

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Kids on Stage
Subject: Marsh Youth Theatre
Discipline: Theatre

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Keith Seales (*second from left*) and his fellow performers in performance of *Jip, His Story* at The Marsh in San Francisco, Still image from SPARK

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Kids on Stage

SUBJECT

Marsh Youth Theatre

GRADE RANGES

K–12 & Post-Secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Theatre, Language Arts, Visual Arts

OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the Youth Theatre program of The Marsh, an integrated arts program for students from diverse backgrounds in the local San Francisco community.

STORY SYNOPSIS

Keith Seales is an ambitious 7th grade student who excels at most any sport he tries. But for the past few weeks Keith has been preparing for an entirely new challenge as he takes on the lead role in the Marsh Youth Theatre’s premiere of *Jip, His Story*, an adaptation of the popular book by Katherine Paterson. SPARK goes backstage as 40 5th-9th grade students in the Marsh Youth Theatre (MYT) Mainstage Performance Ensemble prepare for the performance.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing
Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance
Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently
Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To provide opportunities for students to consider how theatre relates to and can play an important role in an urban community
To encourage students to engage in performance skills to develop self esteem, confidence, creativity and team building
To illustrate how theatre can help students to explore different cultures and histories
To introduce students to the collaborative process of ensemble theatre

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story about the Marsh Youth Theatre on DVD or VHS, and related equipment
Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sounds card, printer

MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
Pencils, pens, and paper
Information on the Marsh Youth Theatre from <http://www.themarsh.org/myt.html> and via Theatre brochures

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects
Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems
Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at www.kqed.org/spark/education

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

STORY PROFILE

Keith Seales is an ambitious 7th grade student who excels at most any sport he tries. But for the past few weeks Keith has been preparing for an entirely new challenge as he takes on the lead role in the premiere performance of Jip, His Story, a play being produced by the Marsh Youth Theatre program in San Francisco.

Based on the popular children’s novel Jip, His Story by National Book Award winner Katherine Paterson, the play is a moving tale of an adolescent boy in rural Vermont in the 1840s. As a toddler he’s abandoned and left by the side of the road, rescued by townspeople and sent to a poor farm where he was given the name Jip. As the story unfolds Jip discovers he is the son of a black runaway slave from the South and her white master.

Like most of the other 40 5th through 9th graders in the MYT Mainstage Performance Ensemble, Keith Seales will be learning to sing, dance, and act for the first time in his life. He and his fellow students will be memorizing lines and learning to sing and dance 18 musical numbers and there are onstage roles for everyone, from villagers to chorus members. Over the course of 14 weeks, this unique performing troupe of young people from San Francisco’s Mission District will work collaboratively to create an original script and songs as an ensemble production. All of the students will also be involved, from start to finish, in producing the set, making props and learning the importance of all of the behind-the-scenes jobs of the theatre. Keith, as Jip, feels more pressure than most as the lead character that must hold the play together.

Emily Klion, Program Director of the Marsh Youth Theatre explains how hard the young people work in the program and how disciplined they learn to be as they prepare for the final performance. “They learn how hard theatre is...how much work it is...it is the hardest thing some of them have ever done.”

As a community theatre, the MYT is committed to making high quality theatre education available to any child who wants to take part, regardless of financial circumstance. The Mainstage Performance Ensemble is one of the programs the theatre offers and their target population are 5th–9th graders ready to commit to a full scale theatre performance. MYT also offers a broad range of classes in acting, music and theatrical production, including Flying Poles, a workshop developed by aerialist Jo Keiter, where students learn to dance off the ground on low flying poles. (Learn more about Jo Keiter at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/jokreiter.jsp>.)

The Marsh describes itself as “a breeding ground for new performance” since it develops new work and encourages experimentation. Most people involved with the Marsh first come to theatre as audience members, but they become more involved: enrolling workshops, attending sing-along nights, volunteering, participating in The Marsh’s internship program, and even occasionally testing their talents as performer in an “open” Monday night performance night.

