

Act Wild!

Purposeful Classroom Chaos

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Henry Doorly Zoo

Omaha, Nebraska

What is Act Wild?

- Science + Performance + Crafts + Life Skills
- Science is learning about animals and animal behavior
- Performance is acting, movement, puppetry, music
- Crafts include designing, painting, gluing, nailing
- Life Skills are trying something new, gaining confidence, taking responsibility and problem solving and most importantly, using Imagination!

What is Act Wild Minus Rhetoric?

- Two day theatre classes centered around a script with an animal theme, culminating in a fifteen minute performance
- OR
- Techniques that can be used in traditional zoo classes to illustrate science themes

Act Wild Theatre Class

Objectives

- Basic acting techniques such as:
 - Never turn your back to the audience
 - Speak loudly and Mean What You Say
 - How to learn lines and how to keep going when something goes wrong
 - Characterization
 - Simple blocking – or where should I go next?
- Animal facts
 - Separating fact from fiction or when to take poetic license
 - Incorporating what we learn about animals into our performance
 - Set design to show what we have learned about animal environments

Objectives (cont)

- Crafts
 - Simple set design
 - Simple set building
 - Construction of puppets
 - Special effects
- Life Skills
 - Responsibility for lines, blocking, and properties
 - Figuring out where you belong
 - Helping others
 - Staying flexible
 - Solving problems that the script writer left hanging
 - Staying safe
 - Getting the job done
 - Thinking of new ideas

Preparation

- Script Writing
 - Flexibility
 - Humor
 - Content
 - Workshop
- Preliminary Technical
 - Set design
 - Costume/makeup planning
- Gathering the staff (or how to lead sheep to slaughter)

Script Flexibility

- Problem: Writing scripts with MANY unknowns (number, age, talent of children)
- Solutions
 - Write many short, non-critical scenes
 - Use a Narrator Docent to move the story forward and speak some of the character lines
 - Be prepared to cut sections of scenes or add new material on the fly or throw in a stick puppet
 - Challenge exceptional children with multiple parts
 - Include lots of non-speaking parts with an element of physical acting or a gag
 - Use Scene Changers to walk through playing space before the scene with a Scene Title sign

Script Humor

- Problem: Writing plays that kids and adults enjoy
- Solutions
 - Pick easy stories to tell and look for humorous aspects
 - Cartoons for one-liners and natural dialog
 - Sight gags and pratfalls
 - Play with exaggerated animal behaviors and/or anthropomorphisms (good for stimulating discussion of fact vs fiction)

Script Content

- Problem – how to write a script for between eight and thirty children on your lunch hour
- Solutions
 - Start with animal stories with characters children know
 - Aesop's Fables
 - Lion King
 - Jungle Book
 - Rainbow Fish
 - Stellanuna
 - Choose a moral or point to the story
 - Outline several small scenes to progress the story, choosing characters and setting
 - Write the narrative, allowing the narrator to speak for the characters. Keep each scene to less than a page and a half.
 - Write in dialog lines for the characters.
 - Optional Script Workshop/Beer&Pizza Party

How to Workshop A Script

Small group of adults read through the play

Brainstorm new ideas, new site gags, new jokes

Get up and play some of the scenes to get ideas for physical movement

Good way to spot problems early

Get ideas for properties, set pieces

Author takes notes, makes script changes

Walkthrough (Day 1)

- Welcome Children
- Cast and pass out scripts
- Dismiss for scene rehearsals
- Technicals – set design, construction, properties, puppet construction, special effects
- Run through
- Snack/Notes
- Real Science
- Wrap Up

Walkthrough (Day 2)

- Welcome children
- Chaos: Make Up/Scene Rehearsal/Gathering Props and Set Pieces
- Run Through
- Set up/Seat Audience/Notes
- Seat Performers by Scene
- Introduction to Audience
- Performance
- Cast Party/Real Science
- Parent Feedback

Make Up Notes

- Design –
 - Abstract from one or two distinctive features
 - Eye emphasis
 - Natural colors with white highlights (browns, golds, tans)
 - Nose/mouth techniques
 - Tools – good quality paints, eye liner pencils (and sharpeners), sponges, and brushes and don't forget a mirror!
- Application
 - Making kids comfortable
 - Introducing animal facts, pictures
- Organization
 - Lots of volunteers = Speed and Efficiency (3 min per child max)
 - Repair
 - Cleanup

Costume Notes

- Costumes should be kept extremely simple and used to augment face paint.
- I have purchased baseball caps in bulk, painted them with fabric paint and attached antennae, horns, or ears, but you have to spray for head lice each time.
- Costume pieces work better than whole costumes – an apron for the mother, an old leather jacket and cool shades for the Jumpin’ Jack Grasshopper

Set Pieces

- The scenery is suggested by one or two simple set pieces constructed by the children during Day 1
- Biofacts make excellent set decorations and make the children think
- Good idea to start any complicated set pieces (a Baobab tree) in advance and let children complete painting
- Lead discussions with the children to think about simple set pieces and properties, but remember that time is limited
- Puppet making includes the sun, the moon, and various animal characters and can be simple stick puppets

What to Think About

- Kids have different abilities and talents. Its like that box in the back of your closet. Sometimes you don't know what's in it until you look.
- Theatre offers activities for every kind of personality – not everyone has to perform but everyone has to have an important job.
- The final word is Science. At the end of the day, each child has to take home something they didn't come with.

Act Wild in the Classroom

*Act Wild techniques for the Faint
Hearted*

Ideas

- Rain Shed Deserts
- Living Food Webs
- Layers of a Rainforest
- Living Experiments – Permission to shout
- Music is evocative

Sharing Ideas

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