



Where Circus Meets Food and Family:
A Recipe for The 7 Fingers performance of
Cuisine and Confessions



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Zellerbach Hall, University of California Berkeley

Table of Contents

How to Use this Engagement Guide	2
Your Starring Role in the Theater (theater etiquette for students)	3
About The 7 Fingers.....	4
Artistic Concepts: Tension and Balance.....	5
10 Things You Should Know about <i>Cuisine & Confessions</i>	6
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY (pre-performance)	7
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY (post-performance)	9
Cal Performances Education Program Donor List	11
About Cal Performances Classroom	12



How to use this Engagement Guide

If you have photos or lesson plans to share, please let us know! Use #7Fingers@cal

We invite you to challenge yourself and your students to think with the curiosity and passion of the arts. This engagement guide is organized around 4 key artistic practices (as identified by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards at <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>)

Investigating: Questioning, exploring and challenging.

Imagining: Opening the door to what's possible, and even to what seems impossible.

Creating: Making artistic choices with a work of art in mind.

Connecting: Reflecting on both process and product and making connections to other aspects of life and study.

You'll be able to link on specific subjects that you or your students may want more information about. The body of the Engagement Guide invites exploration before and after the performance, giving each student tools to make personal and meaningful connections during the show.

We've included a pre-performance engagement activity and a post-performance activity for artistic practice and reflection. By no means should you feel limited by these suggestions! Go, make art, learn more...and share your experiences where you can.

Artistic Literacy: Having the skills and knowledge you need to connect meaningfully with works of art—that's what we mean by artistic literacy. We think that means something different than knowing the names of all the different instruments musicians might play, or being able to reproduce the exact melodies you might hear during a show. To us at Cal Performances, it means you and your students will have a significant glimpse into the artistic process and will have a chance to try to solve the problems the artists aim to solve creatively. It means that the next time you see a performance, you'll be able to use these same insights to connect with a work of art through the artist's process and that this will deepen your experience as an audience member.

The artistically literate student audiences comes to understand that every artist draws from a core set of concepts skillfully chosen and applied in performance to create a work of art both unique to the artist, and connected to other works of art.

And along the way, we hope that students of all ages—and their teachers and adult mentors—will be inspired to experiment with artistic decision-making and creativity themselves.

Enjoy the show!

Your ★ STARRING Role in the Theater



As an audience member, you are a STAR, too! You play an important role in the performance community. The artists need YOU in order to give you their best work.

S.T.A.R. Audiences

S = Support the artists by being attentive and focusing on the performers.

T = Tune in: listen and watch for understanding (and for The 7 Fingers, watch for how the artists use tension and balance when bringing their characters to life, and in the ways their characters interact.)

A = Appreciate the performers by clapping at the right time. For example, when a scene or dance ends, or when the stage lights fade to dark.

R = Respect the performers and other audience members. At a performance, you, the others in the audience and the artists are sharing this experience together and are part of a performance community. Think about ways you can best support the community's performance experience.

We know you will be a STAR today and will help you classmates shine too!

About The 7 Fingers

The Montreal-based circus company The 7 Fingers (also called in French *Les 7 doigts de la main*) is known for creating "circus at a human scale," placing the extraordinary element of circus in ordinary contexts (like kitchens, for example), putting into focus identifiable characters with dramatic stories leading to their moments of physical exploits.

Les 7 doigts de la main translates literally as "the 7 fingers of the hand." It is a twist on a French idiom ("the five fingers of the hand") used to describe distinct parts united tightly, moving in coordination towards one common goal. Here it refers to the 7 founding directors of the company (Isabelle Chassé, Shana Carroll, Patrick Léonard, Faon Shane, Gypsy Snider, Sébastien Soldevila and Samuel Tétreault) who, by combining their distinct talents and experiences, work towards their common artistic goals with the beautifully awkward dexterity of a 7-fingered hand.

Their newest creation, "Cuisine & Confessions" colorfully displays that life happens in the kitchen and that storytelling can happen through food. In this show, all of our senses are heightened by high-flying, eye-popping acrobatics, elaborate choreography, and pulsating music coupled with visuals of mixing batter, baking cookies, and sprinkling oregano.

