



MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS

DIRECTED BY MATTHEW D. KALLIS

THE STUDY GUIDE



OWN

OPRAH WINFREY NETWORK

CANYONBACK FILMS

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WHY WE MADE THIS FILM

As a society, we cherish our music, movies, TV shows, stand-up comedians, books and Broadway too. Yet when school budgets shrink, the first thing that gets cut is the arts – as if it’s merely a disposable afterthought to education.

In reality, the arts are the perfect way to help apply the more basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Interpreting scripts, building sets, making costumes, learning to dance or playing music utilize classroom skills in a more active and fun application. The arts help keep kids off the streets, create expectations and set goals, offer opportunities of unique expression, build self-esteem, encourage friendships and camaraderie, create extended families and teach valuable life skills and lessons.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS is a documentary that portrays performing arts education in action. While there are plenty of films that demonstrate how our schools and teachers have failed us, this film proves that, through the arts, school can be both inspiring and transformational.

Improving the quality of education is a fundamental concern in our society. There is currently a major debate in the United States about how we can make our schools better.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS tells the story of how the members of one community find a way to keep the arts alive and vital in their schools. We hope this film inspires a call-to-action in people and communities to rethink their commitment to arts education by supporting these essential programs or creating their own.



SETTING THE STAGE

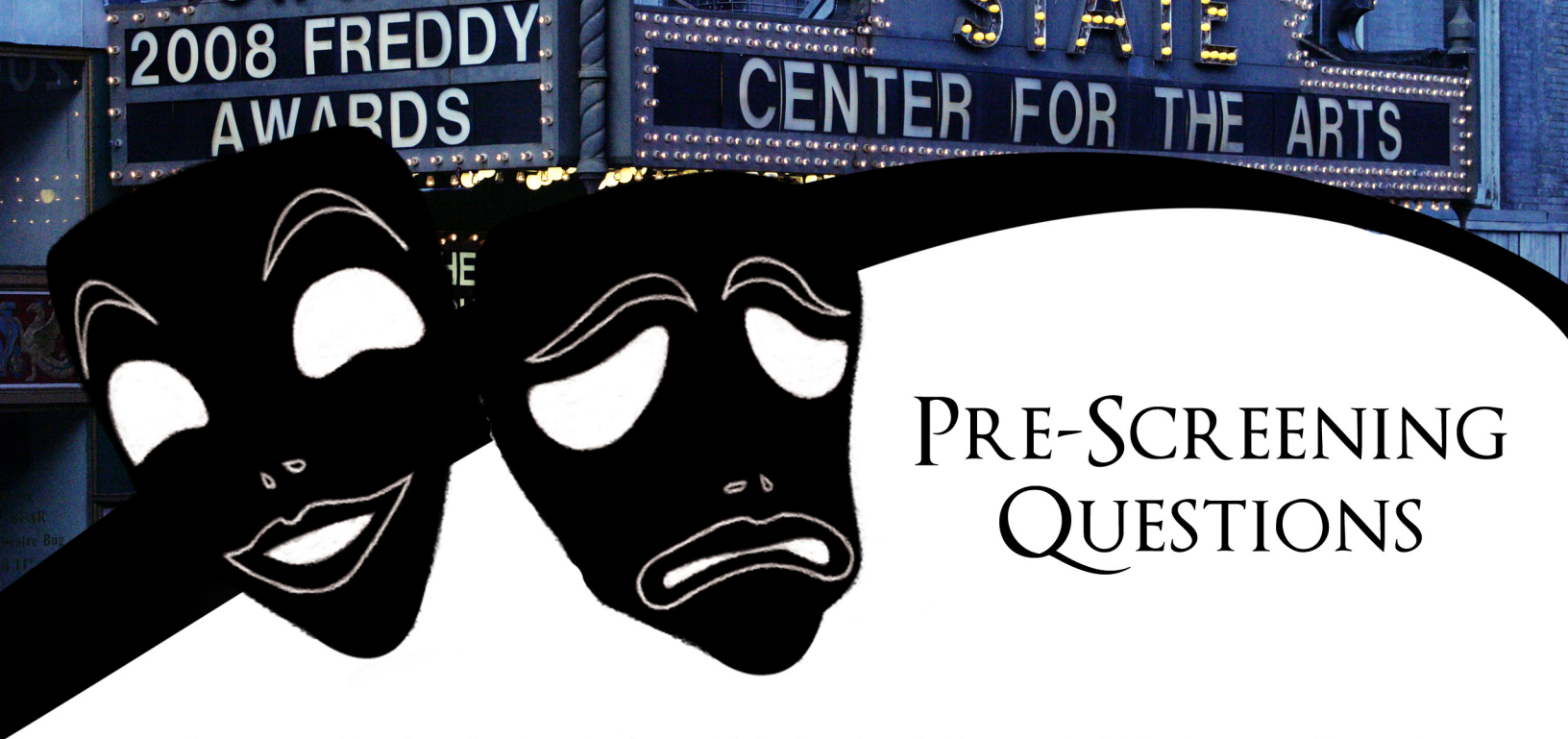
MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS follows three high school theater troupes and their creative journeys to the “Freddy Awards” - a live, televised event modeled after Broadway’s Tony Awards - that recognizes excellence in high school musical theater. The film demonstrates that arts education encourages the same teamwork, camaraderie and confidence as sports – in spite of the inequity between the two in high schools across America.

