

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Home, Sweet Home  
Artist/Organization: Lorraine Hansberry Theatre  
Discipline(s): Musical Theater (Percussion)

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Still image from SPARK story, 2006

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### EPISODE THEME

Home, Sweet Home

### SUBJECT

Musical Theater, Percussion

### GRADE RANGES

K-12 and post-secondary

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Theatre, Music, Language Arts, Social Studies

### OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre's world premiere of "Hit It!" - virtuoso drummer Jared "Choclatt" Crawford's autobiographical musical set to urban music from the 1930's to the present.

### STORY SYNOPSIS

Jared "Choclatt" Crawford was a street percussionist performing outside of New York's Broadway theaters until he was discovered by tap star Savion Glover and cast in the hit show, "Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk." In 1985, the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre was founded with a vision to promote multicultural theatre and to showcase works by African American artists. SPARK follows the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre's mounting of Crawford's show, "Hit It!" from rehearsal to opening night as the Hansberry's Artistic Director, Stanley E. Williams, directs this ambitious show for the theater's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Individual, partner and group rhythm-based activities
- Individual and group writing
- Individual student drawing
- Individual student research



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

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, to the performer Jared "Choclatt" Crawford and the process of opening a new show
- To give students hands-on opportunities to explore rhythm and percussion
- To invite students to create art from personal experience
- To introduce students to the histories of musical theater, of drumming in urban music, and of street performance

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story about "Hit It!" on DVD or VHS and related equipment

Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, and a printer  
Audio music player such as a CD or MP3 player, cassette deck, or record player

*Optional:* A camera, and video recorder and player

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Open space for circle and group activities  
Rhythm sticks and other basic percussion instruments

4 Chairs

Objects to use as instruments

Pencils, pens and paper

Resource books (see Resources)

*Possibly also:* magazines, pictures or colored paper (for montage)

### Intelligences Addressed

Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

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

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

To close their 25th anniversary season, the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre chose a musical extravaganza, Jared "Chocclatt" Crawford's wildly percussive autobiographical journey "Hit It!" which celebrates the drum-infused music of Big Band sounds, Latin styles, rhythm and blues, soul and today's hip-hop masters. **Spark** goes behind the scenes as the star, director, cast and crew of "Hit It!" prepare for its world premiere.

The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre was founded in 1985 by artistic director Stanley E. Williams and executive director Quentin Easter. Named for Lorraine Hansberry, the first African American woman to have a play produced on Broadway, the company strove to showcase the work of African American playwrights and give voice to an underrepresented population in Bay Area theater.

Williams and Easter felt that the Bay Area's rich variety of cultures wasn't visible on the stages of mainstream theaters. Convinced that these theaters were underestimating theatergoers' desire to see plays representing diverse cultural experiences, they produced work by playwrights such as Ntozake Shange and August Wilson and commissioned new works by local writers. Their belief has been validated by an audience that consistently fills the 300-seat theater and that considers the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre a beloved and integral part of the Bay Area cultural scene.

At the age of 3, Chocclatt Crawford began playing drums. At the age of 12, he found his singing voice. Performing in subway stations and on the sidewalks of New York City, Crawford became one of the New York Bucket Drummers. Crawford caught the attention of Broadway producer George C. Wolfe and tap-dancing prodigy Savion Glover. The two asked him to choreograph the on-stage percussion for

"Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk" as well as to join the cast as a featured performer.

Opening on Broadway in 1996, "Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk" traced centuries of African American history through evocative music and dance. The show had a nearly three-year run, then Crawford moved on to create and star in "Keep Bangin'," a critically acclaimed musical featuring different drumming styles from around the world.

In "Hit it!" Crawford took his own coming-of-age story and created a musical under the direction of Williams, with choreography by Antonio Naranjo. The show's book (the text and narrative of the production) is made up of poems by "Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk" writer Reg E. Gaines that pay homage to jazz history and Manhattan's African American heritage. The book also includes story segments from Crawford's life written by André C. André (Crawford's father and a regular performer at the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre).

