



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEATRE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.0 Overview	1
1.1 Background And Purpose	1
1.2 Objectives.....	1
1.3 Methodology	2
1.4 Limitations	3
2.0 Detailed Findings By Objective	5
2.1 Identify Teens' Current Sources Of Entertainment.....	5
2.2 Determine Level Of Interest And Attitudes Toward Theatre	6
2.3 Identify Obstacles To Attending Theatre.....	8
3.0 Conclusions and Recommendations: Strategies To Overcome Obstacles In Attending Theatre	16
Appendix A: Recruitment Screener	A-1
Appendix B: Respondent Profile	B-1
Appendix C: Topic Guide	C-1



1.0 OVERVIEW

1.1 Background and Purpose

Audiences at non-profit theatres across the country tend to be older and theatres are interested in diversifying their audiences by age. High school students are one segment rarely represented in theatre audiences, and when they are they usually attend with parents or school groups, not with their friends. Theatre Communications Groups (TCG) contracted with Shugoll Research to conduct research to examine high school students' attitudes and perceptions toward theatre.

This study begins to examine the obstacles to theatre attendance among high school students and strategies to overcome them. It addresses the need for the non-profit theatre community to create the audiences of tomorrow. Future studies may examine the theatre-going habits of college students and those under age 35, additional segments that non-profit theatres would like to attract in greater numbers.

1.2 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- Identify high school students' current sources of entertainment
- Determine level of interest and attitudes toward theatre
- Identify obstacles to attending theatre
- Identify strategies to overcome obstacles to attending theatre

1.3 Methodology

Focus groups were the chosen methodology because they allow for in-depth exploration of attitudes and preferences. A total of four focus groups were conducted on April 17 and 18, 2008 in Chicago and Washington, DC, cities selected for their large number of non-profit theatres, located both downtown and in the suburbs (so lack of availability of theatre wasn't an issue in not attending). In each city, one focus group was conducted with arts engaged students (those who participate in school activities such as theatre, orchestra, band, chorus, and advanced art classes). These students were considered the "low hanging fruit," those whom, it was thought, might have the most interest in attending theatre. A second group was held in each city with non-arts engaged students.

A recruitment screener was developed by Shugoll Research and approved by TCG (see Appendix A). This is a questionnaire administered over the telephone. The research team first contacted parents by phone to get some background information and then asked their permission for their students to attend the focus group. Only with parents' permission were the students put on the phone and then asked a series of qualifying questions. In order to qualify for all groups, students had to:

- Not have an immediate family member employed by a market research company, advertising agency, public relations firm, or performing arts organization or theatre (asked to parents)
- Have family incomes of at least \$25,000 to ensure they could afford to purchase theatre tickets (asked to parents)
- Be a junior or senior in high school
- Have attended one, but not more than two, live professional theatre performances in the past 2 years or indicate they are interested in attending a live theatre performance in the future

- Have reliable transportation such as their own car, parents' car, or access to public transportation (to ensure transportation wasn't the sole reason for not attending theatre)
- Be comfortable expressing their opinion in a group setting
- Be articulate and speak English clearly

In each city, an attempt was made to mix students on:

- School attended
- Location of school (city or suburb)
- Type of school (public or private)
- Gender
- Ethnicity/race
- Family income

A total of 41 high school students participated in the study, 21 arts engaged students and 20 non-arts engaged students. A profile of participants is shown in Appendix B. Focus group respondents received an honorarium of \$75 to encourage participation.

Questions were developed by Shugoll Research with input from TCG. A copy of the moderator's topic guide (which includes the discussion topics) is shown in Appendix C.

1.3 Limitations

The focus group technique is a qualitative research methodology that identifies hypotheses rather than quantitatively precise or absolute measures. Because of the limited number of respondents involved in this type of research, the study should be regarded as exploratory in



nature. The results can be used to generate hypotheses for marketing decision-making and further testing. The non-statistical nature of qualitative research means the results cannot be generalized to the population under study with a known level of statistical precision. Shugoll Research and TCG plan to integrate the results of this study into a national, quantitative study next year.

2.0 DETAILED FINDINGS BY OBJECTIVE

This section of the report presents key study findings. Many are highlighted with actual quotes from the students in the focus groups. Note that there are few differences in results between the arts engaged and non-arts engaged students (they are pointed out where they exist). Also, the findings are enormously consistent across the Washington, DC and Chicago markets.

2.1 Identify Teens' Current Sources of Entertainment

When asked what they do for fun, students provide a long list of activities including going to the movies, concerts, the mall, playing sports and hanging out with friends.

"We go to the movies, hang out at the mall."

"We go to a lot of concerts."

"Usually play baseball or football with my friends."

"I like going to a friends' houses and watch movies and just hang."

Other mentions include going downtown, attending live sports events, going out to eat, baking, going to parties, playing Guitar Hero and other video games, playing poker, pool, and board games, skating, skiing, going to the beach, bowling, setting off fireworks, tee-peeing houses with toilet paper, racing cars and working out. It seems almost every conceivable activity is mentioned except going to the theatre.

Teenagers seek activities that are fun, but also activities where there are a lot of kids their age, some of whom they know and others whom they can meet. Going out is often a social activity.

"They're fun; it's a way to relax."

"Nobody likes to be alone. It's a good way to socialize."

“It’s a way to be with your friends.”