The show reminds us that each individual is composed of a unique set of ingredients and that the kitchen is a meeting point that spans generations and countries throughout the world.

Directed, written, and choreographed by

Shana Carroll and Sébastien Soldevila

Starring

Sidney Iking Bateman, Heloise Bourgeois, Melvin Diggs, Mishannock Ferrero, Anna Kachalova, Anna Kichtchenko, Gabriella Parigi, Matias Plaul, Pablo Pramparo



Artistic Concept: Tension and Balance

How do the performers in The 7 Fingers use tension and balance to tell their stories about relationships, family and food?

This engagement guide provides some classroom activities to help heighten your and your students' awareness of the various ways we see tension and balance in our daily lives (and in literature, science and PE classes too!). And when you come see The 7 Fingers performers on stage, you and they will be able to notice not just that you are surprised and delighted, but how the artists made that happen for you—by using tension and balance to share their stories about relationships, family and food.



Tension is one aspect of life that most of us could do without. In art, however, tension is a creative force that invites audiences into the work of art in a powerful way. We're not talking creative tension where artists are in conflict with one another, but tension as an artistic concept that shows up on stage for the audience to engage with.

In the physical world, **tension is the act or process of stretching something tight**. It's often described as a force which tends to stretch or elongate something. It can be experienced as the stretching of an object in opposite directions, as in the rope that is used in a game of tug-of-war.

In the performing arts, **tension is akin to a feeling of suspense, a kind of uncertainty about and interest in the outcome of certain actions**. In dance and acrobatics, we see tension in the bodies of the performers as they stretch, reach, climb and move in ways we don't often see in real life. And tension is also created with and around objects, as they hold the performers up or move around unexpectedly. We as audience are also in a state of suspension and tension: we're waiting to see if the artists can accomplish the challenge they set themselves and if their partners will be there for them (thank goodness they always are!). Our satisfaction comes when the tension is resolved into balance and we see what human beings are really capable of when they push themselves, prepare properly, and trust one another.

There's another point of tension here: these circus acts happen in a working kitchen, and we can just imagine all the things in a kitchen that can create tension! It's a fun and interesting artistic concept—tension—and when you know how to look for it, you can increase your enjoyment of the performance.

10 Things You Should Know About *Cuisine & Confessions*

The Stories Are True

Cuisine & Confessions was built on the real-life personal stories of each cast member. Creation began with extensive storytelling sessions, after which directors Shana Carroll and Sébastien Soldevila extracted facts, themes, and images and wove them throughout each act. Everything is based on these real stories.

All Music is Original

The entire soundtrack was created specifically for the show. Notably, New York jazz club owner and pianist Spike Wilner came to Montreal for extensive recording sessions, providing a selection of piano music to choose from during creation. (Director Sébastien Soldevila is also musical director.)

The Show Has Been Performed in Seven Languages

Cuisine & Confessions has travelled the globe and was first performed in the United States in Boston. Wherever it has been performed, it has been translated into the local language. To date, the show has been presented in English, Italian, Spanish, Russian, French, Swedish, and German.

All Food is Prepared Live on Stage

Food preparation begins on stage during the 30-minute pre-show and continues during the performance, at various times with assistance from audience members. From the minute the house opens through the final bows, food is always cooking—from omelets, to vegetable pasta, to our signature banana bread.

Montreal Chef Alex Winniki Helped Refine Recipes

Not only did Alex Winniki help refine the recipes used in the show, but he also gave weekly cooking lessons to the original cast, sharing tips on chopping, slicing, dicing, and more. Each cast member was given a chef's knife to practice with at home.

The Set is Inspired by the Cast's Home Kitchens

To create the set, scenic designer Ana Capellutto asked company members to share photos of their childhood kitchens, their current kitchens, and their “dream kitchens,” greatly inspiring the final design. She also asked each performer to bring in a personal item to keep somewhere on the set, to help create an intimate kitchen space. The set continues to tour with these personal items.