As Crawford's character takes a magical ride through the subways of New York, each subway stop represents a different style of percussion-driven urban music. The audience follows him on an odyssey through the history of drumming, from the Big Band sounds of Chic Webb, Max Roach, Cab Calloway and Buddy Rich to the Latin styles of Tito Puente, Mongo Santamaria and Celia Cruz. Crawford also covers rhythm and blues/soul legends Al Green, Marvin Gaye, Sam Cooke and Aretha Franklin as well as hip-hop performers Sheila E., Grand Master Flash, Doug E. Fresh and Run-DMC.

## THE BIG PICTURE

### *Drumming in popular music*

Crawford has noted that “Hit It!” took inspiration from African ancestors who for centuries used the drum to communicate over long distances. These “talking drums” imitated the rising and falling rhythmic patterns of speech. Drums were also an important part of African ceremonial and religious functions that could include rituals, dance and storytelling. Thought to originate in West Africa (present-day Nigeria and Ghana) the “talking drum” spread to America and the Caribbean during the slave trade.

The influence of African and Latin drum traditions was later seen in American jazz. Unlike the piano or violin, there is no large body of composed work for the drum, nor is there a standardized notation key or tuning system. Created in a primarily improvisational manner, jazz drumming and the role of the drummer evolved over the past century. In the early 1900’s, a drummer’s part in a typical New Orleans jazz band was to keep the music’s momentum going by playing patterns that clearly outlined the piece’s beats and forms. Drummers also infused musical shifts in mood and energy with dynamism and excitement, but primarily the drummer’s job was to “keep the time” for the band as a whole. This time-keeper role continued for drummers in the swing bands of the 1920’s and ‘30s. However, in the 1940’s, alto saxophonist Charlie Parker traded the smooth rhythms of swing music for the unpredictable beats and lengthy improvisations of bebop. The complexity of bebop asked drummers to interact with the other musicians’ melodic improvisations. Drummer Maxwell Roach worked with Parker and experimented in the bebop style creating a polyrhythmic, percussive feel by exploring the flexibility of the trap-drum set.

During the 1950’s, drummers like Tito Puente and Ramon Santamaria injected Afro-Cuban and Caribbean sounds to popular music and brought the mambo, son and cha-cha-cha to mainstream audiences.

Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, among other musicians of the 1950’s and 60’s, introduced music that sometimes tossed out the drummer’s time-keeping role entirely as the

ensemble wove together the spontaneous, instinctively-inspired rhythms of “free jazz.” In music today, we see the drummer’s role vary from time-keeper, to equally interactive ensemble member, to the virtuoso percussive solo’s featured in “Hit It!”

### *Street Performers*

Reported to have entertained the public since the days of ancient Egypt and Greece, street performers worked the pavements as minstrels (entertainers who performed a repertoire of music, storytelling, juggling and acrobatics) during Europe’s Middle Ages. Street performing, or “busking” as it is known in Europe, was first documented in the United States in the 1700’s when New York newspapers began printing articles about street performers. Laws and registered complaints from that time concerning vendor songs and cries also document the thriving street performance scene.

Around 1900, immigrants in New York helped boost the popularity of street performances. Music from many different cultural styles and traditions came to be heard on the streets, from German marching bands, to Italian organ grinders (called “hurdy gurdies”) to singers and banjo players. Artists like Eddie Cantor, George Burns and Irving Berlin emerged from these humble beginnings.

In 1935, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia made it illegal to perform on the city’s streets. Undaunted by this ban, artists coming up in the 1940’s, like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and others in the Urban Folk Revival movement played music at subway stations and public parks. Singing songs about social change they also attempted to reclaim public space. In the 60’s, bands like The Grateful Dead staged “be-in’s,” performing at public places and passing the hat amongst the crowd. Eventually, federal court cases brought by folk singers and the poet Allen Ginsberg set into motion the First Amendment legal challenge of the street music ban, and in 1970, the ban was finally lifted by Mayor Lindsey.

