

LEARNING LINKS

Cahoots NI: Egg

MONDAY
MARCH 21 2016
11 AM
TUESDAY
MARCH 22 2016
9:30 AM & 11:30 AM

2015 > 2016

BROADEN THE HORIZONS
OF YOUR CLASSROOM.
EXPERIENCE THE VIBRANT
WORLD OF THE ARTS
AT THE McCALLUM!



McCallum Theatre Institute
Field Trip Series



McCALLUM THEATRE INSTITUTE
PRESENTS

Cahoots NI: Egg

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“My parents bought me a magic set when I was 5 or 6 and that was the beginning of the whole thing...and now I have a giant set to play with on stage.”

Paul Bosco McEaney

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

ARTS • Theater

NATURAL SCIENCE • Birds

THEMES • Leaving the nest

Expanding the Concept of Literacy

What is a “text”? We invite you to consider the performances on McCallum’s Field Trip Series as non-print texts available for study and investigation by your students. Anyone who has shown a filmed version of a play in their classroom, used a website as companion to a textbook, or asked students to do online research already knows that “texts” don’t begin and end with textbooks, novels, and reading packets. They extend to videos, websites, games, plays, concerts, dances, radio programs, and a number of other non-print texts that students and teachers engage with on a regular basis.

We know that when we expand our definition of texts to the variety of media that we use in our everyday lives, we broaden the materials and concepts we have at our disposal in the classroom, increase student engagement, and enrich learning experiences.

Please consider how utilizing your McCallum performance as a text might align to standards established for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

How do we help students to use these texts as a way of shaping ideas and understanding the world?

Please use this material to help you on this journey.

NON-PRINT TEXT • any medium/text that creates meaning through sound or images or both, such as symbols, words, songs, speeches, pictures, and illustrations not in traditional print form including those seen on computers, films, and in the environment.

The Work of Art

A Non-print Text for Study

- What's it made of? How can this work serve as a *Common Core State Standards*-mandated "text" for student study in the classroom?



What does it mean to "leave the nest?" Cahoots NI; a physical theater company from Belfast, Northern Ireland, offers its own take on this rite of passage. Appropriately enough, the characters are young birds. We observe their antics, as they live out the daily rituals of their 'adolescent' lives. They search for worms. Gather drinking water from the occasional rain. Groom each other's wings. Groove out to their little bird radio. Brush their little bird teeth. The fact that birds don't actually sport teeth, and are not often spotted fiddling with radio dials, suggests that the story here is perhaps more about us than about our fine feathered friends.

Never a word is spoken in *Egg*. Apart from the occasional cry of a marauding predator, these birds communicate through movement and facial expression — an approach completely in line with the genre of theater called 'physical theater'. The three highly adept actors who play these avian siblings bring broad action, exaggeration, and finely controlled timing to the job. The result is clarity of expression, comedy that borders on zaniness, and the occasional poignant moment which gives this work its added resonance.

Developed from a children's book — *Egg and Bird* by Alex Higlett — whose ultra-simple illustrations and spare text give new meaning to the term minimalist; *Egg* tells the story of three brothers who have evidently been left to their own devices in the parental nest. As they fend for themselves, they take loving and attentive care of each other. Before very long, the oldest one senses the call of nature and begins to prepare for taking wing. On goes the flight jacket and goggles. Up the ladder he ascends. Light streams from below and behind him. With a flurry of feathers, he is off. His brothers watch him disappear in the distance with what may be a mixture of awe and sadness. Those left behind have their own perspective of the phenomenon, "leaving the nest." Still, they go about their daily routine, adapting tasks formerly performed by three.

Of course, it is only a matter of time before sibling number two heeds "the call," donning his gear and soaring away into the vast blue firmament. The remaining bird must carry on, managing solo what had always taken more than one. Functionality breaks down a bit, as certain tasks no longer seem quite manageable. The rains come long enough to make things wet and cold but harvesting the water for drinking proves a challenge. The radio falls silent. Even daily tasks like brushing teeth take on a tinge of melancholy.

In the midst of all this upheaval, something rather surprising happens. The nest's lonely inhabitant discovers an unhatched egg in a recess beneath one of the stage trap doors. With the touching care of a new parent, he sorts through the contents of the nest for something to provide comfort and cheer to the egg. A rocking chair, a bed, a table replete with tasty dishes — each just the perfect size for an unhatched egg — present themselves. As both bird and egg settle in for the night, it appears things have taken a turn for the idyllic. But lest the scenario become too dull, a horrific cry rends the air. Something is circling above. A predator! And it is clear there will be trials before the story can conclude to everyone's satisfaction.

The Artists

Who has *produced* this text for study?