Refrigerator Postcards are Real

The cast has collected postcards from every city where they have appeared and placed them on the set's refrigerator, making it an ever-evolving set-piece.

They Keep a “To Do” List, Too

Observant theatergoers will see a “to-do list” written out on a chalkboard as part of the kitchen set (like a grocery shopping list). This is actually a list of numbers performed in the show, and cast members cross off items as they are completed during each performance.

A Child's Game Inspired the Lyrics of the Final Song

The odd phrase “Chop Chop Miam Miam” came from a tickling game the directors had with their 5-year-old daughter. During the show's creation, the expression was used as a kind of call-and-response game, and it soon became the show's accidental mantra. When the cast turned it into a song, at first it was thought of as a joke—until everyone decided it was the best way to close the show. The song is also used as a pre-show get-in-the-mood warm-up exercise for the cast.

Cast Members Take Turns Washing the Dishes

Every family has its own way of sharing responsibilities, and the *Cuisine & Confessions* family is no different. Cooking creates a mess, and at the end of each performance, a different cast member cleans up the dishes in our working on-stage sink, adhering to a scheduled rotation.

Engagement Activities

Engagement Activity #1 (Pre-performance) TENSION AND BALANCE: Artistic Exploration

Guiding Questions

- How can we create tension playfully with our bodies?
- What is the interaction between tension and balance?
- What are ways objects can be animated to evoke human characteristics?

Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive listening. Balance. Tension. Balance.

Overview

Time needed: 20-30 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration).
Students will explore tension and balance in their own bodies, and with a partner.

Supplies and Prep

- Open space for students to stand and move around a bit (no large dance movements required).
- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements).

Instructions

- Step 1** Start with everyone standing, preferably in a circle if there's room. **Ask students to stand in a balanced position:** with their feet planted firmly on the floor about shoulder's width apart, back straight, arms down to the side and relaxed. Notice how you are balanced. (If accommodation is needed, ask students to find whatever position they can be in that feels as balanced as possible.)
- Step 2** Now gently take yourself off balance (**coach if needed:** Lift one foot and the opposite arm. Stick your bottom out as far as you can without falling over. Bend your knees then go on tip-toe.)
- How do you have to hold your body to keep from falling over?
- Notice where there is tension in your body.
- Come back to a balanced position (balance), and find a new way to be gently off-balance.
- Where is the tension now?
- Come back to balance.
- Step 3** Discuss: where did you feel tension in your body when you were off-balance?
- What felt different when you were balanced?
- How did you know you were off-balance?

Step 4

Work with a partner to explore tension and balance together.



a) Choose a student to demonstrate with. Ask everyone to turn to a partner. Demonstrate facing a partner and grasping one another gently but firmly around both wrists.

b) Demonstrate carefully leaning away from one another, holding firmly and finding balance as you move. Be sure not to move any faster than your partner. Stick together and find balance. Then come back to balance and find a new position to balance each other.

c) Following the demo, encourage students to explore finding balance with different positions. Coach them to notice where they have tension in their bodies.

d) They can talk quietly with one another as they figure out how to balance each other. Laughter is to be expected, but don't let go of your partner! Stay together.

e) **Come back to the circle. Discuss** what you noticed about tension and balance while working with a partner.

Step 5

Watch short videos about the performance before you come to the live performance and look for tension and balance in the performers:

<https://calperformances.org/performances/2016-17/theater/7-fingers-cuisine-and-confessions.php?gclid=CKeN2dGS7dECFY9afgodSZUGCQ&gclsrc=aw.ds>

Step 6 (Optional) Check out the photo below, or other photos in this guide, to ask students where they see physical tension, where they see balance/balance, what do they recognize and how do the artists make that recognition possible?



Engagement Activity #2 (Post-Performance)

TENSION AND BALANCE IN THE 7 FINGERS: Reflection & Artistic Exploration

Guiding Questions

How do The 7 Fingers artists use the artistic tools of tension and balance?

Where did we see tension between people, or between people and objects?

How does being in a kitchen and making food that is part of a family story add to the performance?

Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive listening and responding. Tension.
Balance.

