

The Benefits of Doing Drama Productions

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One of Temple Grandin's pieces of advice for helping children on the spectrum fit in at school is to have them get involved in special interest clubs because there would be other classmates who have at least the one common interest to do something together with (from her book *The Way I See It*). I've certainly had some of my best moments in school while being in a special interest extra-curricular activity. For me, this was participating in school drama productions.

Now I know that can sound intimidating for a lot of people-getting up and performing in front of an audience can be so nerve racking. While getting nervous during a drama production is understandable and maybe unavoidable, there are many benefits to being in one. Since almost all of my drama experience was in playing a character on stage, I will be talking about the benefits of performing.

Here they are:

1. Throwing yourself into a character can give you a break from any negative feelings (e.g. sadness) that you may be feeling in your everyday life which is great since it's never good to feel negative all the time.
2. You're guaranteed to have structure in your interactions with your other cast mates because you have to follow a script and certain cues (such as appearing on or disappearing off stage at certain times to keep the story flow going). Now there may be some unexpected mishaps that occur, but you'll probably have had a lot of time to think over what your character would do in that situation so the change may not be as disturbing for you.
3. You might make some friends from the production but even if you don't, you will all be at least united by your wanting to make

the production a success. That's at least one common bond there!

4. Being a character can give you the chance to project your voice (singing or speaking) and you can feel bigger and more powerful following that.
5. You're accomplishing something and succeeding in something that you're into, which is incredibly rewarding.
6. You can also step up and do things like offer treats to everyone. Doing a drama production takes a long time to make and get together and there's nothing like having a little something sweet to feel good. I did that in high school and at least one other person said that they remembered me for that and I got a lot of thank-yous which is certainly gratifying.

Acting is not something that everyone is interested in so maybe you might want to do more behind the scenes stuff. Those are really important jobs too!

I hope that my listed benefits can help those who decide to either act or work behind the scenes as well as those who want to try to find some way to fit in with others in school.

Finally, I would like to add that performing and autism, Asperger's, etc. are not as mutually exclusive from each other as a lot of people may think. There are people who have been given these and other diagnoses who are successful performers. There is Daryl Hannah (the mermaid from *Splash*), Susan Boyle (a singer who got her start on *Britain's Got Talent* with "*I Dreamed a Dream*") and Dan Aykroyd (Raymond from *Ghostbusters* and the town leader in *Christmas with the Kranks*) just to name a few.

Furthermore, as it turns out from a university study that one of my sisters and I took part in, persons diagnosed with any of the aforementioned labels can actually be surprisingly good voice imitators. One of my favourite high school production memories was during senior year when I participated in a production of Rent both as a group member and as Alexei Darling, a wealthy agent. Before I officially performed along with my fellow cast members, I listened to Alexei's specific songs from the musical soundtrack (as well as the group songs) and I imitated my character's pitch and intonation perfectly while also putting my own non-fake spin on her and singing by myself.

Break a leg! You can fit in better at school through involvement in extra curriculars.

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