Cahoots NI, a professional children's theater company, created in 2001, is based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. In part these artists are dedicated to that form of theater called physical theater, and in part they are devoted to creating works which can sit at the center of an arts-in-education outreach program. This means on the one hand that they are focused on maximizing the visual potential in theatrical presentation, while introducing a strong thread of magic and illusion into the mix. It means on the other hand putting a work of art at ground zero of a student's educational experience – or what they call "extending the imaginative life of a piece beyond the performance itself."

These far-sighted founders were Paul Bosco McEneaney and Zoe Seaton.

Here are some further thoughts concerning their mission:

"To provide inspiring theatrical experiences for children. To encourage appreciation of the arts in children from all sections of society. To develop meaningful links with the communities in which the company works. To expand the imagination and stimulate the artistic creativity of children. To produce high quality large-scale work for children to tour main stages throughout Ireland. To work with experienced and highly regarded professional artists from Northern Ireland and in doing so contribute to the cultural economy of the region."

Right?

"More children in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to see world-class children's theatre than if [Cahoots NI] hadn't been created."

Paul Bosco McEneaney

Contexts

- What *information* surrounds this text for study & could help make students' engagement with it more powerful?



PHYSICAL THEATER

The main thing that distinguishes physical theater from other varieties of theater is its reliance on purely visual means of storytelling. There are a number of different strains, each of which calls itself physical theater. The unifying thread that runs through each of these is the preference of movement over text. Gesture, body language, use of stage space and levels – these are the building blocks of physical theater. “Breaking the fourth wall” is also generally a feature. This means that the actors, instead of appearing oblivious to the presence of an audience, directly interact with those in the theater. They may in fact encourage the public to actively take a part in the performance, chiefly again through physical activity versus, say, using voices.

Jacques Lecoq of L'Ecole Internationale de Theatre is someone physical theater practitioners point to as inspirational. Seminal! This influential teacher made a practice of telling his students as they graduated from his school, “Now your job is to get over me.” From the beginning, he had been wary of hidebound tradition and slavish adherence to the way things had always been done. He was looking to discover a revitalized form of mime that could take its cue from the interior worlds of the performer. In striking out on this exploratory path, he ended up founding his own school. This is the acclaimed Ecole Lecoq. A hugely significant “voice” in the discipline of mime – and by extension in the world of physical theater – Lecoq explored the boundaries of physical discipline, emotional and comedic content, and spontaneity. “Like Grotowski, Lecoq was a master,” wrote Jack Lang, former French Culture Minister, referring to the theater director Jerzy Grotowski.

Additional influences are said to include Commedia dell Arte as well as the theater of the ancient Greeks.

By the 1500s, mime had fully flowered in the area we today call Italy in a seminal form of theater, Commedia Dell'Arte. Stock characters – in the style, say, of Laurel and Hardy, or Lucy and Ricky – were the central and beloved figures. These characters, called zanni collectively, had names like Harlequin and Columbine. The story lines were familiar and humorous. Performing troupes who presented the zanni could fall afoul of the ruling classes, since they often poked fun at society and its institutions. The more outlaw the troupe, the greater their popularity with the serving classes. In addition, these troupes traveled far and wide throughout the continent of Europe, presenting their largely visual works successfully to audiences who couldn't understand Italian.

Among the more prominent exponents of physical theater today is master teacher Daniel Stein. Serving early in his career as translator for Etienne Decroux, as well as studying under the renowned master (who in turn had studied with LeCoq), he has since taught at Juilliard, Sarah Lawrence, and Berkeley Rep, among other venues. A recent engagement off-off Broadway caused one critic to declare he'd seen "in the space of a mere hour...a performer change the entire course of an established art form." This serves to remind us that there is something cutting edge about physical theater. Its always going new places and ever changing.

"I think physical theatre is much more visceral [than other forms of theater] and audiences are affected much more viscerally than intellectually."

Daniel Stein • Physical theater teacher

To get ready for the performance, students could research these:

- Physical theater and its principles
- Theatrical scripts



Here's a 60 minute lesson in collaboration & problem-solving you could teach to help prepare students for this work:

Line of Inquiry* How does Cahoots NI in Egg create a theatrical presentation that uses movement – and not speech – to carry the storyline forward?

Start by showing this brief clip from the show: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XknYvRdbA0Y

Then question students: What do you notice about the actors? Their movements? The sounds? How do the actors communicate with the audience without speaking?

Have students select a story from your current curriculum. In pairs, have them select a single "scene" from the story and create two different versions of this scene on paper. The first version includes dialogue. The second version includes no dialogue – and instead movement, posture, and physical interaction between the actors communicate what is conveyed through speech in the first version. Students write out all of the actions as a script without dialogue.

