a full length play came as a shock to many of the students since they had come to rely and accept the fact that the Theatre department always did a series of One-Act plays on the first night of the Arts Extravaganza.

The students understood early on that this production was being done to not only help them improve their skills in various theatrical areas, but to develop the entire Theatre program. The students were well aware of the SmARTs grant that the JSA received. One of the first steps in understanding Master's classic work is to find the connection it has the metaphor of fabric. Through several class discussions, the Theatre III students deduced that the characters in *Spoon River Anthology* were all threads that were woven together to create the fabric of community or the tapestry as the grant referred to it. There were many colors in the fabric that was the community of Spoon

River. There was a great deal of misfortune, destruction, and deceit in the community. The poems contained stories of not only the speaker, but those in the community that impacted their lives. The secrets of the community came to the surface in these final epitaphs for all those who lie in the cemetery of Spoon River. In a community, each person's life touches others. This metaphor was also applicable to the students in the School for the Arts. Each area of the arts influences the others and all areas had a role in the production.

Scenery was minimalistic in the production, but the idea of vivid fabric needed to be apparent to the audience. The student directing teams would be spending weeks getting novice actors ready to perform major monologues in the spotlight. The research or dramaturgy they were required to do have already been mentioned in a previous section. As required by the State of Ohio Academic Content Standards K-12 Fine Arts, by the end of the high school program in Theatre, each student should be able to "Synthesize knowledge of the arts through participation in the creation of a dramatic work or experience" and "the relationship between concepts and skills used in drama with other curricular subjects" (144). With these academic standards in mind, the Theatre III students would need to illustrate through their production how it was truly a collaboration of various academic disciplines. Each academic area was also a thread being woven together to create the fabric of *Spoon River Anthology*.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

##### Production Considerations

There are many production considerations when choosing a play for production. We had to consider when the production was typically held in previous years. The production was scheduled for February 20 and 21, 2009 to be a part of the JSA Extravaganza. The Arts Extravaganza is an annual arts show and fundraiser for the JSA. Students in grades 6-12 share their visual art, their vocal and instrumental music, and dance performances with the community. Both a silent and live auction are held to raise money to fund the arts school. The community was already expecting to see a theatrical production in conjunction with the Arts Extravaganza. There would already be a captive audience so this was the best opportunity to change the theatre production tradition. The one-act show would be replaced with a full-length drama and the one day performance would be changed to a two days of performance. With the support for the arts so evident in Jackson Local, it would hopefully be a welcomed effort to provide more theatre in the school district.

The choice of *Spoon River Anthology* as a work of literature was important. It also allowed the student directing teams to have more time and flexibility for rehearsals. This was important for several reasons. The production would not be able to move into the school auditorium for rehearsals and set construction until the last few

weeks of rehearsal. The last two weeks of rehearsal included several school holidays that would make it difficult to use the auditorium. The middle school in our school district would be using the auditorium and would not have their scenery out of the scene shop and auditorium until about fifteen days prior to the show opening. The lack of rehearsal time in the auditorium and the lack of time to create and work with a set made *Spoon River Anthology* the best selection for the school production.

Enhancing the production would be lighting, historical pictures from research, and music from the time period. The choice of dramatic monologues would allow the students to focus more on development of character and vocal techniques that may not be apparent in a play where physical movement, blocking, and character interaction are essential. Individual coaching by student directors would make each actor feel like the lead in the play. Small rehearsal settings would be workable with minimal blocking. Auditions were ready to proceed.

#### Approach to Recruiting the Students

With a student body of nearly 2000, the One-Acts provided acting opportunities for only a few select students, most of who were in the School for the Arts. I really wanted, especially in this first year of doing a full-length production, to provide a large number of acting roles in the play selected to produce.

When a school has only produced two full length plays in over twenty years, dramatic plays were not something that the student body had much interest in as an extracurricular activity. Jackson High School has a very large musical each fall and had, as mentioned previously, a series of student directed One Act plays in the winter. The Theatre III class knew, as did I, that getting students to participate would be one of

the primary roadblocks in the production process. After many months of preparation, involvement of the high school staff was key to the success of the project.

The advertisements for the auditions for *Spoon River Anthology* were to begin the Monday after the high school musical was produced. This schedule was chosen by the production staff in order to take advantage of the student body's current theatre excitement. The school musical, *Beauty and the Beast*, was sold out and a large number of students in the high school had attended the production. The musical was a monumental production in terms of staging, set design, costumes and student performances, but also in the way the community responded to the production. To capitalize on the school community's interest in theatre at Jackson High School, all the teachers in the English department were asked to post an audition announcement in their classrooms.

The students in Theatre III noted that this opportunity to recruit students to audition for the play that would serve as an introduction to those students who would potentially audition for theatre production the next three or four years. A significant goal was to recruit younger students outside of the School for the Arts to audition for the play. Younger students would not have the mistaken notion, as older students seemed to have, that the plays were primarily open to students in the Arts School.

In addition to the English department staff, I asked all of the Arts school staff to announce the auditions to their students and to post the audition information. Getting returning "acting" students to audition for the production was a class goal. These returning students included students who had been in the high school musicals, students who had been in the One Act plays, and students who had acted in the Arts school annual

Showcase. I contacted several students directly, offering them audition packets and providing them with the support they needed in order to feel ready to audition for the play (see Appendix A).

Students were asked to sign up for an audition time outside of the black box theatre that serves as my primary classroom. This was done for several reasons. I wanted students to sign up in advance since I had no idea how many students would be interested. The second reason for organizing the auditions around the black box theatre was to provide a more intimate setting. The signups provided another facet of information that was of major importance: only a few males were auditioning! This was often a problem for the musical in the fall, but the male students could draw from the boys who were members of the choir. The School for the Arts had quite a few male students enrolled, but they were accustomed to the small number of male roles available in the previously produced One Act plays. The student staff in Theatre III decided that they would have to approach the concept of casting males in the play differently than originally planned since only three male students planned on auditioning.

Even with a production like *Spoon River Anthology*, where the monologues were being selected by the Theatre III production staff, the majority of the monologues were male. The directing team planned on casting actors, especially males, in more than one role, but with only three male actors, the production was not going to really achieve the recruitment goals envisioned. This required some revised strategies for the audition and the audition recruitment process (see Appendix A).

