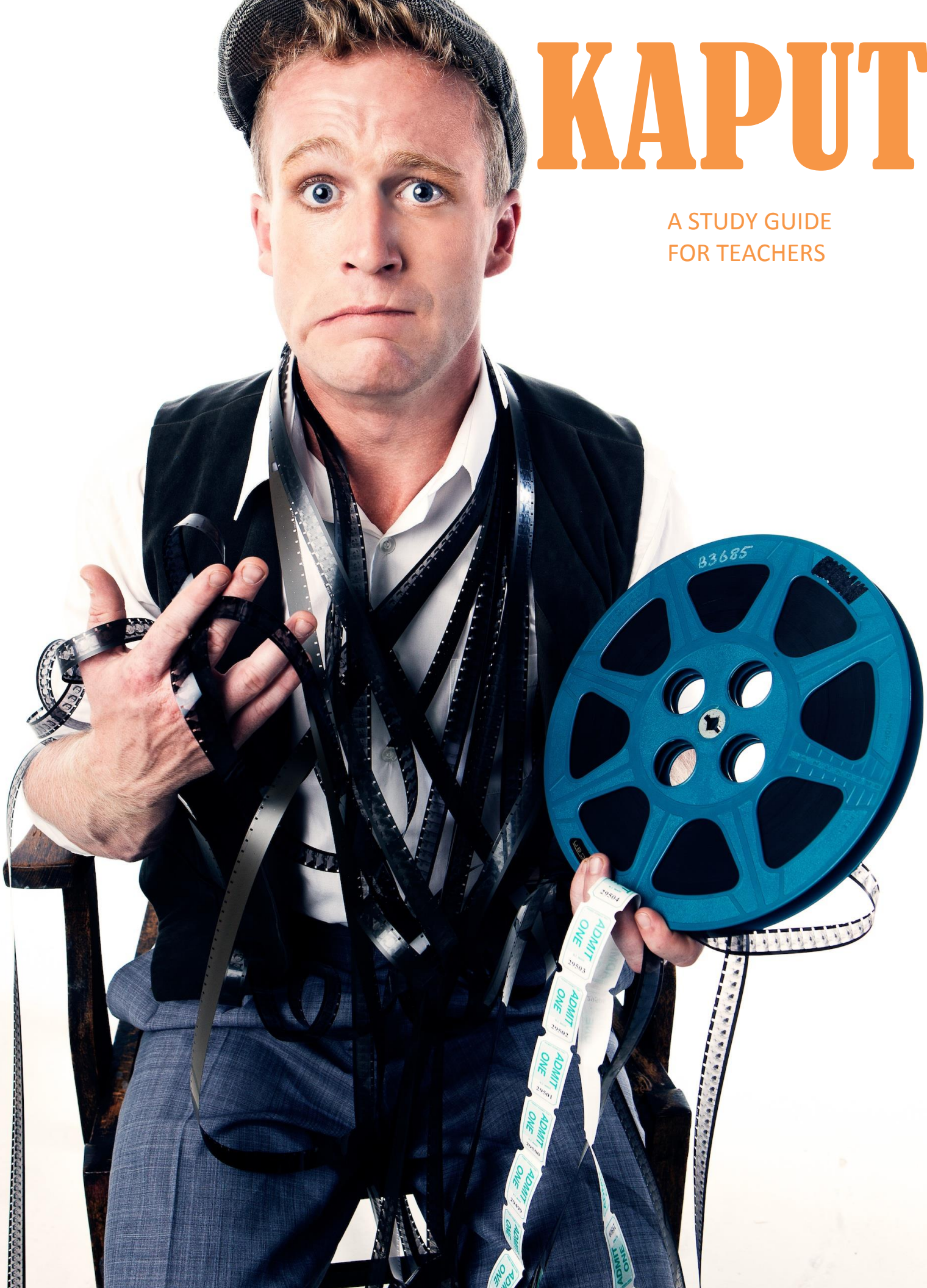


KAPUT

A STUDY GUIDE
FOR TEACHERS



ABOUT THE STUDY GUIDE

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this Study Guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will experience at the performance of Kaput. Filled with acrobatic thrills and silly blunders, we're sure Kaput will delight you and your students. Throughout this Study Guide you will find topics for discussion, links to resources and activities to help facilitate discussion around physical theatre, physical comedy, and the golden age of silent films.