### *The history of African American musicals*

Early in the 1830’s, minstrel shows featuring white performers wearing “blackface” (black makeup) and performing racially stereotypical comic skits, songs and dancing became a popular form of entertainment in America. The first distinctly American theatrical

form, blackface minstrelsy pandered to the racism of white audiences by serving up grotesque and demeaning portrayals of African Americans in the name of humorous entertainment.

As minstrelsy provided theatrical opportunities previously barred to them, African American performers joined minstrel shows in the 1840's and 50's. The first exclusively African American troupes emerged around 1855 and African Americans made up a large part of the audience for these shows. Reportedly, so many African American patrons attended that theater owners relaxed rules about where they were allowed to sit.

For all its negative aspects, minstrelsy provided a spawning ground for popular music in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America. For example, James Bland, an African American composer created hits with songs like *O, Dem Golden Slippers* and *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny*.

The rise of vaudeville (light entertainment featuring a number of different kinds of performers) at the end of the 1800's eventually eclipsed minstrel shows. While vaudeville employed African American and white performers in the same variety shows, most Southern states still segregated theater audiences and Northern cities often refused African Americans choice seating even during the 1920's.

Still, vaudeville gave many African American performers and composers the chance to hone musical acts, thus paving the way for them to create their own full-fledged musical productions.

Bob Cole and Billy Johnson's "A Trip to Coontown" and Will Marion Cook's "Clorindy: The Origin of the Cakewalk," both opened on Broadway in 1898 and were the first full-length musicals written, directed, performed and produced by African Americans. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century two other vaudeville song and dance men, Bert Williams and George Walker produced the musical comedies, "In Dahomey" (1903), "Abyssinia" (1906), and "Bandanna Land" (1908).

The 1920's ushered in other successful African American musicals. Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake's "Shuffle Along" (1921) showcased the remarkable talents of Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson and had

such hit songs as *Love Will Find a Way* and *I'm Just Wild About Harry*. Lew Leslie staged a series of "Blackbirds" reviews featuring performers like Ethel Waters and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. Songs like *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* from "Blackbirds of 1928" are still known today.

In the decades that followed, musicals like George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," "The Swing Mikado" (a modernization of Gilbert & Sullivan's operetta, "The Mikado") and "Carmen Jones" (Oscar Hammerstein's version of Bizet's opera "Carmen") opened on Broadway with African American casts. The 1970's and 80's saw musicals based on African American works such as "Purlie," Ossie Davis' comedy and "Raisin" based on Lorraine Hansberry's classic play "A Raisin in the Sun." "The Wiz," a rock-musical retelling of The Wizard of Oz with an African American cast was a hit in 1975, as was "Ain't Misbehavin'," a revue featuring the songs of early jazz great Fats Waller. "Jelly's Last Jam," showcasing the music of jazz pioneer Jelly Roll Morton opened on Broadway in 1992. But it wasn't until "Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk" opened in 1996 that a Broadway production openly dealt with the complex history of the African American people through their musical roots.



Still image from SPARK story, 2006.

## SECTION III – RESOURCES

### CHILDREN’S BOOKS & MUSIC

Resources to help children learn music concepts and build vocabulary. Especially appropriate for younger children.