There were several factors that contributed to the lack of interest in auditioning that were not foreseen. When the student directors and I approached students to ask why

they had not signed up for the auditions, a common response was that they had never heard of the play *Spoon River Anthology*. In an age of computers and movies, students were “shocked” that theatre could be produced from something they had not seen on the internet or at the movie theatres. The fear of the unknown was definitely an issue since every musical that had been done at Jackson High School during the four years I had taught there were quite well known, including *Hello Dolly*, *Into the Woods*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. The concern about the play being a drama was also mentioned. It appeared that a drama was not the kind of play that most students would choose, but rather a comedy. Conflicts with athletic practices were also a common excuse by students who were approached about participating in the auditions. Efforts had to be made to make the male students especially see the benefits in auditioning.

All of the male students in the School for the Arts theatre classes were approached individually and informed about the plot of the play. The extra efforts paid off with ten talented male actors auditioning for the production. Each of these young men pleased the production team with quality auditions, with each of the actors earning several roles to portray in the upcoming production. The directing team was satisfied to find that of the ten student male actors, three were freshmen, four were sophomores and two were juniors. Only one of the male actors was a senior.

Locating female students to audition for the production did not prove to be as problematic as recruiting male actors. The same recruiting techniques were followed to encouraged female actors to audition. The female actors signing up for audition times were drawn from two sources: freshmen and sophomore students in the School for the Arts, who had been hearing about the production all school year and freshmen and

sophomore students who had heard about the auditions in their English classes. Nearly fifty female students auditioned for the production. Thirty-one students were cast in roles. Most of the female actors were awarded one to two roles, although one female actor did receive four parts. She is a fabulous senior actress who has performed in many previous shows. Twenty-one actresses who were cast were either freshmen or sophomore students. This cast of over forty students would not have been possible with a more conventional play choice.

### The Audition Process

Encouragement for the young, inexperienced actors was also provided by making the audition preparation process easier. Although many theatre directors and teachers may disagree; the Theatre III students felt the audition would be more inviting to a larger number of students by providing all of the audition materials beforehand. The student directors worked in groups to create a female audition packet and a male audition packet. Each packet consisted of both humorous and dramatic monologues written to mimic the narrative style of *Spoon River Anthology*. Students were asked to select one monologue from their packet to prepare. Students were encouraged to memorize the monologues, but it was not a requirement. The student directors discussed many different goals they had for the auditions. They all agreed that teaching the students how to audition was as important as getting them to audition. It was imperative that the students auditioning feel comfortable during the process, yet still take the entire process seriously. Although many high schools use open auditions, this was just another “fear factor” that was to be avoided. As noted in the book, *Play Director’s Survival Kit*, “Directors have more control over the process in a closed



audition. They can take time to talk and even work with actors in a quiet and more personal manner. They have a better opportunity to break down inhibitions and see how well an individual can follow direction.” (123). Although closed auditions would take a longer amount of time to complete, making the actors feel confident in the audition was important.

Four to eight students came into the audition space at one time. Students were each given the opportunity to introduce themselves and present the monologue they selected. Student were asked to do a cold reading from a one of the several monologues the Theatre III directing staff had selected from *Spoon River Anthology*. A common audition rubric was provided to all of the directors to cast their Acts. This made it simple for the students to find the students they wanted for the monologues they selected for their Act.

When making decisions about the auditions for the production and how the show was going to be cast, I had decided in advance that there would not be a set number of students cast in the play. I realized there was the potential for one-hundred students to act in this play, but I also knew that this was unlikely. I knew that I would rather have the student directors feel that they could give any actor, who gave a strong audition, a role, especially with the young group of actors auditioning. From the initial audition forms the actors completed, it was apparent that the acting pool was almost completely novice. Several of the auditioning students were very nervous and not really the most skilled, however they were extremely motivated. This script made it possible for these actors to be considered for roles because the directors could spend more time coaching actors one on one. When the auditions were completed after two

days, the directing team cast all but eleven actors. The eleven actors who were not cast were not well prepared for their auditions or had too many conflicts to meet the rehearsal requirements.

The next step was to determine which directors would work with which actors. After the last day of auditions, a similar type of “draft” was used to cast actors. When it was obvious that several directing teams wanted the same actor for a role, that actor typically earned two or more roles to showcase their talents.

The directing teams were selected based on their specific areas of expertise and their leadership styles. I had worked with these students for two years in both English and Theatre classes. I had been evaluating their ability to complete assignments, organize materials, research, and work with others. With these factors in mind, I also tailored the directing teams to have students from different areas of the art school, if possible. One final factor that had to be considered in organizing directing teams was the extracurricular activities of each of the directing team members. I wanted to ensure that each team would have common times to hold rehearsals. With the directing teams established, the students now would embark on the crucial task of research.

### The Role of Dramaturgy in Producing High School Theatre

To consider directing a play without discovering the history that lives within that play is to miss a fundamental facet of the theatre process. Anne Bogart says: “Inside every good play lives a question” (21). Although I agree with Bogart, I believe that there is more than one simple question. The students were unaware of the process of and the term dramaturgy. As noted by Susan St. John, drama teacher at South Mountain High School,

By training students to be dramaturgs, investigating the text and history behind a play, theatre teachers can facilitate learning in many academic areas. In a similar way, academic teachers could enhance curriculum with the introduction of dramatic literature which encompasses the subject matter they teach. In this way, every curricular subject could be enhanced through the study of the right play.

Dramaturgy had an even more vital function in the production of *Spoon River Anthology* (Appendix B). *Spoon River Anthology* is a classic work of American Literature that was taught in the sophomore English classes. This connected students to a work of literature they were already going to study this school year. *Spoon River Anthology* captured the lives or, more specifically, the deaths of Americans in Midwest America during the post-Civil War era, the Gilded Age, and into the early part of the twentieth century. The location of the fictitious Town of Spoon River is based on the Midwestern towns in Illinois where Edgar Lee Masters grew up (Orth). Each narrative poem included varying degrees of history, from a character's personal family tree to the character's interaction with the community while they were living. These poems provided many opportunities for integration into the other aspects of the school curriculum. The book, *Dramaturgy in American Theatre*, illustrates that the concept of dramaturgy is not a difficult process, but a necessary one if interdisciplinary cooperation is to take place. "The idea of a dramaturgical sensibility suggests that dramaturgy is not so much a matter of how to do it as it is about the development of an interconnected set of ideas, attitudes, feelings, skills, and behaviors: in short, an education" (39). The students would not only be learning, but they would function as teachers through this process. They would really be exploring many other academic areas, not just theatre.

