

CIRCA

DUCKPOND

Education Resource Guide



ABOUT THE COMPANY

“The mighty Circa” (Lyn Gardner, The Guardian)

Circa Contemporary Circus is one of the world’s leading performance companies. Since 2004, from our base in Brisbane, Australia, we have toured the world - performing in 40+ countries to over 1.5 million people. Our works have been greeted with standing ovations, rave reviews and sold-out houses across six continents.

Circa is at the forefront of the new wave of contemporary Australian circus - pioneering how extreme physicality can create powerful and moving performances. We continue to push the boundaries of the art form, blurring the lines between movement, dance, theatre and circus, and leading the way with a diverse range of thrilling creations that ‘redraw the limits to which circus can aspire’ (The Age).

Under the direction of circus visionary Yaron Lifschitz, Circa features an ensemble of exceptional, multi-skilled circus artists. We are a regular fixture at leading festivals and venues in New York, London, Berlin and Montreal with seasons at Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Barbican Centre, Les Nuits de Fourvière, Chamäleon Theatre as well as major Australian Festivals.

Find a Circa performance near you and discover why Circa has been hailed as nothing short of “... a revolution in the spectacle of circus.” (Les Echos).

We are committed to fostering the next generation of circus artists and run Circa Academy classes our studio in Brisbane. Circa also runs regular circus programs with communities throughout Queensland and around Australia.

As a champion of live performance, we were the Creative Lead for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games arts and cultural program.



ABOUT THE SHOW

Prologue

Cupid appears in a flash.

ACT 1

The palace, a dream

It is the night before the Prince's birthday. Various friends, prospective partners and assorted revellers engage in acrobatically-infused merriments. A pillow mishap abruptly ends the party. In a brief encounter the Prince meets the Ugly Duckling and, with the help of Cupid, they fall in love. Romantic duets follow. Reality soon intrudes. It could never be that a humble duck and a magnificent prince could be together. The Duck Army comes to console the Ugly Duckling. She leaves somewhat cheerier.

The Black Swan enters dazzlingly. Her magnetic, spiky presence captivates the Prince. The ball that follows celebrates the impending union of Black Swan and Prince. Yet, despite the merriments, something is amiss.

ACT 2

The Lake

A lake with swans. We marvel above and below the water. In despair, the Ugly Duckling decides to throw herself into to swans. Unexpectedly she flies! She is, in fact, a swan.

The Black Swan appears. She and the White Swan fall eternally in love. Duets of love follow. The Prince, confused and devastated, implodes as the two enamoured swans head into the sunset.

ACT 3

The Theatre

We catch a glimpse of what swans are like in nature. It's almost time to go home but as we pack up the theatre, true identities are revealed and real magic – the kind that does not depend on swans, tutus or spells – is rekindled.

CREATIVE TEAM

Created by Yaron Lifschitz and the Circa ensemble.

Duck Pond is co-commissioned by QPAC and the Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi; The Art House Wyong; Frankston Arts Centre; HOTA - Home of the Arts; Merrigong Theatre Company and Orange Civic Theatre.

Circa acknowledges the assistance of the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body and the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

Director Yaron Lifschitz

Composer and Sound Designer Jethro Woodward

Costume Designer Libby McDonnell

Head of Wardrobe Anna Handford

Lighting Designer Alexander Berlage

Associate Director Marty Evans

Dramaturg and Associate Choreographer Rani Luther

Voice Over Artist Elise Greig

Footage of brutal swan fight used with the kind permission of Carl Bovis.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

If a cliché is an archetype that didn't go to university, then a fairy tale is a myth that didn't graduate high school. Swan Lake and The Ugly Duckling have all the trappings of the great myths – everyone knows them or feels like they do, they speak of deep, hidden truths, they are immutable and yet endlessly iterable and they seem to have always been here.

Both are tales of identity and discovery. A woman who is cursed to be a swan is doomed to destruction by her other and an ostracised duckling discovers they are actually a swan. In Duck Pond these two myths collide. Swan Lake seems to be gaining the upper hand – for sheer romantic ebullience and untrammelled beauty it is hard to surpass.