Ah, Music! Aliko

The Completed Hickory Dickory Dock Jim Aylesworth

All Join In Quentin Blake

Berlioz the Bear Jan Brett

Miss Mary Mack: And other children’s street rhymes Joanne Cole & Stephanie Calmenson

My Family Plays Music Judy Cox

City Sounds Rebecca Emberly

Jazz Cats David Davis, Chuck Galey

Nathaniel Talking Eloise Greenfield

The Jazz Fly Matthew Gollub, Karen Hanke

Mama Don’t Allow Thatcher Hurd

Bring on That Beat Rachel Isadora

Crocodile Beat Gail Jorgensen

M is for Music Kathleen Krull

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom Bill Martin, Jr. & John Archambault

Jazz: My Music, My People Morgan Monceaux

Music Is Lloyd Moss

Charlie Parker Played Be Bop Chris Rashka

I Live in Music Ntozake Shange & Romare Beardon

Max Found Two Sticks Brian Pinkney

Train Song Diane Siebert

Possum Come A’Knockin Nancy Van Laan

Music, Music For Everyone Vera B. Williams

### MUSIC COLLECTIONS

Children’s Jazz Chants Old and New (Audiobook): Carolyn Graham. USA, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Shake It to the One That You Love the Best: Play Songs and Lullabies from Black Musical Traditions. (Book&Cassette edition) Cheryl Warren Mattox. Tennessee, JTG of Nashville, 1990

### RESOURCE TEXTS

Encyclopedia of Percussion. John H. Beck. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, United States, 1995.

Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World. Dale Cockrell. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Swing to Bop : An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s. Ira Gitler. New York, Oxford University Press, 1985.

Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Afro-American in the Performing Arts. Langston Hughes & Milton Meltzer. New York, Da Capo Press, 1990.

The Book of Rhythms. Langston Hughes. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Drummin' Men: The Heartbeat of Jazz - The Swing Years. Burt Korall. New York, Oxford University Press, 1990.

Jazz ABZ: An A to Z Collection of Jazz Portraits. Wynton Marsalis, et al. Candlewick Press, Massachusetts, 2005.

The Drummer's Time. Rick Mattingly. New Jersey, Modern Drummer Publications Inc, 1998.

A Century of Musicals in Black and White: An Encyclopedia of Musical Stage Works By, About or Involving African Americans. Bernard Peterson. Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1993.

Understanding Jazz. Tom Piazza & Wynton Marsalis. New York, Random House, 2005.

The Great Jazz Drummers. Ronald Spagnardi. New Jersey, Modern Drummer Publications Inc, 1992.

101 Music Games for Children: Fun and Learning With Rhythm and Song.

Jerry Storms, Anne Griffiths. California, Hunter House Company, 1995.

African American Musicians. Eleanora E. Tate. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000.

How Sweet the Sound: African-American Songs for Children. Wade and Cheryl Hudson. New York, Scholastic, 1995.

Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls. Allen Wool. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1989.

#### ARTICLES

Craig, Pat. "Hit It!," A musical journey (theater review), Contra Costa Times May 18, 2006. Available at [www.contracostatimes.com](http://www.contracostatimes.com)

Gomolvilas, Prince. "Lorraine Hansberry Theatre's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary" Theatre Bay Area Magazine, May 2006.  
<http://www.theatrebayarea.org/mag/article.jsp?sessionid=47F22B9CF9084F4AC9D7F64DAB4C1A62?thispage=archives.jsp&id=287&hi=1>

Jones, Chad. "Musical 'Hit It!' makes some sweet noise (theater review), Oakland Tribune May 16, 2006.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4176/is\\_20060516/ai\\_n16364367](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4176/is_20060516/ai_n16364367)

Hurwitt, Robert. "It's the sticks that fly in "Hit It!" (theater review), San Francisco Chronicle May 17, 2006. Available at [www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com)

Terry Morgan, Elmo. "Noise/Funk: Fo' real Black theatre on 'Da great White way – play 'Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk' on Broadway" African American Review Winter 1997.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2838/is\\_n4\\_v31/ai\\_20425713](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_n4_v31/ai_20425713)

Whitehead, Sam. "Keep Bangin'" (theater review), Time Out New York September 30-October 7, 1999.  
[www.choclatt.com/timeoutnewyork.htm](http://www.choclatt.com/timeoutnewyork.htm)

#### WEB SITES

The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre  
[www.lorrainehansberrytheatre.com](http://www.lorrainehansberrytheatre.com)

