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West students get into the act

Club produces one-act plays

By **Rob Daniel**
Iowa City Press-Citizen



Hadiza Sa-Aadu, left, Jeff Irlbeck, Lauren Baker, Leah Hirsch, Abi Marshall and Greg Redlawsk rehearse for their one-act play, "The Case of the Crushed Petunias" by Tennessee Williams. **Press-Citizen / Hannah van Zutphen-Kann**

If you go

- What: Students Producing Innovative Theatre's productions of "The Case of the Crushed Petunias" by Tennessee Williams and "Gary Grinkle's Battle with Wrinkles" by Stefan Graves Lanfer.
- When, where: Thursday and Friday, West High Little Theatre.
- Cost: \$3 for students and senior citizens, \$5 for adults.

Lauren Baker and Jeff Irlbeck went through their paces on stage, working to create the personas of a suppressed young woman and a lively young man.



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"I can't give definite answers," said Baker, as "Miss Simple," in response to an invitation to go out for fun. "I'm from Boston."

The play is a one-act production of "The Case of the Crushed Petunias" by Tennessee Williams. It is unique because all facets -- acting, directing, technical staff work -- are being done by students at West High who also collaborated with Horn Elementary students.

The play, along with "Gary Grinkle's Battle with Wrinkles" by Stefan Graves Lanfer, will be performed Thursday and Friday at West High's Little Theater by Students Producing Innovative Theatre, a new drama group at West High.

Seniors Andrew Redlawsk, Brett Maier, Kathleen Hession and Kelly Johnson revived the group after a six-year hiatus.

"You get the chance to make your ideas work," Redlawsk, 18, said. "I would see scenes played out in books. I've always had an interest in directing and acting, so I thought I'd give it a shot and see what it's like."

SPIT had auditions in mid-December, with some 20 students eventually being selected. They read scripts for the plays during the winter break so they could begin rehearsals in January.

Hession, who along with Johnson will direct "Battle with Wrinkles," said the plays were designed to be child friendly. This included recruiting the third- and fourth-graders in Pam Kautz's class at Horn Elementary to draw pictures of the characters' houses, which will be recreated by the West High students for the production.

"I think that's really great to bring in," Hession, 17, said. "We wanted something that would have mass appeal. Given the talent we have at West High, we thought we would be able to do something with it."

The students taking their first hands at directing have their own styles as well. Redlawsk and Maier worked with the actors to perfect their expressions and the pace of the performance.

"If you breeze through this, the audience, it's going to be over their heads," Redlawsk said to the actors at a rehearsal last week.

Hession said she and Johnson decided not to micro-manage the production.

"Kelly and I will build the frame of the house, and the actors get to fill it in," Hession said.

The actors said they hope to carry on the group once this year's senior directors graduate. For Baker, this includes directing her own show next year.

"It's like bringing along the next generation," the 16-year-old junior said. "I really thought it would be interesting to do a production with my peers."

Irlbeck, 17, a junior, said he hopes to pursuing acting as a career one day and thinks being on the other side of the production might help him.

"I might want to take a play and direct it," Irlbeck said. "I want to get

some directing skills so I know what they're (directors) going through."

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