The Marsh is the inspiration of Executive Director Stephanie Weisman, an artist who spent several months living on the edge of a marsh, writing and watching the rich interplay between the different elements of the landscape, which she found to be a perfect metaphor for artistic development in the urban environment. Weisman and collaborator Peggy Howe started a Monday Night performance series at the Hotel Utah in 1989 which moved to Morty’s in North Beach in 1989, and then into the back room at Café Beano. The theatre began presenting more than 150 different performances a year and in December 1992 found its current home on Valencia Street in the City’s Mission district, an intimate 110 seat theatre. The Marsh bought the 12,000 sq. ft. building in 1996.

THE BIG PICTURE

Children's Theatre ~ Youth Theatre

In the United States, the history of children's theatre is relatively brief, beginning in the early 1900s as the passionate commitment of individuals and certain institutions before coalescing in the mid-20th century into the diverse and thriving field of theatre it is today. In Europe, Eastern Europe and Asia theatre for young audiences has always been an integral part of performing arts, including performances specifically for young audiences as well as works written for young performers.

One of the first and arguably the most prolific theatre educators to support theatre for young audiences was Charlotte Chorpenning (1872-1955), a teacher who made tremendous contributions to the field of children's theatre. In 1931 Chorpenning was appointed as director of the Goodman Children's Theatre in Chicago, which, under her 24-year leadership became the greatest institutional contributor to the field of children's literature, developing over 50 original plays for children. This body of plays, many of which were written by Chorpenning herself, made the Goodman Children's Theatre one of the first theatres in the US to produce a full season of theatre for children – a tradition that continued for 70 years.

Chorpenning saw universal qualities in the characters and storylines of classic fairy tales and fables such as Little Red Riding Hood and The Emperor's New Clothes. She adapted tales such as these into plays, making the archetypal issues of childhood and growing up into theatre based on the belief that if children recognized the story and identified with the characters, they would have strong interest in the plays and in the theatre.

Chorpenning plays were produced nationally, marking the first time a children's playwright was produced across the country. Over the years, two awards have been developed in her name to recognize outstanding achievement in the field of children's theatre: the Charlotte Chorpenning Cup was awarded annually by the Children's Theatre Association of America, and the Charlotte B. Chorpenning Playwright Award, which is given annually by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE).

Another champion of youth theatre and education, also in Illinois, was Winifred Ward (c1905-1975), a professor of speech at Northwestern University from 1918-1950 who is believed to be the first person to offer drama classes at the college level in 1920. In 1924, Ward succeeded in getting theatre as a subject integrated into the core curricula of the Evanston school district, a program she supervised until her retirement. While teaching, Ward co-founded the Children's Theatre of Evanston in 1925, creating one of the first theatres for youth performance in the country. The theatre cast college students and children from the local elementary schools in productions for audiences of all ages, becoming a national model for university and community collaboration and for youth performance. In 1944 Ward founded the first national youth drama organization, called the National Children's Theatre Conference which is known today as the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. The AATE hosts the Winifred Ward Memorial Fund, Inc., which annually awards the Winifred Ward Scholarship, as well as the Charlotte B. Chorpenning Award Playwright Award.

Following on the heels of Ward was Aurand Harris (1915-1996), who began writing plays for young audiences in the 1940s. Harris explored many new and different styles for youth theatre in his large body of plays, including vaudeville (The Tobey Show), melodrama (Rags to Riches), and what he called his "death show," The Arkansas Bear, the story of a young girl coping with the loss of a family member. His works include Monkey Magic, Pinballs, and The Orphan Train, his last play, as well as very popular adaptations of well-known stories such as Pocohantas and The Magician's Nephew.

Harris was the first children's playwright to receive a Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the first to be awarded the Charlotte Chorpenning Cup from the Children's Theatre Association of America. He was also the first children's playwright to be invited to China to produce a production with the Children's Art Theatre, the oldest children's theatre in China (c.1940s) Harris' work forever changed the standards and expectations of children's theatre and he remains

the most produced playwright for youth audiences in the US.