The Ugly Duckling is an essential counterpoint– it adds vital naivete, anarchy and humour. And together they mash to create something new – neither quite ballet nor circus, familiar yet strange, rich yet playful, moving yet accessible; so, quintessentially, Circa.

Yaron Lifschitz





PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What thoughts/understanding do you have about Circa and their performance?
- What do you think the title of the production means?
- Do you have any prior knowledge about the story of Swan Lake?
- Do you have any prior knowledge about the story of The Ugly Duckling?
- What do you think will be the message behind the performance?
- Can you think of any specific health and safety protocols you might need to consider to create and perform a Circa show?
- What do you think might be the best theatre etiquette when visiting the theatre to view this production?

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Character and Relationships

Discuss and explore how the movements communicated Character and their Relationships without words.

Character: identification and portrayal of a person's values, attitudes, intentions and actions as imagined relationships, situations and ideas in dramatic action.

Relationship: the connections and interactions between people that affect the dramatic action.

Space and Time

How does the space manipulate the narrative, in relationship with Movement?

Space: the space of the performance and audience, fictional space of the dramatic action and the emotional space between characters. This includes level, direction, dimension, active and positive space.

Time: manipulating time in dramatic forms using blocking and stage areas for dramatic effect. Can also be used when manipulating metre, tempo, momentum, duration, stillness and rhythmic patterns.

Movement and Tension

Discuss how Tension is created through Movement

How is Tension created through the playing of music?

Movement: using facial expression, posture and action expressively in space and time to create roles, situations, relationships, atmosphere and symbols.

Tension: a sense of anticipation or conflict within characters or character relationships, or problems, surprise and mystery in stories and ideas to propel dramatic action and create audience engagement.



CURRICULUM LINKS

THE ARTS (Australian Curriculum)

(The curriculum links are provided based on the content descriptions for Australian Curriculum V 0.9)

DRAMA AND DANCE GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Critical and Creative Thinking, Digital Literacy, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding, Literacy, Numeracy and Personal and Social capability.

YEAR	DRAMA	DANCE
5 & 6	<p>Explore ways that the elements of drama are combined to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in drama across, cultures, times, places and/or other contexts AC9ADR6E01</p> <p>Develop characters and situations, and shape and sustain dramatic action to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in improvised, devised and/or scripted forms AC9ADR6C01</p> <p>Rehearse and perform improvised, devised and/or scripted drama in informal and/or formal settings AC9ADR6P01</p>	<p>Explore ways that the elements of dance are combined to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in dance across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts AC9ADA6E01</p> <p>Develop and practise technical and expressive skills using safe dance practice and the elements of dance AC9ADA6D01</p> <p>Practise and perform dances using technical and expressive skills in informal and/or formal settings AC9ADA6P01</p>
7 & 8	<p>Investigate ways the elements of drama and/or conventions are used to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in drama created and/or performed across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts AC9ADR8E01</p> <p>Develop performances skills relevant to selected drama styles and/or forms AC9ADR8D01</p> <p>Rehearse and perform improvised, devised and/or scripted drama to audiences, using performance skills and conventions relevant to style and/or form AC9ADR8P01</p>	<p>Investigate ways that dance works, performers and/or choreographers across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts use the elements of dance, choreographic devices and/or production elements to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning AC9ADA8E01</p> <p>Choreograph dance by selecting and manipulating elements of dance and choreographic devices to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning AC9ADA8C01</p> <p>Rehearse and perform dance for audiences, using technical and expressive skills and as appropriate genre – or style-specific techniques AC9ADA8P01</p>

9 & 10	<p>Develop performance skills and/or techniques to manipulate elements of drama and/or use conventions to communicate the physical and psychological aspects of roles and characters consistent with intentions AC9ADR10D01</p> <p>Rehearse and refine drama making deliberate aesthetic choices to unify dramatic meaning AC9ADR10C02</p> <p>Perform improvised, devised and/or scripted drama to audiences, using performance skills and conventions to shape the drama AC9ADR10P01</p>	<p>Develop and refine safe dance practice, expressive and technical skills and genre- or style-specific techniques AC9ADA10D01</p> <p>Choreograph dance that communicates ideas, perspectives and/or meaning by selecting and manipulating elements of dance, choreographic devices and/or structure AC9ADA10C01</p> <p>Rehearse and perform dance for audiences, using technical and expressive skills and genre- or style-specific techniques AC9ADA10P01</p>
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WARM UPS

