

Optional ways to use the VBS musical

Present the entire drama, full length songs and choreography at Parent's Night at the end of VBS week.

- The entire VBS enrollment would serve as the choir. Full length songs and choreography are taught during music class every day in VBS.
- Cast would be chosen in advance, memorize the script and rehearse for a minimum of four 60 minute rehearsals (either after VBS every day or begin rehearsals before VBS week.)

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- The entire VBS enrollment would serve as the choir. Full length songs and choreography would be taught during music class every day in VBS.
- Instead of doing the full drama, individual children recite the related Scripture before each song.

Present the entire drama, full length songs and choreography as a children's choir project the weekend before VBS begins as a kick-off event.

- The Children's Choirs would serve as the choir. Full length songs and choreography would be taught during the spring semester of children's choir.
- Cast would be auditioned, chosen and rehearse as a part of the choir schedule.

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- The entire VBS enrollment would serve as the choir. Full length songs and choreography would be taught during music class every day in VBS.
- Use the drama segments in the *Worship Rally DVD*. Play the appropriate scene before the choir performs each song.
- Prepare the drama as a video production. Audition and rehearse the cast before VBS and enlist your technical crew to videotape the scenes at various locations that you devise to look like the Big Sky campground.
- Plan for plenty of time for editing and finishing your video. Enlist an expert (maybe a high school student) as cameraman and editor.

Audition Guidelines

- We suggest that you try open auditions for the parts in your musical. This involves everyone who wants to audition attending and observing all the auditions. Parents are also invited. This gives the children practice before an audience. We suggest holding the audition in the choir room or your auditorium so there is plenty of room, and the one auditioning can face the audience. There is great value in the experience of auditioning as the children develop confidence and skills of communicating. Be sure to have a good accompanist on hand. Introduce the judges (various choir directors, drama coach, at least 3 people) Emphasize that they have asked God to guide their choices.
- Prepare and distribute an audition information letter at least two weeks before auditions. The letter should include these or similar instructions: Choose anything that you would like to speak. It may be a poem, a verse of Scripture or lines from a story, etc. Limit it to 3 or 4 lines. Speak with expression and articulation. To try out for a solo part, sing one verse of a hymn of your choice. Speak and sing from memory. Parents and all auditioning are the audience. In the information letter, include rehearsal schedule so they know what days and times will be required.
- After each child has presented their material, ask them to do a little "improv." We use the Pledge of Allegiance because everyone knows it. Give each child a style or accent to use in reciting the Pledge. Prepare a list of ideas beforehand. Suggestions: British, Southern lady, Australian (crocodile hunter), angry, sad, shy, scared, baby, preacher, hockey announcer, etc. These are not cast characteristics. They are "caricature" styles that the children can imitate so you can see if they are inhibited or creative or embarrassed, etc.
- At the audition: Have everyone be seated and open with prayer. Give a little pep talk - everyone is nervous; do your best, etc. Talk about what you are looking for – personality, animation, loud clear voices, etc. Give a few "audience" pointers: be courteous and be good listeners, don't move around during a scene or a song. Collect all completed audition forms, then call on children one at a time. Consider beginning with the youngest grade and working up to the older children.
- Plan for the judges to stay after the auditions are completed. It is ideal if the decisions can be made then. Talk about the personality and "look" needed for each character. Ask everyone for their top two choices for each role as a starting point. Be sure to consider commitment and cooperation in choir if applicable. When it is a close call, usually go with the older child.
- After the decisions are made, telephone every child who auditioned. If they did not get a part, tell them something they did well and encourage them to try again next time. If possible, tell them something specific to work on, such as speaking with more energy or slower. Emphasize how glad you are that they are in choir and the importance of every choir member in the production. Try your best to call every child before posting the cast list so no one has to deal with an unhappy situation without any notice.

Drama and Soloist Rehearsal Suggestions

Give your budding actors and soloists plenty of help and suggestions to prepare them to do their very best. At the first drama rehearsal give some general guidelines that will help them focus on the different ways an actor must think. (You will need to remind them of these concepts approximately one million times.)

ACTORS

- Think about your character's personality. How can you project it with your voice, your body and your responses to other characters? Always remain "in character" whether you are actually participating in the scene or not.
- Speak to the last row in the room. Do not rely on the microphone to amplify your voice. (Director, sometimes stand at the back of the room as they practice a scene.)
- Speak slowly and very distinctly. Articulate every consonant. Take a breath at every punctuation mark. Make yourself slow down by taking breaths between phrases where it is meaningful.
- Practice your lines out loud while looking at yourself in a mirror. Decide what to do with your face, your eyebrows, and your mouth to make your lines interesting and meaningful.
- NEVER turn your back to the audience. When you are speaking to someone beside you, only look partially to the side. (This is called "cheating.")
- When you move, always move on your own lines, never when someone else is speaking. For gestures, always use your upstage (away from the audience) hand.
- When there are several lines by different characters all in a row, each character should do something as they begin speaking to help the audience "find" them - a hand motion, a step, a shrug, etc.
- When you are in a scene but not speaking, follow what is going on. Look at whoever is speaking and respond nonverbally. Your eyes are very important. Stay focused.
- If the audience laughs or otherwise responds to a line, wait for quiet or a cue from your director before beginning the next line.