They are very spontaneous in determining what to do for fun, often deciding the same day or even at the last minute. The only things they plan in advance are big events like concerts by their favorite artists.

“That’s the thing about teenagers; most of the time we don’t plan ahead. Most of the time like when we’re at lunch, ‘What are you doing after school?’ ‘Nothing.’ ‘Okay, let’s go shopping.’ It’s not like we plan ahead.”

“[I make plans] usually the day of or the day before unless it’s a special occasion.”

“Ten minutes before when I get a phone call, ‘You want to do something?’ And I just go.”

When discussing what they do for fun, none of the 41 students across the four focus groups mentioned going to the theatre (or any type of performing arts event for that matter). Theatre is not on their radar screen or in their decision set. In fact, if they wanted to go, they typically can’t name more than one non-profit theatre in their town and they do not know the plays currently running.

“I didn’t come up with one [name of a play or show currently playing].”

“I have no idea.”

“I didn’t come up with anything.”

2.2 Determine Level of Interest and Attitudes toward Theatre

Although students don’t currently attend much theatre with their friends, some who have attended with their parents or schools say they enjoyed the experience and found it exciting and special. Of those who have not been to the theatre recently, some would like to try it. Thus, there is a segment of young people who potentially could be converted into theatre attenders or more frequent attenders if some of their concerns are addressed. This is one of

the more encouraging findings of the study: that interest in attending theatre might be increased if theatres are willing to address some of the needs students have.

"[The theatre is] pretty exciting. Every year I go to summer camp and one weekend of the summer we go to New York to see a play. All the kids enjoy it a lot. They look forward to it all summer."

"I think it's an adventure. Sometimes I go with my friends or family, we get all dressed up nice and go to the theatre and have a fun time. It's really fun and interesting."

A more typical reaction to theatre, however, is a lack of interest in attending, or at best, a half-hearted interest.

"I wouldn't choose it over most things, but like if it came down to nothing to do at all, then maybe."

Regardless of whether they enjoy theatre or not, the first image students have of it is that it is expensive. Several say they would go if it wasn't for the price, including some students who have not attended before but would be willing to try it.

"If it was drastically cheaper, then it is something more conceivable to do. But if it is \$70 or something for a ticket, most just can't afford that."

Other dominant negative images of theatre are that performances can be long and boring (and you have to sit still and pay attention, not eat or talk like they feel you can at the movies), theatre is for old people (who usually are rich and white), theatre is not "cool," and theatre is something you do with your parents or on a formal school trip (most look forward to these trips because it is a day out of school not because they look forward to going to the theatre).

2.3 Identify Obstacles to Attending Theatre

The major reason high school students say they don't go to the theatre is the cost of tickets (yet they spend as much or more to go to things they truly care about such as concerts). Because of the price, they see theatre as something to do on a "special occasion."

"I really like going to the theatre, but it is so expensive! I mean who wants to spend \$50 just to see a show? For me, that's a lot!"

They are completely unaware that most non-profit theatres offer reasonably priced student tickets. When asked if student prices are available, a similar number say they don't know or respond with a definitive, "No." Only one or two believe student tickets are available. This may be because students do not understand what non-profit theatre is, and lump non-profit and commercial theatre together. Their experience in buying tickets for popular touring shows like *Wicked* leaves them with the impression that student discounts are not available.

Given the price, they also say they don't want to possibly waste their money on something they may not like. Students seem to want to know in advance what a play is about. For movies, with previews shown in the theatres and constantly on television, and all their friends talking about the same films, they know exactly what they will get. In theatre, they have no idea of the plot, don't know whether a play is a comedy, drama, or musical, and don't recognize any of the actors. They don't seem to want to take risks when it comes to film or theatre.

"You don't see any previews and it's like you have to guess what it is about. But with the movies, you can see a preview that is really interesting, but with a play you just go there blindly and you don't know what is going to happen. You don't know if you're going to like or not."

Another major reason for not going is that theatre is just not top-of-mind. When thinking about things to do or places to go, theatre almost never comes up. When asked to name theatres in their area, most can't do so. When asked to name plays currently running in case they wanted to see a play, again most came up empty. By contrast, they can name lots of films now showing. Clearly, if students aren't aware of what is running and can't name

theatres to go to, they have few viable theatre attendance options. They have no recall of any theatre advertising, whereas they see movie advertising all the time. Commercial theatres fare slightly better. If a student can name an area theatre, it is typically a touring house (“Cadillac Palace” in Chicago, the “National Theatre” in DC). If they can name a play up and running, it usually is a commercial production (*Jersey Boys*, *Wicked*, *Spamalot*).

“One thing is like when we were naming all the plays we knew like Wicked and Jersey Boys. But, if you were to ask what movies were out right now, I think we could probably name 10 movies that are playing right now.”

“My friends...we don’t know of any particular play at any moment. We all know about Wicked in Chicago or something like that, that you have to get tickets in advance. For places that you can get tickets in advance, you never hear of that being advertised. So, how am I supposed to know if a show is running if it’s not being advertised?”

In part, students don’t know what is playing in theatres because they tend not to read the newspaper’s arts section (where much theatre advertising takes place), don’t read theatre reviews, and don’t visit theatre websites. Students say finding out what is at a theatre takes research, while it is easy for movies (they often go to a “centralized” website like Movies.com or Fandango). They say that theatre must come to them with promotion and advertising, not wait for them to seek out information on theatres. Increasingly, theatres are trying to drive customers to their websites for information. This strategy does not currently work for students. Students don’t even know the name of the non-profit theatres, let alone their website addresses.