The film explores the following themes:

- I. Benefits of Arts Education
- II. Sports vs. Arts
- III. Competition in the Arts
- IV. Stereotypes in the Arts
- V. Funding for the Arts in Schools

Explore Themes and Essential Questions:

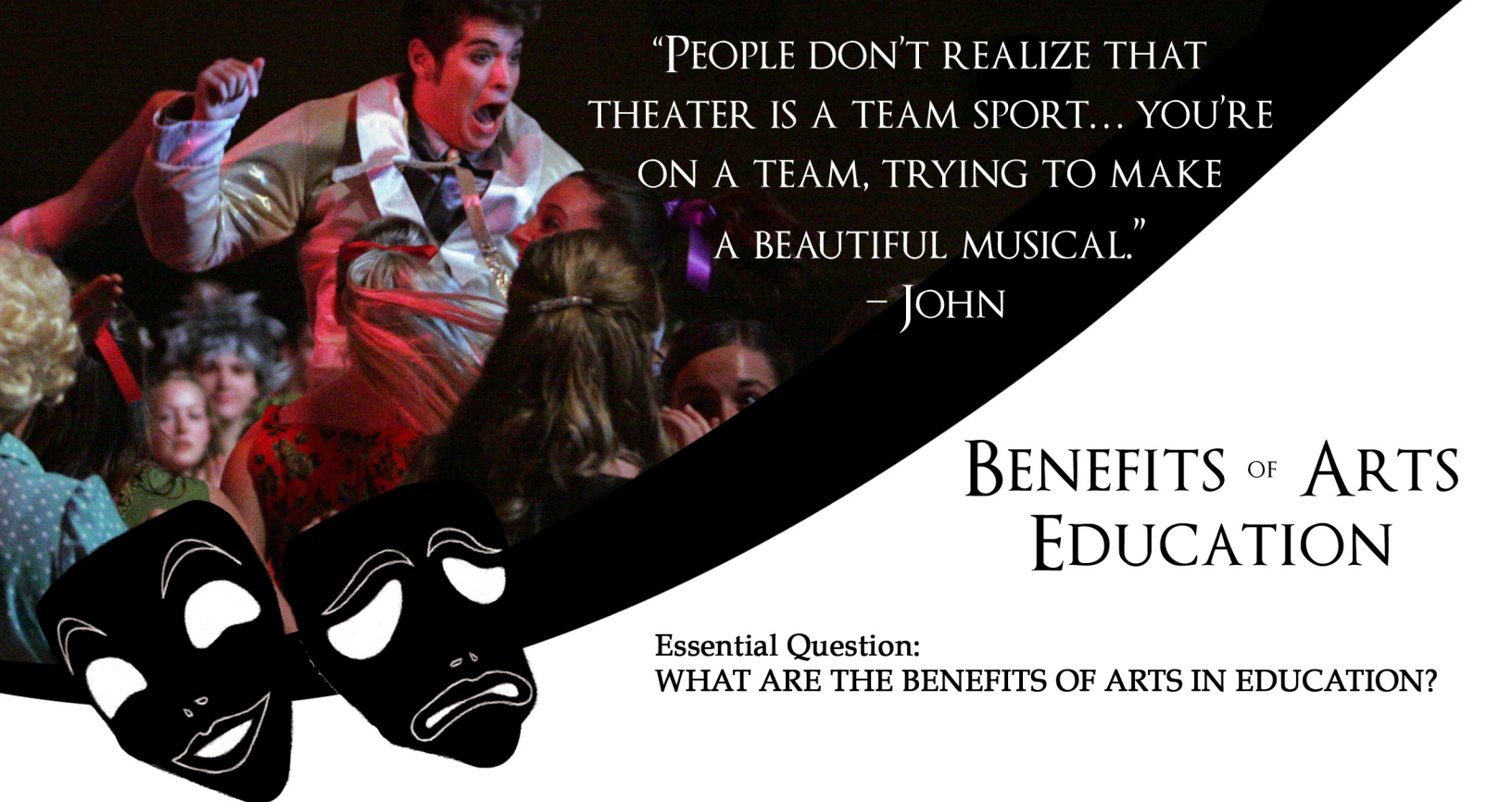
The following pages contain a list of themes, essential questions and topics touched on in **MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS**. Before watching the movie consider the prescreening questions. After viewing the film, explore with your teacher and classmates the material and assignments provided within this study guide.



PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS

In preparation for viewing the film, think about and discuss the following questions with your teacher and fellow students:

- What is arts education?
- What kind of arts can be found in your school?
- What have your arts experiences been in school?
- How have you experienced the arts outside of school?
- What do you think can be learned from an arts education?
- How can the arts strengthen a school's connection to the community?
- What is a documentary film?
- How does it differ from a fictional (or narrative) film?
- If a film is a documentary, does that mean it depicts the "truth"?
- How are film and activism connected?
- Does film have the potential to make change?
- As a student, what can you do to improve the quality of education for your school community?
- As a filmmaker, what are the challenges inherent in trying to move your audience to take action?



“PEOPLE DON’T REALIZE THAT
THEATER IS A TEAM SPORT... YOU’RE
ON A TEAM, TRYING TO MAKE
A BEAUTIFUL MUSICAL.”

– JOHN

BENEFITS OF ARTS EDUCATION

Essential Question:

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ARTS IN EDUCATION?

The arts are a crucial component of education. Theater, music, dance, painting, ceramics, and etcetera play a vital role in the maturation of young people. The arts help in social and emotional development, critical thinking, forming opinions, communication, goal setting, teamwork and many other disciplines – all in an active setting.

- What difference has the arts made in your life?
- What are some of the emotions the film elicits? Why does it make you feel that way?
- How can the arts prepare one for the future?
- What are some occupations that the arts might prepare one for?
- Do people who will never become artists need an arts education? Why?
- Do you think the arts are necessary in vocational high schools? Why or why not?
- What are the different teaching styles of Rita Cortez, Mark Stutz and Jennifer Wescoe?
- Is one teaching style more effective than the other? Why?
- How does a high school musical theater awards ceremony benefit arts education?
- Why might there not be more high school musical theater award ceremonies across the country?



BENEFITS ^{OF} ARTS EDUCATION

ACTIVITIES

- Create a campaign to develop awareness and foster support of the arts in your school. Include a logo and slogan.
- Start an outreach program to introduce the arts to students in elementary and middle schools.
- Design a musical theater awards program for your area. What would you call it? Why? Design the trophy. What categories would you include? How would you organize such an event? What sort of challenges might be involved in planning this kind of ceremony? How could it be implemented?
- Formulate a “Top 10 List” of why arts education is important to student development. Present the list at the local school board meeting.
- Create a monthly newsletter to keep the entire school informed about the various arts programs.



“WE WANTED TO DO THIS BECAUSE
PUTTING ON THE HIGH SCHOOL
MUSICAL WAS NEVER GIVEN THE KIND OF
ACCOLADES THAT SPORTS RECEIVED.”
- SHELLEY BROWN

SPORTS vs. ARTS

Essential question: WHY DO SPORTS IN SCHOOLS SEEM
TO BE MORE HIGHLY REGARDED THAN THE ARTS?

It seems like sports in schools is favored over the arts. The athletic facilities are often well maintained and plentiful while auditoriums and band rooms lack the funds to keep up appearances. In many schools, most of the resources go to athletics. In times of budget cuts, it often seems like money is taken away from the arts before sports.