American History is studied by the sophomore history classes culminating with the Ohio Graduation Test. Master's work studies decades of the Midwest landscape and lifestyle, with some actual connections to historical figures and events. Lastly, as the students explore the different strands of community that connect each member of Spoon River, the production makes a connection to the SmArts grant for the Kimono.

"When do we get to start directing?" This eager plea uttered, to some degree, by various members of the directing team, seemed like a very obvious question. Using dramaturgy as part of the directing process was something the students knew was part of the directing process; however, they did not realize that dramaturgy was such an in-depth task. It was difficult to convince several of them that it was a valuable technique that would benefit the entire production.

The dramaturgy process began with the initial reading of the text. Students received forms to complete for each poem as they read. They were asked to do a basic character analysis as they read. They were to describe the character's profession, family connections, life stories, locations discussed in the text, specific clothing described in the text and finally any essential properties mentioned (see Appendix B). This was in many ways a process different than the one I typically followed in preproduction. I normally would not begin taking notes until the second read, however this collection of poems seemed to require a slightly varied approach. I had taught the collection of poems previously in an English class years ago and noticed that despite the fact that I had read the complete work numerous times I frequently would get the names of monologues and their details confused. There were just too many poems and

too many minute details. It seemed imperative to begin the notetaking during the first reading for these reasons.

### Technical Aspects of the Production

Once all the students had read the entire work one time, they were all given technical responsibilities. Each student had ranked the areas of technical production they wished to contribute. With these preferences in mind, I organized the students into several technical committees. Each student would serve on two to three technical or production committees. This division of responsibilities served to expose the students to various technical areas, some in which they had no prior experience. In addition, the students were delving into the collaborative aspect of theatre. These groups would divide the research for each of the technical areas. The committees had approximately two weeks to study and research the technical area and create packets of information for all members of the directing team.

Dramaturgy, the story behind the play, is essential in order to have a fully developed technical production. The research needed for a production is noted in the previous section, but all theatre designers need to understand how important it is to their job, as well. When realism is vital, attention to specifics can take a great amount of time and detail. Organization became a close ally for the Theatre III students, especially when they discovered that Edgar Lee Masters' collection of poetry spanned the late 1800's to the early 1900's. This required in-depth study of a variety of clothing styles, fads, professions, and living conditions. For example, the costume committee researched the clothing styles suitable for the twenty-five year old wife of an impoverished farmer in the 1880's, as well as a fifty year old newspaper editor who

lived after the turn of the century. The goal was to attempt to recreate not only the characters within a fictitious small town in Illinois, but characters that had lived, died, and were buried in the town cemetery over approximately a sixty year period.

This vast research challenge led to one important lesson: Use the resources one has available. Jackson High School has an elaborate media center with a very helpful media specialist, as I noted in a previous chapter. When I selected *Spoon River Anthology* for the class project, one of the first people I spoke with regarding the project was the Jackson High School media specialist. The most valuable source shared with me was a part of the Library of Congress website called the “American Memory.” By accessing this website, the students were able to see artwork and photographs from the time period to assist with the costuming, hairstyling, properties, makeup, and scenery. Insight regarding the music of the time periods was also gleaned from the “American Memory” website. This database was an invaluable resource for the production and helped to make the student production staff and actors, as well as the audience, understand the impact of history on the art of storytelling.

The set was very unique since it would not be able to be assembled and secured until thirty minutes before the house was opened for seating. This was due to the fact that vocal music groups would sing on the stage during the evening of the Arts Extravaganza prior to the production. Access to the stage also only provided about two weeks of time to construct sets or be onstage due to the middle school musical being staged in the auditorium and their set being constructed in the scene shop. This is a constant strain for the Theatre department productions...we can't use our own stage! To make the production happen, I specifically selected *Spoon River Anthology* with the

set construction issues in mind. The Vocal Music Department's platform risers were set at varying heights to enable multiple actors to stand onstage at a time. Chicken wire "hills" were created out of various shades of green calico fabric (one form of the tapestry or quilt) to cover the openings in front of the risers. The actors looked as if they were walking on the hills of the cemetery. No tombstones were used because the students and I agreed that the play was not meant to be morbid or even really sad. The play was reflective and the messages the characters had for the living were better received by actors who were costumed to look "real." There were no ghosts or scary special effects in the production. This was important to ensure the message of the play was recognized by the audience.

The lighting design for the production was all about color and shape. An initial consideration was to rent a backdrop of trees behind a meadow. The flatness of the drop minimized the impact the directing team wanted the trees to have. The students selected the symbol of a leafless tree for the show's advertising campaign and integrated that into the lighting design. The tree illustrates life, but without the leaves the audience sees what remains when life is stifled in the "winter" of life. Like the trunk, there are remembrances from the time the tree was alive, just as the memories of the characters are instilled into the audience or listener. They are messages for the living left even after death.

The lighting designers selected several barren tree gobos. They were placed across the lights onstage and gelled so that they overlapped slightly. Green, yellow, red, purple, and orange gels were used to illustrate the four seasons as the mood of the play changed. The final Act of the play was meant to bring hope even in death. The

color green was used to symbolize life. The lighting was a fantastic way to make a simple set more powerful.

All of the costumes for the play were created by students or remade from existing costumes by students. No costumes were rented. As mentioned previously, the more elaborate costumes were created by a senior JSA intern. The costumes were amazing and lent to the believability of the characters. The use of costumes was essential since many of the male actors played five to seven different roles.

Properties were not a significant technical aspect for this show. There were a very small number of props and the actors found most of them themselves. The directing team held a props scavenger hunt. There was incentive to bring in the most creative items to fit the show. Many students started going to rummage sales and resale shops on the weekends to look for needed items. The crew enjoyed working on this technical committee because the students relished the quest for the most interesting props

### The Rehearsal Process

Rehearsing this production was unlike any other production I have been a part of, in any capacity. Traditionally organized all cast rehearsals would waste time and frustrate students. Alternative rehearsal schedules were implemented to include students who typically found their schedules full. They would be able to participate without stress related to their busy schedules (see Appendix C).

