

LEARNING LINKS

Childsplay:
Rock the Presidents

THURSDAY
OCTOBER 6 2016
9:30 AM & 11:30 AM
FRIDAY
OCTOBER 7 2016
9:30 AM & 11:30 AM

2016 > 2017

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

Childsplay: *Rock the Presidents*

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“To create theatre so strikingly original in form, content or both that it instills in young people an enduring awe, love and respect for the medium, thus preserving imagination and wonder, those hallmarks of childhood that are the keys to the future.”

Childsplay Mission Statement

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

HISTORY • United States, Presidents

ARTS • Musical styles, visual elements of design, storytelling, rhyming

STUDENTS' LIVES • Unlikely heroes, actions & consequences, ethics & morality

IDEAS • Social studies, government, civics, biographies

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

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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 happens when you mix the stories of our forty-four presidents with the most up-to-date kid pleasing entertainment? A madcap romp through American political history that plays practically like a rave, that's what! Rock. Rap. The brash, free-wheeling fun of the boy-band. The folksy tenderness of Joni Mitchell-like vocals. A wide range of contemporary musical styles, in other words. Listen to what creator Dwayne Hartford has to say about this unorthodox combination of subject matter and delivery:

"A number of years ago, I started toying with the idea of creating a piece that would pay tribute to the U.S. Presidents. I wanted to honor the office and the men who have served, while at the same time, to recognize the common humanity shared by Presidents and today's young people. In doing so, I hoped to encourage participation in American civic life. As I gathered books and research materials, I looked for a hook into the subject, a fun way to bring forty-four stories together as one. Eventually, I decided that music could serve that purpose."

Not just any sort of music, of course. The *Rock the Presidents* music is optimized as a way to get buy-in when it comes to young audiences. Indeed, the three dynamic performers (yes, there are only three!) deliver a total of 23 songs with capable vocalism and a strong sense of style! The standouts among the songs include: *Hail to the Chiefs* with its boisterous energy and driving rhythm that reminds one of Kid Rock. Then there's *Ronald Reagan* with a lil bit o' country and an amiable twang. *Benjamin Harrison* is an ode to heavy metal and big hair. *Who In the World Is Millard Fillmore?* with its bluesy wailings, laments a less memorable president's slide into obscurity. *Shake America* includes a projection of Nintendo on the back screen, drawing parallels between Old Hickory (Andrew Jackson) and the turtle-bashing fictional character, Mario. The song *John and Tom* presents Caribbean styling to demonstrate the relationship between Adams and Jefferson including the lyrics,

"John and Tom, different as can be
If they can get along, why can't you and me?"

Not All Bad is a funkacious nod to the 70s, followed by *The Only Thing We Have to Fear* – a folk-rock ballad whose evocation of the 12 years presided over by Franklin D. Roosevelt resonates with us today.

As it runs the gamut of musical styles, *Rock the Presidents* reminds us that we can find things to appreciate in each of our former leaders, regardless of political stripe. Controversial topics (and what president can't boast one or two?) are avoided. The emphasis here is on positive achievement. What a gift civility makes in these tumultuous times! Best of all, we catch up on our presidential history in the most painless way – by having fun. It's Childsplay!

The Artists

Who has *produced* this text for study?



If *Rock the Presidents* is lyricist/book writer Dwayne Hartford's brainchild, he has cemented its success in his choice of composer (Tempe's own Sarah Roberts) and director (Anthony Runfola). Where Ms. Roberts has brought her wide knowledge of a variety of contemporary musical genres to the project, director Runfola has helped translate the score into a vibrant theatricality that takes no prisoners. Video projections – vivid and cartoonlike – comment on and augment the hi-jinks on stage. The performers, done up like cosmic Secret Service agents, launch into their routines with fervor – and the staging makes dynamic use of their skills and the material.

Dwayne Hartford is a Phoenix-based director and actor – as well as playwright in residence with Childsplay. Sarah Roberts, singer and songwriter, is also a sound designer. A denizen these days of Los Angeles, California, she makes music as a player in The Ladies Gun Club.

David Saar founded Childsplay in 1977 because he recognized during his MFA studies that children could reap great benefits from experiences with professional theatre. After graduating, Saar gathered classmates in a 1964 Chevy Impala, and equipped with basic sets and costumes, began performing in local classrooms.