- Why might sports and arts be considered opposites?
- How might busy schedules for students play a role in keeping sports and arts separate?
- How might tradition play a role in favoring sports over arts?
- How might college scholarships be a factor in favoring sports?
- What are the differences between theater and sports?
- What are the similarities between theater and sports?
- What do you think is more important in schools, sports or arts? Why?
- What have your experiences been in regards to sports versus arts?
- How might a ceremony like the Freddy Awards strike a welcome chord in a sports-minded community?
- Why is the film called MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS?



SPORTS ^{vs.} ARTS

ACTIVITIES

- Create an event in which the arts and sports work together to unite and rally support for all.
- Conduct a screening of MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS for students on the sports' teams. Formulate a lesson plan that both enriches the movie experience and creates an understanding of arts education for those not involved in the arts.
- Make an inference as to why the school district tends to support sports over the arts. Support your answers with research.
- Predict what would happen if your school board cut all sports.
- Organize a softball game between your theater troupe and one from a neighboring school.



“WHEN IT GOT TO BE COMPETITIVE TO THE POINT WHERE SCHOOLS WERE BEING NEGATIVE WITH EACH OTHER – I HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THAT.”

–MARK STUTZ



COMPETITION IN THE ARTS

Essential Question: SHOULD THERE BE COMPETITION IN THE ARTS?

Many educators, parents and teachers believe that the arts are different than sports in that it is not competitive by nature. Athletes can be judged in an objective manner (like by passing yards or home runs). Judging excellence in the arts is more subjective; it's a matter of opinion. As a result, experts often complain that competing for awards goes against the grain of what the arts are all about. In traditional thinking, athletes win trophies and scholarships, whereas, the performer works for applause not prizes.

- In general, what are the pros and cons of competition?
- What competitive elements exist in the theater?
- In what ways is school competitive?
- How might competition help the arts?
- How might competition hurt the arts?
- How can trophies and scholarships help the artist?
- In the film, Mark Stutz from Parkland High School seems like the most competitive of the teachers. Is this a good or bad trait? Why?
- How do award ceremonies like the Tony's, the Oscars or the Grammy's affect our opinions of competition in the arts?
- Describe an event from one of the big award shows where competition was handled well. Describe another event where it was handled poorly.
- In the film, we learn that some schools threatened to drop out of the Freddy Awards over a costume controversy. What might you foresee as other potential controversies in this kind of award ceremony?



COMPETITION IN THE ARTS

ACTIVITIES

- Break up the class into small theater troupes. Each troupe writes a brief play dramatizing how competition in the arts might create hurt feelings. Do not resolve the conflict. Each troupe performs its play and allows the class to brainstorm various solutions to the conflict. Each troupe takes the best solution and improvises it to resolve the conflict in its play.
- Write and read to the class your acceptance speech for winning a Freddy Award.
- Compare your school's theater program to those at neighboring schools in terms of resources, reputation, popularity, strengths and weaknesses. Explain what this comparison teaches you.
- Organize a "one-act" play festival with other high school theater programs. Form a panel of judges; choose criteria in which the plays are to be judged and a winner chosen.
- Research schools involved in high school musical theater award programs. Formulate a list of questions about competition in the arts and interview/survey those involved (organizers, teachers, students). Analyze, evaluate and present the data to your class.



"I'M NOT GONNA LET YOU LABEL ME
JUST BECAUSE OF WHAT I LIKE TO DO."

– ZACH



STEREOTYPES IN THE ARTS

Essential question: WHAT ARE THE STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE ARTS?

Those who participate in the school arts programs are often stereotyped in negative ways, while athletes are treated as school heroes. Although the stigma and stereotypes have diminished in recent years, they remain strongly ingrained in our society. Arts education is vital to dispelling stereotypes and helps to make participating in the arts a source of recognition and admiration.

- Why might these stereotypes exist?
- Some say stereotypes are based on truth. Is this accurate? If yes, why are people's feelings hurt when they're stereotyped?
- How might you stereotype John, Zack, Amanda, Ali and Katie?
- Who are some of the students in your class that reflect similar personalities to the kids in the movie? What are the similarities?
- Why might playing in a garage band be considered cool but performing in the high school musical not?
- What stereotypes exist for the high school athlete?
- List and discuss other student stereotypes.
- Who else, other than students, is stereotyped in school?
- Describe a time you labeled someone a certain way and then learned you were incorrect.



