



dance music theater

Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

2008-2009 Season

SchoolTime Study Guide



Golden Dragon Acrobats

Monday, December 1, 2008 at 11 a.m.

Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Berkeley



About Cal Performances and *SchoolTime*

The mission of Cal Performances is to inspire, nurture and sustain a lifelong appreciation for the performing arts. Cal Performances, the performing arts presenter of the University of California, Berkeley, fulfills this mission by presenting, producing and commissioning outstanding artists, both renowned and emerging, to serve the University and the broader public through performances and education and community programs. In 2005/06 Cal Performances celebrated 100 years on the UC Berkeley Campus.

Our *SchoolTime* program cultivates an early appreciation for and understanding of the performing arts amongst our youngest audiences, with hour-long, daytime performances by the same world-class artists who perform as part of the main season. Teachers have come to rely on *SchoolTime* as an integral and important part of the academic year.



Cal Performances Education and Community Programs Sponsors

Cal Performances' Education and Community Programs are supported by Above Ground Railroad Inc., Bank of America, The Barrios Trust, Earl F. and June Cheit, Shelley and Elliott Fineman, Flora Family Foundation, Fremont Group Foundation, The Robert J. and Helen H. Glaser Family Foundation, Jane Gottesman and Geoffrey Biddle, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Kathleen G. Henschel, Beth Hurwich, Kaiser Permanente, David L. Klein Jr. Foundation, Carol Nusinow Kurland and Duff Kurland, Macy's Foundation, Susan Marinoff and Thomas Schrag, Maris and Ivan Meyerson, Pacific National Bank, Kenneth and Frances Reid, Jim and Ruth Reynolds, Gail and Daniel Rubinfeld, The San Francisco Foundation, Nancy Livingston and Fred Levin, The Shenson Foundation, Sharon and Barclay Simpson, Wells Fargo Foundation, Wilsey Foundation, and The Zellerbach Family.

Welcome

November 8, 2008

Dear Educators and Students,

Welcome to *SchoolTime*! On **Monday, December 1, at 11:00am**, your class will attend a performance of **Golden Dragon Acrobats**. The gymnasts, juggler, cyclists and tumblers of this accomplished acrobatic ensemble keep their audiences spellbound with the amazing feats of their ancient folk art. The top performers from the finest training schools in China are selected for their mastery of 2000-year-old acrobatic feats. Their performances are breathtaking kaleidoscope of entertainment and wonder, performed amidst all the excitement and pageantry of a Chinese carnival.

This study guide will prepare your students for their field trip to Zellerbach Hall. Your students can actively participate during the performance by:

- **OBSERVING** how the performers use their bodies when working alone or in groups
- **MARVELING** at the skill and technique demonstrated by the performers
- **THINKING ABOUT** all the practice and training that goes into each act
- **NOTICING** how the music and lights enhance the acts
- **REFLECTING** on the sounds, sights, and performance skills on display

We look forward to seeing you at *SchoolTime*!

Sincerely,



Laura Abrams
Director of Education
& Community Programs



Rica Anderson
Education Programs Administrator

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1 Theater Etiquette

Be prepared and arrive early. Ideally you should arrive at the theater 30 to 45 minutes before the show. Allow for travel time and parking, and plan to be in your seats at least 15 minutes before the performance begins.

Be aware and remain quiet. The theater is a “live” space—you can hear the performers easily, but they can also hear you, and you can hear other audience members, too! Even the smallest sounds, like rustling papers and whispering, can be heard throughout the theater, so it’s best to stay quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance without distractions. The international sign for “Quiet Please” is to silently raise your index finger to your lips.

Show appreciation by applauding. Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation. Performers return their appreciation for your attention by bowing to the audience at the end of the show. It is always appropriate to applaud at the end of a performance, and it is customary to continue clapping until the curtain comes down or the house lights come up.

Participate by responding to the action onstage. Sometimes during a performance, you may respond by laughing, crying or sighing. By all means, feel free to do so! Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form. For instance, an audience attending a string quartet performance will sit very quietly, while the audience at a gospel concert may be inspired to participate by clapping and shouting.

Concentrate to help the performers. These artists use concentration to focus their energy while on stage. If the audience is focused while watching the performance, they feel supported and are able to do their best work. They can feel that you are with them!