Before auditions, it was made certain that the male students were made aware of the unique organization and structure of *Spoon River Anthology*. The male actors, if cast, would most likely have the opportunity to play multiple roles and develop skills to



assist them in future acting endeavors. The final enticement to audition was the fact that the rehearsal schedule was more individualized for the first month of rehearsals. The directing team acknowledged that *Spoon River Anthology* was a distinctively formatted production. Due to this factor, individual and small group rehearsals were held for the first part of the production schedule. This would enable the student directors to have more one on one time with their casts and give the student actors more opportunity to participate in school sports, after school jobs and other school activities that are often difficult to accommodate during a typical rehearsal schedule.

The students would now have to focus on developing characters and how to achieve a truly believable performance. An additional Drama Ohio Academic Content Standard that should be met by the end of a high school theatre program involves the development of creative expression and communication. Students should be able to “Analyze the physical, social and psychological dimensions of a character and create a believable multidimensional portrayal of that character” (135). The students spent the school year discovering and learning about building characters. Several of the key techniques that were taught for the purpose of applying them in their directing were reviewed in the process of rehearsing the play.

Delivery of the narrative poems involved several important techniques. The directors had to ensure that the audience would believe that the speaker was speaking to the living in a very real way. The actors had to work toward a physical and vocal conviction that is often difficult for novice performers.

The stage was “The Hill” as the opening poem of Masters’ work is titled. The directing teams had to work with their actors to create a workable fourth wall as the

actors looked past the apron of the stage. Uta Hagen's desire to develop the actor to his or her fullest potential explained her use of the fourth wall both at a primary and secondary level (108-109). The primary level of the fourth wall focuses on using what each actor "sees." For example, one directing team worked with the poem "Edith Conant." In Masters' poem the speaker says "We stand about his place-we, the memories and shade the eyes because we dread to read; 'June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1884, aged 21 years and 3 days.' And all things are changed" (189). The actor had to "read" the tombstone despite the fact that it was not really there. The actor had to convey this believable use of the tombstone physically and vocally. The actor had to discover through the use of the fourth wall how they would sound as they touched the tombstone and felt the cold stone letters. This was important since "Edith Conant" was the last poem performed in that particular Act.

Hagen's secondary level of the fourth wall requires more precise planning. It is important to understand what is "out there" beyond the stage (109). The actors had to see trees, hills, streams, farms, the distant town square, and even the living. This needed to be exact every time. All five directing teams had to confer to make this fourth wall something workable. This was one of the most time consuming preparations in the rehearsal process. The absence of a great deal of scenery made the fourth wall an essential technique to make "The Hill" real for both the actors and the audience.

Creating the voice and physicality of the actor was the second part of making the characters vivid onstage. Many of the students were uncomfortable with the idea of performing poetry. Reading poetry aloud, even poetry written in free verse, aloud was

difficult. The cadence of poetry is different than the cadence of regular speech. Tim McDonough emphasizes using the natural rhythmic impulses in our voices to tell the story (170). Using the contrasting syllables, speeds, and rhythms in our speech can be combined to tell a story. As McDonough notes, “An actor needs to be sensitive to the possibilities of such rhythmic building blocks” (172).

Developing the physical aspect of each actor was actually the most difficult skill to develop. There were several reasons. The actors were often alone on stage. If other actors were onstage, they were not interacting with them. Actually, most actors did not even notice the other characters onstage. Developing the physicality of the roles was important, but it was also important to develop the physical relationship of the whole cast. The collaboration between the actors was fostered in several ways. Directing teams used Viola Spolin’s theatre games, such as “Part of a Whole,” to help the actors feel comfortable with one another and to develop the physicality of their own characters (69). Other activities like speed run-throughs allowed the actors to get comfortable with their lines, the physical demands of their role(s), and the cooperative nature of being on stage.

Rehearsals were held in a multitude of locations in the high school. This was due to the fact that the cast really could not use the main stage in the auditorium until the final ten school days prior to the performance. All the students could not rehearse at the same time, so directing teams worked with me to establish rehearsal times in my classroom and several hallways that were normally deserted close to my classroom. The directing team worked to establish all of the rehearsal deadlines and goals.

Initial rehearsals were designed to have the directors share their dramaturgical research about the historical period and the overall concept of Masters' work. The directing team explained the vision for the stage and costumes to the students. The cast had several read-through rehearsals so the actors could show how well they read the poetry.

Student directors tried to share with the actors what they had discovered about the family and community relationships the characters had with others in the fictitious town of Spoon River. The actors were then guided to create character analysis charts with their directing team.

Memorization is normally a difficulty for novice actors, but most of the students had memorized their texts by the time they returned from the winter break. This gave the directing teams far more time to develop physical and vocal skills with each individual actor. One on one acting rehearsals were very easy to accommodate and allowed the actors to watch other actors in far more depth; it provided time for line by line vocal work, and more physical activities to train the novice actors. Each actor had a directing staff there to help them develop in the role and in their acting skills.

Blocking was difficult simply because the actors often had no one to interact with onstage. The directing staff and I all found this to be the most difficult aspect of working with the actors. How to creating interesting pictures on stage? For students who had never directed before and never been in a non-musical production, this was a struggle. Two directing teams found they had specific concepts in mind for their staging, only to have to reblock after several weeks.

The entire cast was only able to rehearse together onstage for a brief amount of time. These rehearsals were not difficult. Timing was the biggest issue. Keeping the play interesting with the students only performing monologues and very little dialogue was always challenging. Getting the actors familiar with each other and the other actors monologues, set the schedule back several days in rehearsal process. Many of the student actors got confused by different characters played by the same actor. This caused some confusion in the initial full cast rehearsals.

The developing and polishing rehearsals went well overall. The cast was working together. They were handling difficult material for novice actors. With one week left to the performances, the students were surprisingly ready.

#### Technical Rehearsals

With no scenery to move, few props, and minimal costume changes, the running crew needed for the production was small. Many of the crew positions were filled by the students on the directing staff who wanted the opportunity to add designing and crew positions to their list of accomplishments during the production. Technical rehearsals were spent assisting the novice actors in learning terminology associated with the theatre production process.

The directing team was confident that the final week of rehearsal would be very simple and straight forward—until the flu virus hit the directing team and several actors. During the final seven rehearsals, a minimum of three to four Theatre III students were absent from school and rehearsals due to fever and abdominal problems. One actor had to be replaced during the final week of rehearsal with a student from the Theatre II class. Several parts were cut due to the fact that the actors were just too ill to

perform the entire week. This could have been a disastrous sequence of events in a more conventional play, but since the production was based on a student created script and student selected characters, there was more flexibility in terms of the structure of the performance.