“You’ve got to do [advertising in] places that we are. We’re not going to like come to you, I guess, because nobody really...that’s not like the first thing somebody’s like, ‘Oh yes, what are you doing Saturday? Oh, let’s go to the theatre.’ It’s like something that needs to be like brought up more in school, I guess, or more like wherever you are.”

Another reason students don't attend theatre is that they think many plays are not engaging. They find theatre as a form of presentation to be dull compared to movies, television, and video. They find it quite static and uninvolving.

"Sometimes there is no action and there is just dialogue and the dialogue is not engaging and you're just going to tune out. Nobody really wants to hear someone speak about nothing for 2 hours."

"I haven't been to that many plays, but the plays I have been to, it's like all I want to do is leave. They keep going on and on, dragging it out."

They also say they can't relate to most plots in plays. Some would like plays about people their age, or at least about events they can relate to.

"I mean, if they focus more on the kids and their lives and stuff like that, like we could sit in the audience and be like, 'Oh, that kind of happens to me too.' I would be interested in that. But, if it focused more on like the adults and the parents and that, I would probably get bored because it would just be like watching my parents talk at home."

"I saw Glory Days, which was really great. And it's about four guys who just graduated high school. And throughout the whole play, it was with my English class, and we were trying to figure out who would we be out of the four of them, so you could really relate. So that's a big part of it that you understand what people are going through."

"You got about five or six guys, right? And you've got about five or six girls, right? You're at school. And this one dude sees this one girl. It's like ooh; she's kind of nice and all that. So he steps to her, blah, blah, blah. Then the other dude sees that it's his girl. He's not really feeling it. All of a sudden, blam, blam, blam, you know a couple shots start flying. They go back and forth at it. The gang comes in there. And then they bring it up. Because actually, this side and that side actually hate each other, kind like a little Romeo and Juliet remix, if you would. And it's like West Side Story. But, it's an East Coast/West Coast/Midwest Story."

Some students can't relate to plays that, specifically, are historical. Again, they don't feel the characters have anything to do with them or their lives. They feel contemporary stories are more relevant to them.

"I went to see [a play] with my family and when I walked in there it was pretty much the entire audience were people over 40 or 50, and like there was certain things that I just didn't understand because it wasn't like my generation. But if I went to go see a really modern play, like Rent, or something like that, most of the people would be in their 20s or teenagers. And so I would understand what was going on."

Some specifically express a dislike for Shakespeare. They say they can't follow the play and don't understand the language. Many associate going to the theatre, especially to see Shakespeare plays, with school trips. It's as if they've been trained to think of theatre as educational, but not fun.

"If I'm sitting through Shakespeare, and they're going off with like, 'How art thou,' I don't like that century kind of talking. It's just not appealing, so you just kind of tune it out, veg. It's a waste of money."

Students also would feel more comfortable, more welcomed, at the theatre if the audience included their peers. They look at a theatre audience and see mostly older people.

"Because like at the movie theatre, it is all your friends there and if you went to a play and all your friends are there, then you would fit in more. You would feel more comfortable. It wouldn't be like a bunch of old people or older people, but just teenagers there. And it would be like you're meant to be there."

"I feel that kids just want to hang out where kids are, and at the theatre, there are a lot of adults. Like at the movies theatres, I usually see a lot of kids from my school on Friday nights. You don't really see a lot of adults. And, so it's kind of like a place to hang out."

"I think it's just out of the ordinary for a young person to go to a theatre. You usually find parents are the ones [who go to the theatre]."

Students also have a bias against theatre because they feel it has a lack of action and special effects. Again, their point of reference is mostly movies, but also videogames, even television.

“There are no special effects and so I like it less than a movie. It can be boring.”

“I think that plays are hard to watch because you’re so used to like movies now. You talk about how every movie has explosions and constant excitement. You’re not going to get that watching a play. Teenagers especially aren’t used to like such boring means of entertainment.”

A fascinating finding is that students say they don’t have the patience to sit through a play. They say they just can’t sit still that long.

“It’s just long. I can’t really sit still and watch it.”

“I can’t [sit through a play] because I get impatient and irritated. It’s like they’re just singing and I’m just waiting. It’s so long and the seats are so little.”

When asked whether they sit still for that long at the movies, they say. “No,” they are busy multi-tasking (they text while at the movies, talk to their friends, eat, even get up and walk around). They realize they can’t do these things at the theatre.

“You can’t just sit there and start chatting with your friend because a lot of people have paid good money to go there and you can be kicked out for doing that. So you can’t talk to your peers next to you. If you bring a friend, what are you going to do – stare at each other? It’s not a social thing to do.”

“Today, like kids, you’re always on the go doing something, like texting, going to school. You’re just like always doing stuff. So just like sitting down, still for 3 hours is torture.”

They describe their generation as an “ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)” generation, not in a clinical sense but to describe their impatience with sitting still.

“Maybe teenagers’ patience isn’t there. It’s like they have ADD or something and they can’t focus for that long.”

“You’re just observing; you’re not doing anything. You’re just sitting there, like stewing for 2 and half, 3 hours.”