Jared "Choclatt" Crawford  
[www.choclatt.com](http://www.choclatt.com)

African American World / PBS  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaaworld/>

Education First: Black History Activities  
<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/BHM/index.html>

Jazz for Young People online  
[http://www.jalc.org/jazzED/j4yp\\_curr/launcher.html](http://www.jalc.org/jazzED/j4yp_curr/launcher.html)

Musicals 101.com: The Cyber Encyclopedia of Musical Theatre, TV and Film  
[www.musicals101.com](http://www.musicals101.com)

PBS KIDS GO! / Jazz  
<http://pbskids.org/jazz/index.html>

Rhapsodies in Black – Web site covering New York's Harlem Renaissance  
[www.iniva.org/harlem/home/html](http://www.iniva.org/harlem/home/html).

The African American Music and Culture Archives at Indiana University  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~aaamc/>

#### VIDEO RESOURCES

Jazz, a film by Ken Burns. Available in many video stores. For more information, go to:  
<http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/>.

Stomp Out Loud (1997) Percussive performance show, available at some video stores and for sale on Amazon.com.

American Roots Music (PBS show)  
[http://www.pbs.org/americanrootsmusic/pbs\\_arm\\_episode\\_summaries.html](http://www.pbs.org/americanrootsmusic/pbs_arm_episode_summaries.html)

Broadway: The American Musical (PBS show)  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway>

American Masters (PBS)  
Charlie Parker  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/parker\\_c.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/parker_c.html)

Negro Ensemble Co.  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/negro\\_ensemble\\_co.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/negro_ensemble_co.html)

Vaudeville  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/vaudeville.html>

SPARK (KQED)  
To view online videos go to  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/spark/edguides.jsp>

- Calligraphy of Thought
- Kids on Stage: Marsh Youth Theater
- Opening Nights: Teatro Vision
- Solo Acts: Derique
- Telling Stories: Marc Bamuthi Joseph
- The Long Run: New Conservatory Theater Center
- The Next Generation: Youth Speaks

## BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

*Performance Organizations:*  
Lorraine Hansberry Theatre  
Contact them at 415/474.8800 /  
[www.lorrainehansberrytheatre.com](http://www.lorrainehansberrytheatre.com) to find out about their upcoming season.

African American Shakespeare Company  
Produces the works of Shakespeare and the classics with African American casts. 415/333-1918 /  
[www.africanamericanshakes.org](http://www.africanamericanshakes.org)

Afro-Solo  
Focuses on solo artists and an annual solo performance festival.  
415/771-2376 / [www.afrosolo.org](http://www.afrosolo.org)

Cultural Odyssey  
Committed to the creation of new works by artists from all cultures.  
415/346-5509 /  
[www.culturalodyssey.org/v2/aboutus/index.html](http://www.culturalodyssey.org/v2/aboutus/index.html)

SF JAZZ, The San Francisco Jazz Organization  
Upcoming Bay Area jazz festivals, concerts and events  
415/398-5655 / [www.sfjazz.org](http://www.sfjazz.org)

*Museums:*  
San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum  
Dedicated to documenting the history of the performing arts in the Bay Area. Also, special emphasis and programming on international dance, musical theater and theatrical design. 415/ 255-4800 /  
<http://www.sfpalm.org/>

African-American Historical and Cultural Society Museum  
Displays African American artwork and historical artifacts from American and Africa. 415/292-6172 /  
[http://fortmason.org/visual\\_arts/index.shtml](http://fortmason.org/visual_arts/index.shtml)

African American Museum & Library at Oakland  
Works to discover, preserve, interpret and share the historical and cultural experiences of African Americans in California and the West. 510/ 637-0200 /  
[www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO/](http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO/)

## SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

### DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

#### **Artistic director**

The person who chooses the plays the theater company will perform and hires the cast, crew and production staff (like directors and designers.)