### Overview of the Production

As I reflect back on the production of *Spoon River Anthology*, I feel that overall it was a positive learning experience for all involved: the directors, the student actors, the students who participated in various cross-curricular activities, and finally the staff. The “cloth” that was woven was quite large, but I felt that the production was overall a success. Michael Bloom says “...to create the world of a play, to sew a whole cloth from the threads of language, a director has to know a good deal about many things.” (4). This statement seems to truly encompass the way this project impacted the entire directing team. There was a great deal to learn and they learned it.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY

#### Positive Aspects of the Process

There were a number of goals that proposed at the beginning of this project and as the project concludes I feel that most of them have been accomplished. The goals that were not accomplished began the process of improving the current Theatre program and improving the way the school community viewed the theatre program. I wanted to increase the number of students who were able to perform in the school play. The cast was comprised of over fifty students, so the number of students who got to perform was greatly increased when compared to the one-act plays of previous school years. There were many ninth and tenth grade students who were members of the cast so the Theatre program will have returning actors for future productions.

The original plan to collaborate with other teachers in the building in order to improve student preparation for the Ohio Graduation Test and the Ohio Academic Content Standards was very successful with the English Department. The JSA's OGT passage rates support this as well. A variety of departments within the school cooperated on the project in order to link curriculum with the Theatre program. Those departments which did not integrate their curriculums are now more than eager to assist the Theatre program by sharing their talents or the developing talents of their students. The student directors were able to learn how all of the areas of theatre work together

from the acting to the technical aspects of the production. This production actually gave the students the opportunity to apply practically all of the concepts they have been learning for three years.

The high school finally presented a full length play and plans are already being made to present a full length comedy next winter. The number of students enrolled in the JSA Theatre program has increased greatly, which can partially be attributed to the success of the productions at the high school. Approximately 130 students enrolled in JSA for the 2009-2010 school year and approximately 150 students enrolled in JSA for the 2010-2011 school year, with nearly 50 students enrolled in the entry level Theatre I course.

#### What I Have Learned

Finding a balance is a key component of directing. 2008-2009 was my first year as the Director of Theatre, which included teaching five different subjects with six classes. The theatre productions were very educational, but they were being directed by students. There were many students at each rehearsal. I often found it difficult to keep everything in perspective. I know now that I can easily use my research for the play I am directing to teach different grade level State of Ohio Theatre Standards at every area of the curriculum. I need to learn to use the play I am directing in my own classroom in a more productive manner. There is no reason why the Theatre I students could not have done monologues from Masters' work or the Theatre II students could not have designed scenery or lighting projects to use in the production. This would have accomplished all of the same State Standards, but allowed me the opportunity to do more with the time I had in the classroom, at rehearsals, and even in my personal life.



Students need to be given opportunities to experiment with the limits of the art form. I believe that I have a difficult time relinquishing control of a play that I view as “my creation.” It was a new experience for me to entrust students with a large aspect of a production. Although I did not agree with all of the student directors’ choices, the choices made me view my methods in the production process differently. I found that the students’ choices allowed me to expand my own way of interpreting literature and making artistic choices.

Finally, I realize now that I have only begun to experiment with the integration of drama within the other areas of the curriculum. I find the possibilities intriguing for future performances. As I plan the productions for the next several years at Jackson High School, the involvement of other staff members, their students and the opportunity for non-arts students to experience learning through drama will be a major consideration in my choices.

#### Future Considerations

From this experience I know that I need to revisit the organization of the Theatre III directing staff. Only two students will direct each show next year. All of the other students will have a technical or administrative role during the production. More production meetings will be implemented with weekly reports by each technical area. Many of the Theatre III students still were deficient in the operation of basic technical theatre equipment (light board, sound board, fly, etc). This made the assignment of technical areas difficult for students to accomplish without extra assistance by either the technical director or me. More emphasis will need to be placed

on technical theatre areas in the Theatre II course so students will enter the Theatre III course ready to take on a technical design or director role in the class productions.

Advertising was done through print media for the production in conjunction with the JSA Arts Extravaganza. E-mails were sent to all of the staff in the district. I would greatly increase the methods and quantity of advertising for next year's productions. The JSA parents advertised for the show as a supplemental segment of the Arts Extravaganza. The theatre production needs to have publicity in order to build public interest and support for the theatre program.

The theatre production has always been a one night performance as a part of the Arts Extravaganza. Due to the problems with the live auction schedule on the evening of the first performance, the Arts Extravaganza ended very late and, as a result, the show started late. The JSA parent group always serves dessert after the show, but due to the late hour of the performance, they served the dessert during intermission. Many of the audience members were confused as to when the play was ending. The play will no longer be performed on the night of the Arts Extravaganza. There will be a preview that night with a Saturday evening show and a Sunday matinee performance. Several other productions will be added to the Theatre schedule next year. The three smaller productions will be presented by the JSA students, while the larger play will be open to the entire school. A night of Shakespeare, a commedia dell arte' troupe performance, and a children's play will be presented. The children's play will be an hour long production with a program of children's activities associated with the production. The full length play will be a comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

In order to make it more feasible for the staff to integrate the curriculum with next year's play, the students will be made aware of the play selection far earlier in the school year. I will provide very similar types of teaching units and lesson plans again for the various departments as suggestions for how to incorporate the play into their classrooms. Integration of drama in the classroom can be done daily in a brief amount of class time, while still having a great impact on learning.

It would also be beneficial to both the theatre department and the other departments if I could provide teachers and their students more of a variety of activities that will assist them in learning the State Standards. As mentioned in the previous section, a strong consideration for future performances would be educating both the teaching staff and the student body, especially those students who are not involved in an arts area, about the benefits of teaching with drama. This may not only assist their goal of achieving higher test scores, but also expose a group of students to the arts in the classroom.

With the pressures of standardized test scores, teachers have to find ways for their students to achieve high test scores. Reading, writing, and mathematics are the crucial areas in almost all standardized tests. Drama seems unnecessary to those not involved with the arts, until the benefits of drama on test scores are examined. As noted in a Harvard Graduate School of Education research study, verbal skills have been proven to improve in students of various age levels through the integration of drama in the classroom (Winner, Hetland & Sanni). This technique can be applied in any academic area. Students benefit from "improvements in a variety of verbal areas

including oral and written understanding and recall of stories, oral and written language development, and reading readiness and achievement.”(Winner, Hetland & Sanni).