STEREOTYPES IN THE ARTS

ACTIVITIES

- Share two true statements and one untrue statement about yourself to the class. Allow students to evaluate which are true and untrue. Have each classmate do the same.
- Produce an assembly program that addresses the issues of stereotypes in schools. Use the performing and visual arts to help the audience understand various stereotypes and offer positive solutions to deal with them.
- Formulate a movie poster that best communicates your high school theater résumé. What would you call a film based on your theater experiences?
- List five celebrities who fit specific stereotypes. Research and summarize their backgrounds. Explain how they deal with being labeled. Support your findings.
- Publish a yearbook in Playbill fashion that features the shows produced and people involved as a memento of your time in high school theater.



“THE DISTRICT ALLOCATES MONEY
TO THE SPORTS TEAMS – IT’S NOT
THE SAME STORY WITH US.”

-JENNIFER WESCOE



FUNDING THE ARTS IN SCHOOLS

Essential question: WHY ARE THE ARTS IN SCHOOLS OFTEN CUT IN TIMES OF BUDGET CRISIS?

The fact that school arts are often cut first in times of a budget crunch has been a source of frustration for many years. Despite the studies that prove the benefits of arts education, parents and teachers tend to treat the arts as expendable luxuries. Understanding that the arts in schools help to create a confident and enriching life is one of the goals of MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS.

- Why might sports sometimes be spared from budget cuts?
- How are the arts funded in your school?
- How does this compare to the way sports are funded in your school?
- What were some ways mentioned in the film that the schools raise money for their musicals?
- What are others ways in which the arts can raise funds?
- How can the local arts community help support arts education?
- What are the names of some organizations that support the arts?
- What are some financial similarities between the State Theatre (home of the Freddy Awards) and the high school theaters?
- How might a ceremony like the Freddy Awards help to generate funds for high school productions?
- What are some obstacles that prevent audiences from attending live theater?
What are some solutions to these obstacles?



FUNDING ^{THE} ARTS IN SCHOOLS

ACTIVITIES

- Research minutes of a school board meeting and chart how money is spent. Make an inference as to how the board arrives at its decisions.
- Research how other districts allocate their funds and design a visual graph that depicts findings.
- Organize an event to raise money for your school arts programs.
- Create a Facebook page, website or blog for your theater program to share the arts education experience with others. Include stories, interviews and photographs.
- Organize a day at school dedicated entirely to the arts. What would you call it? What sort of events could you organize to allow people to interact with the arts and artists of your school?



ENCORE QUESTIONS

- What conclusions can be drawn about arts education from the evidence provided in the film?
- What are the similarities and differences you observe in comparison with your own life?
- Describe the ways the school, community and educational experience of the students in the film are similar to your own? How are they different?
- What are the factors that you think contribute to the similarities and disparities between your experiences?
- In the film, we learn that John (the soccer player) was cautious about the “flamboyant” nature of musical theater but later changed his way of thinking. How might that have happened?
- When asked about the future, shy but talented Amanda says she doesn’t plan to pursue theater professionally because she doesn’t think she can handle the rejection. What do you think about her decision?
- During a party at Zack’s house, he mentions that his parents don’t understand him, but his friends in the school theater program are like his family. How would you compare or contrast Zack’s experience with your own experience?
- At the end of the film, Katie explains that when she is onstage, she “knows where she belongs.” What does she mean?
- Do you agree or disagree with the film’s premise that the school arts programs encourage the same teamwork, camaraderie and confidence as school sport programs? What evidence supports your conclusion?
- Did the film change your assumptions about the arts and arts education?