This finding may be of concern to those in the industry who feel that many adults (especially those who are exposed to theatre when they are young) will begin going to the theatre when they are 40-50 years old (since they have more disposable income, their children are growing up and can stay home alone or are out of the house, and their peers are going). However, our society will only offer more and more distractions as electronic and wireless media go in directions we can’t even imagine now. Is it possible that this “ADD generation” will never develop the attention span needed to go to the theatre? Might we be losing future theatregoing generations?

Even students who might be interested in going to the theatre have the perception that their friends wouldn’t enjoy going. Many young people just think theater is not a “cool” thing to do.

“I don’t think the crowd I hang with would like or be interested in a play. I don’t think that me or my friends would be interested in on a Saturday night sitting down and watching a play instead of going out and kicking out at the park.”

“I think it [theatre] is an acquired taste. You have to really like that type of stuff to go. I think when you build friendships; you don’t always find your common interests in types of art. You build friendships on who you think is cool...it’s just hard to decide whether or not that person is going to enjoy this play with you, so you don’t even try it.”

“It’s not cool. It’s like what most people would not be interested in and that it is mainly for adults.”

Since students are spontaneous in their social planning, another obstacle to theatregoing is the belief that it takes too much advance planning. You must find out what is playing and

buy tickets in advance. Movies, again the comparison experience, can be a more spontaneous decision.

“You have to go online, or whatever, and you have to buy tickets in advance, you can’t just sit there and say, ‘Hey, you want to go and see a show?’”

And with movies, there are lots of choices, lots of titles and showings at many different times. You can go see a film on your schedule, not the theatre’s schedule. By contrast, students believe that there is a limited selection or variety of plays at any given time. They have no idea of the number of theatre offerings that are available in their cities. They feel there are a handful of theatres, whereas, in reality there are dozens in Chicago and DC.

“Well, think about National Theatre; say they’re playing Phantom of the Opera. They’re going to play that for like 3 to 4 months. If you don’t want to see that, then you’ve go to wait...like most theatres only have one play [at a time] and they do maybe three to four plays a year. So, I mean there’s not much variety. There’s only like four or five, six theatres in the immediate area, that all of us could probably get to. And so there’s like five or six plays, and I’m not interested in this one, this one, this one, and this one, then I mean, why bother?”

Students think most theatres are located downtown. They are unaware of many suburban non-profit theatres, even though several of them are near where students in the focus groups live. While going to downtown theatres can be fun and an adventure, students acknowledge it is harder to get there than if theatres were nearer by.

Many students associate theatre with musicals. Several don’t like the type of music they think of as theatre music. While many have heard of rock musicals like *Rent* and *Spring Awakening*, they feel these are exceptions.

“It seems like the songs they sing are more like...not like our kind of music. They would sing songs in ways that if you heard it on the radio, you’re definitely turning the station. You’re not about to listen to that song.”

“A concert is music too, but it’s like hip-hop where they can be jumping and dancing. Whereas, with a musical, they’re like: la, la, la...B-O-R-I-N-G!!”

Aside from just the type of music, theatre is negatively compared to concerts because concerts allow more engagement before, during, and after the show. Some tailgate before a concert, dance throughout the concert, and attend an after party at the conclusion.

“At a concert or whatever, you listen to it and you can jump around, move, dance, talk to your friends, scream, sing along, do something. But when you’re sitting at a show, you have to sit there and be quiet and pay attention, or else you’ll miss something.”

Some people saw both the theatrical and film versions of some recent musicals, like *Hairspray*, *Chicago*, or *The Phantom of the Opera*. Interestingly, they almost all prefer the film versions. One major reason is because the films have actors they are familiar with. They think the actors in theatre are “no names.”

“I saw the play Chicago when I was in New York, and then I saw the movie and I liked the movie a lot better. And why was that? I don’t know. The movie and the play, the plot and all was basically the same, but in the play there was like no one famous in it and you pay more for it, and I was really bored. It just was not that good. It wasn’t that it wasn’t good, but not as good as the movie and there were famous people in the movie Chicago.”

Perceived dress requirements can inhibit theatregoing. While some like dressing up for theatre and feel it makes the performance special, others just want to be casual. They are unaware that in most theatres they can pretty much come as they want. Also, they love that they can bring food into a movie theatre.

“At the movie theatres, they offer you so much casual stuff that you get to go in casual attire. You can go in there with some popcorn and nachos, and everything at the movie theatre. Do they even serve nachos and everything at the theatre?”

3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES IN ATTENDING THEATRE

The findings highlight the many challenges of attracting high school students to attend theatre including the perceptions that theatre is not engaging or fun, that theatre requires audiences to sit still and be attentive - a challenge for many in this self-described “ADD generation, that theatre is prohibitively expensive and that teenagers are relatively unaware and uninformed of theatre performances.

The following recommendations to attempt to overcome the obstacles are based on study findings and the interpretation of those findings by the moderator/analyst. Many of the recommendations come directly from the students themselves. Note that recommendations related to artistic policy should not be interpreted as something all theatres should do. However, they are deemed necessary if a theatre desires to attract significantly more high school students. Not all theatres will share this goal or feel the marketing resources necessary to build the high school audience are available or a good use of resources.

1. Produce plays that are relevant to teenagers and feature young characters.

Since students often feel theatre is not engaging, it is important to understand what might engage them. Many want plays about people they can relate to, including people their own age. Comedy is a genre they favor along with action oriented plots (although they are dubious the special effects they like in movies could be shown live on stage). Many want stories set in contemporary times. Given the apparently limited attention spans of this generation, plays targeted at students should be shorter (perhaps 90 minutes).

