



Arts Education for Young People

## THEATRE GUIDE

ALL ABOUT THE THEATRE:  
A Guide To Manners, Conventions,  
Vocabulary, and Careers

Kupferberg Center Performances at Queens College

### THEATRE MANNERS

#### Curriculum Focus:

- Language Arts, Literature, Visual Arts, Social Studies, Theatre, Dance
- Blueprint for the Arts: Theatre
- New York State Arts Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4
- New York State English Language Arts Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4
- New York City English Language Standards: 4a



Following our model, create a chart on the chalkboard that students can fill in during class discussion.

#### CLASS DISCUSSION



Attending a live theatrical or dance performance is a very different experience from watching a movie or television, or

even from attending a live sports event. Before attending a performance at the Kupferberg Center, prepare students by discussing expected behavior in a theatre. Remind them that audiences play a key part in the overall live theatrical experience. Each person affects those around them as well as the actors or dancers on the stage, who can actually hear whispers and noise coming from the audience, and who can also see the flash of camera lights.



#### PLEASE DO:

- Watch closely
- Listen attentively
- Respond appropriately: laugh, applaud
- Have fun!
- Clap to the music
- Follow the directions of the actors if they invite audience participation.

#### PLEASE DON'T:

- Talk out loud
- Eat or drink
- Fall asleep
- Run in the aisles
- Text messages or use electronic devices
- Take photos or make video recordings (these are prohibited by law and require signed permission from both the performing company and the presenter. Similar to copyright laws, this protects the artists' creative work.)

## THEATRE CONVENTIONS

If your students have never before attended a live theatrical performance, discuss some of the **theatrical conventions** they will encounter at the Kupferberg Center.

▶ Watching a play is entering an imaginary world where the audience has agreed to “suspend disbelief” or pretend that the characters on stage are real. These characters might start singing or dancing in the middle of a conversation. They may sometimes speak directly to the audience, or an actor may play more than one part.

▶ To designate the start of the show and sometimes scene changes, the auditorium may suddenly be darkened, with all stage lights turned off. Children should understand that this is a signal that the show is about to begin, that there will be a change in scenery, or it indicates a passage of time in the production. It is **not** a signal to scream out loud!



Have any students ever performed on a stage? If so, would they share that experience with the class? Did they act? Sing? Dance? What did it feel like? How did they prepare for the performance?

## THEATRE AND DANCE VOCABULARY

Before attending the performance, discuss this theatre/dance vocabulary with students. Younger children especially may be unfamiliar with some of these terms and their meanings.

**Act (noun):** The main division of a play. Acts may be further divided into Scenes.

**Act (verb):** To perform.

**Actor:** A person who interprets a role and performs it in a play; a theatrical performer.

**Adaption:** Practice of rewriting a play or story to fit it for conditions of performance different from those for which it was originally composed.



**Applause:** The appreciation spectators show for performers by clapping their hands; a way of saying “thank you” to the actors, singers, or dancers.

**Artistic Director:** The creative leader of a dance company; the person who makes decisions about hiring company members, casting, and selecting repertory.

**Audience:** The group of people watching a play or dance performance. The audience (and sometimes the entire theatre) is also often referred to as “the house.”

**Ballet/classical ballet:** A specific style of dance with a defined vocabulary of steps and arm movements that had its origins in the French

courts of the 16th century and was first codified in France in the 17th century; the theatrical art form that through movement and music tells a story without words, or conveys moods and emotions. In ballet the body is generally held erect with the feet pointed. Many movements call for the legs to be rotated open from the hip joints so that the knees and toes face outward at an angle of 90 degrees. This rotation is known as turnout. It takes dancers many years of training to reach a 90-degree turnout and to be strong enough to dance on their toes.

**“Break a leg”:** Actors are superstitious about wishing each other “good luck” before a performance, so instead they wish each other to “Break a leg.”

**Cast (noun):** A group of actors in a play.

**Cast (verb):** To assign actors to character parts in a play.

**Choreography:** The arrangement of movements in time and space. A Choreographer is the person who composes or creates the steps and movements for a dance. That person may or may not be the Artistic Director of a dance company.

