

PLAY: A (MINI) HISTORY OF THEATRE FOR KIDS



Study Guide for Educators

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Introduction

This is a resource for teachers, administrators, and parents to have a better understanding of the show their students/kids are going to see. In it you'll find themes, discussion questions, activities and lots more to help you extend the learning past the performance. One Little Goat Theatre Company welcomes questions and comments from you and your students anytime. To contact us please e-mail info@onelittlegoat.org

About the Company

“Toronto’s enterprising One Little Goat” (New York Times) is North America's only professional theatre company dedicated to poetic theatre. With over a decade of acclaimed productions for adult audiences in Toronto, Chicago and New York, the company made its theatre-for-young-audiences debut with *PLAY* in 2016 and has since performed it for over 10,000 children in Toronto schools.

About the Author

Adam Seelig is a poet, playwright, stage director, and the founder of One Little Goat in Toronto. His plays and poems have been covered in an array of media including the New York Times, Globe & Mail, New York Review of Books, Canadian Theatre Review, World Literature Today and Poetry Magazine. For several summers, Seelig taught drama at summer camp, directing hundreds of children in weekly performances. He is the proud father of two children, who have taught him more than he ever imagined about the joy of playing.

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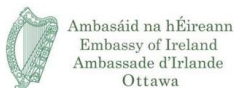


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Overview of PLAY: A (Mini) History of Theatre for Kids

Ideally suited for: Grades 1-6

Performance length: 50 minutes (40 minutes plus our Talk Forward with the Performers)

Synopsis: Beginning with classic games like tag, *PLAY: A (Mini) History of Theatre for Kids* is a dynamic introduction to some of the world's most enduring and innovative games we call "plays." Two actors guide the audience through four exciting periods of drama:

1. Prehistoric Theatre (e.g. games around the fire)
2. Ancient Greek Theatre (e.g. *Antigone* by Sophocles)
3. Japanese Noh Theatre (e.g. *Komachi* by Zeami)
4. Modern Theatre (e.g. Gertrude Stein, Alfred Jarry, Samuel Beckett)

While this is in no way a complete history of theatre, we believe it provides a culturally and historically diverse perspective on drama, with an emphasis on fun and the world of play.

Themes:

- Sharing your thoughts/feelings/stories with others
- Drama and theatre is play

“ Who made the first plays in the world? Children. ”

Why? Because children love to play games — they are natural-born play-makers.

Curriculum Connections

Curriculum Connections

- The Arts (Drama, Music and Dance)
- English (Media Literacy, Oral Communication)
- Math (Measurement of Time / Time as a Concept)

Character Education Links

- Teamwork
- Co-Operation

What Is a Talk Forward ?

After our performance we engage in a Talk Forward with the students. This provides the students with further learning opportunities by engaging them in a conversation with the artists not only about the show that they've just seen, but with theatre as an art form on a larger scale. For example, it's during this discussion that we use the students' existing knowledge to build a definition for theatrical terms, including: mime, mask, comedy, tragedy, etc. Then we ask the students to reflect on moments/examples of these terms from the show they just saw, as well as from their own lives.

We believe that this format allows the artists and students to build deeper connections and helps foster student interest in the art form moving forward.



These are also great starting points for your own classroom discussions.

Classroom Discussion Guide

Pre-Show Conversation Starters

These are a great way to spark student interest in the subject matter and engage the students before the show.

- What do you already know about theatre?
- Are there different kinds of theatre? What do you know about these?
- Are there rules for when you see a play? Are there rules for when you're in a play?
- What questions do you have about theatre or plays?

Post Show Conversation Starters

These are a great way to encourage students to engage critically with the show that they just saw and extend their learning.

- What are the kinds of theatre we learned about?
- Do you know any new words about theatre or plays? (examples of terms covered can be found in the Glossary)
- What were some of the rules for the performer/student who wore the Noh theatre mask?
- How did you know when the performers were moving to a new period of time? How could you tell when they were moving forward/backward through time?
- What kind of theatre did you find the most interesting?
- When you play your own games, do you do what the actors were doing?



Extension Activities

Activity # 1 - The Rock Paper Scissors Championship

Objective: To have the whole class end up on one cohesive team.

Directions:

- Everyone starts off on their own and finds a partner to play Rock, Paper, Scissors.
- When a student loses a round of Rock, Paper, Scissors they are not out - instead they become a part of the winner's team and must cheer them on.
 - Example: Student A and Student B play Rock, Paper Scissors. Student A wins and then Student B becomes a part of Student A's team. Student C and Student A play Rock, Paper, Scissors (while Student B cheers on Student A). Student C wins, so Student A and Student B become a part of Student C's team.
- Students continue playing Rock, Paper, Scissors, steadily growing their teams until the final competition when students end up all together on one team.

Show Connections: During the Antigone section of the show, the two actors play characters who clearly oppose each other (they are antagonists). However, when the Antigone section is done, they talk about how even though they played against each other, in the end they're on the same team. In the same sense students start as opponents and end as teammates in the game.

De-Brief Questions

- How did this game start? How is that different from the end?
- How did it feel to be playing against everyone else as opposed to playing all together on one team?

Activity #2 - Reverse Charades

Objective: To communicate an event or emotion clearly to a classmate using mime.

Directions:

- One student is assigned to be the guesser/detective.
- The guesser/detective leaves the room or closes their eyes while the other students are given a direction that they must communicate using mime.
 - It's a good idea to review mime with the class first: a special theatre skill of pretending an object exists (the show and Talk Forward offer numerous examples, so mime will be familiar to the students).
 - Examples of events for students to mime: dancing, playing soccer, brushing teeth, swimming, watching a funny movie.
 - Examples of emotions : being frustrated, excited, sad.
 - It's recommended that you start simple and get more and more complicated as the students' confidence with mime grows.
- The guesser/detective then comes back or opens their eyes to watch the mimes perform and tries to guess what they see.