2. Offer and promote special discounted student pricing. Discount offers must be communicated through media that truly reach this age demographic since students will not seek out this information.

Theatres must offer special pricing (probably from \$10 to \$20) and communicate much better that discounted student tickets are available. Students believe theatre is expensive and don't realize most non-profit theatres have special student prices. Theatres can't wait for students to come to their website or call to inquire about special pricing. They will not do

this because going to the theatre is not top of mind for them and they can't even name non-profit theatres to contact. Promotion of student tickets must be in places students go to and will see.

3. Develop relationships with high schools to increase theatres' visibility and the awareness of student discounts.

Perhaps the quickest way to get theatre noticed by high school students is by working with their schools. Schools may need to be convinced, however, that they should cooperate with what they first may view as a commercial enterprise. It may be possible to overcome this by communicating with schools and school systems that theatres offer something schools need: access to the arts, which is important since arts programs are often being cut out of school curricula and since studies show arts involvement creates more well rounded students who often perform better academically. If a relationship can be established, theatres might distribute coupons or flyers to schools to be handed out to students that contain information on pricing, plot of shows, dates, and times (getting something into a student's hands is preferable to signage in schools). Alternatively, theatres could distribute posters or other signage, perhaps working with drama or English teachers, or advertise in high school newspapers. They might even have actors make school appearances or have drama departments perform an excerpt from the play running at a non-profit theatre (assuming rights and union regulations are followed).

4. Encourage student influencers or peer leaders to promote theatre.

Another strategy is to use student influencers employing online media (*Facebook, My Space, You Tube*) to network for a theatre. If concerns of unions can be overcome, theatres might create their own previews or coming attractions of their shows in a digital format, which the student influencers could promote online. It is unlikely theatres will have the resources to run these previews on television or in movie theatres without some type of sponsorship relationship.

5. Seek corporate sponsorships to support student tickets.

TCG, civic theatre leagues, or individual theatres might seek corporate sponsorships to underwrite student tickets. This would allow aggressive student pricing without sacrificing the full value of the ticket. Since high school students frequently attend movies, perhaps TCG should seek out a relationship with motion picture studios or exhibitors to allow the promotion of theatre in the movie theatre. A student contest to create a poster or trailer that promotes live theatre could be created with the winning entries shown in movie houses. To override concerns that live theatre would take audience away from movies, perhaps the sponsorship could require students to present a movie ticket to buy a discounted theatre ticket.

6. Offer dedicated student performances.

Since students enjoy the social aspect of being together, theatres might designate some performances as high school student performances. This might be just one performance in the run of a suitably engaging play. Choosing a play that is age engaging, not just age appropriate, is important if the goal is to get the student to return to the theatre. For this special performance, the theatre might have a pre-show pizza party and an after-party with a DJ and cast appearances, things that will make the experience fun. It might also have giveaways to students in attendance. Public sales to this performance should be cut off so adults are not in the house with an audience of high school students.

7. Promote last minute ticket opportunities.

For regular performances in theatres that typically have excess ticket inventory, theatres need to communicate in marketing targeted at students that tickets are available at the last minute (since students are spontaneous in their social planning). Theatres with limited inventory must determine if they are willing to put some seats aside as part of their commitment to growing this audience segment.

8. Investigate collaborative projects.

Since theatres across a market can jointly benefit from having more students in the audience, collaborative projects (perhaps in tandem with a local league representing theatre) might be possible. Creating a common website with information targeted at students from all area theatres is one idea. It would be necessary to promote the site aggressively for students to become aware of it. A collaborative strategy could help overcome students' belief that a city like Chicago or Washington only has a few theatres to choose from and a handful of plays running at any time.

9. Before they attend, give students some information on what a play is about: context, characters, genre of play.

Students want to know what they are going to see. They won't take a chance on a play they know little about. They want to know something about the plot, the characters (especially if the characters are young), whether it is a comedy, drama, or musical, and the type of music (rock or traditional show music). Of course to have any effect, this information must be offered in places where students can find it.

10. Theatres must educate students about what makes the in-person theatre experience unique and enjoyable.

Students have more negative images of theatre than positive ones. They often see theatre as boring, unable to compete with special effects-laden films. Producing more age engaging and relevant work might get students to return to the theatre after seeing this type of work. But it will take a significant education effort to get most students out to a theatre the first time.

11. Despite many legitimate reasons why they may not want to do so, theatres may need to emulate the moviegoing experience on several dimensions.

Movies seem to be the basic point of comparison when discussing what they don't like about theatre. Theatres, therefore, have much to learn from the movies. Theatres can communicate that the theatregoing experience is causal just like at the movies, no need to

dress up. As already mentioned, it may need to shorten running times, ensure the availability of last minute tickets, and keep prices down. But it also may need to make the experience more involving or interactive and even consider allowing food into the theatre. Theatre must be made to be more fun for students, and less something they associate with being educational because of school trips.

12. Theatres must think carefully about the level of commitment necessary to grow the high school audience before seeking out that audience. This commitment includes a significant investment in resources and a willingness to change the mix of plays offered.