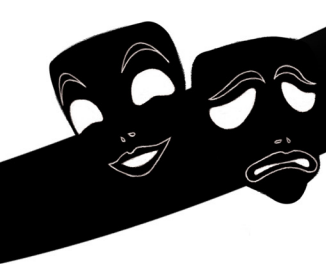
ENCORE ACTIVITIES

- To enhance your MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS experience, visit www.imdb.com to research and list other documentaries about arts education. Watch the ones that interest you. How are they all similar? What are their differences?
- Produce a documentary on the arts in your school. For example, film behind the scenes at your school musical, a rehearsal of the school choir or profile a talented student. Screen your documentary for students, teachers and parents who might be unfamiliar with arts in your school.
- Visit www.MostValuablePlayersMovie.com. Click on BACKSTAGE and view clips of unused footage. What additional information do the clips provide? Why do you think the filmmakers chose not to use that footage?
- What is the National Endowment of the Arts? Research its role in arts education.
- What is a “grant?” Research and list the various grants available for high school performing arts. What are the eligibility requirements? How could your school apply for a grant?
- What is the Tony Awards? Research and write a brief history of the award ceremony. Draw a timeline depicting all the “Best Musical” winners.
- What is the Pulitzer Prize? Research and write a brief history of the prize. Draw a timeline that depicts all the winners in the “Drama” category.
- Who was Viola Spolin? Write a brief biography and address her contribution to performing arts education?
- Identify arts education proponents in your community and invite them to speak at your school.
- Share your feelings or post a review about MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS with friends and family through social networking sites.

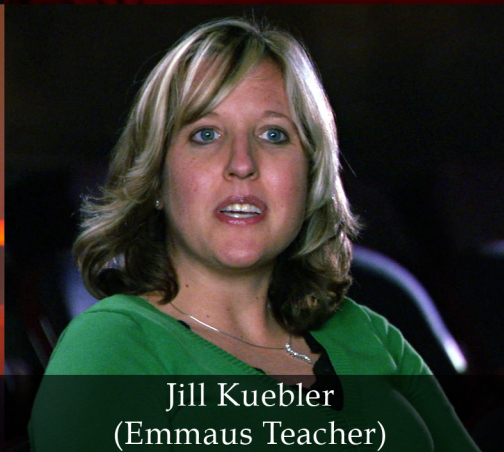
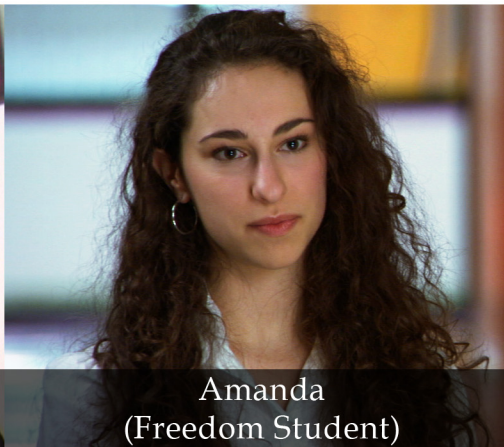


DVD CHAPTERS

1. Fanfare
2. Lehigh Valley
3. State Theatre
4. Freedom HS
5. Parkland vs. Emmaus
6. WAEB
7. Fred the Ghost
8. John's House
9. Zach's House
10. Katie & Ali
11. Sports
12. Freedom Rehearses
13. Emmaus Rehearses
14. Parkland Rehearses
15. Rita's Pep Talk
16. Curtain Up on "Les Mis"
17. Curtain Up on "Bye, Bye Birdie"
18. Parkland Kicks Off Shoes
19. Freedom Cast Meeting
20. Vic
21. Nominations
22. Singing Rehearsal
23. Vic Sings
24. Dance Montage
25. Freddy Vote
26. Raising Money for Vic
27. Parkland Prepares
28. Freedom Prom
29. Freddy Fever Montage
30. Freedom Blocking
31. Freedom Huddle
32. Deena Scolds
33. In the Zone
34. The Red Carpet
35. Opening Number
36. Shelley & Ed
37. Supporting Actress Trophy
38. Emmaus Performs
39. Featured Actress Trophy
40. Parkland Performs
41. Winners/Losers Montage
42. Female Solos
43. Leading Actress Trophy
44. Supporting Actor Trophy
45. Freedom Performs
46. Featured Actor Trophy
47. Vic's Ovation
48. Best Overall Musical Trophy
49. Finale & Exits
50. Monday Morning Quarterbacks
51. End



THE CAST



CREW

Directed and Produced by Matthew D. Kallis
Written and Produced by Christopher Lockhart
Director of Photography Curt Apduhan

Edited by Zack X. Braff
Original Score by Randy Miller
Production Sound Mixer Ken King

Still Photos Courtesy of Wilson Black Photography

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