Please note: *Backpacks and lunches are not permitted in the theater. Bags will be provided for lobby storage in the event that you bring these with you. There is absolutely no food or drink permitted in the seating areas. Recording devices of any kind, including cameras, cannot be used during performances. Please remember to turn off your cell phone.*



2 About the Performance

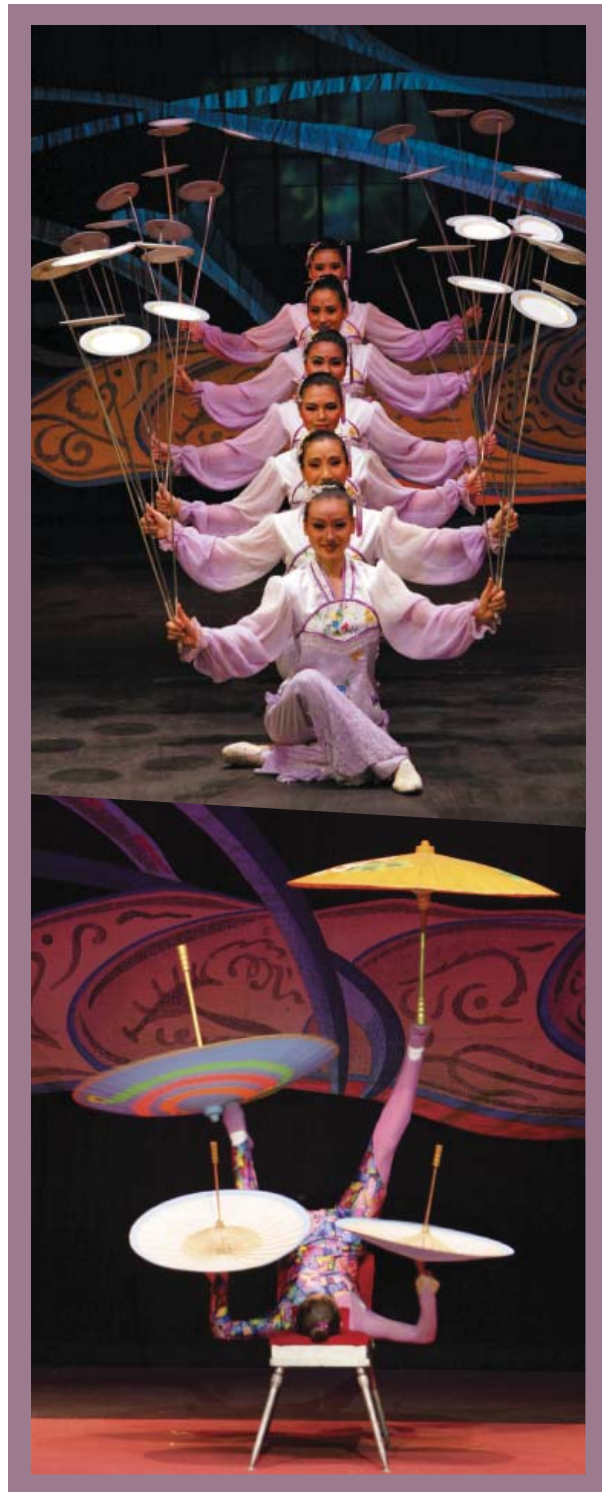
Guiding Questions:

- ♦ What are two things that are unique about the Golden Dragon Acrobats?
- ♦ When do acrobats start training?
- ♦ What are some of the things the acrobats will do at *SchoolTime*?

The Golden Dragon Acrobats *SchoolTime* performance features theatrically staged acts of astounding acrobatics and Chinese traditional dance. Contortionists, tumblers and jugglers will spin plates, create a bicycle pagoda and juggle everything from balls to umbrellas using not only their hands but also their feet and sometimes their entire bodies.

Please see page 5 in “About the Art Form” for a list of acrobatic feats that may be included in this performance.

“Timeless thrills . . . the impossible can be achieved, and once achieved surpassed, then surpassed again” (*Associated Press*).



3 About the Artists

Golden Dragon Acrobats

The award-winning Golden Dragon Acrobats hail from Cangzhou on the east coast of China, within Hebei province, in the People's Republic of China. They have toured the United States continuously since 1978. The 25 troupe members are athletes, actors and artists who have studied and trained for their craft since early childhood.

The longest-running folk art form in history, the traditional art form of Chinese acrobatics has evolved over 2000 years, an outstanding example of China's rich cultural traditions.

Founder and director of Golden Dragon Acrobats, Danny Chang is a leading promoter of Chinese acrobatics. He began training at the age of eight with his family's acrobatic school in Taipei and started performing with the Golden Dragon Acrobats at age ten. He is the recipient of many awards, including the Medal for International Faith and Goodwill by the Republic of China's Coordination Council for North American Affairs.

Danny Chang, along with choreographer and costume designer Angela Chang, create "colorful ways to use [the troupe's] skills and take advantage of their apparent total lack of fear" (*The New York Times*). The Golden Dragon Acrobats combine astounding acrobatics with theatrical techniques and traditional Chinese dance. The show features contortionists, tumblers and jugglers in breathtaking acts like the bicycle pagoda and the traditional Chinese Lion Dance.