Today, Childsplay is a nationally and internationally respected professional theatre company whose chosen audience is children. Performing in schools remains a core Childsplay activity with three annual touring productions that visit hundreds of schools throughout Arizona. It is estimated that one in five Arizona K-6 students will see a Childsplay production at their school. More than half of this audience lives at or below the poverty level. Alongside the tour season, Childsplay's annual programming includes: nine months of in-house productions for school and family audiences at the Tempe Center for the Arts; an on-site academy of theatre classes throughout the year; and a variety of education outreach programs embedded throughout the greater Phoenix community.

“At Childsplay we believe that young people deserve to experience challenging, thought-provoking theatre of the highest artistic quality. Our respect for children’s intelligence and creativity drives us to produce new and innovative works by theatre’s finest artists.”

David Saar

Contexts

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



“I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

Presidential Oath of Office

Hey, did you know that President Ronald Reagan once tried stand-up comedy? The story goes that by 1954 the genial actor whose career had included classics like *King's Row* was struggling to find satisfying work, so he took a gig as a Las Vegas stand-up comic for a few weeks. It doesn't appear to have panned out particularly — but it's a cool fact, huh? Here are some more:

The candy bar Baby Ruth was named after the daughter of president Grover Cleveland and his wife. Quick: name that wife! (If you came up with Frances Clara Folsom Cleveland Preston, reward yourself with a Baby Ruth bar!

President Warren Harding lost the White House china in a poker game! Our 29th President was an ardent gambler. History suggests he was not especially adept however, and we can only imagine what Mrs. H. said when the dinnerware went missing.

Guess what? Gerald and Betty Ford were fashion models. That's right! In the 1940's President Ford even posed on the cover of *Cosmopolitan*. You may already know that his wife Betty was a dancer — but she also signed with the John Robert Powers modeling firm to finance her dance education.

Without looking it up, can you say which president was ambidextrous? Not only was he the first president to be both right- and left-handed, but he could write a sentence in Latin with one hand and write it in Greek with the other hand. Brainy chap! James A. Garfield!

The 18th President of The United States — Ulysses S. Grant — was given a \$20 speeding ticket for riding his horse too fast down a Washington street. That's right, his horse! Do you suppose he had some pull with the highway patrol, though?

Have you ever wondered where the phrase “okay” comes from? Seems President Van Buren was from Kinderhook, NY, which was also called “Old Kinderhook.” His supporters formed clubs called “O.K. Clubs” and from there the term OK came to mean “all right.”

For a time before going to Washington, Herbert Hoover and his family lived in China. Both he and his wife were experts in Mandarin Chinese as a result. Once in the White House, whenever they wanted to keep their conversations to themselves, they just switched from English to Chinese!

During a stint in the Navy, future president Richard Nixon observed friends winning money in poker games. In response, Nixon had the best poker player in his unit teach him how to play – and in short order he had won enough (\$6,000) to fund his first congressional campaign.

Here’s one that will make a hit with students! President Obama collects *Spiderman* and *Conan the Barbarian* comic books, and has read every *Harry Potter* book.

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

- Presidential biographies
- Presidential accomplishments



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

Line of Inquiry – LOI is an essential question that generates a lesson:

How does Childsplay use contemporary musical styles and dynamic staging to bring the U.S. presidents to life for students?

ASK STUDENTS

What do we know about the presidents and our electoral system?

Assemble a list of ideas on the board.

SHARE WITH STUDENTS A BIT OF CONTEXT

The presidential oath of office reads, “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I...” etc...

ASK STUDENTS

Based on the oath, what do you think are some of the things a president must do? In your opinion, what qualities must he/she possess to be a great president?

Create a separate list of these ideas on the board.

Each student gets a list of the Presidents and as homework; they can research a few of these and find a presidential story that really inspires the student in some way. Instruct the student to write that story using their own words. What are the themes? The big ideas?

The following day a couple of volunteers read their stories aloud. What are the lessons? The ideas? The themes? How would you describe the character of this president? If you were going to turn your story into a musical show, how would you do it?"

After coming to the theater, students could research these:

- The U.S. electoral system
- The U.S. system of government



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

Lead students in a discussion by having students take a look back at the performance. What stood out, and why? Describe the performers. How did they move? How did they use their voices? How was music used? What kinds of music? What were the different songs and the presidents that they illuminated? How did the performers interrelate? What emotions were conveyed – and how? What surprised you? What do you want to know more about?

Divide students into table groups. Students then pass their stories that were written the other day around so that everyone gets a chance to read each story, followed by a brief discussion. Students then put the stories in a pile upside down, shuffle them, and pick one at random.