Dismissing the benefits of drama in education is difficult when SAT scores illustrate that students who participated in drama scored an average of 65.5 points higher on the verbal component of the test. Math scores also increased an average of 35.5 points on the SAT through involvement in drama (“Why Drama Matters”).

Drama is also engages the students physically. Students are using both their minds and their bodies as they create characters and devise actions. As schools extol the values of physical education for students, drama education can become a partner in providing student experiences in movement and bodycontrol. Annie Calkins notes in a study of the impact of the arts in education that “movement and emotion drive learning and recall of learning movement and emotion drive learning and recall of learning.” Our emotional connections to the experiences in drama are applicable to recalling information for test taking. This hands-on approach to learning meets differentiated learning styles of students in the general school population.

Offering alternative to the traditional pencil and paper learning styles are being acknowledged in education globally. Instructional methods traditionally utilized in the arts are being promoted for all students. “Three Methods for Teaching the Social Studies to students through the Arts” proposes three techniques for teaching using art: scripted experiences, interpretive experiences and an original method. For example, students could be challenged to perform the Gettysburg Address as they study it from a preconceived script, react to a piece of literature or story (such as the approach that was taken with *Spoon River Anthology*) or create an original work of drama through

historical documents (Morris and Obenchain). These techniques would demand a collaborative effort between the social studies staff and the drama teacher to create learning experiences for the students both in the regular history classroom and as reactions to a theatrical production being presented in the high school.

I was apprehensive to integrate science and math with the production, yet studies have shown that this is something that teachers, parents and students find valuable. In a study conducted by the Oxford Trust, “68% of students (involved in the study) made suggestions for science topics that they would like to work on as a drama. There was a wide variety of ideas, with the most popular suggestions being electricity, health issues (e.g. cancer, AIDS, smoking), biology, mixing chemicals, photosynthesis, magnetism and cloning” (Pearson). The students involved in the work of the Oxford Trust found that drama made science a more interactive process. They could take on the actual role of a scientist. Experimentation through drama made the concepts more obtainable and the students found more connections to the material.

Students, when given the opportunity, can immerse themselves more readily into a unit of study through drama. When students want to learn, it is a more productive learning experience. These examinations of drama being applied to core academic areas are only a sampling of what could be done in almost any school. These are concepts I hope to integrate as I play future performances for the JSA.

### Recommendations

The best advice I can give to any educator who is interested in collaborating on a production is to start early and don’t overlook your best resources-- the staff within your building or district. Take advantage of the media center and the media specialist

in your school. Provide guidance every step of the way for the students, but let them research on their own to truly make the dramaturgical discoveries on their own.

It is also important to know your audience. The production of *Spoon River Anthology* was an excellent choice for the students scholastically and to meet the needs of the arts grant, but the length and the difficulty in understanding the material hindered some audience members in their understanding and appreciation. It is important to educate your audience, but that can be done gradually.

Introduce yourself to all members of the teaching and coaching staff that have schedule that could interfere with play production. Provide each one with a copy your rehearsal schedules in advance so that a mutual level of cooperation can be maintained between your program and their programs.

Ask for help if you need it -and you will! It is a daunting task to create theatre in addition to your normal teaching responsibilities. Take advantage of the talents of your students and fellow staff members. Everyone can benefit from collaboration if it is well planned and there is a positive atmosphere of cooperation.

Plan ahead as much as you can. During the course of a production, there is little time for other things. If you are a teacher, take your own advice and use your productions as a catalyst for your own classroom's learning. Every play can teach plot, technical production, characterization, movement and blocking, and directing skills. You are in control of your productions. The productions should help you be a better teacher and director.

My last recommendation is to keep accurate records of everything you do. Keep a binder to assist you the next time you do a production. I refer to previous production binders regularly to help me plan for other shows.

Any new or experienced play director should always be looking for new opportunities and ideas to make their productions better. Keep notes of plays that interest you. The collection of poetry, *Spoon River Anthology*, has always been a book I enjoyed. I kept it in mind for several years before I had an opportunity to produce and direct it.

Enjoy each directing experience. You will learn something from each one. With *Spoon River Anthology*, I not only taught my students, but I taught myself. Weaving the play into the curriculum will make future productions all the more rewarding.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### AUDITION INFORMATION FOR *SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY*

#### **Dates and times:**

Auditions will be held on December 9th and 10th in room B100. Please sign up for an audition time outside of B100. If you have any questions, please see Mrs. Fatzinger in B100. Audition packets are also available at Mrs Fatzinger's school website. Audition times will be from 2:40-4:30 on those dates. Call backs, if needed will be after school on the 11<sup>th</sup> in B100.

JSA is holding auditions for *Spoon River Anthology*, a selection of monologues in which villagers from the town, Spoon River, interact with each other from the grave. The audience will discover the hidden secrets of the townspeople. In other words, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” For example, the people that were revered in life are shown to be truly despicable in death and those who were scorned while living are shown for their true merit. We will see how all the lives of the people in the town “weave” together to create a community. Keep in mind that this play is NOT people just giving monologues. They are organized as scenes with actor interaction.

This show will be directed by the juniors of JSA. There are over 50 parts available and rehearsal commitment is minimal, so actors will be able to participate in other activities and still take part in the show. We encourage students with no experience acting to students who live to act to all consider this new theatrical opportunity to audition. Audition packets are available outside room B100 near the commons. Both comedic and dramatic parts are available. Auditions will be held on December 9th and 10th in room B100. Please sign up for an audition time outside of B100. If you have any questions, please see Mrs. Fatzinger in B100. Audition packets are also available at Mrs Fatzinger's school website.

The show will be Friday, February 20<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, February 21<sup>st</sup> .

We hope to see you at auditions. Please come with the audition form completed. Any questions- see Mrs. Fatzinger in B100. Thanks!

## APPENDIX B

### STARTING THE DRAMATURGY PROCESS

Spoon River Anthology- Beginning the dramaturgy for the production.

On your own paper, please answer the following questions regarding the poems you are reading. This will help you determine which poems are connected to one another, as well as learn more about each character/poem.

