

Study Guide For Teachers

ALMANAC DANCE CIRCUS THEATRE in *AcroAction!*

Presented by:
Young Audiences
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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Students will understand character education concepts like trust, teamwork, and support, with this visual display fusing acrobatics, storytelling and daring physicality. The four performers of Almanac Dance Circus Theatre tumble, climb, fly and fall in a physical language of storytelling in action. Audience participation is encouraged as the dancers alternate between the silly and the profound, the ordinary and the extraordinary.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- See that artists and performers are disciplined professionals
- Learn the concepts of “theme” and “motif”
- See dancers create living “sculptures” using their bodies
- Experience physical storytelling through the use of abstract movement and daring acrobatics
- Be inspired to have fun challenging their bodies and working together to create something seemingly impossible

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Dance Circus Theatre means the artists take the essential parts of those three genres to craft a new hybrid. It’s THEATRE because they’re telling a story or showing an image an audience member can recognize in his or her own life; it’s DANCE because it’s about the body and rhythm and music; it’s CIRCUS because it’s dangerous — the movements aren’t just beautiful or graceful but visibly difficult to achieve with a real risk of failure. The artists explore the unconventional ways this danger can be used in service of storytelling, and can help them achieve the “presence” they strive for. The trust of the ensemble allows these risks. Trust is honed daily, carefully crafted through play and physical practice, and becomes the axiom from which stems a new world of creation.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Discussion Questions:

- What is a sculpture? Look at pictures of sculptures from different time periods, both traditional and abstract
- What does abstract mean? What makes a sculpture abstract?
- Do sculptures have names? What are some? Why do you think the artist selected that name?
- How can we use our bodies to make living sculptures?

ARTIST INFORMATION

Almanac Dance Circus Theatre forges ensemble-driven performances that fuse acrobatics, storytelling, and daring physicality. Almanac produces both ensemble prompted and commissioned works, develops educational partnerships for students of all ages, and leads an open ensemble circus gymnasium for professional performers.

Almanac Dance Circus Theatre was founded in 2013 by Nick Gillette and Ben Grinberg, graduates of the Pig Iron School for Advanced Performance Training, with Adam Kerbel, a graduate of the Headlong Performance Institute. The company pursues present performance at the edge of what is possible, inventing through playful honesty. They were selected as 2013-2014 Fresh Tracks artists at New York Live Arts, are the resident company at the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts, and are artists-in-residence at Mascher Space Co-Op. Their work has been presented by the Tyler Arboretum and the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, Pig Iron Theatre Company, the Arts and Business Council of Greater Philadelphia, Lois Welk, Circus Now!, the University City District, SmokeyScout Productions, Pig Iron Theatre Company, and New York Live Arts, including as special guests of Bill T. Jones with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company at the NYLA Gala (2014). Full-length productions include Leaps of Faith and Other Mistakes (2015), The Fleecing (2015), Nightfall (2014), and Communitas (2014).

RESOURCES

Videos:

Charlie Chaplin "The Tramp"
Buster Keaton silent movie videos

Websites:

<http://www.groundsforsculpture.org/>
<http://spolingamesonline.org/>

AFTER THE PROGRAM

Teamwork activity: have students sit down on the floor with their knees bent and feet as close to their bottoms as possible. Then ask the students to try to stand without moving their bottoms. Most, if not all, of the students will be unsuccessful. Then ask them to do the same activity, just with sitting back to back with a classmate- they can use the classmate to push against to help them both stand at the same time. If they are unsuccessful, encourage the students to link elbows while back to back and keep their entire backs connected the entire time. Try to pair students of similar sizes together.

Teamwork and creative thinking activity: Each student chooses 2-3 objects from their desk. Pair the students up and have them place all of their objects on a flat surface (a desk or floor is great) Students silently take turns moving just one object- not the object that was previously moved- to create a sculpture. After 2 minutes, have the students freeze and each pair come up with a name for their sculpture. Have the students rotate to a different set of objects and with different partners and name that sculpture before starting the game again. This can be repeated as many times as the teacher would like.

VOCABULARY WORDS

Abstract: art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, forms, colors, and textures.

Concrete: existing in a material or physical form; real or solid; not abstract

Theme: A central idea in a piece of writing or other work of art

Motif: a distinctive feature or dominant idea in an artistic or literary composition

Improvisation: something that is improvised, especially a piece of music, drama, etc., created without preparation.

Partner Acrobatics: Two or more people working together to support each other

Almanac: A book of folk wisdom

Double Image: When what is seen on stage can signify two things at once, i.e., a triangle balance is a triangle, but is it also an image of justice?

Poetic Image: The poetic part of a double image — going beyond the concrete to make meaning out of a moment on stage