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Being in the Audience

When you enter the theater, you enter a magical space, charged, full of energy and anticipation.

- Show respect by watching and listening attentively
- Do not distract fellow audience members or interrupt the flow of performance
- Applause at the end of the performance is the best way to show enthusiasm and appreciation.



About The Performer

Tom Flanagan is one of Australia's youngest leading acrobatic clowns. A graduate of the internationally renowned circus school, *The Flying Fruit Flies*; Tom started tumbling, twisting, flying and falling at the age of six. Tom has performed at festivals and venues around the world collecting accolades including the Argus Angel and Star of the Festival Award.

In 2005 Tom formed *The Tomali Brothers*, with acrobatic partner Mali De Goey. The collective performed at festivals and events throughout Australia including Burtons Circus, Lennon Brothers Circus and Dreamworld. Tom's previous productions have included *Bewland's Bluegrass Circus* (Woodford Folk Festival) and *Barrel of Monkeys* (City of Perth Winter Arts Festival) for Strut & Fret Production House, *31 Acts in 30 Minutes* and *Time Pieces* for Circa, as well as *Caravan*, a Throwdown production for last year's Melbourne Fringe Festival. Tom recently performed in *Feasting on Flesh* at the Sydney Opera House and *Tom Tom Club* at the Adelaide Fringe Festival.

About The Show

Kaput is a loving live tribute to the slapstick comedy of the silent movie era, created and performed by renowned Australian circus performer and Tom Tom Club veteran, Tom Flanagan.

Flanagan's Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin influence is a proud one – the show is nearly entirely performed without Flanagan speaking, and springs conceptually from that simple premise perfected by his two antecedents: put a likeable man in a hapless predicament and witness his struggle to regain situational control.

In Kaput, the likeable man is an eager young silent movie projectionist whose uncomplicated goal of showing a film on a screen is frustrated by a glitch in his temperamental projector. The combination of a heart of gold and very poor spatial reasoning leads Flanagan's character into increasingly desperate attempts to repair his equipment so as not to deny his audience the film that's been advertised.

Chaos, of course, ensues – a flat-capped Flanagan struggles with ladders, trestle tables, various pieces of dysfunctional machinery and a growing pile of stage debris, accompanied only a keyboardist contributing cheesy muzak as an ironic musical commentary to the disaster as it unfolds. Flanagan's signature leaps and tumbles are present, but it's tricks like a set of twists with an exploding roll of sticky tape that show him to be both an exceptional talent and a unique one.

With only one or two pieces of stage furniture modified for Flanagan's use, Kaput is essentially found-object clowning – with the vacuum cleaner a favourite star.



ABOUT PHYSICAL THEATRE

Physical theater is a catch-all term used to describe any mode of performance that pursues storytelling through primarily physical means. There are several quite distinct traditions of performance which all describe themselves using the term "physical theater", which has led to a lot of confusion as to what the definition of physical theater actually is.

"I think physical theatre is much more visceral and audiences are affected much more viscerally than intellectually. The foundation of theater is a live, human experience, which is different from any other form of art that I know of. Live theatre, where real human beings are standing in front of real human beings, is about the fact that we have all set aside this hour; the sharing goes in both directions. The fact that it is a very physical, visceral form makes it a very different experience from almost anything else that we partake of in our lives. I don't think we could do it the same way if we were doing literary-based theatre."

- [Daniel Stein](#) (trained by [Etienne Decroux](#), Paris)

The term "Physical Theater" has been applied to performances consisting mainly of:

[Mime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mime_artist) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mime_artist)

[Contemporary Dance](#)

[Theatrical Clowning and other Physical Comedy](#)

[Some Forms of Puppetry](#)

[Theatrical Acrobatics](#)

While performances based around all of the above could equally claim to be "Physical Theater", the key distinguishing factor is a focus on narrative, character and storytelling. However, it is often difficult to draw a distinct boundary between what is and what is not physical theater, and distinctions are often made quite arbitrarily by critics and performing companies.

