

## Mark Day School Presents *Oliver, Jr.* – May, 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am so grateful to be working with your children in this year's musical, *Oliver! JR.* I'd like to share with you my goals as their director and choreographer.

It matters greatly to me not to underestimate children and their talents. In that light, I strive to set a standard of excellence. As a teacher, director, and artistic mentor to each cast member, I make every effort to give each child an opportunity to truly shine. I emphasize that productions are amazingly rewarding, collaborative experiences that require dedication to oneself and to each other.

A brief note about my teaching and casting philosophy:

The casting process is crucial. We will have a thorough audition process in which everyone is seen and heard. All students have a couple of chances to speak a line by themselves, sing, and show some movement in order for me and our Musical Director, Scott DeTurk, to assess their current skill level. We do this in a positive and nurturing way, demonstrating and discussing what works best on stage.

In my thirty years of teaching children and casting plays, my main goals have always been equity and delight in a shared experience.

It's a matter of principle to me that I've always been very careful to avoid the word "lead" when referring to roles with named, well-known characters, or parts with more lines than others. I emphasize the value and contribution of each and all of the roles in creating a successful show. Every actor is important. Every role is important. I tell them stories of how actors with *zero* lines are fully capable of stealing the show simply by staying in character, and going full-out.

My program is designed to give all students the role that will best challenge them at this particular moment in their life as an actor. I do not cast by seniority, though older and more experienced students tend to be cast in larger roles.

All students benefit from the rehearsal process in learning basic acting techniques and stage terminology, how to project their voices and sing on pitch and in tempo, how to create a character, and how to use their bodies and facial expressions to become a character physically. As such, each actor has something substantial and fun to learn or perform – *independent* of the number of lines they may or may not speak.

As to the decision to do *Oliver! JR.* I strive to choose fun, age-appropriate shows with an inclusive ratio of roles for boys and girls. The Broadway Junior adaptation of the classic novel and award-winning musical springs to life with some of the most memorable characters and songs to ever grace the stage. The music is packed with energy, color, magic, mischief, and is age-appropriate. The original script was written for 30 characters. We will most likely have somewhere in the vicinity of 60 students in our production. **As you can glean, not every child will have a speaking part.**

Of course some students are disappointed if they are not cast in a larger role. That disappointment, though painful at times, will pass, particularly if we as adults understand the importance of the process and purpose of a play production. I'm confident that by the time we are ready for the show, the entire cast will be ready for a wonderful, happy, unifying experience.

Thank you,  
[Kim Danforth](#)