SOLOISTS

- LISTEN! The most valuable help you have is the accompaniment. Sing your song again and again with the track so you are very comfortable with it.
- Don't be afraid of the microphone. Stand (or hold it) very close, almost touching your chin.
- Look up! Don't focus on the microphone (you'll look cross-eyed) or on the floor. If it makes you too nervous to look at people in the audience, look at your director or at the back wall. Be sure to focus your eyes somewhere, don't let them just flicker around.
- Practice singing your song while looking at yourself in a mirror. Work on a pleasant expression; smile with your eyes.
- BREATHE! The first thing that happens when you get nervous is that you lose your breath support. Be conscious of taking full, deep breaths as you sing.
- Your director will help you decide whether to do any kind of motions with your hands. Practice them while looking in the mirror until they are very natural. Don't add anything at the last minute that you have not practiced.

Special Rehearsals

It is extremely important to prepare the children to do their very best. This is a wonderful opportunity for building self-esteem and teaching them to serve the Lord with excellence. We absolutely want to be sure NEVER to embarrass a child, either by letting him perform unprepared or by asking him to do something that he is uncomfortable doing. This does not mean you don't ask them to stretch - just that you must have enough rehearsal time for everyone to feel comfortable with their roles. As you plan extra rehearsals for the cast, be very aware of using their time efficiently. Rehearsals should be for one to one and a half hours, one or two days a week, after school or early evening for at least four weeks before the musical or at least four times during your regular VBS week.

- **Cast Rehearsals**
 - Participants - Actors
 - Goal - Learn each scene. Plan and practice lines, basic stage movements (blocking), timing, inflection, responses. Don't expect children to be able to create a character without lots of help. Give them specific actions, movements and even inflections. Plan on at least four 60-90 minute rehearsals.

- **Solo Rehearsals**
 - Participants – Soloists, ensembles
 - Goal – the singers should learn their song on their own, using the demonstration CD for support. At rehearsal, polish, give pointers. Practice with split track.

- **Blocking/Technical Rehearsal**
 - Participants - Actors, stage crew for set/prop movement, all tech crew - sound, lighting, video
 - Goal - Show everyone where to stand and all stage movement. Go through entire script. Plan everyone's position during scenes and during songs.
 - Plan when and where exits should be made. Run through any song that requires any movement or acting. If there needs to be any prop or set piece movement, it should be rehearsed at this time. Make microphone assignments. All technical directors (sound, video, lights, backstage helpers) should have their marked scripts at this rehearsal.
 - This is probably the most critical rehearsal. Everyone should learn exactly what to do and where to go so there will be no need for explanation to any special parts when the whole choir is present at the dress rehearsal.

- **Dress Rehearsal**
 - Participants - Everyone, in costume. Entire technical crew - sound, lights, video
 - Goals - Line up, placement on stage of everyone. (Assistants write this down!)
 - Rough run-through, for choir to get familiar with drama. Fix details, especially in choreography. Sing all songs, but the music should already be polished and memorized.
 - Take a 10 minute break, then do a complete run-through with no stopping.
 - Plan (before the rehearsal) and practice choir's entrance and exit from auditorium and stage. This is best done at the end of rehearsal.

Production Team Possibilities

Presenting a memorable children's musical will be a wonderful and fulfilling experience IF you get organized and enlist a great production team. This should NOT be a "one woman show." This list is the "ultimate" team. Roles can be combined, but don't limit yourself! Scour your choir parents and your congregation for undiscovered talent. The director should meet with the team to brainstorm, organize and pray. Also meet individually with each team member to discuss all aspects and details of their responsibility. Then let them handle it!

DIRECTOR - The person with ultimate responsibility for all decisions and direction.

STAGE MANAGER - responsible for all stage decoration. In charge of locating and keeping track of all props. Makes sure everything is in place and ready during rehearsals and performance.

SET DESIGN and CONSTRUCTION - Supervise acquiring or construction of all set pieces and backdrop items.

COSTUME COORDINATOR - Oversee all costume instructions and construction. There are two areas of responsibility.

- o Choir Costumes - will need to give specific instructions for choir outfits. Handle anything that is to be purchased in quantity. This involves determining quantity, ordering, taking up money and distributing costumes.

- o Special Costumes – Give clear instructions to cast about what they should wear. Acquire any special or novelty items needed for costumes – such as fishing hat or vest, boots, cowboy hats, etc.

CHOREOGRAPHER - Work with the dance team/front line for any special numbers and introduce choreography and motions to the choir.

