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# Heartland Lutheran to present its first drama Saturday

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After 10 years as a school, Heartland Lutheran High School drama teacher Jennifer Blake and Heartland Lutheran seniors decided it was time to do something different.

With today's performances in the school gym, Heartland Lutheran students will be doing something different with the school's first-ever drama.

"This is the seventh year we've done a play," Blake said. "The previous six were all comedies."

She asked the students, especially seniors, if they were ready to try something different by staging a drama. The seniors wanted to do it. Blake had several potential dramas in mind, with the choice eventually being to go with "Twelve Angry Jurors."

The play, of course, has its roots in "Twelve Angry Men," which premiered as a 1954 teleplay in the old Westinghouse "Studio One" television anthology. In the original teleplay, Bob Cummings is the reluctant juror who cautions against a rush to judgment on the guilt of the defendant.

Author Reginald Rose then adapted the teleplay, "Twelve Angry Men," into a stage play by the same name.

The most famous version of "Twelve Angry Men" is the 1957 movie starring Henry Fonda as the reluctant juror.

The plot reveals how the personal experiences - and even prejudices - that jurors bring into the jury room can get tangled up in the judicial concepts of "innocent until proven guilty" and "guilty beyond a reasonable doubt."

The 1957 film did, indeed, feature only 12 angry men on the jury.

Heartland Lutheran High School's version of the jury, though, is co-ed, which results in the change of the play to "Twelve Angry Jurors."

Anyone who has seen the 1957 movie will see some familiar scenes during Heartland Lutheran's: The sudden flash of a knife into the cover of a book; the methodical discussion of how long it would have taken an elevated train to pass by and perhaps prevent a witness from hearing someone issue an angry death threat; and the deliberations over how long it would have taken a lame old man to walk through his bedroom and down a hallway to see the defendant allegedly running from the scene of the crime.

Blake said the Heartland Lutheran cast is relatively small, including only the 12 jurors and the court clerk or bailiff who periodically appears to answer juror requests for exhibits of evidence introduced during the trial.

Blake said the set is exceedingly simple. It includes the juror tables and chairs, the doorway, a water cooler and two



The jurors take a first vote during rehearsal for Heartland Lutheran High School's production of "12 Angry Jurors." The cast includes (clockwise from far left) Taylor Sherwood, Ashley Mohler, Jenae Ramsey, Zach Mettenbrink, Ava Mackey, Derek Stinson, Courtney Hiegel, Jacob Schwan, Kara Dunn, Jeremy Hollman, Brad Einspahr, Michael Hollman and Becca Spiehs (not pictured). (Independent/Scott Kingsley)

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window frames hung from a line. Thus, the jury room exists mostly in the imagination of audience members.

While the set is simple, executing the drama is not, Blake said. She noted the 12 jurors are on stage for the entire play. None of the actors other than the court clerk ever leaves the stage, which means all 12 students must stay in character for the entire performance.

There is no going off stage and catching one's breath.

Furthermore, much of the dramatic tension in the play arises from the frayed nerves of the jurors. There are moments of cross-dialogue when one juror might angrily interrupt a fellow juror who is talking. Sometimes, those interruptions are accompanied by a person furiously rising to his or her feet to make a point.

Other times, a juror will stalk around the tables to confront a fellow juror, so the heated conversation occurs with the two people's faces only inches apart.

Blake said "Twelve Angry Jurors" will be performed as a theater in the round, with audience members sitting on the bleachers on each side of the gym and also in some seats that will be placed on the north side of the set.

She noted last year's comedy had an elaborate set and large cast. This year's fall drama, with a smaller cast, will be followed by another production next spring that will involve a combination of students in the school's music program with students doing theatrical pieces.

"This is our year for doing something different," Blake said.

### **If You Go**

What: "Twelve Angry Jurors"

When: 1 p.m. matinee and 6:30 p.m. dessert theatre, Saturday, Nov. 14.

Where: Heartland Lutheran High School

Cost: \$5 for Saturday afternoon matinee and \$8 for Saturday evening dessert theatre.

Cast: Foreman, Derek Stinson; Juror 2, Courtney Hiegel; Juror 3, Jacob Schwan; Juror 4, Kara Dunn; Juror 5, Jeremy Hollman; Juror 6, Brad Einspahr; Juror 7, Michael Hollman; Juror 8, Taylor Sherwood; Juror 9, Ashley Mohler; Juror 10, Jenae Ramsey; Juror 11, Zach Mettenbrink; Juror 12, Ava Mackey.

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