Pre-Show Activities

**Magic Box**

**IN- AND OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 5 MINUTES**

**Objective:** Students will use their faces and bodies to explore different emotions.

**Discussion:** One of the tools that an actor uses is his/her body. In the play *How I Became a Pirate*, Jeremy Jacobs becomes scared of the storm and angry when he has to eat vegetables. The actor playing the role of Jeremy must convey these emotions to the audience using his face and body. As a class, we’re going to first practice using only our faces to show these emotions.

**Activity:** Ask each student to reach up into the sky to pull down a “magic box” that can be placed on the floor and opened. The first thing in each box is a set of four magic strings. Ask the students to pull out the first string: stretch it out, dangle it, play with it. Next, ask students to reach into their magic box and get their magic glue. Using the glue, attach one end of the string to his/her forehead, then repeat this activity by gluing the remaining strings to his/her cheeks and chin. Now that the students have strings attached to all four sides of their faces, they can have some fun! Practice pulling the strings in different directions (e.g., pull all the string above the head) to see how they affect the emotions displayed on each student’s face. When the exercise is done, have each student pull a magic washcloth from their box to remove the strings. As they wash, explain to them that because the washcloth is magic, it has the power to turn all their faces happy. Ask them to show you their happy faces. Repeat for the emotions of sad, scared, goofy, excited, mad, etc.

**Extension:** Repeat this exercise using the entire body.

**Theater Etiquette**

**IN-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 10-20 MINUTES**

**Objective:** Students will actively explore good theater etiquette.

**Discussion:** How should you act when watching a play? How is that different from watching a movie or playing at recess? Is it okay to laugh during a play if you think it’s funny?

**Brainstorming:** Develop a list of good and bad theater behaviors.

**Modeling:** Ask a volunteer to act out both a good and bad behavior. Compare. What makes each behavior good versus bad?

**Activity:** Ask the class to act out a series of good and bad behaviors. Discuss each. Stress that bad behavior should not be glorified or portrayed as “cool.” Conclude with the class acting as a good theater audience.
A Behind-the-Scenes Spotlight on Directing
An interview with New York City Director Rob Urbinati

With his pulse on everything that is happening in current American theater, Director Rob Urbinati’s career reflects a lifetime passion for theater.

His work has spanned the nation and includes experience as a theater reporter for Home Box Office (HBO), a theatre consultant for HBO in New York City, and a Ph.D. from the University of Oregon. He directed over 40 plays at theatres across the country before returning to New York in 1995, where he directed Staceyann Chin’s Border/Clash for the Culture Project; the premiere of Eric Bogosian’s Griller for the Lincoln Center Director’s Lab; Jeff Whitty’s Suicide Weather at NYU; and Lucas and Sonheim’s Marry Me a Little with Brent Barrett and Sally Mayes at Queens Theater in the Park.

Plays written by Rob Urbinati include Hazelwood Jr. High, directed by Scott Elliott for the New Group, with Chloe Sevigny, and Rebel Voices, which featured Danny Glover, Steve Earle, and Lili Taylor in its rotating cast. His new play, Death by Design, was commissioned by the Houston Family Arts Center, where it opens in September 2011.

Q: What is the most interesting part of being a director?
A: I like to work the staging out in my head before rehearsals begin, and I like to work with the designers to create the world of the play. Rehearsals are fun because I’m not an actor, and it’s fun to see what ideas the cast comes up with as they explore the script. I even love tech - trying to balance the practical with the artistic. The best part, though, is watching the show when it finally opens!

Q: Do you prefer to direct musicals or plays? And, why?
A: I really don’t have a preference. I also don’t have a preference between commercial productions and experimental ones. Diversity is fun. It makes me sharpen my skills as a director. I like to be able to overlap: use musical theatre techniques in straight plays, experimental techniques in commercial plays, etc. Dabbling in all genres and styles is the way to go!

Q: When directing a show such as How I Became a Pirate, what do you do first?
A: The first thing I do is read the script over and over. Then, I close my eyes and start to imagine the show on stage - trying to see what it looks like “in space” and how it moves from scene to scene. The next step is to meet with the designers to start developing the “look,” so I can get more specific.