Suzan Zeder has initiated a new wave of children's theatre. Zeder's plays for family and youth audiences address directly the real life circumstances and challenges that children face. Her characters are contemporary and recognizable and the plays add to a new awareness that children's abilities to comprehend serious material have been, for a very long time, underestimated. Her plays give credit to children for being intelligent and intuitive, particularly when it comes to recognizing truth, in the story and on the stage. In Doors for instance, Zeder tells the story of divorce from the child's perspective, addressing straight on, the painful experience of a child hearing parents argue and watching them separate. In Step on a Crack Zeder addresses the subject of the step-mother, vanquishing the "evil step-mother convention" in favor of a nuanced story addressing the complex difficulties of a child in a home with step-mother.



Director Danny Duncan gives youth actor Keith Seales a few pointers during rehearsal.
Still image from SPARK story, 2005.

SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS

The Internet Theatre Bookshop includes a comprehensive catalogue of Youth and Children's theatre texts, drama, musicals, pantomime, monologues etc. - <http://www.stageplays.com> or <http://www.stageplays.com/youth.htm>

Creative Drama Resource site contains a huge selection of titles on: theatre education, creative drama theory and practice, performance and acting techniques and methods, improvisation, theatre games and exercises + books on directing, production and technical aspects of stagecraft. - <http://www.creativedrama.com/book.htm>

Landy, Robert J. Handbook of Educational Drama and Theatre. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982.

Allen, John. Drama in Schools: Its Theory and Practice. London: Heinemann, 1979.

Courtney, Richard. The Dramatic Curriculum. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1980.

Davis, Jed H. and Mary Jane Evans. Theatre, Children, and Youth. Anchorage Press, New Orleans, 1982

Hansen, Brian K. A Curriculum Model for Theatre in Aesthetic Education. St. Louis: Cermel, 1972

Heinig, Ruth Beall and Lydia Stillwell. Creative Drama for the Classroom. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1981.

Jennings, Coleman A. and Gretta Berghammer, Theatre for Young Audiences : 20 Great Plays for Children, St. Martin's Press; 1st ed edition, 1998.

_____, Plays Children Love : A Treasury of Contemporary & Classic Plays for Children, St. Martin's Griffin; Reprint edition, 1992.

_____, Eight Plays for Children : The New Generation Play Project, Univ of Texas Pr; 1st ed edition, 1999.

_____, Theatre for Youth : Twelve Plays With Mature Themes, University of Texas Press, 1986.

Lazurus, Joan. Theatre Arts Discoveries: A Leader's Guide to Informal Drama Activities. Madison, WI, Department of Continuing Education in the Arts, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1986.

Marrs, Carol. The Complete Book of Speech Communication: A workbook of ideas, and activities for students of speech and theatre. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Merriwether Publishing, 1992.

McCaslin, Nellie. Act Now! Plays and Ways to Make Them. New York, S.G. Phillips, 1975.

_____, Nellie, Ed. Children and Drama. New York: David McKay, 1975.

_____, Theatre for Children in the United States: A History. Players Press, 1997.

Creative Drama in the Classroom. Allyn & Bacon; 7 edition, 1999.

Ommanney, Katharine and Harry Schanker. The Stage and the School, 5th Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982.

Robinson, Ken. Exploring Theatre and Education. Exeter, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1979.

Salisbury Wils, Barbara. Theatre Arts in the Elementary Classroom: Kindergarten through Grade Three. New Orleans, LA: Anchorage Press, 1987.

_____, Theatre Arts in the Elementary Classroom: Grade Four Through Grade Six. Anchorage Press; 2nd edition, 1996.

Salisbury, Barbara. Theatre Arts in the Elementary Classroom: Grade Four through Grade Six. New Orleans, LA: Anchorage Press, 1987.

Spolin, Viola. Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook. Northwestern University Press, 1986.

Warren, Bernie, Ed. A Theatre in your Classroom. Ontario, Canada: Captus Press. 1990.

Webster, Clive. Working with Theatre in Schools. London: Pitman, 1975.

Zeder, Suzan. Wish in One Hand Spit in the Other. Anchorage Press, 1990.

