

The Waiting Game

Teacher Resource Pack



INTRODUCTION

Jesting and clowning is a very ancient art that can be traced through medieval Europe to the ancient world. Egyptian hieroglyphs, dating back to Egypt's 5th Dynasty about 2500 BCE, depict jesters and jugglers. The fool and juggler often appear within various tarot cards that first surfaced and attracted attention in Europe at the time of the Renaissance. The Fool is always depicted within the cards of the tarot and carries special meanings. Ultimately it symbolizes a new start. A chance to live in the present moment and transcend the unfortunate aspects of ones past that if re-lived would be sure to bring about the same results. The fool represents the infinite possibility within human development or the negation of those possibilities by the ego. It represents the spirit of adventure ever ready to leave safe places and conformity in order to discover new opportunity.

For many modern audiences, clowns represent our inner child. They are possessed of a childlike innocence and wonder of the world about them, a playfulness and an irreverence, and the freedom of not following the rules that apply to the rest of us. Ask a clown to do a perfectly normal task and mayhem will ensue.

Like the act of waiting...

These notes are designed to give you a concise resource to use with your class and to support their experience of seeing *The Waiting Game*.

CLASSROOM CONTENT AND CURRICULUM LINKS

Essential Learnings: The Arts (Drama), SOSE (History) and English

Style/Form: Traditional & Contemporary Clowning, Melodrama, Visual Theatre, Physical Comedy, Physical Theatre, Non-verbal Communication 7 Mime, Improvisation, Slapstick

Themes and Contexts: Creativity, Imagination, Transformation, Play, Audience Engagement and Interaction, Roles 7 Relationships, Status, Choices and Dramatic Form.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jesters and fools appear throughout history, folk law and legend. They are one of the most common and widely recognised archetypal character types found in culture and mythology throughout world history. Jesters and fools performed a variety of functions as entertainers, social and political critiques and perhaps most importantly as agents of change. They used an array of skills including wit and humour to reinforce cultural and religious fundamental values and principles.

The earliest clowns in Western theatre appeared in ancient Greece. They were bald-headed and padded to appear larger than normal, performing as minor characters in farces and mime and parodying the actions of more serious characters. Roman clowns wore pointed hats and colourful patchwork robes and were the butt of tricks and abuse.

But it was in the late Middle Ages that the clown emerged as a professional comic actor. The *commedia dell'arte*, an improvised masked comedy with stock plots, contained numerous stock clown characters, including Arlecchino (Harlequin) in the 16th century. Harlequin began as a comic valet, or zanni, but soon developed into an acrobatic trickster, wearing a black domino mask and carrying a bat or noisy slapstick with which he frequently hit his victims. Pulcinella became the inspiration for Mr. Punch in the Punch and Judy puppet shows, and Pedrolino became the French clown Pierrot and was the inspiration for the lead character Leoncavallo's opera *I Pagliacci*.

It was during the eighteenth century that the modern clown began to develop. It was Joseph Grimaldi, considered one of the fathers of modern clowning, who elevated the "white face" to a starring role replacing Harlequin. Grimaldi was a master of pantomime and, in homage to his mastery, circus clowns began referring to them selves as Joey's. The term Joey is still used as another name for a clown.

The first circus clown act was created by Philip Astley in 1868. Billy Buttons, also called Tailors Ride to Brentford, was based on a popular tale of a tailor, an inept equestrian, trying to ride a horse to Brentford to vote for an election. Astley impersonated the tailor attempting to mount the horse, and then, when he finally succeeded, falling off when the horse bolted.

The development of vaudeville and music halls in the early 20th century saw the rise of clowning as popular entertainment. Vaudevillian clowns continued the traditions and comic routines (lazzi) of the *commedia dell'arte*. Charlie Chaplin began his career as a vaudeville clown when he was 18, joining Fred Karno's comedy troupe. Touring the United States, the Karno troupe performed a play called "A Night at an English Music Hall. By this time Charlie Chaplin was a leading member of the troupe and Stanley Laurel was Chaplin's understudy (Laurel would go on to work in Hollywood with Oliver Hardy in the comedy duo Laurel and Hardy).

The 3 traditional types of clowns are the White-face, Auguste and Character.

White-face Clown

The White-face clown is the 'classic' clown, the oldest and most well-known of the clowns, and is typically the straight clown in skits.

Associated with the circus, the White-face is the most intelligent type of clown with the

highest status - typically the ringleader. The make-up base of white grease paint meant distant audiences could see the clown.

This is the oldest style of clown, dating back to Greek theatre. Whiteface is the court jester of the Middle Ages. *Commedia dell'arte* popularised several stock clown characters, including Pierrot, Columbine, Harlequin and Clown. Pierrot is a White-face clown. His flour-whitened face is thought to be the introduction of the White-face.

Auguste Clown

The Auguste clown is the least intelligent, and zaniest of the clowns. The Auguste clown tends to be the silly clown in skits. Make-up is a flesh-tone base, with features outlined. The costume of the Auguste clown tends to be gaudy, mismatched, over-sized and very bright.

In the 1860s, or so the story goes, a low-comedy comic appeared under the name of Auguste, who had a big nose, baggy clothes, and large shoes. He worked with a White-face clown and always spoiled the tricks by appearing at the wrong time to mess things up.

The red nose was introduced by Albert Fratellini in the 20th century.

Character Clown

The Hobo or Tramp clown is the most popular character clown, although character clowns can be police officers, women, or babies - any character at all.

The Hobo usually has tattered clothes, a tattered hat, make-up which suggests he is unshaven, exaggerated features and a red nose. The generic Tramp character is 'down-on-his-luck'. The Tramp clown is an American creation, and Charlie Chaplin is the most famous of these.

LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Art Form Definitions

Clown: A character, often with a red nose who looks and acts 'out of place' and makes people laugh. There are many different kinds of Clowns: circus clowns, red nose clowns, bossy clowns, innocent clowns, sad clowns, and happy clowns. Clowns often make us laugh through their *physicality* - how they look, move and act and what they do, rather than what they say.

Status: Where someone acts or is treated as more important than someone else. A King for example, has a higher status than a normal person. Hierarchy or status is important in the world of Clowns. In the performance, there are two clowns - one is high status and one is low status. The white-face clown is always higher status than the Auguste clown.

Mime and Non-verbal expression: Communicating without words, just with the face and body, creating and using imaginary objects

KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS

Discuss and define the following terms with your class with respect to the performance of *The Waiting Game*.

Slapstick, visual comedy, physical theatre, mime, acrobatic, high status, low status, clown,

spirit, masks, heightened physicality, permission, upside down, classic storylines, stand-off.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION AND CONSIDERATION

- What is a clown?
- What is high status and who are some people you know with high status?
- How might a high status character interact with a low status character?
- What techniques would a clown use to communicate non-verbally?

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

The following learning experiences provide an entry point to the style of the performance and its thematic investigations.

Drama: Pre-performance Activities

Making and presenting

Warm up: Exploring physical and gestural aspects of comedy

Students walking around the room as if:

- *They are 50 kilograms heavier*
- *Their knees have turned to jelly*
- *They can't control their legs and arms*
- *They are invisible and can move silently*

Discuss with class what characters are suggested by some of the movements.

Activity 1: Space walk

- Begin walking and fill all the spaces in the room. Be aware of the space in front of you, beside you and behind you. Own your space.
- When the teacher claps their hands together you will stop walking.
- When the teacher claps the second time, you will move only your head to one side or the other.
- When the teacher claps the third time, you will begin walking in the direction that your head is turned.

Activity 2: Stop-Go-Squat-Jump!

- Begin walking around the space. If the teacher says 'stop' you will keep walking. If the teacher says 'go' you will stop.
- You will do the opposite of the teacher's command.

Activity 3: Cirque Train

- Form a single file line. The person at the front of the line will be the first leader. They will begin moving in a way that they find fun and everyone will follow.
- When they run to the back of the line the second person in line will become the new leader. The new leader will change the movement but will be inspired by the former movement. It is important to get out of your head and into your body.

Activity 4: Break out of your baggage & challenge your comfort zone!

Clowns believe they can do anything and their desire and curiosity to try new things is limitless. Therefore, it is important to start with these introductory exercises to challenge our inner critic.

- Have students find their own space in the room. Get them to visualize a material that they could get stuck in. What does it feel like? What texture is it? What color is

it? With their eyes closed get them to visualize a way to break out of their 'shell.' Ex. being stuck in a pumpkin shell and scooping one's self out with a pumpkin seed. Have the students act these out physically and verbally. When they escape make sure they celebrate.

- After the exercise, get them to evaluate themselves. Did they work at their maximum?
- Have them repeat the exercise, but this time get them to challenge their comfort zones! Invite them to be louder and more physical. In essence, get them to 'drop kick their critics!'

Activity 5: Ta da!

Students love to punish themselves when they make mistakes. We fear failure, but clowns embrace failure and let the problem become the solution.

- Students will begin by throwing a large (real) ball in a circle. The first couple of throws they will imagine that the ball is just a normal ball.
- The next couple of throws they will imagine that the ball is now made of glass.
- The final round of throws they will imagine the ball is a puppy. If at any time the ball falls the whole group takes a moment and says (awe) and then immediately afterward the person that failed to catch the ball will loudly announce, "TA DA!" to celebrate their failure.

What makes it funny?

- Students watch each excerpt from the list below. Each performance incorporates different elements that make it comedic.
- Students are to list the techniques used by the performers that enhanced the comedic appeal of the production.

Comedic Excerpts

Mr. Bean – First Aid

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9ju80SMWZY>

Benny and Joone - Funny Scene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfzefmyaefE>

Charlie Chaplin - Escape from the Police

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DufeMOIYUgBU%26feature%3Drelated+

Buster Keaton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgpQ-K7n2uc>

Laurel and Hardy Water Fight

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSJcYzN-vIE>

Gromic Visual Comedy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7A4UsKncSc>

DRAMA

Post-performance Activities

Making and presenting

- Clown Profile – Students are to select one of the 'clowns' within *The Waiting Game* and complete a clown character profile
- With a partner, develop a short scene in which each partner plays either a high status or a low status clown.
- Show the scene to the class.

Responding

- Students to brainstorm with teacher the moments they liked from the performance. Teacher to write up responses. Students then discuss any moments they found challenging?
- Using the following questions further unpack the construction of the performance:

CONCLUSION

Do you have questions about the performance? How was it different to other performances you have seen?

English: Pre-performance Activities

- Why is it so important to laugh, both personally and in our communities?
- Students in pairs create a poster that advertises a clown performance coming to the school.
- Students investigate the website of Homunculus Theatre. What can we tell from the images? Why is the company called Homunculus? What does that word mean and why do you think it was chosen? (Hint: About section on the website)

Web Links

<http://www.silentclown.com/history-page.htm>

<http://www.humourfoundation.com.au/resources/history-of-clowning.html>

<http://www.allaboutclowns.com/history.html>

<http://dramaclassnow.com/?tag=theatre-games>

<http://tarabrodin.com/docs/ModernClowning.pdf>