Some theatres may feel it is their social responsibility to serve an audience more diverse than their current audience, including high school students. Others may seek a more vibrant audience base, which includes younger theatergoers. Regardless of the motivation, note that reaching high schoolers will likely require a whole different marketing strategy and media mix. Since students today don't think theatregoing is fun and can't name non-profit theatres or the plays they have running at any one time, the amount of education and marketing necessary mean such a strategy will likely prove expensive. Some theatres may conclude those dollars could be better spent on increasing the size of its core audience. Also, since the research suggests changing the type of product presented may be necessary to engage high school students, some theatres should consider not pursuing this segment if they are unwilling to make such a change.

13. Results of this study suggest the theory that people will return to the theatre audience when in their 40s may die out with this generation of high school students. Investing in creating the audiences of tomorrow, whether by targeting high school students, college students, or post college adults, may become a necessity for ensuring the future health of theatres.

High school students today suggest they can't sit still long enough to go to the theatre. They are used to multi-tasking and much stimulus. Assuming a continuing growth in mobile and other interactive technology, it is possible that today's high school students may never develop the patience to go to the theatre.



APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE



SHUGOLL RESEARCH
 7475 Wisconsin Avenue
 Suite 200
 BETHESDA, Maryland 20814

TCG0801
CIRCLE

April 17th (Bethesda)
 Arts student 4:30 PM)
 Non-arts student (6:30 PM)
April 18th (Chicago)
 Arts student (4:30 PM)
 Non-arts student (6:30 PM)

THEATRE RESEARCH SCREENER

(RECRUIT 13-14 PER GROUP FOR A SHOW OF 8-10)

RESPONDENT NAME: _____

RECRUITED BY: _____ DATE RECRUITED: _____

CONFIRMED BY: _____ DATE CONFIRMED: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: _____

ASK TO SPEAK TO HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD:

Hello, this is _____ from Shugoll Research, an independent survey research firm. We are conducting a brief, but important survey on theatre and the arts. This is strictly survey research; there is absolutely no sales effort involved. May I ask you a few questions?

CIRCLE ONE

- Yes 1 →(CONTINUE)
- No 2 →(THANK AND TERMINATE)

1. First, do you have any children who are high school juniors or seniors living in your household?

CIRCLE ONE

- Yes 1 →(CONTINUE)
- No 2 →(THANK AND TERMINATE)



NOTE: MUST HAVE A CHILD IN 11TH GRADE (JUNIOR) or 12TH GRADE (SENIOR). ONLY ONE CHILD PER HOUSEHOLD MAY PARTICIPATE.

2. Have you or a member of your immediate family ever worked for any of the following types of firms or in the following fields? (READ LIST)

	<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>
For an advertising or public relations firm	1	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)	2
For a marketing research firm	1	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)	2
In the market research department of a company or organization	1	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)	2
For any type of arts organization	1	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)	2

3. Is your annual household income before taxes: (READ LIST)

	<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
Under \$25,000	1	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	2	
\$50,000 to \$74,999	3	
\$75,000 to \$99,999	4	→(RECRUIT A MIX PER GROUP)
OR \$100,000 or more	5	
(DO <u>NOT</u> READ) Don't know/Refused	6	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)

4. And lastly, to ensure that we have a balanced sample, do you consider your child to be: (READ LIST)

	<u>CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY</u>	
Caucasian/White	1	
African American/Black	2	
Hispanic/Latino	3	→(RECRUIT A MIX PER GROUP)
Asian	4	
OR Some other racial or ethnic group	5	
(DO <u>NOT</u> READ) Don't know/Refused	6	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)



SAY TO PARENT: We are conducting a focus group discussion with high school juniors and seniors about theatre at our offices located in (SAY LOCATION)_____. If your child qualifies would you allow him/her to attend the focus group discussion? Participants will receive \$75.

CIRCLE ONE

- Yes 1 →(CONTINUE)
- No 2 →(THANK AND TERMINATE)

We need to ask a few questions to see if your child qualifies to participate in the study. What is your child’s name? _____ (RECORD NAME)

You are welcome to stay on the line, but please allow your son/daughter to speak for him/herself. Thank you.

GET STUDENT ON PHONE! SAY TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT:

Hi (insert target child’s name). My name is _____ and I have been speaking with your mother/father for a few minutes.

As I explained to him/her, I work for a research company. That means it is my job to talk to people about all kinds of things, and find out what they like and what they don’t like.

Right now, I’d like to talk to you, because we are interested in hearing what high school students think about different things. May I ask you a few questions?

CIRCLE ONE

- Yes 1 →(CONTINUE)
- No 2 →(THANK AND TERMINATE)

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT:

5. What grade are you in school?

CIRCLE ONE

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 9 th grade | 1 | →(THANK AND TERMINATE) |
| 10 th grade | 2 | |
| 11 th grade | 3 | →(CONTINUE) |
| 12 th grade | 4 | |
| Don’t know/Refused | 5 | →(THANK AND TERMINATE) |

6. Which of the following high school extracurricular activities are you involved in: (READ LIST)

	<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
Advanced Art classes	1	→(RECRUIT INTO ARTS STUDENT QUOTA GROUP; AT LEAST 6 MUST BE INVOLVED WITH THEATRE)
Band	2	
Chorus	3	
Orchestra	4	
Theatre	5	
OR None of the above	6	→(RECRUIT INTO NON-ARTS STUDENT QUOTA GROUP)

7. Do you have reliable transportation such as your own car, parents' car or public transportation to get you to and from various locations?