Warm-up exercises are essential for circus performers to prepare their bodies for the physical demands of their performances. Here are some warm-up exercises that can be beneficial:

1. Joint Mobilisation

Gently move each joint in a circular motion to increase mobility and lubrication. Start from the neck and work your way down to the ankles, including shoulders, wrists, hips, knees and ankles.

2. Neck Rolls

Slowly roll your neck in a circular motion, both clockwise and counter clockwise, to loosen up the neck muscles

3. Shoulder Rolls

Roll your shoulders forward and backward in a circular motion to warm up the shoulder joints

4. Arm Swings

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and swing your arms in large circles, gradually increasing the range of motion. This warms up the shoulders and upper body.

5. Wrist Stretches

Extend one arm in front of you, palm facing down and use your other hand to gently pull back the fingers. Hold for a few seconds and repeat on the other hand. This helps to stretch the wrists which are often used in various circus disciplines.

6.Hip Circles

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and rotate your hips in large circles, both clockwise and counter clockwise. This exercise warms up the hip joints and lower back.

7.Squats

Perform a series of squats to warm up your lower body. Start with a shallow squat and gradually increase the depth. This helps to activate the leg muscles.

8.Lunges

Take a step forward with one leg, bending both knees to form a lunge position. Alternate between legs to warm up the hips and legs.