Show Connections: We cover mime as a skill and term in the post-show Talk Forward. The performers mime many different moments throughout the play, including: a sword fight, kicking a soccer ball, and warming hands on a fire.

De-Brief Questions :

- When you mime an action, what do you do to make it clear to the guesser/detective?
- Can you think of a time when you have used mime in your everyday life?

Activity #3 - Gobbledy Gook

Objective: To show that, even when using nonsense, you can clearly communicate experience and emotion to your audience.

Directions:

- Split students into small groups (minimum 2/maximum 5 students per group)
- Give each group a scene prompt.
 - Examples include:
 - You're having a picnic and it starts to rain.
 - A trip to the zoo where the animals break free.
 - Walking dogs and one breaks free.
 - Friends fighting over who gets to go first in a game.
- Explain that while performing this play they must speak in gobbledy gook. That is, they may only say the words "gobbledy gook." As a result, they have to use other, creative ways to communicate their scene and help the audience understand the story even though it's spoken in nonsense.
- Have the students perform for each other and then guess what the scene was about.

Show Connections: During the Modern section of the show, the actors perform three scenes filled with nonsense: a scene by Gertrude Stein in which they repeatedly use the word "saints," a short scene about a buffoon named Ubu, and a scene from *Waiting for Godot* in which the character Lucky makes no sense.

De-Brief Questions

- How did you show your audience what was happening? How did you communicate despite your words being nonsense?
- Can you understand a play / a scene without understanding the words?
- Does it enhance the performance in any way?

Glossary

All of these terms are covered during the show and the post-show Talk Forward, enriching your students' understanding of theatre.

Theatre Vocabulary

Play - A game in which people (called actors) play different roles (called characters) and interact with each other.

Playwright - A writer who writes plays.

Comedy - A play with a happy ending.

Tragedy - A play with a sad ending. (E.g. *Antigone* by Sophocles.)

Tragicomedy - A play that is part tragedy, part comedy, and ends in a way that is neither happy, nor sad, but a combination of the two. (E.g. *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett.)

Game - Games, like tag, are the first plays in our world — made up by children!

Script - When a play is written down (not all plays are, by the way), it is called a script. The script allows the actors to memorize what their characters will say in the play.

Mime - A special theatre skill of pretending an object exists. If I pretend to hold a glass of water and drink from that “invisible glass,” I am miming the action of drinking water. Most people mime something nearly every day without even realizing they are using this special theatre skill. (E.g. In *PLAY*, when the actors pretend to have a sword fight without holding actual swords, they are miming.)

Dialogue - When two or more people talk in a play, we call it dialogue.

Audience - People who watch a play.

Drama - Another word for theatre.

Greek Theatre Vocabulary

Olympics - A sporting competition invented in Ancient Greece featuring track and field.

Question - Some questions have clear answers; other questions are more complicated. When we ask the question, “What is two plus two?” there is a clear answer: “Four.” When Sophocles’ play asks us, “What is more important:

to be safe or to be free?” there is no clear, single answer. That explains why Sophocles wrote an entire play about this question.

Principle - What you feel is right and true. Antigone feels everyone should be free: that is her principle. Creon feels everyone should be safe: that is his principle.

Citizen - A member of a city or country. The actors in *PLAY* are citizens of Toronto. They are also citizens of Canada.

Inhuman, Barbaric, Ruthless - Nasty! All three of these words describe terribly unkind behaviour.

Decency - Proper behaviour.

Chaos - Total disorder and confusion. (This word was invented in Ancient Greece.)

Tyrant - A bully who runs a country. If a prime minister were a bully, we would call him/her a tyrant.

Noh Theatre Vocabulary

Mask - People have been using masks to amuse or terrify others for thousands of years.

Play (verb) - When an actor plays a character in Noh, he/she must not merely pretend to be that character or mimic what that character is like; he/she must feel what it is to *be* that character.

Mimic (verb) - Imitate. If I change my voice so it sounds like my grandmother's, I mimic her voice. In some kinds of theatre, mimicking is used to make audiences laugh; in Noh theatre, however, mimicking is not allowed.

Fascinate - To hold someone's attention, to charm them.

Mystery, Secret - Sometimes we are fascinated by certain people because we sense there is an exciting mystery or secret deep within them. Zeami wants Noh actors to fascinate us in that way.

Poet - Some poets rhyme, some poets don't, but what all poets have in common is the ability to make words express more than expected. There are poets who can express a lot with few words. Komachi, the old woman in our Noh scene, is a great example of such a poet.

Modern Theatre Vocabulary

Modern - Today we use the word modern to describe things that strike us as new and exciting. The CN Tower, for example, struck people as being very modern

when it was first built, and it still looks modern today. The people who made the word modern popular were writers like Gertrude Stein (and artists like Stein's friend Pablo Picasso) whose art struck people as new and exciting.

Nonsense - Nonsense may be the opposite of sense and meaning, but it is no less important, and can be even more interesting and fun. Gertrude Stein, Alfred Jarry and Samuel Beckett all loved to use nonsense in their plays.

Ridiculous - Silly, funny, hilarious, amusing, droll, preposterous, ludicrous, laughable, nonsensical, comical, outrageous, absurd! People have created a category for plays like *Waiting for Godot*: "Theatre of the Absurd."

Waiting - The action of staying where you are until something else happens. So, waiting is the action of no action! Have you ever sat by a tree, or in the hallway, or on the stairs, or in a classroom, and waited for someone? Most of us grow impatient or bored when we have to wait in those situations, but maybe waiting is more interesting than we think. Samuel Beckett definitely thought so, which is why he wrote *Waiting for Godot*.