WEB SITES

American Alliance for Theatre and Education
Organization dedicated to promoting standards of excellence in theatre and theatre education, connecting artists, educators, researchers and scholars with each other, and providing opportunities for our membership to learn, exchange, expand and diversify their work, their audience and their perspectives - <http://www.aate.com>

California Alliance for Arts Education
The CAAE promotes, supports, and advocates for visual and performing arts education for preschool through post-secondary students in California schools. - <http://www.artsed411.org>

California Department of Education: Visual & Performing Arts Education
Complete overview of the state's arts initiatives, including Arts Assessment, Arts Taskforce, Arts Funding, Policies, and Legislation, including the the Framework and Content Standards in downloadable and online version (printable) - <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>.

Model Arts Program
The purpose of the Model Arts Program Network is to help school districts to evaluate, improve, and

expand visual and performing arts programs in California schools through a guided self-evaluation process, professional development seminars, conferences and a supportive network of colleagues - <http://www.teachingarts.org/MAP> and <http://www.cde.ca.gov/shsd/arts/modelarts.htm>.

Teaching Arts.org
The primary on-line resource for arts education in California - <http://www.teachingarts.org>

The California Arts Project (TCAP)
The state's subject matter project in Visual & Performing Arts, TCAP's mission is to deepen teachers' knowledge of dance, music, theatre, and visual art, to enhance student success pre-kindergarten through post-secondary, and to develop instructional strategies to support the Visual & Performing Arts Content Standards and framework in California's public schools - <http://csmp.ucop.edu/tcap>

Theatre Bay Area
Includes calendar & listings of programs, workshops, auditions, grants etc as well as a Bay Area online magazine - <http://www.theatrebayarea.org>

Young Audiences of Northern California
The Bay Area's oldest and largest arts education non-profit offering K-12 programs in dance, music, theatre, and the visual and literary arts – <http://www.ya-nc.org> – YANC is part of the national organization Young Audiences, Inc., the largest provider of arts education in the US – <http://www.ya.org>

VIDEO RESOURCES

Creative Drama & Improvisation, Theatre Video Series, DVC Inc., 1990. (Available through [Amazon](#).)

The Arts in Every Classroom
Two specialist teachers work on basic theatre skills with children of various ages and use theatre education as a gateway to other kinds of learning <http://www.learner.org/channel/libraries/artsineveryclassroom/video5.html>

American Library Association

The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), publishes an annual list of Notable Children's Videos includes videos for children 14 years of age and younger, including documentaries, films, animated movies, educational videos and films of theatrical performances - <http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2005/january2005a/2005notablevideos.htm>

Arts Literacy for A Changing America

Film made of the 1998 teleconference between the US Department of Education and the Arts Education Partnership on arts literacy. Copies available for \$7 from the Council of Chief State School Officers Publications Office, One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20001-1431, Attn: Arts Literacy Video. <http://aep-arts.org/Publications&Resources.html>

SPARK* STORIES ABOUT YOUTH IN THE ARTS:

Young Audiences of Northern California – Arts education organization profile (PreK-12) <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/yaba.jsp>

San Francisco Circus Center and Lu Yi – Circus master Lu Yi and his students <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/luyi.jsp>

Oxbow School – Visual arts intensive program in Napa, CA for high school students - <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/oxbow.jsp>

Youth Speaks – Internationally known youth spoken word project - <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/youthspeak.jsp>

Sahara Sunday Spain and Elizabeth Sunday – Published youth artist and mother team - <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/sundayspai.jsp>

Carlos and Salvatore Santana – Musicians in the family - <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/sundayspai.jsp>

Shri Krupa Dance Foundation – Indian Bharata Natyam dance program run by Vishal Ramani <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/shrikrupa.jsp>

SF Jazz All-Star High School Ensemble – <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/sfjazzall.jsp>

SECTION IV – BAY AREA RESOURCES

BAY AREA RESOURCES

(A more complete list of theatres in the Bay Area is available on the Theatre Bay Area Web site at

http://www.theatrebayarea.org/tba/links_comp.jsp)

Academy of Art University

Summer Art Experience (ages 14–18)
79 New Montgomery Street, San Francisco, CA 94105
800/544.2787
<http://www.academyart.edu>

Acrosports

Ongoing classes (PreK-grade 12)
639 Frederick Street, San Francisco, CA 94117
415-665-2276
<http://www.acrosports.org>