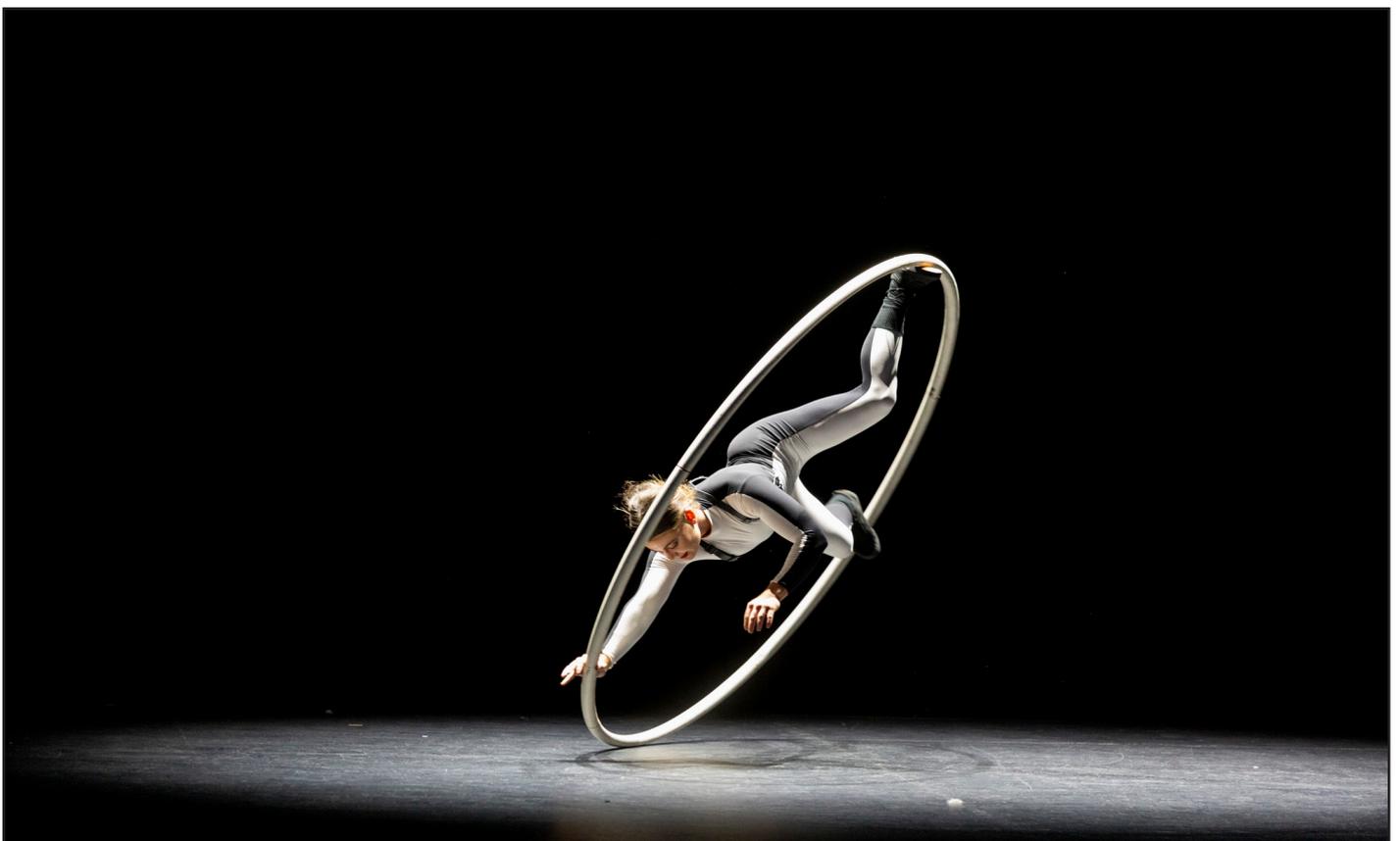
9.Ankle Rotations

Stand with one foot slightly lifted off the ground and rotate your ankle in a circular motion. Repeat on the other foot. This warms up the ankles which are crucial for balance and stability.

10.Jumping Jacks

Perform a set of jumping jacks to increase your heart rate and warm up the entire body.

Remember to listen to your body and modify these exercises according to your specific needs and physical capabilities. Gradually increase the intensity and range of motion as you progress through your warm-up routine. Additionally, it's always a good idea to consult with a professional trainer or coach to ensure you're using proper form and technique.



PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

WRONG NAME

Students stand up and are instructed to walk around the space silently, trying to keep an even distance between each other. Students are not to engage with others, this is intended to allow students to become focussed for the activity ahead. To introduce the idea of the game, students are instructed to stop at the sound of the clap (teacher claps). Once this sound is heard and students stop, they are to point to a random object in the room and shout the name of the object. This should be as basic as “Chair! Hat! Bag! Pen! Etc.” Once the students understand the rules, we now break them. Students will follow the same commands (walking around the space and listening for the clap) however this time, they point and shout the wrong name. Students can shout anything except the object’s real name. Designed to be fun and energetic, ensure this is a fast-paced game to ensure engagement in the room. This can also be altered to be completed in pairs or small groups and could be used with real teacher chosen objects or placards with objects on them.

RITUAL GESTURE

Students are to stand in a big circle in the room and the teacher invites a student into the middle of the circle. The student is asked to make a ritual gesture, that is, an action which belongs to a ritualised social structure (practices of everyday life). The rest of the group in the circle observes the gesture. When a student from the circle believes they have worked out which ritual it belongs to, they go into the middle and ‘completes’ the gesture with another, equally ritualised. A second person, then a third, then all those who think they’ve understood the initial gesture, as well as the modified – completed – gesture, also go into the middle and together form a large static image of the ritual suggested by the first gesture.

Adding rhythm, words, movement. Students are to remain with their new groups (large static image), remembering the initial ritual gesture. After a sound command (clap) from the teacher, students must make a rhythmic movement suggested by the position they are in. The rhythm should enhance their understanding of the image. At a second sound command from the teacher, at the same time, each student starts a movement extending the movement from the first sound command. (Think of the static image as a freeze-frame that suddenly starts running). It is at this moment that the ritual gesture is transformed into ritual: movements, actions, words, gestures, etc.

