



OMG: Teens put techno-acronyms to work in 'Edit: Undo'

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Photo by Andrea Mays

A scene from *Edit: Undo*, with Steven Rada, left, Kyle Smith, Michael Sapp, Roderick Howard II and Matt Thornton.

Creative Cappies Take I-M-ing to Stage.

By Mary Specht, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Teenagers may communicate in trendy acronyms that baffle some adults, such as OMG and LOL, but this doesn't mean they're losing their literacy.

In fact, teens can be downright creative with their digital language. Students made good use of it when they wrote and acted in their own musical about a clash between net-savvy students and the technophobic adults who run their high school.

In *Edit: Undo*, performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., earlier this month, the school board refuses to give the building wireless Internet access. Some of the board members, including a pencil-manufacturing tycoon, aim to profit on the school's place in the digital dark ages.

"Kids are micro-weak and micro-crazy, micro-spoiled and micro-lazy," the board members sing, shaking their fists as they march around a meeting table. "They are way too Micro-soft!"

Students strike back by refusing to help adults with computer questions, mocking their tech ineptness with a terse "ROTFL!" (translation: "rolling on the floor laughing").

The show was organized by the Cappies. The theater critics and awards program allows students in 300 high schools nationwide to critique each other's plays, publish reviews in local newspapers and select the best student performers in

each region. The winners receive their awards at a glitzy Tony Awards-style gala.

The cast members of *Edit: Undo* were Cappie award winners from across the country. Writers, lyricists and composers were Cappies critics from the Washington area who began creating the musical last fall. A DVD and CD will be available for order online (DVD \$15, CD \$10) near the end of September at www.cappies.com.

Bill Strauss, co-founder of Cappies and of Capitol Steps, a political satire troupe popular in the nation's capital, started the student organization in 1999 to give high school thespians more recognition, especially compared with student athletes. A few years ago, Strauss spoke at a school honors ceremony that highlighted the difference: 22 of the 25 awards were for sports performance.

Athletics "is not the only thing young people do," he says. "You've got young people with incredible gifts and incredible capacity to organize a show."

Mace Sorensen, a graduate of Stone Bridge High School in Ashburn, Va., who played the nefarious owner of a pencil company, played four sports in middle school and the beginning of high school. But then he traded the field for the stage. "I quit sports completely after doing my first musical my sophomore year," he says. "A lot of my friends that were in sports didn't really understand."

Past participants of the Cappies program have launched careers in the film business, Strauss says. One, Travis Tucker, was a finalist in *American Idol's* fourth season.

K-K Bracken, a junior at George Mason High School in Falls Church, Va., who helped write *Edit: Undo*, says the older generation shouldn't take IM-speak as a sign that technology is dumbing kids down.

"Your students are going to talk like that," she warns her dad, who is beginning a second career as a history teacher, "but you can't underestimate them just because they do."