Westminster College’s CELEBRITY SERIES for KIDS Guide to
Theater Etiquette and Terminology

The following study guide was written to assist teachers and parents in explaining theatre etiquette to children. We recommend using it to introduce your class/children to the guidelines and etiquette expected when attending live theatre events so that all audience members will be able to enjoy the performance with few distractions.

The Theater Experience

A live theatrical production is exciting and vibrant. The actors, the audience, and the backstage personnel are all part of the experience. YOU, as part of the audience play an important role in the atmosphere of the production and your response plays an important role to the performance of the entertainers. It helps them (and can hinder them) in their performance.

All of these guidelines are based on one simple standard: Creating the best experience for everyone, keeping in mind that actors are live and can see and hear you – as can your fellow audience members.

THEATER ETIQUETTE:

• **How should I dress?** Years ago people got dressed to the “nines” to see a show. Nowadays, when everything is more relaxed, so is the acceptable dress standard for theater.
  o People tend to get a little more dressed up on Friday and Saturday nights, with men in suits and women in dressier attire.
  o But for most performances, simple, neat, clean clothes are perfectly acceptable. Even jeans, t-shirts and tennis shoes are seen, especially at matinees, as long as they are clean and don’t have holes.
  o Smart casual is always a good rule to follow. Smart casual is when you dress in your nicest casual clothes.

• **Arrive promptly.** Plan to arrive 30 minutes early. Arriving late to theater is a big NO, NO. Late entry disturbs everyone, including the performers.
  o Most shows post signs that say “latecomers will be seated at an appropriate interval. This means when it will cause the least disruption. This is usually during a scene break or applause break at the end of a song.
  o Let the usher know you have arrived late and ask to be seated. The usher will usually peek into the house and escort you to your seat when the time is right.
  o There is a safety issue here too. The theater is dark once the show has begun and the usher will have a flashlight to assist you.
  o Don’t be surprised if you have to wait in the very back until intermission if you arrive late and your seat is down near the stage.

• **Restroom visits are best made before the show begins.** A helpful tip is that if you dine out before attending the theater, use the restroom at the restaurant as theater restrooms often have long lines.
• **Stay with your family or group at all times.** Wait for the ushers to help you find your seat – they’ll want to see your ticket to make sure everyone is in the right place.

• Some people are allergic to perfumes and colognes, so if you must wear these, go lightly.

• The usual rule in theatres where live performances are given is that there is **NO eating or drinking in the theater.** In recent years, this rule has relaxed somewhat in many theaters. But for the purposes of your visit to ORR AUDITORIUM at Westminster College:
  o Save the snacks for intermission.
  o Eating and drinking can be distracting not only to other people in the audience but also to the actors, ie. chewing gum.
  o You are not at a movie theater. Everyone likes popcorn during the movies, but you aren’t at the movies!
  o If you must have something to keep your throat from getting dry, unwrap cough drops or hard candy **before** the performance begins. The crinkling as you unwrap the candy is distracting to those around you.

• **Photography and recording during the performance are not usually permitted.**
  o There are copyright laws that prohibit photographing or recording so it is actually illegal in some instances. You may be asked to leave if you are caught.
  o Flash photos can be dangerous to the actors, who may be temporarily dazzled by the flash and step off stage. Actors will sometimes stop the show if they are photographed.
  o Times are changing though and some performers welcome photos and encourage audience members to post on Facebook or twitter even during the show. Only do this, however, if it is clearly stated that this is allowed. Otherwise, assume it is not allowed.

• Please turn off all electronic devices such as cell phones, etc.

• It is important to remain seated throughout the entire performance

• Sit straight in your chair with feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
  o Do not sit up on your knees because you may block the person behind you.
  o Do not put your feet on the seats or kick the chair in front of you. This will damage them and the theatre will not be as nice for future visitors

• Lights Out = Quiet Time. When the lights in the theater dim, this is a signal that the show is about to begin. When the lights on the stage come up, all attention should be on the performance

• Give your full attention and energy to the performers. In return, the performers give it back to you with a better performance.

• Don’t talk or sing along during the show unless you are asked by someone on the stage. Audience participation is lots of fun but only appropriate when participation is by invitation by the performers
- Sometimes we think that if we whisper it is ok, but if everyone in the audience whispers, it can be disruptive to the performers.
- The audience paid to hear the performers sing – **not you**!
- Enjoy the show – free free to laugh and clap but don’t talk to the person next to you – you are not watching TV.
- If you begin to cough and can’t stop, try to leave during a round of applause and perhaps watch the show from the back of the theater.
- Do not jangle keys, bangles or coins during the performance.

- **Show the performers your appreciation for their efforts!** When there are parts of the production that you particularly enjoy, naturally you should feel free to laugh and clap. Performers appreciate this positive feedback.

- **Please remain in your seat until the very end. The end means the end of the curtain call. It is extremely discourteous to the actors for you to head for the door before the performance is entirely over.**
  - Not everyone stays to watch movie credits roll, but applauding the actors is a way you can show them how much you enjoyed the show. Applause is a sound actors love to hear! Your appreciation is why they are there!

**REMEMBER THE GOLDEN RULE!**
Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you!

We hope you enjoy this theater experience and that you will return, either with your class or with your friends and family to enjoy other presentations.

Your cooperation will ensure a well-focused environment for everyone to enjoy, cherish, and remember.

Thank you!