THE MACHINE (compiled notes from Games for Actors and Non-Actors – Augusto Boal)

Everyone works together to make a machine. One person enters the space. They start making a noise and a gesture (as a combo). A second person joins in. They make a complimentary noise and gesture. (The second person has to find a way to fit with the first person, it has to be cohesive). Each person in the group adds their own noise and gesture until the entire group is involved. At that point, you become the conductor. You signal the machine to speed up, to slow down, and perhaps to break down. Try the exercise again, only this time tell the group what problem their machine has to solve. Repeat the process of adding a noise and gesture one by one, but with a specific purpose in mind.

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

STORY INFLUENCES

The story of Duck Pond weaves through story influences of both Swan Lake and The Ugly Duckling. Can you identify any key influences seen in Duck Pond?

Swan Lake	The Ugly Duckling
<p>Swan Lake is a timeless love story that mixes magic, tragedy, and romance into four acts.</p> <p>It features a Prince and a lovely Swan Princess. Under the spell of a sorcerer, the swan spends her days swimming on a lake of tears and her nights in her beautiful human form as Odette.</p> <p>The couple quickly falls in love. As in most fairy tales, things are not that easy and the sorcerer has more tricks to play. That brings Odile, his daughter, into the picture. Confusion, forgiveness, and a happy ending with the prince and Odette together forever round off the ballet.</p>	<p>The Ugly Duckling is a Danish literary fairy tale with a moral expressing that it doesn't matter where you come from, but who you are inside.</p> <p>After a mother duck's eggs hatch, one of the ducklings is perceived by the other animals as an ugly little creature and suffers much verbal and physical abuse. He wanders off alone.</p> <p>The duckling sees a flock of migrating wild swans. He is delighted and excited but cannot join them, for he is too young, ugly, and unable to fly. The duckling spends a miserable winter alone outdoors, mostly hiding in a cave on the lake that partly freezes over.</p> <p>The duckling, now having fully grown and matured, cannot endure a life of solitude and hardship anymore. He decides to throw himself at a flock of swans, feeling that it is better to be killed by such beautiful birds than to live a life of ugliness. He is shocked when the swans welcome and accept him, only to realize by looking at his reflection in the water that he had been not a duckling but a swan all this time.</p>

TRANSFORMATION - CONTEXT

How can we reframe purpose, context and meaning through transforming story?

This hybrid performance merges the stories of both Swan Lake and The Ugly Duckling to tell this unique story of identity, told within three acts. Use the space provided to break down the action within each act.

Act 1 The Palace, A Dream	Act 2 The Lake	Act 3 The Theatre

EXPLORING MOTIF AND MOVEMENT SIGNATURES

A motif is usually introduced at the start of a performance, then once established, is developed and varied. It can be a single movement or a phrase of movement that contains the 'essence' of the performance. An entire performance can be built around the development and variation of motifs, complimentary or contrasting. These can also be identified as Movement signatures within a work. In Duck Pond, motif is explored in many different ways throughout the performance. Some examples are below, can you identify any in addition to the following?



Identified motif / movement signature	Explain the action / movement	Explanation / link to story
Marching lines	Duck's movement resembles the marching style of walking that mirrors the army	The Duck Army resembles the ducks in the lake that don't accept the woman, yet resemble lack of status in the world of the production. This creates a heightened tension between the ducks and swans, blending the true identity for the Swan and their yearning to identify their true self
Original Music	Accompanying the movement throughout is the reoccurring motif of the original score for Swan Lake.	The use of this familiar music creates references between the action and melody to inspire connection to the influence of the original story. The heightened sense of the music from Swan Lake compliments heightened movement, tempo and momentum.
Beaks	The performers adopt a beak like gesture using their hands that reoccurs throughout in both a fluid and structured state	Movement that is symbolic enhances the believability of the story for the audience. The blending of human and bird characters requires that escape to be real and allows the audience into the world of the performance. Juxtaposed action throughout determines the ducks from the swans, establishing an inherited status and creating tension in the movements for the audience.

CIRCUS IMPROV JAM

This activity is great to encourage your circus performers to explore movement, enhance their improvisational skills and develop their own unique style of expression.