Q: What was your theatrical vision for How I Became a Pirate?
A: One of the things that pirates represent for kids is a life free from care, a life of giddy abandon, where you can do and say whatever you want without worrying about how your teachers or parents will respond. That’s the type of adventure that Jeremy embarks upon in the show, and that’s what I wanted the audience to experience.

Q: What is the most difficult part of your job?
A: Working within time constraints! There’s never enough rehearsal time, never enough tech time, never enough previews, etc. When I write, I can take as much time as I need to finish a play. With directing, there are always time limits.

Q: What is the most enjoyable part of your job?
A: Before I was a director, I was a theatre consultant for HBO. I have always loved sitting in the audience and watching shows. And, as a director, that’s still my favorite part.
Post-Show Activities

Exploring the Job of a Director: Pirate Statues

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 10-20 MINUTES

Objective: Students will be introduced to the concept of directing by creating frozen stage pictures that represent various action scenes from How I Became a Pirate.

Discussion: What are the qualities of a good leader? Why is it important for a director to have these traits?

Vocabulary:
- Director: The person responsible for making sure that everyone works together as a group to tell the story of the play. Directing includes actors, set design, lighting, sound, costumes, and others involved in the production.

Modeling: Ask four to five students to come to the front of the classroom. These students are the “clay” for your demonstration. By giving the students specific instructions as to how to shape their bodies, sculpt the “clay” into a statue that resembles the scene from the play where Braid Beard discovers Jeremy Jacobs on the beach. (e.g., You can assign one student to be Braid Beard. Ask him/her to open his/her eyes and mouth wide and to put a hand on each side of his face as if he’s shocked to see such a great sandcastle.)

Activity: Ask another four to five students to come to the front of the classroom. The students who remain seated in their chairs will be the directors this time. As a class, sculpt the actors into statues that represent other scenes or moments from the play (e.g., when Jeremy learns that he doesn’t have to eat vegetables, when Jeremy learns there’s a “no luck-in” policy on the ship, or when Jeremy decides that he wants to go home). The students should raise their hands to give specific instructions as to how the actors should move. Continue the exercise by asking new students to the front of the classroom.

Extension: Allow students to work in small groups with one student serving as the director and the others serving as actors. The director should make a stage picture to share with the rest of the class. Rotate directors, allowing all students a chance to direct small group.

Note: It’s important to emphasize that there are no wrong answers when participating in this exercise. All of the pirates and scenes will look very different from one another.

Pantomiming: Pirate Booty

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 5-10 MINUTES

Objective: Students will warm up their imaginations by using pantomime.

Vocabulary: Pantomime: Someone who uses gestures or expression without speech to convey a message.

Discussion: In the play, Braid Beard needs help burying a treasure. Why do pirates bury their treasure? How do we keep items safe today? What type of items did pirates typically bury?

Modeling: Ask the class to join you in a circle. Imagine there is a treasure chest in front of you that contains pirate booty (an object) that you want to keep safe. Using pantomime, show the students the size of the chest and then slowly unlock it and remove your imaginary object. Show the students how you would hold your object. Then, show them how you would use it or play with it. Ask the students to guess the name of your object.

Activity: Go around the circle. Have each student, one at a time, unlock and pull out an imaginary object from the treasure chest. Each student should use pantomime to show their object to the rest of the class. There is only one rule: the pirate booty must be small enough to fit inside the treasure chest you pantomimed at the beginning of the activity. After each student shares their object, ask the other students to guess his/her pirate booty.

Pantomiming: Pirate Booty (Continued)

Side Coaching: Make sure there is enough space between your hands to show the size and shape of the object. How would you hold your object? How much does it weigh? How can you show us what it does or how you play with it?

Extension: Have the class try out each other’s imaginary pirate booty.

A Day in the Life of a Pirate

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 10-20 MINUTES

Objective: Students will use their bodies, voices, and imaginations to explore a “day in the life” of a character from How I Became a Pirate.

Discussion: As a class, name the characters in the play. How did the actors change their bodies and voices to become those characters?

Brainstorming: Ask each student to pick a character from the play to act out. What do they eat? How do they move? What noises do they make? How do they speak? How do they sleep? Are they energetic or shy?

