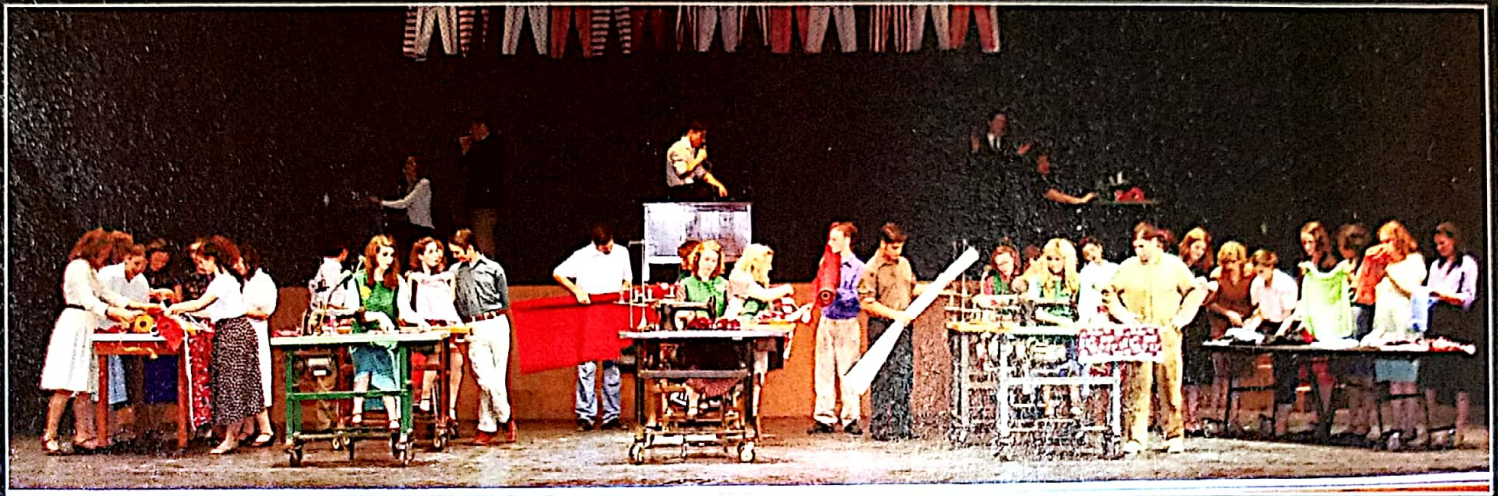


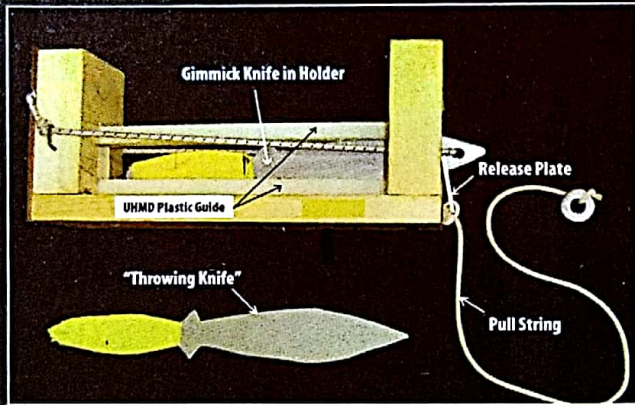
Low-Tech, Cutting Edge

How one performing arts center in Oklahoma dealt with the throwing knives in *The Pajama Game*

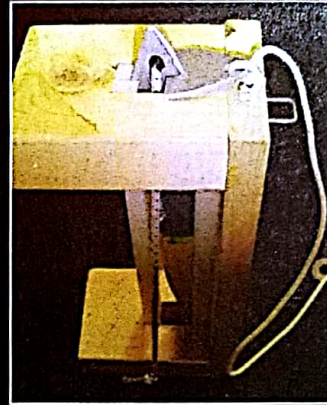


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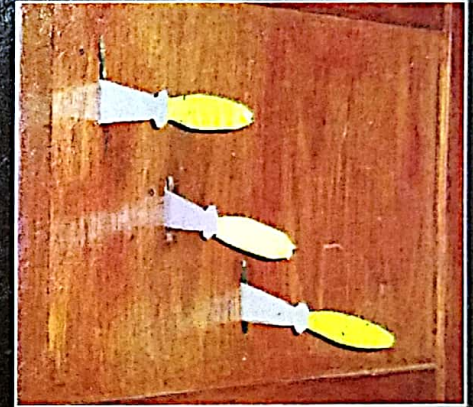
The shop floor of Norman High's production of *The Pajama Game*, Directed by Brenda Webb, at the Nancy O'Brian Center for the Performing Arts, fall 2007.



The frame and knife. Bungee cord propels the knife along a U-shaped track of UHMD Plastic guides and also stops the knife from releasing out of the kit since it is thicker than the slot the knife passes through.



The tip of the throwing knife in the cocked position. Bungee cord is threaded through an eye at the tip, and a notch in the blade holds a plate that, when pulled, releases the knife.



The knives protruding from the desk.

The Nancy O'Brian Center for the Performing Arts serves the Norman Oklahoma Public School system as the central performance venue for the district. Each fall the two high schools in the district individually stage a musical and we at the Center help guide the directors and students in producing their shows.

For a recent production of *The Pajama Game* we needed a "knife gimmick" so that the jealous boyfriend Vernon Hines could throw knives without injuring anyone. The gimmick needed to work on a target during the picnic scene and later in a desk in the office.

We were aware of the electronic set-ups that others had used to produce the effect, but our budget couldn't stretch that far after costumes and props were rented. Our solution was to build independent units that could be constructed by high school students, installed on the scenery or props and then saved for future use.

For the gimmick we constructed three "throwing knives" out of $\frac{3}{16}$ " aluminum plate cut on a bandsaw with two winding wraps of colored electrical tape for the handles. We made an extra knife that the actor playing Hines could "cover" after pretending to throw it.

The gimmick knives had a hole drilled through the tip to

accept $\frac{3}{16}$ " bungee cords. We also cut a notch into the tip to hold the knife in a cocked position. The knife was then installed in a framework of two 2x4 supports and a 1x4 base that held two U channels of UHMD Plastic as guides. The exit slot from this framework was a piece of $\frac{1}{4}$ " hardboard with an opening just a bit wider than the taped blade handle. The opening captured the tip of the blade with the bungee cord and prevented the knife from coming out of the framework.

For the knives to work in a desk we cut slots in the side of the desk for the knives to pop through. Then we attached three packages (one for each knife) to the inside of the desk with three or four sheet rock screws.

The target board for the picnic was made from $\frac{1}{2}$ " plywood and the screws to anchor the framework of the target went through the plywood, then into the gimmick's 2x4 framework, which made a more secure attachment.

These pieces were used for another show a year later when we rented them to another school that was doing *The Pajama Game* and all the units held together with no problems. **SD**

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