**Composer:** A person who writes music.

**Costume Designer:** The person who devises a visual concept for a production through the creation and the use of clothing worn by actors or dancers.



**Costumes/Wardrobe:** Clothes worn by performers on stage. The clothes often give information about the character. In dance performances, for example, the lead dancer(s) are distinguished from the rest of the company (corps de ballet) by the colors and design of their costumes.

**Cue:** Any prearranged signal, such as the last words in a speech or an action, that indicates to the performers that it is time to proceed to the next line or action.

**Curtain Call:** Any prearranged signal, such as the last words in a speech or an action, that indicates to the performers that it is time to proceed to the next line or action.

**Dialogue:** A conversation in a play between two or more characters.

**Director:** The person who conceives of an overall concept for a production, supervises all its elements, and guides the actors in their performance.

**Downstage:** Area of the stage closest to the audience; the back of the stage—away from the audience—is referred to as Upstage.

**Modern Dance:** A form of dance originally developed in the early years of the 20th century as a revolt against classical ballet and its codification of steps and movements. The varied modern dance styles encourage artistic individualism and personal vision; there are as many different styles as there are choreographers. Although today's modern dances often incorporate elements of classical ballet technique, there is an emphasis on natural movements, such as walking, running, and falling. Movements are often floor-bound, not aerial, and dancers generally perform in bare feet, not toe shoes.

**Playwright:** A person who writes a play.

**Plot:** Story line of a play developed through the unfolding of a series of events.

**Props or Properties:** Items (except costumes, scenery, furniture) used on stage to create a sense of place.

**Rehearsal:** A period of time during which the performers experiment and develop their characters, learn their lines, and learn where to stand and walk, etc. (staging). A Dress Rehearsal is the final full run-through of a play in costume, to practice the show as it will be on opening night.

**Repertory/Repertoire:** The dances performed by a company.

**Scene:** A division of a play, usually part of an Act, in which the action is continuous.

**Scenery:** Painted canvas mounted on wood frames, cloth drops, cutouts, etc. used on stage to represent a place or environment where the action happens.

**Score:** The musical or sound accompaniment to a dance or musical play.

**Script:** Written text detailing what happens on stage, including what is to be said during a play or performance.



**Set:** Arrangement of scenery and props on a stage; they can be painted, three-dimensional, realistic, or symbolic.

**Set Designer:** The person who imagines and creates the scenery and decides how the set and props should be arranged.

**Stage Left:** Left side of the stage from the performer's point of view.

**Stage Right:** Right side of the stage from performer's point of view.

**Understudy:** Someone who learns another actor's or dancer's part in order to be his or her substitute in an emergency.

**Usher:** The person who guides audience members to their seats.

**Wings:** The areas offstage, right and left, from and to which performers make exits and entrances; performers wait "in the wings" for their entrance cues. The wings are part of the theatre's back-stage area, the sections of the theatre that are out of sight of the audience.

## CAREERS IN THE THEATRE AND DANCE

New York State Standard for Career Development  
& Occupational Studies: I



Putting on a musical or a dramatic play or a dance production is a collaborative effort involving many individuals. Discuss all the jobs required to create a theatrical production, from those who work back-stage or “behind the scenes” to the



actors or dancers, to the “front of house” staff.

What do these people do?

What training do they need?



Here's a list of some of the people who may have been involved in presenting productions at the Kupferberg Center.

Artistic Director

Rehearsal or Ballet Mistress/Master

Playwright

Composer

Lyricist

Director

Musical Director/Conductor

Musicians/Orchestra

Choreographer

Set Designer

Costume Designer

Properties Designer

Lighting Designer

Hair/Make-up Designer

Actors Dancers

Stage Manager

Theatre Manager

Box Office Manager

Ushers/Ticket Takers

Stage Hands

Electricians

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Vivian Charlop, *Executive Director*

Dedi Firestone, *Director of Arts Education*

Trudy Garfunkel, *Writer*



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