It would be beneficial to do this on a spreadsheet on the computer. You will be able to refer to the list later in the production process and be able to add additional notes.

1. What is the name of character?
2. What is the character's age (approximately)?
3. Do you know the character's profession?
4. Are any family members mentioned? Name them and their connection if possible.
5. Do you know how the character died?
6. What was their socio-economic status?
7. List any other "people" they have a connection to in Spoon River Anthology? Explain the connection between these characters.
8. What clothing is described or was worn by the character?
9. Are there any props needed based on the text?
10. Describe in two or three sentences the story of the character in the poem.
11. Where is the speaker during the poem? Are any other locations important?
12. If it is helpful, draw a picture of the character as you picture it in your mind.

## APPENDIX C

### WEEKLY REHEARSAL AND PRODUCTION GOALS

#### *Spoon River Anthology*

Auditions will be held the first week in December.

We will have an all cast meeting the second week of December to discuss rehearsal schedules. Each group will meet with their directors twice a week until after the Winter break.

#### Week of January 5<sup>th</sup>

- All monologues should be memorized by January 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Costume measurements
- Vocalization and characterization.
- Dramatury presented to cast.
- Rehearsals begin in B100.
- Meeting for Set Design committee.
- Select musicians/music

#### Week of January 12<sup>th</sup>

- Blocking at rehearsals
- Meet with musician
- Set construction
- Costume work
- Prop work-lists for each Act are due to prop committee by 1/14/09
- Select photos for projection during the production.

#### Week of January 19<sup>th</sup>

- Scenery Painting Monday
- Run through entire "ACTS"
- Props are all collected and organized.
- All program information due.

#### Week of January 26<sup>th</sup>

- Publicity photos taken and distributed
- Ticket orders sent home with all actors and crew.

#### Week of February 2<sup>nd</sup>

- Include music in the rehearsals
- All rehearsals will be in the auditorium until the show.
- Finalize all the photos for production incorporate into the Power Point.
- Film "The Hill" at cemetery for opening of the production.
- Set should be on the stage.

#### Week of February 9<sup>th</sup>

- Run curtain call.
- Finish editing the film of "The Hill."
- Include technical elements

Week of February 16<sup>th</sup>

Show Week

We will run the entire show each day.

Each student will have their makeup and hair done.

Costumes will be worn.

## APPENDIX D

### ORDER OF ACTS AND MONOLOGUES

#### **Act I-Gobo Directing Team**

Richard Bone  
Hamilton Greene  
Elsa Wertman  
Caroline Branson  
Homer Clapp  
Aner Clute  
Lucius Atherton  
Jacob Goodpasture  
Lydia Humphrey  
Minerva Jones  
Indignation Jones  
Dr. Meyers  
Mrs. Meyers  
Shack Dye  
Nellie Clark  
Julia Miller  
Elizabeth Childers  
Archibald Higbie  
Widow McFarlene  
Edith Conant

#### **Act II-Teaser Directing Team**

Mabel Osborne  
Constance Hately  
Lydia Puckett  
Knowlt Hoheimer  
Dippold the Optician  
Wendell P.Bloyd  
Elijah Browning  
Henry Phipps  
Zilpha Marsh  
Ace Shaw  
Amelia Garrick  
Washington McNeely  
Mary McNeely  
Danielle M'Cumber  
Ida Frickey  
Margaret Fuller Slack  
Butch Weldy  
Editor Whedon  
Ezra Bartlett



**Act III- Tormentor Directing Staff**

Amos Sibley  
Mrs. Sibley  
Serepta Mason  
Nancy Knapp  
Barry Holden  
Granville Calhoun  
Oaks Tutt  
Francis Turner  
Rosie Roberts  
Dorcas Gustine  
Ollie McGee  
Fletcher McGee  
Pauline Barrette  
Faith Matheny  
Peleg Poague  
Felix Schmidt  
Russian Sonia  
Georgine Sandminer  
Willard Fluke  
Lois Spears

**Act IV- Cyc Directing Staff**

Benjamin Fraser  
Daisy Fraser  
A.D. Blood  
Zenas Witt  
Francis Drummer  
Ami Green  
Louise Smith  
Yee Bow  
Blind Jack  
Tom Merritt  
Mrs. Merritt  
Elmer Kerr  
Amanda Barker  
Harold Arnett  
Penniwit, the Artist  
Judge Somers  
Chase Henry  
William and Emily  
Mrs. Williams  
Dora Williams

**Act V-Fly Directing Staff**

Trainor, the Druggist  
Benjamin Pantier  
Mrs. Benjamin Pantier  
Reuben Pantier  
Emily Sparks  
Petit, the Poet  
The Town Marshal  
Jack McGuire  
Deacon Taylor  
Roscoe Purkapile  
The Village Atheist  
Rev. Lemuel Wiley  
Mrs. Charles Bliss  
Sarah Brown  
Flossie Cabanis  
Hortense Robbins  
Anne Rutledge  
Hannah Armstrong  
Davis Matlock  
Lucinda Matlock

CURTAIN CALL

## APPENDIX E

### PRODUCER'S NOTES FOR PROGRAM

It is difficult for many of us to believe that we have a connection to a piece of literature that is approaching its 100 year celebration. Upon closer examination, it seems that the only major difference our world has with the characters of Spoon River Anthology is that our world is just far more public with our news. Gossip and scandal, discord and malice all existed in Spoon River...just as they do today. The people just kept their secrets quiet and took them literally to the grave.

In a century where divorce was a scandal, women were meant to only work in the home, and a reputation was actually a bad thing, we are greeted by the most unlikely of advice distributors...the deceased. The citizens of the fictitious town of Spoon River share their elaborate epitaphs with the living. They offer their somber stories of woe and regret, sharing the bitter side of life. We are left to believe that there is little to love about life at times, only to have a glimpse of hope shared by the more optimistic soul.

So why produce Spoon River Anthology? Probably the best reason is to celebrate one of the classic works of American literature with our student body and our community. The full collection of poetry has 244 epitaphs, our students have selected about 100 poems that they feel best tell the "story" of Spoon River. With the Jackson School for the Arts celebrating the theme of "Life is a Tapestry", all of us can see the subtle and bold threads of humanity that weave together to create the town of Spoon River. The stories of the citizens create a vivid tapestry that still lives on through their memories. Like a patchwork quilt, the citizens each bring something unique to the community. The community would not be the same without all of them lending the threads of their story.

