

The Trial of Billy Scott, by Mazie Hall, is a twenty-minute children's language comedy focused on the trial of main character Billy Scott who is accused of abusing Vernon J. Verb by using the sentence "We was going to the park." Throughout the act, testimony for and against Billy is given by those who knew him best. The ending of the play changes every time the play is performed based on whether the jury, who is the audience, finds Billy guilty of the crime. There are fourteen characters.



The Trial of Billy Scott is not set in a particular time period but is set in the United States. (The Prosecuting Attorney mentions a few of the founding fathers in his opening remarks: George Washington, the first president of the United States and Patrick Henry, a politician and orator famous for his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech.)

The action of the play takes place in a typical courtroom complete with tables and chairs for the prosecution and defense, a bench for the judge, and a witness stand. As in the United States today, anyone accused of a crime receives the right to a trial by a jury made up of their peers. Therefore, the cast includes a bailiff, judge, prosecuting attorney, defense attorney, foreman of the jury, and a jury. However, unlike modern law, the jury's vote does not have to be unanimous. For example, if there were six members of the jury and five thought the accused was guilty, the ruling would be guilty. The same goes if five find the accused innocent, the ruling would be innocent.

The people in this world appear to have a god: Webster, the creator of Merriam Webster's Dictionary. As opposed to asking God the Almighty to guide them when on the witness stand they swear according to this prompt: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Webster?" However, the language of the play suggests that it is not Webster himself that these people worship, but the prescribed correct usage

of grammar. It follows then, that a good, beautiful, and polite person always uses proper grammar in this society. They are members of the Good English family the Prosecuting Attorney states. This character also gives us a glimpse into the reason for Billy's trial; those who deviate from the mold of prescribed grammar must be corrected for the sake of order, heritage, and respect for others lest "the very streets of our fair city [be] filled with broken verbs, fractured pronouns and murdered phrases!"



Here are two excerpts from this play that I used for auditions:

1:

Prosecuting Attorney: Mrs. Good English, this child was adopted by you at a very early age, wasn't he?

Mrs. Good English: Oh, yes. He was not more than a year old when I took him.

PA: You tried to give him good training?

MGE: Yes, sir. I set him a good example at all times. I tried to show him correct usage.

PA: How did he repay your kindness?

MGE: He was so careless. I gave him four kinds of sentences, eight parts of speech and thousands of words to use! But he had no regard for my feelings. He tossed his verbs about, left sentences unfinished and was not careful to make his pronouns agree with their antecedents.

PA: Then you think he is capable of committing the crime of which he is accused?

MGE: Yes, I'm sure he is.

2:

Prosecuting Attorney: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we are to consider the facts in the case of Vernon J. Verb against Billy Scott who, as you have heard, is accused of using a singular verb with a plural subject. I shall attempt to prove that this man committed the unpardonable crime of saying, "We was going to the park." This, you will see at once, is a rime of such nature that it is the duty of all right-thinking citizens to stamp it out. Think of the confusion which might follow such a practice! Verbs, my dear ladies, and gentlemen are the most important members of the Good English family. Yet, here we have a man who is so careless, so ignorant, or so lawless, that he fails to use verbs which agree with their subjects. Is this behavior worthy of our great heritage, as English-speaking people? This is a crime against Washington, against Patrick Henry, against our early history! Why our very country is based upon a decent respect for the rights of others!



As I look back on this project as a whole, I think there were more positives than negatives to this production, although there are a few things I think could have been improved. I was really pleased that I chose a play that required audience interaction (the jury voting for Billy's innocence or guilt). I had a lot of people say they enjoyed getting involved and not just being a bystander, and I thought it worked really well. I was also pleased with the way each character's personality developed and was portrayed. Everyone created their own unique person that mixed well with the other characters in that society. Part of this came from the amazing suggestions that were shared with me, the cast, and my assistant director. I was overwhelmed by the number of suggestions, some good and some not as good, that cast members had throughout the rehearsal process. This production definitely would not have gone as well as it did without their suggestions and support. One thing I think contributed significantly to a positive cast chemistry was that I managed to cast a group of people that spend a significant amount of time together already. Everyone was used to and enjoyed each other's presence and I think this made the process more enjoyable for everyone. Obviously, staging and sightlines could have been better, but I think it worked as well as it could for the space where we were performing.

If I could go back and do this again, I would have liked to choose one standard selection from the script for auditions and then picked other selections for each person auditioning based on what I heard and saw during the initial reading. I also wish I would have added no more than one-half hour to each rehearsal to allow more time for different activities and exercises. One day we did the play overacting and that brought out a lot of good things.

Ultimately, I loved going through this process and I loved being able to collaborate and communicate with the other directors both in and out of class. I was able to get a lot of helpful suggestions from them and they were a great resource to bounce ideas off of. If anything, I wish we could have done more of this.