Activity: Ask the class to spread out and find an open space in the room where they can lay down without touching anyone. The students should pretend to sleep, then wake up as their character and begin moving around the room. You can guide them through daily activities such as eating breakfast, getting dressed, sailing the ship, doing chores on the ship, etc. Freeege the actors occasionally in order to ask a question to a specific student or to hear what each character is thinking.

Side Coaching: What are you dreaming about? What are you eating for breakfast? What do you do if it rains? Do you have friends on the ship?

Hot Seating

OUT-OF-CHAIR ACTIVITY • 10-15 MINUTES

Objective: Students will explore the emotions of the characters featured in the play.

Discussion: When an actor plays a character in a play, he has to take on the emotions of that character. The actor must be able to walk, talk, and feel like the character he is playing.

Brainstorming: Ask the class to help you list all the characters from the play. Write the names on the board. Behind each character’s name, list the emotion that most accurately describes the character’s predominant state of being during the play. How did Jeremy usually feel? How was that different from or similar to Sharktooth? Next, ask the class if the characters exhibited any emotions during the show that are different from the emotions listed next to each character’s name. Make a secondary list of these emotions. Ask for student volunteers who are willing to demonstrate how certain characters walk, talk, sit, and move.

Modeling: Each student should pick one character from the list on the board. Tell them to sit as that character. How would their hands and feet be positioned? Would their back be straight or slouched? Next, ask the students to make their faces look like their character’s main emotion. Do they look angry, scared, or silly? Ask one volunteer to walk to the front of the room and sit down facing the class. Ask them several open-ended questions that they can respond to “in character.” What is your favorite food? Who is your best friend? Why do you like/dislike being a pirate?

Activity: Ask two to three students to sit together in front of the class as you ask them questions. Remind the students to use their imaginations and answer how they think the character would answer.

Side Coaching: How would your voice sound as this character? How does your character move his arms and legs? Would your character refuse to answer some questions? Do they like or dislike the interviewer?

Extension: Have the students interview each other in partners.
Bibliography

Did you enjoy *How I Became a Pirate*? If you did, then you may want to check out these great web sites and reading materials.

**Web Sites for Kids**

http://www.nationalgeographic.com/zipirates/

This National Geographic web site provides great pirate facts and pictures.

http://bertieathepirate.co.uk/games.aspx

Find pirate-themed games, coloring sheets, books, and more on this web site.

http://www.learn4good.com/games/action/cannonblast.htm

This web site features educational pirate games with lots of sounds.

**Web Sites for Teachers**

http://www.readingisgood.com/2008/06/how-i-became-a-pirate/

This web site provides literacy activities, comprehensive questions, and a review of the book. Links to other elementary-aged books are also provided.

http://www.theatricalrights.com/how-i-became-pirate

Find great show-related information here: samples of the songs, information on the composer and lyricist, and a photo gallery of past productions.

http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/1801.html

Lesson plans, art activities, and curriculum tie-ins can be found on this web site.

**Other Books by Melinda Long**

*When Papa Snores*

*Hiccup Snickup*

*Pirates Don’t Change Diapers*

*Pirates Activity Book*

*The Twelve Days of Christmas in South Carolina*

**Other Books You Might Like**

*Rabbit Pirates: A Tale of the Spinach Main* by Judy Cox (Harcourt, 1999)

*Olivia Saves the Circus* by Ian Falconer (Atheneum, 2001)

*The Amazing Voyage of Jackie Grace* by Matt Faulkner (Scholastic, 1987)

*Meanwhile...* by Julie Feiffer (HarperCollins, 1997)

*Roger the Jolly Pirate* by Brett Helquist (HarperCollins, 2004)

*Mapping Penny’s World* by Loren Leedy (Henry Holt, 2000)

*Edward and the Pirates* by David McPhail (Little, Brown, 1997)

*Baloney* (Henry P.) by Jon Scieszka (Viking, 2001)

*David Gets in Trouble* by David Shannon (Scholastic, 2002)

*David Goes to School* by David Shannon (Scholastic, 1999)

*No, David!* by David Shannon (Scholastic, 1998)

*How I Spent My Summer Vacation* by Mark Teague (Crown, 1995)

*Moog-Moog, Space Barber* by Mark Teague (Scholastic, 1990)

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Please feel free to contact us!

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