	<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
Yes	1	→(CONTINUE)
No	2	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)
Don't know/Refused	3	

8a. In the past two years, have you attended a live professional theatre performance? This does not include school theatre performances.

	<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
Yes	1	→(CONTINUE)
No	2	→(SKIP TO Q.9)
Don't know/Refused	3	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)

8b. Now, in the past year, about how many times did you attend a live professional theatre performance not including school performances?

	<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
0	1	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)
1	2	→(CONTINUE)
2	3	
3 or more	4	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)
Don't know/Refused	5	

8c. The last time you attended a live professional theatre performance outside of high school, who did you attend that performance with? (READ LIST)

- | | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| | <u>CIRCLE ONE</u> | |
| Friends | 1 | →(SKIP TO Q.10) |
| Parents or other relatives | 2 | |
| School group | 3 | |
| Another organization | 4 | |
| OR Just went myself | 5 | |
| (DO <u>NOT</u> READ) Don't know/Refused | 6 | |

9. Using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is “Not at all Interested” and 7 is “Extremely Interested,” how interested would you be in attending a live professional theatre performance in the future?

CIRCLE ONE

Extremely <u>Interested</u>	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Not at all <u>Interested</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>
		↑				↑			
		(CONTINUE)				(TERMINATE)			

MUST ANSWER 7, 6, OR 5 TO CONTINUE



10. What is the one most important reason why you do not attend the theatre more often?
(DO NOT READ LIST)

	<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
Do not like theatre	1	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)
Transportation/Can't get there	2	
Don't know/Refused	3	
Expensive/Tickets cost too much	4	→(CONTINUE)
No one to go with/Friends don't like theatre	5	
Don't know what is playing	6	
Theatre is not cool	7	
Too busy	8	
Type of plays don't appeal to me	9	
The people who attend theatre are older	10	
Other (SPECIFY): _____	12	→(CONTINUE, REVIEW RESPONSE WITH PROJECT MANAGER TO QUALIFY FOR THE STUDY)

11. Now, what do you enjoy most about school? Please describe it for me. (RECORD ANSWER VERBATIM. PROBE AND CLARIFY FULLY.)

- ANY SCREENER WITHOUT A VERBATIM ANSWER DOES NOT QUALIFY
- IF RESPONDENT IS UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO GIVE AN ANSWER, THANK AND TERMINATE
- IF RESPONDENT HAS A HEAVY ACCENT OR CANNOT MAKE THEMSELF CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD, THANK AND TERMINATE
- IF RESPONDENT ONLY GIVES ONE OR TWO WORD ANSWERS AND IS UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO ELABORATE ON MEANING, THANK AND TERMINATE

(IF RECUITING IN BETHESDA ASK Q.12a, IF RECUITING IN CHICAGO SKIP TO Q.12b).



12a. (FOR BETHESDA ONLY) Do you live in: (READ LIST)

		<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
	District of Columbia	1	→(RECRUIT A MIX PER GROUP)
	Maryland	2	
OR	Virginia	3	
(DO <u>NOT</u> READ)	Somewhere else	4	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)
(DO <u>NOT</u> READ)	Don't know/Refused	5	

12b. (FOR CHICAGO ONLY) Where do you live _____? (RECORD)

RECRUIT A MIX OF TOWNS. RECRUIT A MIX OF CHICAGO CITY AND SUBURBS RESIDENTS.

13a. What high school are you currently attending? (ACCEPT NO MORE THAN TWO STUDENTS PER HIGH SCHOOL)

13b. Is that a public or private high school?

		<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
	Public	1	→(RECRUIT A MIX)
	Private	2	

14. How comfortable do you think you would feel talking with high school students you haven't met before in a group discussion? Would you be: (READ LIST)

		<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
	Very Comfortable	1	→(CONTINUE)
	Pretty Comfortable	2	
	Not Too Comfortable	3	→(THANK AND TERMINATE)
	Not Comfortable At All	4	

RECORD, DO NOT ASK: GENDER

		<u>CIRCLE ONE</u>	
	Female	1	→(RECRUIT A MIX)
	Male	2	



INVITATION TO STUDENT (INVITE THROUGH STUDENT ONLY)

We are conducting a focus group discussion with about 10 high school students like yourself to discuss theatre and the arts. The discussion is scheduled for (INSERT DATE) at our office located in (INSERT LOCATION) at (INSERT TIME) and will last 2 hours.

As a token of our appreciation, each participant will be given \$75; we will also serve (4:30PM GROUP WILL BE SERVED LIGHT REFRESHMENTS) (6:30PM GROUP WILL BE SERVED A LIGHT DINNER). Are you available to attend the discussion?

CIRCLE ONE

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|
| Yes | 1 | →(CONFIRM AND GIVE DIRECTIONS) |
| No | 2 | →(THANK AND TERMINATE) |



APPENDIX B: RESPONDENT PROFILE

	Total	Arts Students	Non-Arts Students
Annual Household Income	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	6	2	4
\$50,000 to \$74,999	8	5	3
\$75,000 to \$99,999	10	6	4
\$100,000 or more	17	8	9
Ethnicity	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
Caucasian	31	16	15
African American	7	4	3
Hispanic/Latino	2	0	2
Other	1	1	0
Gender	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
Male	22	10	12
Female	19	11	8
Grade Level	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
11 th grade	22	12	10
12 th grade	19	9	10
Extracurricular Activities*	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
Advanced art classes	7	7	0
Band	4	4	0
Chorus	2	2	0
Orchestra	2	2	0
Theatre	11	12	0
Other	20	0	20
Frequency Of Theatre Attendance In Past Two Years	(n=30)	(n=19)	(n=11)
1	18	12	6
2	12	7	5
Attended Theatre Performance With*	(n=30)	(n=19)	(n=11)
Friends	10	7	3
Parents	22	15	7
School group	3	2	1
Other organization	1	0	1

*More than one answer was accepted.