Alameda Children’s Musical Theater

Theatre Camp (ages 8-16)
510/521-6965
<http://www.acmtkids.org>

Alameda Civic Light Opera

ACLO “Kids” (ages 7–14)
180 Grand Ave., Ste. 1550, Oakland 94612
800/321-5297
<http://www.aclo.com>

American Conservatory Theatre (ACT)

Young Conservatory (ages 7-18)
415 Geary Street, San Francisco, CA 94109
415/ 439.2444
<http://www.act-sfbay.org>

Bay Area Theatresports (BATS)™

Youth and Teen Improv Camps (ages 11-17)
B350 Fort Mason Center, San Francisco, CA 94123
415/474-6776
<http://www.improv.org/school/workshops.htm>

Brava! For Women in the Arts

Brava Theatre Academy (ages 6-25)
2781 24th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110
415/641.7657
<http://www.brava.org/index-v3.html>

Berkeley Repertory Theatre

School of Theatre (grades 6-12)
2025 Addison Street, Berkeley, CA 94704
510 647 2900
<http://www.berkeleyrep.org>

California Shakespeare Festival

Summer camps (ages 8-18)
Shakespeare Festival Way, Orinda, CA 94563
510/548.9666
<http://www.calshakes.org>

Children’s Musical Theater San Jose

Ages: 4–21
1401 Parkmoor Ave., San Jose 95126
408/288.5437
www.cmts.org

Cinnabar Theater

Ongoing workshops & classes (ages 5-18)
3333 Petaluma Blvd. N., Petaluma 94952
707/763.8920
<http://www.cinnabartheater.org>

Contra Costa Civic Theatre

Ongoing classes and camps (ages 7–16)
951 Pomona Ave., El Cerrito 94530
510/524-9132
<http://www.ccct.org>

Contra Costa Musical Theatre

Spotlight Academy (grades 5-12)
1136 Saranap Ave, Suite F, Walnut Creek, CA 94598
925/210.0268
<http://www.ccmt.org>

Dell'Arte International

Summer Youth Academy (ages 7-17)
131 H Street, Box 816, Blue Lake, CA 95525
707/668.5663
<http://www.dellarte.com>

East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

Ongoing classes and camps (ages 2–26)
339 11th Street, Richmond, CA 94801
510/234-5624, extension 6 or 20
<http://www.eastbaycenter.org>

East Bay Children's Theatre

3612 Webster Street, Oakland, CA 94609
510/537.9957
<http://childrens-theatre.org>

First Stage Children's Theater

Ongoing classes (ages 8–11)
2112 22nd Street, San Francisco, CA 94107
415/647.0914
Sue Walton - sue6ft2@berkeley.edu

Golden Thread Productions

Theatre Camp for Children
KZV Armenian School, 825 Brotherhood Way
San Francisco, CA 94132
415/626.4061
<http://www.goldenthread.org>

Intersection for the Arts

Alternative Theatre Institute (all ages)
446 Valencia Street, San Francisco, CA 94103
415/626-2787
<http://www.theintersection.org>

Julia Morgan Center for the Arts

Kaleidoscope Performing Arts Camp &
Rainbow Arts Camp (ages 4–12)
2640 College Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704
510/845-8542 x301
<http://www.juliamorgan.org>

Kids on Camera TV/Film Acting (ages 4–18)

Box 6203, San Rafael, 94903
415/440-4400
<http://www.kids-on-camera.com>

Lorraine Hansberry Theatre

Youth Academy (ages 5–19)
710 Taylor Street, San Francisco, CA 94108
415/345-3980 x6
<http://www.lorrainehansberrytheatre.com>

Marin Shakespeare Company

Ongoing workshops & classes (ages 5-19)
Box 4053, San Rafael 94913
415/499-4487
<http://www.marinshakespeare.org>

Marin Theatre Company

Summer camps (grades K-12)
397 Miller Avenue, Mill Valley, CA 941941
415/388.5200 x310 for camp info
<http://www.marintheatre.org>

(The) Marsh

Marsh Youth Theatre (grades 5-9)
1062 Valencia Street, San Francisco, CA 94110
415/826-5750 x3 or myt@themarsh.org
<http://www.themarsh.org>

