

Operation Legos

by Lavinia Roberts

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GENRE: Comedy/Light Drama

SYNOPSIS: Two distant relations at a family reunion connect despite their family's history of not getting along. They additionally discuss the importance of community.

TIME: 7 minutes

CAST BREAKDOWN: 1F, 1M or 2M or 2F

THEME: Reconciliation, Family, Unity

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 10:17

CHURCH YEAR SEASON: Any

SUGGESTED USE: Youth Ministry and Outreach; Communion

CHARACTERS:

ERIC—a teenager

LEA—a teenager

PROPS: Two chairs, 1 plate with potato salad, a napkin, 1 plate with two brownies, 1 teen magazine

COSTUMES: Both can be in dressy, yet casual clothes

SOUND: Two wireless microphone (*optional*)

LIGHTING: General stage

SETTING: A potluck dinner

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Chemistry

The onstage chemistry between the actors who play Eric and Lea is important, but a shade tricky. The strange truth of drama is that an audience tends to look for romantic interest any time a male and female character appear in a scene together. Drama at its simplest level is essentially conflict, and romance is one of the main forms of 'dramatic tension' that writers use these days, which means modern audiences have become hypersensitive to spotting it, even when it may not exist.

The banter between Eric and Lea is entirely platonic and absolutely necessary---as Eric's humor is a large part of what convinces Lea to lower her guard---but proceed with caution. Witty exchanges between a male and female character can easily look like flirting if not handled wisely, and flirting between cousins (even distant cousins) can get a bit...weird. There's no need to make a big deal of this with your actors (young actors might in fact be thrown off by even the suggestion), but as a director, you might be sure the onstage interplay between them more closely resembles what you'd find between good-natured siblings than perfect strangers of the opposite sex.

Handling All The "Stuff"

Operation Legos has more than its fair share of props, and these can be a tremendous help to a scene, or a tremendous burden. The trick is to make sure all of the onstage items (in this case, plates, cups, magazine, food, etc.) are working for you and not against you; in other words, helping to make the story clearer, and not distracting the audience from what's being said. A couple of things to keep in mind:

Always rehearse with the actual props in advance. Pantomiming them is OK (and often necessary) for early rehearsals, but the actors need to be comfort-

able with the handling of the actual items before they get in front of an audience. The smallest and most insignificant props have been known to cause huge problems on stage, so take nothing for granted. This not only helps narrow the margin for error, but also tends to help with the memorization of lines and blocking. The more 'literal' the rehearsals are, the more ingrained the dialogue and actions become for the actors.

Don't trust random movements. When depicting characters at a meal, the temptation is to say "Just act like you're eating and drinking throughout the scene", but beware of this short-cut. When both actors are seated for the majority of a scene (which prevents them from "big" blocking), the audience will tend to look for the "small" blocking to determine meaning. In other words, let the motions of taking a sip from a cup or placing a magazine down have specific dramatic purpose (i.e. beat changes), and don't put random movement in that might distract from the dialogue. This doesn't mean that your actors should feel like robots, but as much as possible, encourage them to make all of their onstage movements purposeful.

What Came Before

Sometimes it's helpful for actors to ask themselves "what came immediately before lights up?" Lea is sullen and bored when the scene opens, and though most of us know what bored looks like, it may be wise for Lea to mentally explore what the last hour or so has been like at this lackluster reunion. It's easy for actors to fall into the trap of thinking their characters' lives begin when the spotlight hits them (or when they walk on stage), but it's much more effective to instead think of the scene as illuminating a story that's already in progress. This avoids portrayals that are 'cookie-cutter' and predictable, and adds to the illusion that the characters are real people.