Modern Physical Theater has grown from a variety of origins. Mime and theatrical clowning schools such as [L'Ecole Jaques Lecocq](#) in Paris have had a big influence on many modern expressions of physical theater, and practitioners such as Steven Berkoff and John Wright received their initial training at such institutions. Eastern European practitioners have also had a strong influence on modern physical theater, and both Vsevolod Meyerhold and Jerzy Grotowski are regarded by many as "fathers" of modern physical theater. Contemporary Dance has also had a strong influence on what we regard as physical theater, partly because most physical theater requires actors to have a level of physical control and flexibility rarely found in those who do not have some sort of dance background. Modern physical theater also has strong roots in more ancient traditions such as [Commedia dell'arte](#) and some suggest links to the ancient [Greek theatre](#) - particularly the [theatre of Aristophanes](#).

Source - © The Wikipedia Website. 2006

ABOUT PHYSICAL COMEDY

Physical comedy is one of the older forms of humor in human culture. Watching another person fall down, get dirty, receive a slap, trip over obstacles or perform a stunt has always been a popular source of entertainment for audiences of all ages. Physical comedy often depends on a sense of *schadenfreude*, the secret pleasure an audience member may derive from witnessing the misfortune, real or imaginary, of the performer. A circus clown who takes a hit of seltzer water to his or her face or a comedian making a comically exaggerated entrance is using his or her physicality to sell the joke to the audience. Physical comedy is not necessarily a low-brow form of entertainment, since many mimes and comedic actors can tell elaborate stories through body movement alone.

One of the masters of physical comedy was the late silent film comedian [Buster Keaton](#). Keaton's films were often based around his willingness to put himself into risky situations for the sake of a visual joke. The sight of Keaton stoically riding on the pistons of a steam train, for example, entertained audiences because of the sheer physicality of the act. Other silent film stars such as [Charlie Chaplin](#) and [Harold Lloyd](#) also used physical stunts and visual humor in their films. Charlie Chaplin's character "The Tramp" would routinely throw himself in front of a moving car or get struck by flying objects. Lloyd's films featured his ability to hang precariously from tall buildings or perform other seemingly impossible feats of strength.

Many modern comedians also use physical comedy in their acts. The late John Ritter, for example, would take at least one pratfall per episode of the sitcom *Three's Company*. Some of the best humor from situation comedies is derived from physical comedy bits such as a slow burn reaction or comical expressions of other emotions. The character Kramer on the sitcom *Seinfeld* became famous for his exaggerated entrances and exits, along with his over-the-top physical movements as he delivered his lines. Actor Jim Carrey also became well-known for his ability to use physical comedy in order to enhance a comedic scene. The premise of many popular cartoons is based on physical comedy or sight gags, such as the endless cat-and-mouse pursuit between a coyote and a roadrunner or a literal cat and mouse team known as Tom and Jerry.

Clowns and mimes primarily focus on physical and visual humor because of their natural restrictions with dialogue. A mime or clown must use his or her physicality to set up a scene, play it through and sell the punchline to an audience. Even stand-up comedians who use spoken dialogue must occasionally use physical comedy in order to enhance the joke's delivery. A number of comedians, notably the late Lucille Ball and comedienne Carol Burnett, can successfully combine verbal and physical comedy skills to entertain their audiences. Physical comedians depend on the same sense of timing as other types of comedians in order to produce the desired results.

- [Wisegeek.com](#)



THE ART OF THE PRATFALL

Pratfalls are a classic technique utilized throughout the history of the stage and screen. Essentially, a pratfall is some type of intentional exaggerated fall that is used as a slapstick comedic tool to elicit laughter from the audience. Perhaps the classic example of a pratfall is that of an individual slipping on a banana peel that was just discarded by another person. The combination of unexpected events, exaggerated movement, and the embarrassment of falling to the ground has delighted audiences for centuries.