Artistic directors will often direct shows for the company as well.

#### **Autobiographical**

When a person tells their own story

#### **Black American theater**

Plays, musicals and other theatrical productions in the United States, written by, for, and about African Americans.

#### **Broadway**

A wide avenue in Manhattan, New York, where a number of the world’s most prestigious theaters are located

#### **Cast**

The performers in a theatrical production

#### **“Drive the show”**

Theatrical elements (like story, character or music) that propel the momentum of a production

#### **Light(ing) grid**

The pipes or bars over a stage from which the lights are hung

#### **Opening night**

The first performance of a show for the general public

#### **Percussion**

Musical instruments (or objects) that make sounds when you strike, rub, shake, pluck or scrape them

#### **Programming**

The selection of productions scheduled by a theater company

#### **Read-through**

When actors sit and read a play out loud, from the beginning to the end

#### **Rehearsal**

Sessions where performers practice working through scenes, musical numbers, dances, etc. from the play they will perform

#### **Spin-off**

A production inspired by another existing work

#### **Spoken theater**

Referring to “spoken word” performance wherein performers speak or sing lyrics, poetry or stories, sometimes accompanied by music.

#### **Tapping**

An expression referring to tap dancing where the dancer wears shoes with metal plates on the toe and heel so that beats are heard when their shoes “tap” against the floor.

#### **Tech crew**

A group of people who work on the technical aspects of the show including operating the sound system and lighting board.

#### **Tech week**

The week before a show’s opening night wherein all of the technical elements (such as lights, sound, scenery, costumes and makeup) are added.

#### **Universal themes**

Subjects that have meaning for people from all cultures

#### **World Premiere**

The first public performance of a theatrical work anywhere in the world

## SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### **NAME CLAPPING** (Grades K-12)

Have students sit or stand in a circle and each go around saying and clapping out the syllables in their first name (eg., Ru/dy or An/na/bel). *Option:* In unison, the class can repeat each students' name pattern or rhythm after they hear it. After everyone has had a turn, choose a student to repeat their name rhythm to another student across the circle from them. This student should then respond with their name rhythm, passing it to yet another student in the circle, and so on. Eventually, have the students stop saying their names as they're clapping and just listen to the rhythms.

*Other variations:*

- Instead of clapping, students can "tap" their bodies with their open hands to sound out the syllables, or snap their fingers, use rhythm sticks (ridged or smooth 10"-12" wooden sticks) or drums
- In groups of 4-6, ask students to create an ordered pattern for their name rhythms and perform them for each other.

#### **CALL & RESPONSE** (Grades K-12)

Pair students up with one student as the leader and one as the follower. Using clapping, rhythm sticks or drums, have the leader improvise a rhythm. The follower should immediately improvise with a rhythmic response. Have both continue this "conversation" for a minute or so, then have them switch roles.

*Option:* Students can also improvise vocal sounds and melodies (and movement) as part of their call and response.

#### **VOLUME & TEMPO** (Grades 2-12)

Using clapping, body tapping or rhythm sticks, have students explore volume and tempo. Establish a basic rhythm for students to play in unison. A teacher then acts as "conductor" signally with his/her hands for students to play louder, softer and variations in between. Do the same for tempo – the

teacher signals when students should play faster, slower and between the range of these speeds.

*Additions:*

- Ask students to experiment with using volume and tempo to express emotions. As a class, compile a list of different emotions. Have students clap or play their rhythm sticks "sadly" and so on. (*Option:* Students could come up with different adverbs and play their rhythms in the manner of the adverbs.) Afterwards, discuss which volume, tempo and playing technique worked best to express each emotion. Students can explore alone, in pairs or groups.
- Using other instruments (sand blocks, cymbals, maracas, etc.) have students explore pitch (how high or low a note is) and timbre (the quality of a sound). Discuss how different pitch and timbre communicate emotional qualities as well.