How would you turn this into a musical show? What kinds of music might be most useful? Do you want to use humor? How might you do that? Brainstorm some ideas. Be inspired by what Childsplay did, but make your own choices. Maybe even a short demonstration of one of your ideas?

Each group then shares some of their ideas with the whole class.

“The revue shows the common sense of duty and patriotism shared by all the Presidents.”

Dwayne Hartford • Creator

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 were some of the things you saw & heard that showed a director's hand?
- What do you make of the costumes? What could be the idea there?
- Did the performers ever assume the role of a president? How did they do that?
- How did the themes of adversity and problem-solving play out?
- What were some of the other themes in this work?
- What role did humor play in this presentation?
- What did you notice about pacing?
- What were the different kinds of music used? What were some examples of a strong connection between subject matter and genre of music used?
- How would you describe the vocal qualities of the singing?
- What did lighting contribute?
- How is a work like this an effective vehicle for conveying information such as presidential facts?



Internet

The White House History and Grounds

www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents

The official White House site includes details about Presidents, First Ladies, Camp David and Air Force One.

List of Presidents of the United States

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Presidents_of_the_United_States

POTUS - Presidents of the United States

www.ipl.org/div/potus/

This website is no longer being updated after the election of President Obama, yet still contains a plethora of information about all 44 Presidents. Includes biographical details, salary, other government positions held, Members of Cabinet, and Supreme Court appointments – to name just a few of the details.

American Experience – The Presidents

www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/collections/presidents/
TV's most-watched history series

Social Studies for Kids – U.S. Presidents

www.socialstudiesforkids.com/subjects/uspresidents.htm

All things Presidential! Including Inaugural Addresses, pets, the White House and libraries and election history.

Congress for Kids - Elections

www.congressforkids.net/Elections_electoralcollege.htm

Did you know that voters in the United States don't vote for the president? People actually vote for a group of electors when they go to the polls on Election Day.

Books

The Look-It-Up Book of Presidents

By: Wyatt Blassingame

Reading level: Ages 10 and up

Publisher: Random House Books for Young Readers, 1990

ISBN-10: 0679803580

A reliable resource for reference and browsing, offering comprehensive, informative profiles of American presidents.

The New Big Book of U.S. Presidents: Fascinating Facts about Each and Every President, Including an American History Timeline

By: Todd Davis, Marc Frey

Reading level: Ages 8 and up

Publisher: Running Press Kids, 2009

ISBN-10: 076243337X

The perfect introduction for young readers to the lives and times of America's 43 most influential leaders.

Books

Smart About the Presidents

By: Jon Buller

Reading level: Ages 5 and up

Publisher: Grosset & Dunlap, 2004

ISBN-10: 0792259351

Containing cartoon-style illustrations and some fun facts, this publication also presents a paragraph of information per president.

Time for Kids: Presidents of the United States

By: Editors of Time for Kids

Reading level: Ages 7 and up

Publisher: Collins, 2006

ISBN-10: 0060815566

Did you know that James Monroe was the first President to appear without a wig in formal public settings? Or that George W. Bush named the first African Americans as secretaries of state? In this informative reference book by the editors of the award-winning *TIME For Kids*® magazine, you'll learn about the Presidents' childhoods, careers, accomplishments in office, and life after the White House. As a great plus for school reports, you'll find hundreds of fascinating facts — and the history of our nation is woven into each presidential portrait.

DVDs

1776

Starring: William Daniels, Howard DaSilva

Directed by: Peter H. Hunt

Studio: Columbia Pictures

Released: 1972

A musical celebration of the founding of the United States based on the award-winning Broadway production.

Schoolhouse Rock: America Classroom Edition

Studio: Disney Educational Productions

Released: 2008

Take a pilgrimage through American history with the award-winning series that has engaged generations of school children. With eleven classic animated songs including *Shot Heard 'Round the World* and *Fireworks*, they learn about the key milestones, events and people that make up this great country. Includes a bonus interactive assessment activity to reinforce key learnings, Public Performance Rights, and a printable educator's guide.

Schoolhouse Rock: Election Collection

Studio: Walt Disney Video

Released: 2008

This new collection from the Schoolhouse Rock franchise includes 14 songs from the classic TV series focusing on the election process. Among the songs are well-known jingles such as *I'm Just A Bill*, *Shout Heard 'Round The World*, *I'm Going To Take Your Vote To College*, and more... Also contains an interactive election tracking kit with stickers that lets kids follow the election process.

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“I wanted young audiences to relate and connect to these stories, so I decided that the music should have a contemporary sound.”

Dwayne Hartford • Creator

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