**A Line of Inquiry is an Essential Question that generates a lesson*

Students read one or two of these aloud in class. To deepen student noticing, question them on the way in which actions are put into words on the page. Will these actions tell the story of the scene? How do word choices help the actors to do their job clearly? In what ways is the version without dialogue different from the one with?

Student pairs then share their two different scripts with another pair.

After coming to the theater, students could research these:

- Bird species: their features, feathers, colors
- Stage costuming principles



Here's a 45-60 minute lesson you could teach after students have experienced the work:

Begin by questioning what students observed in the performance: How does Cahoots NI outfit the bird characters in *Egg*, by borrowing features from the bird world and converting these into costuming? What kinds of movement did the actors use that seemed birdlike? What made them so? What costuming did they use that suggested birdlike appearance?

To deepen student thought, ask them in their pairs from the prior lesson, to consider what features they would like to borrow from the bird world and emphasize in costuming the actors who would perform their scene script.

Visual Arts project: Student pairs produce drawings of the costuming pieces they design for the actors who would perform their scene.

These images are displayed together on a wall and examined by students. Through questioning, get students to describe details in one or two of these.



What's *your* read of this non-print text?

How would you answer these questions – and how could they be adapted as Guiding Questions to spark student discussion?

- What did the actors do to engage our attention?
- What elements did they use to tell this story?
- What did you notice about the music?
- What are the different ways in which physicality is used?
- What did you notice about the relationships between the characters?
- How did the actors interact with each other? With the set?
- How were sound effects/music used?
- If some other animal had been substituted for birds, how might that have altered this work?
- How did props/costumes assist in telling these stories?
- How did the artists express emotion and convey mood?
- How did the element of illusion and magic figure into the performance?
- How was humor used? And was it necessary? What lessons about ourselves can we learn watching the birds interacting on stage with each other?
- What are some themes in this work?
- If you could title this work something other than *Egg*, what would you call it – and why?
- What personal associations does this work call up for you?
- Why use birds to tell a story which has such potent application to the human experience?

Internet

EurekaAlert! – The science of eggs

www.eurekaalert.org/eggs/

Educators, scientists, and staff help children and their families play fun games and find ways to learn about many different types of animal eggs, including birds and fish.

Natural nests

www.pnc.com/grow-up-great/resources/lessons/habitats/natural-nests.html

This site aids children in gathering materials to build a bird's nest and explores bird habitats.

Books

Birds, Nests & Eggs

By: Mel Boring

Reading level: 5 and up

Publisher: Cooper Square Publishing (1998)

ISBN-10: 155971624X

A fun, informative take-along guide that will help children identify 15 birds. Kids will also learn how and where birds build their homes and all about their young.

Birds and Their Nests

By: Linda Tagliaferro

Reading level: 4 and up

Publisher: Capstone Press (2004)

ISBN-10: 0736851232

Egg and Bird

By: Alex Higlett

Hardcover: 24 pages

Publisher: Macmillan Children's Books (2006)

ISBN-10: 1405048972

This clever and highly original picture book forms the basis for Cahoots NI's production, *Egg*. The sparse text offers a witty commentary on the child/adult relationship of Egg and Bird in their day-to-day lives.

How Does the Show Go On: An Introduction to the Theatre

By: Thomas Schumacher

Reading level: 3 and up

Publisher: Disney Editions; (2007)

ISBN-10: 1423100883

Filled with detailed explanations, captivating illustrations, and entertaining trivia, this clearly written, lively, and uniquely-designed book is a first-of-its-kind introduction to the world of theater, from the box office to backstage, and beyond.

Books

Hiding the Elephant

By: Jim Steinmeyer

Publisher: Da Capo Press (2004)

ISBN-10: 0786714018

This is Paul Bosco McEneaney's favorite book! Steinmeyer, who has designed illusions for Siegfried and Roy and David Copperfield, presents a cultural history of magic's golden age (from the 1890s to the 1930s), some legendary tricks (including the Levitation of Princess Karnak and Harry Houdini's Disappearing Elephant) and the fierce rivalries that dominated the craft.

Stunts, Puzzles, and Stage Illusions (Inside Magic)

By: Nicholas Einhorn

Reading level: 10 and up

Publisher: Rosen Central (2010)

ISBN-10: 1435894545

Stunts, puzzles, and stage illusions all spark the same question in friends, family, and audience members: how can the seemingly impossible actually happen before their eyes?

"I've always worked in the theater, but I'm lucky enough that my best job is what I'm doing now. I love directing shows and looking for new pieces of work."

Paul Bosco McEneaney

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