#### **FOUND OBJECT ROTATION** (Grades 4-12)

*(Inspired by Keith Terry and Crosspulse Music and Dance Ensemble)*

Invite each student to find an object, or idiophone (self-sounding instruments), they would be interested in "playing" (a book, pencil box, keychain, etc.) Ask students to experiment with creating improvised rhythms on their found object. (Warning: the classroom will get noisy!) Place four chairs at the front of the class and ask for four volunteers to take the seats with their objects in hand. One at a time, ask students to play a repeated rhythm on their object until they are all playing together. (They should be listening, improvising and adapting their rhythms to work in harmony with the other players.) Rotate students out of the chairs one at a time and replace them with new students who will need to work in harmony with the existing players' rhythms.

### **SIGNATURE BEAT** (Grades 3-12)

Ask students to think about their own energy and personality. (Or to consider something specific that reflects their personality, like how they get up in the morning. Do they jump out of bed or need to drag themselves out?) What's a short rhythm that communicates their energy? They can use claps, snaps, rhythm sticks, drums or a found object to express this. Have students pair up and teach each other their signature beat. Students can also loosely draw or graph (or notate using icons, symbols, lines, curves, dots, etc.) their own or their partners' rhythms.

### **JAZZ / RHYTHM CIRCLE**

(Grades 5-12 & Post-Secondary)

In a circle, have a student improvise a basic rhythm (or share their "Signature beat") and repeat it a number of times. (They may choose to clap, snap, use rhythm sticks or sound it out vocally.) Once this beat is established, have the other students join in with their own short rhythms one at a time, complimenting this basic rhythm. You may want to play some jazz music before this activity so students can get a feel for the musical quality and rhythms. (CD's of Cab Calloway, Max Roach and Tito Puente might be appropriate as "Hit It!" includes music played by these performers.) Discuss the discoveries and challenges that emerge when working together as an orchestra.

#### *Variations & Additions:*

- Once a "drum beat" is established, other students can join in vocally, mimicking different instruments in a band.
- Instead of imitating an instrument, some students can choose to "scat" sing (vocalize a tune without words).
- Some students can observe the "Jazz circle" and draw or paint a response to what they hear.
- Videotape the activity and watch it later with specific attention to how students worked together to improvise this piece. Share observations about the process of collaborative improvisation.

### **RHYTHM MACHINES** (Grades 2-12)

In groups of 5 or 6, ask students to decide on a machine together. (This can be a real machine like a toaster or clock, or an imaginary machine like a robot chicken that lays golden eggs.) First, have each

person in the group determine which part of the machine they are. (For example, if their machine is a clock which person represents the hands, the motor inside, the alarm?) Each person should also decide on the rhythm, tempo, pitch and volume of their part of the machine, and if their rhythm continually repeats (the clock ticking) or only plays at intervals (the alarm.) As in the Jazz Circle, maybe one student should begin first and establish the primary beat as the others join in one by one until all are involved.

### **ENVIRONMENT PIECES** (3-12 & Post-Secondary)

Take the class outside (preferably to different places within the school site) and have them listen for a few minutes to the sounds they hear in the school environment. Have students find a partner and each mimic three noises they heard using vocals, claps, rhythm sticks or sound objects, whichever evokes the sound best. Then, in groups of 5 or 6, have each student choose one noise, then together experiment with the arrangement of the noises until they find a satisfying rhythm. Share each group's piece.

#### *Variation:*

- **Historical Soundscape:** Focus on a specific place and time period, for example, New York's Ellis Island in the 1900's or a California gold mine in the 1850's. Have the students imagine they are in that time and place. Brainstorm and list the noises they might hear in these environments. Then, in groups, have each student reproduce one of the sounds in a repeated rhythm and together work all the sounds into a piece. Taking this further, students can write short scenes set in this historical time and place and perform them against the background of these soundscapes.