Musical Theatre Works

Ongoing classes (ages 7–17)
72 Craggs Court, San Francisco, CA 94131
415/641.5988
<http://www.musicaltheatreworks.org>

New Conservatory Theatre Center

Youth Theatre Conservatory (ages 12-18)
Andrew Nance - andrew@nctcsf.org
YouthAware Educational Theatre
Sara Staley 415/861-4914 x109 - sara@nctcsf.org
25 Van Ness Avenue, Lower Lobby
San Francisco, CA 94102
415/861.4914
http://www.nctcsf.org/youth_programs.html

(The) Palo Alto Children's Theatre

1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA 94301
650/463.4930
<http://www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/theatre/about.html>

Peninsula Youth Theatre

Summer classes (ages 3 & up)
2500 Old Middlefield Way
Mountain View, CA 94043
650/988-8798
<http://www.pyt.net>

San Carlos Children's Theater

Ongoing classes (ages 6-adult)

Box 512, San Carlos 94070

650/594-2730

<http://www.sancarloschildrenstheater.com>

San Francisco Arts Education Project

ARTSummer (ages 9–14)

School of the Arts High School

555 Portola Ave.

SF 94131

415/551.7990

<http://www.sfartsed.org>

San Francisco Circus Center

Summer Day Camp (ages 7–15)

755 Frederick Street, San Francisco 94117

415/759.8123

<http://www.circuscenter.org>

(The) San Francisco Shakespeare Festival

Bay Area Shakespeare Camps (ages 7-18)

The San Francisco Shakespeare Festival

P.O. Box 460937

San Francisco CA 94146-0937

415/422.2222

800/978.PLAY (outside the 415 area code)

<http://www.sfshakes.org/camp/index.html>

TheatreWorks

Youth programs of different types (all ages)

P.O. Box 50458

Palo Alto, CA 94303-0458

650/463.1950

<http://www.theatreworks.org>

Young Performers Theatre

Ongoing classes (ages 5-14)

Fort Mason Center

Building C, Room 300, San Francisco, CA 94123

415/346.5550

<http://www.ypt.org>

SECTION V – VOCABULARY

VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Adrenalin

Hormone secreted by adrenal gland that stimulates a high level of activity. Surge of activity

“At risk”

The term is associated with members of underserved communities who are exposed to dangers such as drugs and criminal activity because of their vulnerable position in society. Endangered

Audition

Trial for actors being cast in a play to see if they suit the role

Dedication

Commitment

Discipline

Orderly and rigorous behavior

Ensemble

Collaborative group of artists working together on a production

Folk

Ordinary people

Pressure

Urgent or exerting stress

Traditional

Based on history and traditions or ways of doing things that have been established over time

SECTION VI – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION POINTS

These activities are designed for 5-9th graders, but can be adapted for use with students of younger age.

Grounding Exercises

Play music during this warm-up to generate a positive mood in the classroom. Invite students to stand in a circle with enough space to move around. Ask them to begin by moving their arm, leg, other leg, other arm, shoulders, ribs, hips, knees. Start over - arm, leg, leg, arm, shoulders, ribs, hips, knees. They should repeat this 3-4 times going faster each time. Now ask students to put all their weight on their feet and walk around. How does it feel to move? Interact with each other? Now ask them to shift their weight to their hips. Does it change the way they walk or interact? Now shift weight to the chest and interact. Finally, ask students to find their own center of gravity and to walk around, interact, and pay attention to how others carry themselves.

MYT activity from Emily Klion, the Program Director of the Marsh Youth Theatre

Invite students to stand in a circle and feel the weight on their two feet. Suggest that they rock backwards and forwards and focus on the way their weight is redistributed. Then ask students to stand - as if waiting in line at a grocery store - as if greeting the queen etc. etc.

Ask them to think about how their posture and their way of standing changes in each situation. How does a way of standing project energy, confidence, fear etc. Invite students to respond to this question with their own thoughts.

Finally ask the group to think about stage-fright. How should they stand to manage these feelings? Explain the importance of putting weight on both feet to feel balanced. Ask them to try it.