Overview

Time needed: 20-30 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will reflect on the The 7 Fingers performance in kinesthetic and interpersonal ways. They will explore using the creative tools of tension and balance through their own creature design and interacting with a partner's creativity.



Supplies and Prep

- Open space for students to stand and move around a bit (no large movements required).
- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements)

Instructions

- Step 1** **At their desks, ask students to think back** to the The 7 Fingers performance and jot or sketch some of their memories of the performance.
- a) Where did you see tension and balance in how The 7 Fingers characters moved?
 - b) Where did you see tension and balance in how the The 7 Fingers characters related to one another?
 - c) What relationship did the food have in creating tension and balance?
 - d) Ask students to share what was most memorable to them.

- Step 2** **Have everyone come to a standing circle.**
- Ask students to think of the performers from The 7 Fingers and how they moved. Go around the circle as each student demonstrates a moment of tension or balance that they saw. After a student shows a movement, the whole group repeats the movement.

Step 3

“Kitchen Conversation” Options

a) Discussions

- What foods are an important part of your family traditions?
- Read stories about family meal traditions, like

Strega Nona, by Tomie dePaola

In the Night Kitchen, by Maurice Sendak

Stone Soup, by Ann McGovern

Bread and Jam for Frances, by Russell Hoban

Food Trucks, by Mark Todd

Yum Yum Dim Sum, by Amy Wilson Sanger

How To Make An Apple Pie, by Marjorie Priceman

The Seven Silly Eaters, by Mary Ann Hoberman

A Fine Dessert, by Emily Jenkins

Minette’s Feast, by Susanna Reich

This is the Way We Eat our Lunch, by Edith Baer

b) Assign each student to bring in a favorite family recipe

- Create a “Our Classroom Families” Cookbook with recipes from each family.
- Decorate it with drawings or photos from your students.
- Consider simple cooking lessons for certain foods.

c) Discuss and reflect as a group.

You might consider seeking curricular connections in physical science, math or literature. If you design a lesson that you’d like to share, please let us know! We’d like to include it on our blog or in future workshops for teachers...

Resources

The 7 Fingers web site: [http://www.The 7 Fingers.com](http://www.The7Fingers.com)

Video Clips of The 7 Fingers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KupNtEzPow4> (behind the scenes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDPv0othKA> (dance highlights)

Cal Performances Classroom educational activities are generously supported by many donors in the community who believe in the power of artistic literacy to transform teaching and learning. Cal Performances Classroom activities throughout the season are made possible, in part, by Wells Fargo.

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For information on supporting our Artistic Literacy (Education & Community) Programs, contact Sarah Sobey. Phone: 510.643.7053 / Email: ssobey@calperformances.org.

About Cal Performances and the Cal Performances Classroom

The mission of Cal Performances is to produce and present performances of the highest artistic quality, enhanced by programs that explore compelling intersections of education and the performing arts. Cal Performances celebrates over 100 years on the UC Berkeley Campus.

What is a Cal Performances Classroom?

Your classroom, of course!

The arts are an endlessly replenishable resource for a lifelong love affair with thinking, learning and feeling across disciplines and cultures. They connect fluidly with curriculum throughout the school years, and – perhaps with more endurance – they connect us to ideas and reflection on human experience that can't be easily expressed any other way.

Each season at Cal Performance, you will find a menu of compelling performances and classroom opportunities for any age. You can create your Cal Performances classroom through any or all of our artistic literacy programs for grades K-12.

Cal Performances holds artistic literacy on a par with language and numerical literacy. Those who are artistically literate hold the keys to a lifelong engagement with the arts, able to unlock and make personal connections to any work of art, regardless of level of familiarity with the work and the artists.

Artistic literacy skills are developed in the Cal Performances classroom as students and teachers are engaged in the artist's process. These skills are embedded in everything we do, from pre-performance talks to community conversations to teacher workshops and artist visits to the classroom.

Cal Performances Department of Artistic Literacy Staff:

Rica Anderson, Manager of Student Engagement

David McCauley, Master Dance Teaching Artist

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Sabrina Klein, Director of Artistic Literacy