### **LIFE MAP** (Grades 2-12 & College)

Give students a long piece of paper and ask them to document with drawings, and/or collage and words the beginning of their lives, the middle, and where they are now. Then, have them fill in (with self-portrait drawings, words, quotes, etc.) significant moments from their beginning to where they are now. Students can then create a "soundscape" for this piece. What would the rhythmic pattern of the beginning of their lives sound like, rhythmically how would they transition from the middle to the end? Students can also create movement phrases to represent moments in their life maps.

### **I AM FROM POEM (Grades 2-12)**

Read the class George Ella Lyon’s poem “Where I’m From.” Challenge the students to create their own “Where I’m From” poems by asking them to start lines with “I am from…” and write about their own backgrounds and experiences. Teachers can have students fill out a worksheet with sections like “favorite foods”, “closest friends and family,” “most treasured things I own”, etc. to jumpstart their imaginations.

#### *Additions and Variations:*

- Have students create a rhythm to accompany their poem, then teach this rhythm to a partner. The partner will play this rhythm while the student reads their poem and vice versa.
- Students can edit their poems into a group poem and perform it together, each reading brief sections or lines. Another group can create a rhythm piece, or even a piece with soft vocals and some instrumentation to accompany it.
- Students can choose one of their favorite pieces of music (and can also ask parents and grandparents for their favorites) to accompany the poem.

#### **RELATED STANDARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

##### Grade 3

2.2 Plan and present dramatic interpretations of experiences, stories, poems, or plays with clear diction, pitch, tempo, and tone.

2.3 Make descriptive presentations that use concrete sensory details to set forth and support unified impressions of people, places, things, or experiences.

##### Grade 7

2.1 Write fictional or autobiographical narratives.

- Instead of using the “I am from” structure, students can choose to write their own original poem borrowing from their lives and using haiku, free form, sonnet, and limerick styles.

### **RESEARCH PROJECT – PREPARING FOR A PRODUCTION (Grades 3-12)**

Invite students to interview students (and teachers) who are involved in the school show, and to research about other productions of this show in addition to the story and background involved in the creation of the show. Students may then write an article about the production, the cast and crew and the history of the show. Students could also make artist statements (with accompanying photos) for each of the cast and crew and post them around the performing space on the days the production will run. Additionally, the cast and crew of a school show could have a Q & A with the audience after each show.

### **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**

Select other SPARK stories focusing on a different style of theater. Compare and contrast those episodes with this one about “Hit It!”

#### **RELATED STANDARDS THEATRE**

##### Grade 3

2.1 Participate in cooperative script writing or improvisations that incorporate the Five Ws.

##### Grade 5

5.1 Use theatrical skills to dramatize events and concepts from other curriculum areas, such as reenacting the signing of the Declaration of Independence in history social science.

5.2 Identify the roles and responsibilities of performing and technical artists in theatre, film, television, and electronic media.

**RELATED STANDARDS**  
**MUSIC**

Kindergarten

- 1.1 Use icons or invented symbols to represent beat.
- 1.2 Identify and describe basic elements in music (e.g., high/low, fast/slow, loud/soft, beat).

Grade One

- 2.4 Improvise simple rhythmic accompaniments, using body percussion or classroom instruments.

Grade Two

- 4.2 Create developmentally appropriate movements to express pitch, tempo, form, and dynamics in music.
- 4.3 Identify how musical elements communicate ideas or moods.

Grade 3

- 2.3 Play rhythmic and melodic ostinatos on classroom instruments.
- 2.4 Create short rhythmic and melodic phrases in question-and-answer form.

Grade 4

- 2.3 Compose and improvise simple rhythmic and melodic patterns on classroom instruments.

**RELATED STANDARDS**  
**SOCIAL STUDIES**

Grade K-12

All social studies standards for grades K-12 include “Historical Interpretation” as a core objective.

Including where students:

- Summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contexts of those events and

Identify the human and physical characteristics of the places they are studying and explain how those features form the unique character of those places.

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>.



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