SOUND and LIGHTS - Enlist and coordinate people to run the sound system and the lights. If your sound technician is a church staff position, be sure to "book" him with plenty of advance notice for special rehearsals and the performance.

DRAMA COACH - Stage and block all drama scenes and pantomime scenes. Meet with cast for scheduled extra rehearsals.

Technical Tips

SOUND - "Book" your sound technician at least 6 weeks in advance to be sure he is available for technical rehearsal, dress rehearsal and performance. Meet with him to discuss mic needs, accompaniment CD, and monitors for choir and soloists. Monitors are critical – you need 1 or 2 aimed at the choir so they can hear the track clearly and one near the solo mic (if you are using solos.) If you have never discussed children's performances with him before, specifically talk about how the children's voices should balance with the accompaniment - voices should always be "out front." Decide whether you will use the split track with voices or the stereo track. One option is to put the voices from the split track only in the choir monitors for the children to hear and put the accompaniment and your children's voices in the "house" speakers. This requires a special set-up on the sound board, so you need to talk about it in advance. If available, it is ideal for the cast to wear lavalier or headset mics.

It is helpful to let the sound man himself talk to the actors and soloists at the technical rehearsal. He can emphasize to them the necessity of standing close to the mic and projecting (speaking with volume). He should also give any special instructions about where to get their mic's, where to return their mic's, if or how to turn wireless mic's on and off, etc.

SCRIPTS - Prepare two scripts for sound, one for lighting and one for video if needed.

- One is for the sound man with mic cues. It is helpful to list at the beginning of each scene which characters will speak during the scene. Ask your sound man what information will help him.
- The other script is for the sound assistant who will cue the accompaniment CD or iPod. She should be very familiar with the script and music. (One of your choir directors or assistants is a good candidate.) Every sound effect cue and "song start" cue should be highlighted in this script.

OTHER- Lighting and video crew also need marked scripts.

LIGHTS - If you have any special lighting available in your church, it will add greatly to your performance. Enlist someone who knows how to run the system. Prepare a script with specific cues. Be sure the children are well lit, and there are no shadows on their faces. If you have the option of lighting different areas of the stage, darken the choir area during the drama scenes. Meet with the lighting operator to run through the script before technical rehearsal.

Tips for Teaching Choreography to Children

- Children love to move! It is natural for them to express themselves through movement. "Choreography" is planned movement that enhances the meaning of the music, and in the VBS/Christian context, it contributes to clearly communicating the message of the songs. When teaching children the choreography that goes with the VBS music, encourage them to sing, smile and have fun!
- The director should thoroughly learn the choreography before beginning to teach it. Mirror all movements so the children will be correct (right/left) when they mirror you. This means if you want the children to move their right hand, you move your left hand. If you want them to step to the right, you step to the left. Of course, you must say, "right," when you want them to move to the right, even though you are moving left.
- Encourage the children to be expressive with their faces and keep their faces toward the audience. They should not look down at their feet!
- Remind the children that the movements are supposed to make the meaning of the songs clear and the singing is the priority! If the moves are messy or not sharp and distract from the song, leave them out.
- In the context of VBS, we have to teach the songs and movement in a very short time frame so it is necessary to "cut to the chase" with teaching methods. Use the CD extensively to let the children sing along with the voices as they learn the movements. This especially contributes to the excitement and energy level.
- Display the words to the songs in an easy to read format: PowerPoint, overhead cels, posters, etc. If you use posters, make sure they are written with wide tipped marker in letters big enough to read from the back of your rehearsal room. Write in poetry format - starting each new phrase on a new line. PowerPoint files are available on *VBS 2010 Worship Rally Enhanced CD*. You can also use the DVD version with the lyrics.
- Teach the motions as you teach the songs. Break each song into sections to teach. Figure out what is the hardest section (if there is one) and teach it first. You may want to teach the difficult movement before you teach the vocal part.
- Enlist one or two middle school or high school students to learn the choreography and be your assistants. This is especially helpful if you have to teach the music in a large room with lots of children at once. The youth should stand at the front with you and demonstrate the moves, then do all the choreography as the children do it. It is your choice whether they will face the children (and learn the choreography backwards so they can mirror) or if they will have their backs to the children.
- As the leaders, stay ahead of the choir. Give them reminder cues about what is coming next 2 or 3 beats before time to do it. Example: Point in the direction of the next move before doing it.
- Choose a "front line" for each (or some) of the songs. Choose 6-8 children who are good at the choreography to stand in front of the choir (facing the audience) and perform the song as the leaders. This is especially helpful for the one or two most complicated songs. The choir has someone to watch and the audience sees the "cleanest" choreography.
- The choreography for Saddle Ridge Ranch VBS 2010 is one of the "secrets of success." Doing the "moves" adds a layer of learning that helps lock the words in the kids' memory and they love it! Learn it well before you teach it, get inspired by Jeff's creativity, loosen up and have fun!