

4c. Rehearsal Journals

March 22 4pm-5pm: First Rehearsal — Read Through/Director's Vision

We opened by reintroducing ourselves to one another and sharing some details about us—names, majors, minors, etc. We were all happy to meet each other!

I decided to begin making “questions of the day” as an ensemble building tactic for our rehearsals. Today’s question of the day was a zinger: what movie can you quote the most from? I shared my love of *Airplane!* and the cast responded with similarly quotable films.

I continued on with my Director’s Vision presentation and introduced Thornton Wilder as well as contextualized the scene we were staging. I even shared photos from the Fall 2019 Loyola production of *Our Town* as a reference!

We then began the read through, which I timed around eleven minutes. That was with reading all stage directions, so I felt comfortable with the length of my scene knowing the text of those stage directions would not impact the run at the showcase.

I continued on with my presentation and introduced my concept of the *Our Town* memory play and how I planned to stage the scene in the dark and low light. This garnered great excitement from my cast, and they all seemed enthusiastic to work on such a stylized piece.

We concluded early with a tour of the Loyola theatre spaces for those who did not know where all the rooms were located. Everyone, especially me, left with high hopes for our process.

March 27 6pm-7pm: Table Work

Our second rehearsal consisted of another read through, table discussions on the scene, and some small character notes. I hoped to get the scene sounding the way I envisioned it in order to make blocking that much more of a swift process—I want to focus on the blocking, not the delivery of the scene!

Today's question made us all warm and fuzzy: what is the best compliment you have ever received? I conveyed how someone once called me "heaven on the stage" and the cast affirmed that comment.

I gave some suggestions on where and what to inflect—pitch and tempo namely. I also developed a number system to communicate my intended intensity for certain stretches of monologue and dialogue. The range of numbers corresponded with the dynamic intensity (e.g. starting the argument at a 4 and ending at a 9). The cast seemed responsive to this method of communication, and I felt like the direction was free enough to allow the actors their own opportunity to play.

We got great work done today!

April 5 4pm-6pm: Blocking No. 1

Today was a long rehearsal: two whole hours! Plenty of work was in front of us to fill that time, though, as we began blocking the scene.

We all chuckled over the question of the day: what is the funniest thing you have seen in recent memory or have ever seen? I showed everyone a silly DJ Kaled TikTok I found earlier in the week, and the cast laughed as hard as I did.

I gave blocking for two pages at a time and then we ran those two pages until we continued on. The cast was responsive to my direction and asked clarifying connections when needed. I did notice myself getting tripped up in my own thoughts at time, and I felt I could have better communicated my intended blocking the first time so I did not have to clarify what I meant later.

We managed to block the whole scene, however, and just in time—we did use all two hours in our first Underground rehearsal!

April 8 6pm-7pm: Blocking No. 2

Today was dedicated to reviewing the blocking from the previous rehearsal and tweaking any blocking issues I found or remembered from the previous rehearsal.

I posed a doozy of a question today: if there was a religion based on yourself, what would be your food and drink during communion? My mom's risotto and Sprite Cranberry were my answers; on top of the cast's answers, we all soon grew hungry.

I revised some of my original blocking for clarity as well as sight lines and stage pictures. I gave the cast—particularly Amanda and Ryan—notes about how to form

diagonals and also how to line up their shoulders in a way that makes each other more visible to more of the audience. They incorporated these notes well!

I am excited to continue cleaning up the scene at our next rehearsal!

April 10 6pm-7pm: Character Work — Stage Manager and George

Unfortunately, Amanda was under the weather today and could not make it to rehearsal, so I had to shift my original plans of working out more blocking kinks to character work with Grace and Ryan.

I continued the food theme in today's question: sweet or savory? We all shared our favorite foods and food types, and once again grew hungry. I made sure to text Amanda the question of the day so she could answer as she rested.

To Ryan, I suggested how sensitivity in speech would be key towards evoking George's feelings for Emily. At this point, Ryan had fallen into a somewhat monotonous tone and I helped break him out of it. The focus we gave to his speech really improved the scene, which we ran through with Grace reading for Emily.

With Grace, I discussed how we can make the Stage Manager conversational with the audience and also approachable. I emphasized making eye contact with individual audience members and we found comfortable places in which to develop connections with the audience by kneeling down and literally getting on the audience's level.

What began as an unexpected change in plans turned into a very productive and individualized rehearsal process! I look forward to welcoming Amanda back next week.

April 15 6pm-7pm: Runs and Fine Tuning

Now with the full cast back, we dove into running the scene. While we were still on book, I did not incorporate all props while scripts were still in hand, but I reminded them to be aware of what props they will be working with. I also gently reminded them that their off-book date was the next rehearsal.