Our Theatre III students have directed this production. By directing this play, they explore all of the aspects of theatrical production. There are five separate acts within the play. Each act has a common set and similar organization, but each directing team brings their own style and concept to the show. You can appreciate this in their choices of music, in the lighting, the costumes, and the blocking. We hope you enjoy the

culmination of their work and can appreciate the “memories” that they share with you tonight.

Sincerely,

Stefanie Abbott Fatzinger  
Director of Theatre

## APPENDIX F

### LESSON PLAN: LANGUAGE ARTS

Goal: Understanding Poetic Devices and Analyzing Poetry

I. Before discussion Spoon River Anthology, review the poetry and literary terms below. The definitions are in the classroom sets of Writer's Inc.

epitaph	dramatic monologue	plot diagram
types of conflict	free verse	irony
allusion	alliteration	metaphor
simile	assonance	consonance
repetition	hyperbole	onomatopoeia
personification	tone	imagery
theme		

II. Encourage students to research background information on Edgar Lee Masters prior to coming to class. Suggest the following website for their reading. If you assign the reading, you may wish to assign questions for the students to complete as they research. The article is listed below with the web address.

Academy of American Poets- Poets.org  
<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/638>

Illinois Hall of Fame: Edgar Lee Masters  
[http://illinoisreview.typepad.com/illinoisreview/2006/11/illinois\\_hall\\_o\\_18.html](http://illinoisreview.typepad.com/illinoisreview/2006/11/illinois_hall_o_18.html)

Questions (The answers are in parentheses.)

1. What profession did Edgar Lee Masters have other than writing? (He was an attorney.)
2. What pen name did Masters use when he wrote about his political views? (It was Dexter Wallace. Dexter was his mother's maiden name and Wallace was his father's middle name.)
3. What famous attorney did Master's know? (Clarence Darrow)
4. Masters was born in the state of \_\_\_\_\_, but he was raised in the state of \_\_\_\_\_.

(He was born in Kansas, but raised in Illinois (the setting for his famous Anthology).

5. Masters associated with a famous group of poets known as the \_\_\_\_\_ . (Chicago Group)

6. Masters was inspired to write his collection of poetic epitaphs after reading \_\_\_\_\_ . (*Epigrams from the Greek Anthology*)

III. Your class will have the opportunity (if you wish) to have student actors come to your classroom and perform several poems from the upcoming production of Edgar Lee Masters' poetry collection, Spoon River Anthology. Students will discuss how they discovered the meaning behind the poem during the rehearsal process.

III. After the presentation, reread the following poems.  
They can be accessed on the website <http://www.bartleby.com/84/index2.html>.

Mrs. Benjamin Pantier  
Benjamin Pantier  
Trainor the Druggist

I. Student actors will perform the poems above. Listen carefully. You will be asked to review a written version of the poems in order to answer questions about them.

II. Answer the following questions regarding the poems above.

1. In the poem "Benjamin Pantier" the line "Then she, who survives me, snared my soul" is an example of \_\_\_\_\_. (b)

a. assonance   b. alliteration   c. blank verse   d. consonance

2. Mrs. Benjamin Pantier speaks about her husband in her narrative poem. What is the **tone** of the poem? (c)

a. excitement   b. fear   c. frustration   d. surprise

3. Trainor, the Druggist compares the relationship of Mrs. Benjamin Pantier and her husband to that of oxygen and hydrogen. "Good in themselves, but evil to each other." This comparison is known as a \_\_\_\_\_.(d)

a. hyperbole   b. simile   c. allusion   d. metaphor

III. You will create a dramatic monologue using a format similar to those you have just seen performed and read. Use the literary devices listed below. Follow the guidelines for your poem.

- a. Your poem should be written in **free verse**.
- b. It should be 15 to 20 lines in length.
- c. Your poem should include a type of **conflict**. Review these in the class copies of Writer's Inc.
- d. Confer with the other member or members of your group as you complete the questions below. You will have to work together to create poems that relate to one another.

1. What is the relationship of your characters? Consider the following choices or with teacher approval, you can create your own. You may combine two categories if you are in a group of three.:

- husband and wife
- parent and child
- business partners
- criminal and victim
- attorney and criminal
- siblings
- wealthy citizen and their employee

2. What are three **plot** events that relate to the conflict between your characters? Be sure that your story has a beginning, middle, and an end.

3. Incorporate three of the following types of figurative language devices into your poem (each student). Be creative.

irony	allusion	alliteration	metaphor
simile	assonance	consonance	repetition
hyperbole	onomatopoeia	personification	

Use the classroom copies of Writer's Inc. to review the definitions of any of the terms above.

## APPENDIX G

### LESSON PLAN: SOCIAL STUDIES

#### Exploring the American Dream

##### **\*Integrating *Spoon River Anthology***

#### **Introduction:**

#### **I. What is the American Dream?**

- A. Describe the concept of the American Dream.
  - B. Ask students to write what they perceive to be their own concept of the American Dream.
  - C. Put students into small groups of three or four. Each group will discuss their concept of the American Dream.
  - D. Using their social studies book as a starting point, each group will locate three events in America's growth through the Midwest that illustrate the quest for the American Dream.
  - E. Write a one to two paragraph summary of each of the three events.
  - F. Find five actual images or photographs from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century of people attempting to find the American Dream.
  - G. Define, present and defend your group's ideas on the American Dream at the turn of the century through a character in a poem from Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. You will present your summaries, poem, and photos to the class as an illustration of the American Dream at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - H. The class should be able to understand how the fictional citizens of *Spoon River Anthology* illustrate the quest for, the realization of, and the loss of the American Dream by the time all of the students have presented their photographs, poems, summaries, and interpretations of the American Dream.
- 

For a smaller/individual version of this project:

Students may do this on their own, or you may wish to have them attend the school production of *Spoon River Anthology* and locate the poems from the collection based on what they connect with from the play.

- A. Choose five poems from *Spoon River Anthology* that illustrate the following aspects of the American Dream:
  1. The person who has found monetary success.
  2. The person who has found love.

3. The person who has lost their fortune or find it unobtainable.
4. The person who found that love was out of their reach.
5. An unexpected achievement of the American Dream.

B. Explain to the class how the poems you have selected are a representation of “our” quest for the American Dream.