



Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association

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Building confidence since 1895
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State One-Act Play Contest: Backgrounder

- Each year, 50-80 schools across the state participate in the Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association (WISDAA) One-Act Play contest series. Each school performs a short work or a cutting from a larger play or musical.
- The first official contest level involves 12 geographic *districts*, plus a statewide “virtual district.” Schools earning qualifying scores from two of three adjudicators (judges) at the district level are invited to participate in one of five geographic *sections*, plus a statewide “virtual section.” At the sectional level, schools earning qualifying scores (at a higher threshold) from two of three adjudicators are invited to participate at the State Festival. Typically, about 40-50 schools are invited to present at the State level as part of the larger *Wisconsin Interscholastic Theatre Festival*, held in person, as well as an online one-act contest component, if needed (no schools used this in 2022).
- At the State Festival, schools may earn several awards upon benchmark scores by two of four adjudicators, respected artists and practitioners who are drawn from professional, collegiate, community, and educational theatre backgrounds. These awards include:
 - Merit Awards (each school can earn any of these)
 - **Directing:** interpretation and staging of the production is cohesive and imaginative.
 - **Ensemble:** the company collaborates well, driving effective pacing of the production.
 - **Technical:** elements of scenery, costuming, etc., communicate/enhance the audience’s experience.
 - **Acting:** actors bring authentic, memorable, and poignant characters to life on stage (available to any number of actors in each cast).
 - Overall Award (each school earns one of these)
 - **All-State:** represents a school’s achievement of advancing to, and performing at the State Festival (default award a school gets if it does not achieve *Critic’s Choice*).
 - **Critic’s Choice:** represents the highest standards of excellence at the State Festival. Criteria for consideration include innovative vision, authentic storytelling, and artistic development; the production should clearly support learning and development of students.
- Like solo and ensemble contests run by the Wisconsin School Music Association (WSMA), the WISDAA festival series is *non-competitive/non-comparative*. If schools achieve benchmark scores, they advance or earn awards. The WISDAA, alongside the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association and WSMA, is a member of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), which provides standards for interscholastic athletics and performing arts activities.
- One-Act award statistics for 2022 (November 17-19 at UW-Whitewater)
 - Participating– Schools: 40; Students: 888
 - Directing: 30 schools
 - Ensemble: 32 schools
 - Technical: 32 schools
 - Acting: 73 students
 - Critic’s Choice: 25 schools



Wisconsin Interscholastic Theatre Festival (WITF)

- Schools whose one-acts do not advance to the State level – as well as schools who did not participate in the earlier levels of the one-act contest – are encouraged to participate in myriad programming offered beyond the one-act contest, including:
 - Workshops instructed by professional theatre artists and university-level faculty
 - Educational Theatre Association “Thespian Excellence Awards” contests in performance and in technical theatre that can earn students the opportunity to participate in the International Thespian Festival in Indiana in June.
 - Tech Challenge contest run by ETC (Electronic Theatre Controls) out of Middleton, Wis.
 - Full-length “showcase” productions (play and musical)
 - Exhibit expo featuring university recruiters in theatre, as well as theatrical vendors
- Attending the event, in addition to 40 one-act schools and 888 students, were an additional 13 schools and 226 students and a total of 152 adults from among the 53 schools. Friends and families who came to watch shows (and were not official school chaperones) were not included in those numbers.
- The signature festival sponsor since 2018 has been Festival Foods headquartered in De Pere, Wis.
- Additional support for the festival is provided by the Alliance for Wisconsin Theatre Education, a group of PK-12 and post-secondary educators and vendors interested in advancing theatre education in Wisconsin; along with the Educational Theatre Association/Wisconsin Thespians Chapter, the national organization for PK-12 theatre.
- Current rotation of hosting institutions for the event:
 - UW-Green Bay (2023 – *inaugural hosting*)
 - UW-Whitewater (2022)
 - UW-Stevens Point (2021)
 - Online (2020)
 - UW-Milwaukee (2019 – *inaugural hosting*)
 - Viterbo University, La Crosse (2018)
 - In the past, UW-La Crosse and UW-Oshkosh have also hosted the event.
- While the one-act contest has been in place since 1930, all additional programming was added in 1991 as part of a partnership with UW-Madison’s Division of Continuing Studies, which at the time, managed professional development and extension programming in theatre. In 2018, that program was disbanded, and the Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association (WISDAA) took on full operation of the entire festival (and not just the one-act contest).
- Many Wisconsin schools participate in the festival every other year. In “off” years, those schools often opt to produce a full-length production and/or musical, rather than an interscholastic contest one-act.

Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association

Since 1895, the Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association (WISDAA) has provided programming that now serves middle and high school students in theatre, film, debate, and public speaking “forensics” activities. Each year, our nonprofit organization serves about 10,000 Wisconsin students from 350+ high schools, and 100+ middle schools in some of the oldest speech and theatre contests in the United States. Our aim is to bolster students’ confidence and creativity through interscholastic assessment of performance in a public setting. For more information, visit www.wisdaa.org.