SPARKLERS:

* Ask students to stand straight. They should then imagine being bigger than they are. Ask them to imagine that they are giants taking up a lot of space, weighing 200 lbs or more. Do they feel bigger? Do they feel different?

* Have students stand in a circle so they can make eye contact with everyone. They should not talk. Ask them to point to someone who should acknowledge them with a nod. The student may then walk to their place. The individual that nodded must point to someone else and receive a nod before moving. Adjust the pace so that each person gets to the place after it has been vacated. When students feel comfortable, speed up the pace or give them the option of shaking their heads instead of nodding. Explain to students that they are working as an ensemble. The object is to accomplish tasks together regardless of difficulty.

Improvisation Exercises *

* Bus Stop

Split the class into two groups for simultaneous group improv, or have one group be the audience and then switch with the other group. Ask students to improvise standing at a bus stop waiting for the bus to arrive. As each new passenger boards the bus, everyone on the bus adopts the attitude, personality, accent, movements, etc. of the new arrival until the bus is full. Then begin randomly letting passengers off the bus remembering to adopt the mannerisms of the passenger that boarded before the individual exits.

* What are you doing?

All the participants pair up. Within each pair, one player asks the other, "What are you doing?" The second player responds by naming whatever action comes to mind, from "I'm building Frankenstein" to "I'm dancing in a ballet" or whatever. The first

player then immediately starts performing whatever action the other player named, and while they are doing so, the second player asks them, "what are you doing?" and enacts whatever action the other person names. This goes very quickly, and once it gets started, both players should always be doing something physically. Theoretically, this can go back and forth forever.

One great way to get everybody started is to declare an action that one person in each group starts with, and the other will then begin the questioning.

* Passing an Object

MYT activity from Emily Klion, Program Director of the Marsh Youth Theatre

Encourage students to sit in a circle. One student should begin by simulating holding an object in their hands, defining the object by the way they handle it. As their neighbor takes the object they should change it into something else until the last person handling it expands it into a final form.

* 10 Seconds

MYT activity from Emily Klion, Program Director of the Marsh Youth Theatre

Divide students into small groups. Then invite students from the class to call out a scenario with a twist, such as you are waiting at a bus-stop and an elephant pulls up....you are going to a wedding and the groom ends up being you.....

Allocate the scenario to a group giving them a minute to talk about it – i.e. who will be which character etc. They then have ten seconds flat to perform the scene.

* Group story

Sit in a tight circle and write down the opening line of a story and pass it to the person sitting to your left. Challenge each participant to add a sentence and pass the story on to person to the left. The last person to add a sentence should then read the story aloud to the group. This activity can also be done verbally, which would then omit the final reading, but call upon the participants to listen to and remember what came before. Consider making the opening line something exciting or evocative such as "Suddenly last summer I discovered..." or "When the door opened Matilda screamed....."

Developing Character

MYT activity from Emily Klion, Program Director of the Marsh Youth Theatre

Play the SPARK story on MYT to introduce students to the work of the theatre. Participants in Mainstage Performance Ensemble rotate through classes in dance, drama, music and art taught by award winning theatre artists. All participants have an onstage role in the final performance, and to prepare supporting actors, students are encouraged to go deeper than the script and develop stories about their character by responding to questions such as:

Who were your parents?

What did they do?

Where did they come from?

What is your daughter's name?

Where do you live?

What kinds of food do you like?

How do you wear your hair?

Who do you dress?

As a class read a scene from a play and then allocate characters to students. (Since many of the stories performed by Mainstage are based on myth, students may have a frame of reference, pictures and images etc for this activity if the play selected is based on a myth.) Ask students to work in pairs and develop a series of questions for their partner to help them to explore their character. When they have completed the questioning, ask each student to write a paragraph about their character. If roles are limited, some students will be working on the same character, and may enjoy comparing versions.

Challenge students to draw pictures of themselves in character. What do they look like? Share the drawings by putting them up on the walls in the classroom. Finally encourage students to design aluminum foil models of their character and stand the figurines on a base for display. An up-turned plastic beaker works well as a stand. MYT has many intriguing and convincing models of this type from former and current productions.