WARM UP

- Always begin with a light warm-up to prepare your body for movement. Include stretches, joint rotations and gentle cardio exercises (see warm ups listed in this resource)
- Focus on increasing your flexibility, balance and coordination during this phase.

CIRCLE UP

- Form a circle with the participants. This activity can be done individually or in small groups depending on the number of participants.

WORD OR EMOTION ASSOCIATION

- Begin by selecting a word or emotion (e.g. joy, confusion, fear, freedom) and have each performer express that word or emotion through movement in the circle.
- Encourage participants to use their entire body, including facial expressions and gestures.

PASSING THE MOVEMENT

- Start with one person performing a short movement sequence (approx.. 10-15 seconds). This can be a simple circus skill or a creative movement.
- After their turn, the next person in the circle picks up a movement element from the previous performer and adds their own unique movement.
- Continue passing the movement around the circle, creating a collaborative and evolving sequence.

PROP INCLUSION

- Introduce a prop (such as a scarf or juggling ball) to the activity.
- Performers should incorporate the prop into their movements, exploring ways to integrate it seamlessly into their sequence.

SOLO OR SMALL GROUP IMPROVISATION

- Give each performer the opportunity to improve a short solo or collaborate in small groups.
- Encourage performers to experiment with different circus skills, levels, speeds and dynamics during their improvisation.

REFLECT AND SHARE

- Gather the group and invite participants to share their experiences. What did they discover during the improvisation? Did they find new ways to express themselves or incorporate circus skills?

COOL DOWN

- Conclude the activity with a gentle cool-down, including stretches and deep breaths to relax the body.

TIPS:

- Emphasise the importance of embracing mistakes and going with the flow during improvisation.
- Encourage performers to focus on the quality of their movement and how it communicates emotions or ideas.

MAKE YOUR OWN MOVEMENT SEQUENCE

Ask students to make movement sequences and experiment with a range of options when seeking solutions and putting ideas into action. Students can experiment with simple movement to communicate or allow creative motif to drive a message. A guided experimentation can create some wonderful moments for students:

Providing context:

Students can devise a 1 – 2 minute original movement sequence in groups. They are to collaboratively develop the piece, which can be a part of a larger story, or a scene that stands alone. Using the insights from the production as examples, ask students to note their influences and any music they may want to use. They could also consider key lighting concepts they may like for their sequence.

To extend: Ask the students to sit in a group and swap stories of their lives that have happened (must be appropriate) that includes at least one character. Ask students to reflect upon and choose ideas that make their piece unique.

Guide students through the following process:

Students are to discuss their skills and their comfort level in completing this task. This is a productive conversation about safety and moving forward as a group. Each student will be given a role to play in the group so discussing this at the beginning is very important.

Students share their personal stories/ideas to shape a narrative. This should inspire research of these ideas further by using inspiration from various mediums of their choice E.g. Music, books, comics, magazines etc. Students select their favourite parts of the story to make movement choices to convey to the audience. Students should experiment with both still and moving movements to create the movement sequence. This includes using different levels including safe use of heights. Experiment and rehearse your sequence to ensure your performance is conveying a message aligned to your chosen message from your story.

Choose different sounds or play different music to accompany the movement. Are there key choices made here that suit your sequence better? Experiment with facing in different directions and travelling to different parts of the room whilst performing your sequence.

Rehearse and perform your movement sequence for an audience of your peers.

Extension: Try performing your sequence and establish a point where your sequence could meet up with another groups. What happens if you cross or interrupt each other's sequences?

Extension: Try performing your sequence and establish a point where your sequence could meet up with another groups. What happens if you cross or interrupt each other's sequences?

Post-activity discussion questions:

- What could you call your performance?
- How is the movement in the sequence used to represent your idea/s?
- What could you learn from watching others' sequences based on their movements?
- What movements could you learn, and use in performance, based on everyday activities and other cultural practices?
- How else could you link or contrast these sequences?



DESIGN LANGUAGES

The visual design elements of Duck Pond have three main parts: scenic, costume and lighting. Each has their own challenges and inspirations and each has to work with the overall storytelling and feel of the show.