While the basic elements of the pratfall have been part of entertainment for as long as recorded history, the device came into its own during the early 20th century and the days of [vaudeville](#). Many vaudeville shows were staged to move at a fast pace and elicit instant response from the audience. This led many of the comedic stage acts of the day to include sequences in their routines for people slipping on a freshly mopped floor, or tripping and landing on a table full of cream pies. While predictable even in those early years, the pratfall rarely failed to achieve the desired result. With the dawn of movies, the pratfall also became a common visual device used in silent films. Since the medium relied heavily on broad movements to convey emotions among the players, the pratfall was an ideal device to employ in many of the more famous comedies of the day. After movies moved on to include sound as well as visuals, the pratfall was enhanced with the addition of screams, warnings intended to alert someone to an impending but ultimately funny fall, and various remarks by the person who just took the fall. Comedy teams such as Laurel and Hardy often made good use of the pratfall.

Television continued the legacy of the pratfall well into the latter part of the 20th century. The television variety show format that was popular from the 1950's to the 1970's often used the device as part of an overall broad comedy sketch format that was the staple of some of the biggest shows of the day. Many people consider comedienne Carol Burnett to be the consummate performer when it comes to sketch physical comedy and the use of pratfalls.

Pratfalls were not confined to variety shows when it came to television. Situation comedies often included the use of pratfalls as part of the action with main characters in the productions. In this respect, Lucille Ball is often cited as one of the most beloved and most adept of actresses to employ the use of the pratfall within a situation comedy setting.

Today, the pratfall remains a staple of entertainment on both the stage and screen. While perhaps not as prominent as in times past, the device continues to delight audiences and will not doubt continue to do so for many years.

- [Wisegeek.com](http://www.wisegeek.com)

Resources

<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2014/jan/15/kaput-strut-fret-and-tom-flanagan-review>

<http://www.scapa.com.au/physical-theatre/>

<http://www.danielstein.org/bio.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mime_artist

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemporary_dance

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clown>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puppetry>

http://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/en/school_en-000001.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_ancient_Greece

http://www.theatredatabase.com/ancient/aristophanes_001.html

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-physical-comedy.htm>

<http://www.busterkeaton.com/>

<http://www.charliechaplin.com/en/biography/articles/21-Overview-of-His-Life>

<http://www.haroldlloyd.com/bio/biography>

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-pratfall.htm>

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-vaudeville.htm>

THE GOLDEN AGE OF SILENT FILM (1894 - 1929)

Calling them *silent films* is something of a misnomer - movie theatres and other dream palaces provided pianists, Wurlitzers, and other sound machines, and some films were produced with complete musical scores. Most early silent films were accompanied with a full-fledged orchestra, organist or pianist to provide musical background and to underscore the narrative on the screen. Some even had live actors or narrators. Unfortunately, many of the early classics have been lost to decomposing nitrate film bases and outright destruction.

Many early silent films were dramas, epics, romances, or comedies (often slapstick). One-reelers (10-12 minutes) soon gave way to four-reel feature-length films. - Filmsite.org

In silent films for entertainment the dialogue is transmitted through muted gestures, mime and title cards. The idea of combining motion pictures with recorded sound is nearly as old as film itself, but because of the technical challenges involved, synchronized dialogue was only made practical in the late 1920s with the perfection of the Audion amplifier tube and the introduction of the [Vitaphone](#) system. (The term silent film is therefore a retronym, that is, a term created to distinguish something retroactively – the descriptor silent used before the late 1920s would have been a redundancy.) After the release of [The Jazz Singer](#) in 1927, "talkies" became more and more commonplace. Within a decade, popular widespread production of silent films had ceased. - [Wikipedia](#)

Danger!! Danger!!

Cellulose nitrate plasticized by camphor was used by Kodak, and other suppliers, from the late 1880s as a film base in photography, X-ray films and motion picture films; and was known as nitrate film. After numerous fires caused by unstable nitrate films, safety film started to be used from the 1930s in the case of X-ray stock and from 1948 for motion picture film.