Students may also enjoy designing their character's costume, drawing the design and even making it.

Conclude the exercise by asking students to think about how their character will communicate on stage. How will they stand? What will they wear? How old should they be?

By the end of this activity students should have a strong sense of their role and be able to describe their character to the group.

SPARKLERS:

Suggest that students attend one of the MYT workshops or join MainStage Performance Ensemble, a group of 5th-9th grade students from all over the Bay Area who work together to create a performance under the direction of award-winning artists. See - <http://www.themarsh.org/mytsch.html> For an application and brochure call 415/826-5750 x3 or e-mail myt@themarsh.org

Encourage students to attend a performance at The Marsh Theatre - <http://www.themarsh.org/about.html>

Non Verbal Presentations

Ask students to work in groups and select a situation where spoken language is not an option e.g. communicating with a person who speaks a different, unknown language, or with someone who is deaf, or making a silent movie. Challenge students to create a message about something they think the person or the audience ought to know.

Students should communicate their message by acting it out non-verbally. Enactments can include charades, pantomime or hand signals, dance, or using their bodies to form letters in the message. They can also use any other methods they can think of, such as drawing or painting illustrations to help. Music, clapping, sounds or other special effects can be used to enhance the performances.

It may be interesting to videotape the performances to review. What are the challenges of this exercise?

Connecting to the Community

MYT activity from Emily Klion, Program Director of the Marsh Youth Theatre

As an integrated arts program, the MYT Mainstage encourages participants to engage with music, art, dance, and drama i.e. in all aspects of theatre arts.

Students are expected to experience all these theatre arts before specializing - if they then decide to do so.

Suggest that students take pictures of the landscape or visit the locality in which the story being dramatized is set. They should be encouraged to get a sense of the area, the landscape, culture and traditions of the locality either through direct experience or research.

Encourage students to work on different areas of the set and the production, for example:

- building rocks or making leaves
- learning local dances
- learning the songs of a region
- designing scenery to represent the area
- designing costumes

The intention is to encourage students to connect theatre arts to the community and environment. Since MYT Mainstage productions are unique and all the work is new, the ensemble is free to work with their art in any way they choose.

RELATED STANDARDS LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 5

LISTENING AND SPEAKING

1.4 Select a focus, organizational structure, and point of view for an oral presentation.

1.6 Engage the audience with appropriate verbal cues, facial expressions, and gestures

2.1 Deliver narrative presentations:

Establish a situation, plot, point of view, and setting with descriptive words and phrases

Grades 9 & 10

1.0 LISTENING AND SPEAKING STRATEGIES

1.1 Formulate judgments about the ideas under discussion and support those judgments with convincing evidence.

In Appreciation

MYT concludes rehearsals with a moment of appreciation for all participants.

Ask students and teachers to sit in a circle. Give the group a minute to think about the small things that happen that can be valued and appreciated. Invite each member of the ensemble to acknowledge something they have noticed and appreciated about another member of the ensemble until everyone has been acknowledged. This exercise enables students to enjoy and value working in an ensemble.

RELATED STANDARDS VISUAL ARTS

Grade 4

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (color, shape/form, line, texture, space and value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

Grade 6

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Use various observational drawing skills to depict a variety of subject matter.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>.

RELATED STANDARDS

THEATRE

Grade 2

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Use the vocabulary of theatre, such as plot (beginning, middle, and end), scene, sets, conflict, script, and audience, to describe theatrical experiences.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.3 Students critique and derive meaning from works of theatre, film/video, electronic media, and theatrical artists on the basis of aesthetic qualities.

4.4 Identify the message or moral of a work of theatre

Grade 4

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.4 Identify a character's objectives and motivations to explain that character's behavior

Grade 7

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.2 Explain how cultural influences affect the content or meaning of works of theatre.

Grades 9-12 (Proficient)

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.2 Write dialogues and scenes, applying basic dramatic structure: exposition, complication, conflict, crises, climax, and resolution

3.0 HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXTS

3.2 Describe the ways in which playwrights reflect and influence their culture in such works.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.2 Report on how a specific actor used drama to convey meaning in performances.