	Total	Arts Students	Non-Arts Students
Reasons For Not Attending Theatre More Often	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
Expensive/Tickets cost too much	15	12	3
No one to go with/Friends don't like theatre	2	2	0
Don't know what is playing	9	3	6
Too busy	12	4	8
Type of plays don't appeal to me	3	0	3
Location	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
District of Columbia	3	1	2
Maryland	8	2	6
Virginia	11	8	3
Chicago - city	11	6	5
Chicago - suburbs	8	4	4
High School Classification	(n=41)	(n=21)	(n=20)
Public	28	15	13
Private	13	6	7



APPENDIX C: TOPIC GUIDE



MODERATOR'S TOPIC GUIDE HS STUDENTS' INTEREST IN THEATRE

PROJECT: TCG0801
DATE: April 17, 18
LOCATION: DC, Chicago
TOPIC: Things You Do In Spare Time

Introduction

Who am I

What I do

Ground Rules

Taping and why

Articulate loudly enough to be heard

Talk one at a time

Avoid side conversations

Mirror and observers

Avoid peer pressure

Be candid

No right or wrong answers

Need to hear from everyone

Gratuity for your time and opinions



Respondent Introductions

Tell us:

First name

School

Hometown

School activities

Favorite hobby

Things Do For Fun on Evenings or Weekends

- With friends (dinner, movies, HS sports and other HS events, just hang out, etc.)
- Why do these things? (Fun, that's what teenagers do, etc.)
- With family/parents
- When decide on your plans (in advance, at last minute)

Interest in Theatre

- Word association: when I say _____ what words come to mind? Rock concerts, HS football games, theatre
- What are your feelings about seeing plays and shows (professional theatre)?
- How interested would you be in going to see a play or show at a professional theatre?
Why say that?
- Write on pad: name any theatres in area have heard of. Probes:



- DC: Arena Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre, Studio Theatre, Olney Theatre, Round House Theatre, Rep Stage, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Signature Theatre, Kennedy Center, National Theatre
- Chicago: Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Lookingglass Theatre, Victory Gardens, Northlight Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Royal George Theatre Center, Cadillac Palace, LaSalle Bank Theatre, Ford Center for the Performing Arts
- On pad: name any plays/shows now performing in the area

Obstacles to Going to Theatre

- Why don't you go to the theatre (or go more often)?
- Probes:
 - Expensive: Write on pad how much it costs, write on pad how much would you pay to go, do theatres have student pricing, how do you think you'd find out if they have student pricing, why haven't you looked into student tickets, do you go to concerts/how much pay for concert tickets/why do this and not theatre, would you go if cost \$10 (about price of a movie)
 - Busy: What type of things do you find time to do, then why not have time for theatre, best day of week to go to theatre, best time of day
 - Don't know what is playing: Where do you think you'd get this information, how do you find out what movies/concerts are playing, do you read newspapers, do you go to websites for entertainment information/which ones, ever go to a theatre website/for what purpose, how important is what your friends do for entertainment in what you choose to do
 - Type of plays not appealing: Clarify what this means, what type of plays don't you like, what type of plays do you think you would like



- Not cool: Clarify why you say this, what type of people go to the theatre, what type of students go to the theatre
- No one to go with: do you want to go but others don't, would you go with parents/siblings
- Computers, DVRs: too much to do at home, plays too long/require too much concentration/computers and DVRs provide entertainment in small doses/can control how long pay attention, theatre doesn't provide the wow factor of film and computer animation
- Transportation: are you allowed to drive to social events/how far, do you take public transportation, how get to concerts/movies
- (FOR ARTS INVOLVED GROUPS) You all do something related to arts in school (theatre, art class, band, orchestra, chorus). Why don't go to theatre? Go to other arts events (symphony, opera, dance)? Theatre kids: act in plays, don't you want to see professional theatre?

Attitudes about Theatre

- Reactions to:
 - Is theatre fun?
 - Is theatre boring?
 - Is theatre for old people like your parents?
 - Is theatre uncool?
- If been to the theatre describe/If not been to the theatre what do you think:
 - Like best about it? Least about it?



- Describe good experience/bad experience you've had in the theatre
- Plays you've liked/not liked
- The type of plays I think I'd like best is what? Probes:
 - Plays about young people, plays with young people on stage, musicals/dramas/comedies, stories set today (not many years ago)

Strategies to Overcome Obstacles

- Pretend you have been hired by a theatre to help it get more HS students to attend. What would you do?
- Ideas: Special student nights when know will be other students there, free pizza before the show, post show where can meet the actors, post show party (DJ), theatres advertising in school (in newspaper, on bulletin boards), \$10 tickets available anytime, flyers/discount coupons distributed at school
- How important are discount tickets?
- How important is being able to get discount tickets in advance, at last minute?

False Close

Role Play: What could you do at your school (or what could your school do) to interest students in going to the theatre, increase awareness of theatre?

Final Comments