The question of the day inspired us: what is your dream role? I narrowed my answer down to Roy Cohn in *Angels in America* and Phil Connors in *Groundhog Day the Musical*. The cast shared similarly niche dream roles, and we hyped each other up as a result.

I incorporated a change in Grace’s blocking—a double-take false exit prompted by her character’s memory or rather, her character’s moment of forgetfulness in her opening monologue. We worked out how it would look, sound, and feel, honing in on everything from her run back on stage to her adorably awkward laugh. I felt this change added an extra layer of humanity to the Stage Manager—he forgets things too from time to time!

The rest of the cast did very well too. Amanda continued to deepen Emily as an honest but self-conscious figure to Ryan’s George. We also worked to make George more irresponsible with beat work on George’s offer to carry Emily’s books.

Today went great and I am excited to see how the cast does off-book!

April 17 6-7pm: Off Book Runs

Today was our first day off-book. I stayed on book during our run (using my phone so I could see my script clearly in the dark). Before rehearsal officially began, I observed the cast running through their lines to themselves and with each other, which reaffirmed the passion this cast has towards the scene.

The question of the day proved challenging: what is your least favorite color? I condemned the color red, but defended the color pink from scrutiny. This question had the cast thinking, and some even admitted they could not pinpoint a color they did not like or look good in.

We fit in two runs; the second was slightly more successful than the first, in which a few calls for “line” were made and a few lines were forgotten. This was less so in the second run, and I left rehearsal feeling confident in the cast’s preparation.

April 22 7-8pm: Filming and Photo Shoot

Today was another run and after reconfirming everyone’s comfortability, I busted out my phone to record tonight’s run as well as take rehearsal photos.

Nobody crumbled while answering the question of the day: what is your favorite kind of cookie? I admitted my love of Oatmeal Raisin cookies and where I expected disagreement, the cast affirmed my taste in cookies.

While we were filming, Grace realized she messed up a line in her opening monologue and broke character to acknowledge that. She asked to restart, so we did and the remainder of the run went well! There were some overlapped lines during the scene, but no lines were dropped or forgotten.

After filming, I reminded Grace that in the actual showcase, if she got thrown off script, she should do her best to stay in character and continue the scene. Grace agreed with a nod.

We commenced another run soon after but this time, I was taking photos—Joe Mazza style. After clarifying the procedure of the photo shoot, I took many photos from different angles, had actors stop and restart to capture the best shots, and even took a few specialized portraits.

I took the photos and picked the best ones. I also edited black and white filters onto certain photos for an aesthetic difference. The cast was very excited to see how the keepers came out!

April 24 6pm-6:30pm: Abridged Fine Tuning

Amanda rescheduled a work shift to accommodate availability for tech rehearsals on April 25, so I wanted to respect that flexibility she offered and held rehearsal without her. Additionally, I had a last minute conflict arise, so I could only stay for a half hour of rehearsal. Perhaps this was a deserved break for my cast. I was not worried about the scene, however. The cast was already well off-book and had their blocking down to a T. With the half hour of rehearsal I had, I refined some small hiccups with Ryan and Grace.

Perhaps because I was hungry before rehearsal, I once asked a food-oriented question at the top of rehearsal: what is the perfect PB&J ratio—more peanut butter, more jelly, or equal amounts? I personally prefer more jelly on my sandwich, which the cast respectfully disagreed with in their varied answers.

I helped Grace tweak some stance issues I noticed; Grace has a tendency to not securely plant herself down after taking a cross, so I ran her opening monologue as a drill to work that habit out of her. We made great progress! I call the swaying look of that insecure posture the “seasick stance” and by the end of my work with her, we were on steady ground.

I emphasized to Ryan the importance of tempo and pitch—Ryan had slowly begun to slip back into a monotone and I sought to cut that monotone regrowth at the stem. Grace once again read for Amanda in her absence so that I could focus on side coaching Ryan, and we got into a more varied sound for his George. Not too big of a variation—still simple and sweet.

The half hour zoomed by, but I was happy with the fine tuning we accomplished today.

April 25 8:30pm-8:45pm: Tech

Due to the tight timing of tech, I did not ask a question of the day. But did this breach in rehearsal tradition affect the quality of tech? It most certainly did not! Everyone arrived on time and we had a great tech.

The overall goal for today was to solidify the additional lighting elements controlled by the lighting board with stage manager Sara Segneri. I achieved the looks I wanted for the opening moments of the scene and provided clear instruction on when to black out for the scene.

The run went very well! I was not concerned about my cast and their work. I did realize that Amanda's all-black outfit tended to make her body invisible against the black floor and wall of the Underground. I plan to ask her to wear something dark blue to match Ryan's costume while also making her pop out more in the dark.

Excitement grew over the approaching Saturday presentation date. We all are ready to share *Our Town* with the Loyola Theatre program!