Slow projection of a cellulose nitrate base film carried a risk of fire, as each frame was exposed for a longer time to the intense heat of the projection lamp; but there were other reasons to project a film at a greater pace. Often projectionists received general instructions from the distributors on the musical director's cue sheet as to how fast particular reels or scenes should be projected. In rare instances, usually for larger productions, cue sheets specifically for the projectionist provided a detailed guide to presenting the film. Theaters also—to maximize profit—sometimes varied projection speeds depending on the time of day or popularity of a film, and to fit a film into a prescribed time slot. – [Wikipedia](#)

PHYSICAL COMEDY

+ SILENT FILM

= SILENT COMEDY

Silent comedy refers to a style of acting, related to but distinct from mime, invented to bring comedy into the medium of film in the silent film era (1900s–1920s) before a (synchronized) soundtrack on film was technologically practicable. Silent comedy is still practiced, albeit much less frequently, but it has influenced comedy in modern media as well.

Silent comedy like Chaplin, Hal Roach's Beetle Boy comedies, Buster Keaton, etc. placed a heavy emphasis on visual and physical humor, and what are known as "sight gags", to tell a story and entertain the viewer. Many of these physical gags were exaggerated forms of violence, or even abuse, and came to be called "slapstick". The term "slapstick" refers to a doubled, or "tricked", hitting stick that makes a loud sound upon (light) contact with another person. The "prat fall", slipping on a banana peel, getting soaked with water, and getting a pie thrown in one's face are all classic examples of slapstick comedy devices.

- [Wikipedia](#)

Resources

<http://www.filmsite.org/silentfilms.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitaphone>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_film

<http://www.filmsite.org/jazz.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nitrocellulose>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_film

RESOURCES AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

You may want to share the previous parts of this study guide with older students to provide context to the performance and facilitate discussion. Be prepared to share your own expectations of and reflections about the performance. Have students compare ideas and ask questions to make new discoveries. We have provided you with just a few suggestions of topics for discussion and activities to help your students learn more about physical theatre.

Be the Critic

Activity: Be the critic – write an article (5-7 paragraphs) aimed at publication in a school or local newspaper or blog describing the performance. Rather than focusing on the content of the performance, focus on the way the play was staged, the use of live musicians and the minimalist style. Try not to make value judgments (“I liked it.” or “I didn’t like it.”) but rather to describe the way the artists used their own artistic style to tell the story and to create a mood.

Discussion: Have students ever seen physical comedy like this before? What about in cartoons? Did they like the style (why or why not)? What was their most favorite moment? What was their least favorite moment? What is minimalism? How did the style of the performance contribute to the story?

Tell a Story Without Saying a Word

Activity: Have students prepare cards with simple story scenarios written on them. Examples can include: making a sandcastle at the beach, surprise party, breaking up, coming inside from the cold and starting a fire. It’s a good idea to prepare a few age appropriate scenarios for your students. Divide students into small groups and have someone from each group pull a scenario card. Give the students a few moments to flesh out their stories and then perform them. Other students should attempt to guess what the scenario is.

Discussion: Was it challenging to communicate without speaking? What was the hardest thing to communicate without words? What was the most fun part of making the scenario?

Making a Silent Film

Activity: Have students break into groups and make a short (2-5 minute) silent film on their cellphones or video cameras. This can be a project over the course of a few days, or just something quick on the spot. Title cards or text overlays are acceptable.

Discussion: What were some of the challenges you faced in communicating the scenario? Did using film change the scenario? If so, how?

Body and Expression

Activity: Write out several emotions on cue cards. Have students pull a card, memorize the emotion they chose, then walk around the classroom. Tell the students when you say “freeze” to use their facial expressions to convey the emotion on the card. Encourage students to ramp up their facial expressions and exaggerate them as much as possible. Next ask the students to move around with their exaggerated faces and silently locate others with the same expression. Once in appropriate groups have the students spend a few moment quietly discussing how develop a walk that represents that emotion.

Discussion: How did you know you were in the right group? What were some of the challenges you faced in developing a walk for your emotion? How might clowns and other performers use activities like this to convey emotion?