The general design brief for Duck Pond was:

- Opulence: everything should feel luxe - radiant, glowing, sumptuous and delightful
- Charming, playful with comic undertones
- Reference ballet in subtle ways and without parody
- reveal character and assist with storytelling
- Be functional for circus use
- Change or surprise

Design discussion questions:

- How does the choice of stage design impact the audience's experience and the way a story is told on stage?
- In what ways does lighting design contribute to the mood, atmosphere and storytelling in this production?
- Discuss the significance of costume and set design in conveying character traits in this production. How do these design elements enhance the audience's understanding of the narrative?
- How do sound design and music influence the emotional impact of a theatrical performance? Can you think of how the sound design played a crucial role in the storytelling?

DESIGN YOUR DREAM THEATRE

Creating a space for students to design a performance space can be both educational and fun. This exercise assists students to understand the practical and artistic choices that enhance the experience when creating and designing for performance.

Resources: large sheets of paper, markers, coloured pencils, access to stimulus

Theatre design discussion and stimulus

Begin this activity by discussing the various elements that go into designing a theatre space. These elements can include:

- Seating arrangements
- Stage design
- Lighting
- Sound
- Costume and prop storage
- Accessibility
- Aesthetic choices

In small groups, assign each group one aspect of theatre design to seek stimulus. This stimulus will assist students to find representations of their ideas in image form. To begin this activity, using Duck Pond design notes and photos first, allow students to explore three aspects to the design process and how these were created on stage.

Stage Design	Costumes	Lighting

STAGE DESIGN

The key challenge was how to create a world without a frame - we didn't want wings or any external frame of reference. If we cover the sides and back, how do we get cast on and off. Using the slit drapes allowed multiple entrances and exits from any point. Having them high gave an element of scale and impact and allowed for the lights to be out of sight lines. The hi-shine floor added opulence.

COSTUMES

The costumes needed to meld the world of ballet and circus. Practicality is a key concern. There are multiple challenges, for instance some disciplines require bare legs, other need them to be covered. The worlds of the court, the swans and the Act 3 deconstruction (may not be in schools' versions of the show) needed to be differentiated. By working with a monochrome pallet, multiples of the same costume and fast changes this was achieved. The Duck Army, wings, the ruff that becomes the tutu and sparkles are all key features.

LIGHTING

The specific lighting brief was to be radiant without any visible fixtures. The lights needed to change from night to day and to augment the story including moments of character highlights, floor reflection, suggesting the lake and supporting the comedy of the Duck Army. These were achieved by conventional front light, a large overhead rig with colour changers and colour changing profiles set behind the curtain.



DESIGN YOUR DREAM THEATRE

Once each group have explored the design concepts from Duck Pond, students can begin designing their own theatre space. Students use this time to discuss and seek imagery linking their vision for these design choices and how they can consider audience engagement and understanding.

Each group can use the resources (large sheets of paper, markers, coloured pencils, access to stimulus) to design their own space. Students should consider:

- Layout of the seating arrangements (e.g. proscenium, in-the-round)
- Stage design (e.g. size, shape, trapdoors)
- Lighting setup (e.g. types of lights, colours)
- Sound design (e.g. any effects, key music to establish meaning)
- Costume and prop (e.g. meaningful costumes, colours, accessories)
- Aesthetic choices (e.g. colour schemes, symbolism/meaning)

Presentations

Have each group present their theatre design to the class. Allow time for questions and discussion after each presentation. Encourage students to provide feedback and ask clarifying questions. Ask students to reflect on what they have learned about their approach to design and the importance of making clear and informed choices.

Post-activity discussion questions. Answer in groups and share your answers with the class:

- How did your choices impact the audience experience and the way you see the story told?
- How would your lighting choices contribute to mood and atmosphere in the show?
- What significant elements of your costume design conveyed the traits of the characters?
- Did you incorporate sound choices that enhances the audiences experience?
- Was the role of collaboration and compromise within the design space important and did it impact the final product?

CIRCA



Queensland
Government



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Photos by David Kelly, Damien Bredberg and Pia Johnson