Taking a Tour

Activity: Divide students into groups, and appoint a “tour guide”. Have the tour guide choose a building like a school, bank, hospital, or house. As the tour guide walks through the building, have them describe what’s happening in each room, and have one of the groups of students act out that activity (i.e. surgery in a hospital, or people visiting a child that has a broken arm). Optionally, the tour guide can change the behaviors of the groups by adding more description about what they are doing (i.e. the doctors are fixing the patient’s arm now; now they are stitching up the patient).

Discussion: Ask students to describe why they chose to do what they were doing. Was it hard to improvise on the spot?

Pass the Ball

Activity: Have students gather in a circle and pass a ball or balloon around the circle. Remove the ball or balloon and have the students imagine passing it around. As the imaginary ball is passed around, change the weight and shape of the ball by calling out “now the ball is a fireball” or “now it is a snowball” or “now it is heavy like a boulder”. Encourage students to use their whole bodies, including facial expressions, to react to receiving the ball.

Discussion: What were some ways you and your classmates caught the ball? How and why was this exercise funny? How and why did you change your body and faces when you caught different balls (i.e. a sticky ball verses a fireball).

What’s in a Gesture?

Activity: Gesture is the use of our arms, shoulders and face (and sometimes legs if not the whole body) to communicate ideas to the audience. Examples of gesture in melodrama include holding the back of the hand to the forehead to indicate that one is upset, or when the heroine pleads for her life by clasping her hands up towards the villain. Have students come up with their own gestures.

Resources

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/drama/exploring/drama_mediumrev6.shtml

OTHER RESOURCES

Grade 2-4

- Harvey the Child Mime (Loryn Brantz, Hometown 520 Press, 2011)
 - Silent Movie (Avi, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003)
 - On Stage: Theatre Games and Activities for Kids (Lisa Bany-Winters, Chicago Review Press , 1997)
 - An Acrobat (I Want to Be) (Ivan Bulloch & Diane James, World Book Inc, 1995)
 - Juggling and Acrobatic Stunts: Coloring & Activity Book (Idan Boaz, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2014)
 - 101 Circus Games for Children: Juggling – Clowning – Balancing Acts – Acrobatics – Animal Numbers (Paul Rooyackers, Hunter House, 2010)
-

Grade 4-7

- Break a Leg! The Kids' Guide to Acting and Stagecraft (Lise Friedman & Mary Dowdle, Workman Publishing, 2001)
 - Eyewitness: Film (Richard Platt, DK CHILDREN, 2000)
 - Charlie's Little Tramp (Jeremy Geltzer, The Hollywood Press, 2013)
 - Behind the Scenes: A Young Person's Guide to Film History (Jeremy Geltzer, The Hollywood Press, 2013)
 - Kids Take The Stage: Helping Young People Discover the Creative Outlet of Theatre (Backstage Books, 1997)
 - Revenge of the Aztecs: A Story of 1920 Hollywood (Susan Beth Pfeffer, Topeka Bindery, 2001)
 - Who Threw that Pie? The Birth of Movie Comedy (Robert Quackenbush, Albert Whitman & Co, 1979)
 - Sir Charlie: Chaplin, the Funniest Man in the World (Sid Fleischman, Greenwillow, 2010)
-

Grade 8-12

- Acrobatics for Children and Teenagers: From the Basics to Spectacular Human Balance Figures (Michael Blume, Meyer & Meyer Fachverlag und Buchhandel, 2013)
 - Secret Acrobatic Drills (Mary Gentle, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013)
 - Overcoming Gravity: A Systematic Approach to Gymnastics and Bodyweight Strength (Steven Low, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2011)
 - Mad Skills (Ben Musholt, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013)
 - Filmmaking for Teens (Troy Lanier & Clay Nichols, Michael Wiese Productions, 2005)
 - Structuring Drama Work (Jonathan Neelands & Tony Goode, Cambridge University Press, 2000)
-

Websites

Teaching Physical Theatre:

http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/BTEC%20Nationals%20from%202010/Unit_32_Developing_Physical_Theatre.pdf

Watch silent films for free:

<http://www.openculture.com/free-silent-films>

Everything you need to know about silent films:

<http://www.silentera.com/info/siteLinks.html>

Written and designed by Jason Helbig and Joanna Kapusta
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