The Golden Dragon Acrobats have performed in all 50 of the United States and in over 65 countries around the world. The troupe had its Broadway debut at the New Victory Theater in 2005, for which it was nominated for two Drama Desk Awards.



4 About the Art Form

Acrobatic Artistry

Guiding Questions:

- ♦ What kinds of props do the acrobats use and how do they use them?
- ♦ How is Chinese culture reflected in the performance?
- ♦ What are the four basic acrobatic skills?

Acrobatic acts have evolved throughout the history of China, a country credited with producing some of the best acrobats in the world. Chinese acrobats maintain a notable style and standard routines. Chinese acrobats learn handstands, juggling, trapeze, and balancing, and, as in most recognizable circuses around the world, also maintain juggling, trapeze, handstand acts and comic relief. Differences between troupes are reflected in theatrical presentation, including music, novelty acts such as clowns, and lighting.

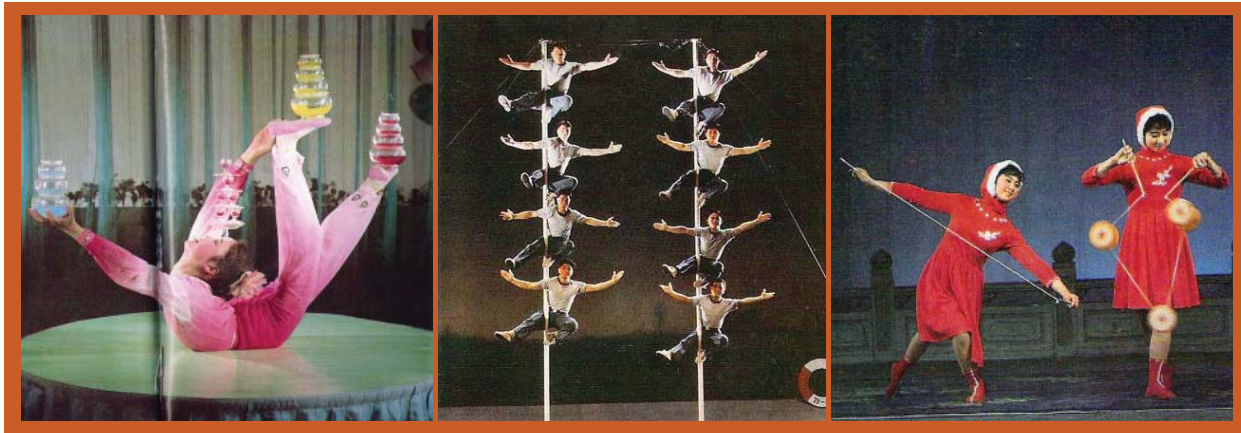
Acrobatic Training and Handstands

Most Chinese acrobats are selected to attend special training schools at around six years of age. Students work long and challenging hours to hone their craft. Six days a week they practice gymnastics, juggling, martial arts and dance in the mornings, and then take general education classes in the afternoons.

The first two years of acrobatic training are the most important for aspiring acrobats. Acrobatic students work daily on basic skills. The four core foundational skills for Chinese acrobats are mastering the handstand, tumbling, flexibility, and dance.

Each student will have a more pronounced talent for one of the four core acrobatic skills. Among the four, handstand is the most important as it is considered the essence of Chinese acrobatics. Many signature acrobatic acts include some form of handstand. Master teachers have commented that, “handstand training is to acrobats what studying the human body is to a medical student.”





An acrobat goes through progressive steps to learn basic to advanced handstands. Training directly affects three areas of the body— shoulders, lower back, and wrists. A weakness in any one of these areas will compromise the acrobat’s ability. In China, the basic handstand is learned by the youngest, beginning students, starting against the wall. In three to six months of full time training, students build up to one half hour of wall handstands. During this time, the three areas of the body become stronger until at last students are able to hold the free handstand.

Holding a still handstand is translated in Chinese as the “Dead handstand.” A good handstand has pleasing form and versatility. A versatile handstand is a position from which the acrobat is able to execute many variations.

Understandably, young acrobats intensely dislike handstand training. In a basic handstand, one is upsidedown with all the body’s weight on the wrist, shoulder and lower back. There is natural pressure to want to come down and, since the hands are the only support for the body, there is absolutely no way to cheat.

After the initial two-year training, only a few acrobats will specialize in the

handstand. However, handstand training is essential to all acrobatic work, due to the role it plays in strengthening the body, mind and spirit of the acrobat.

Signature Chinese Acrobatic Acts

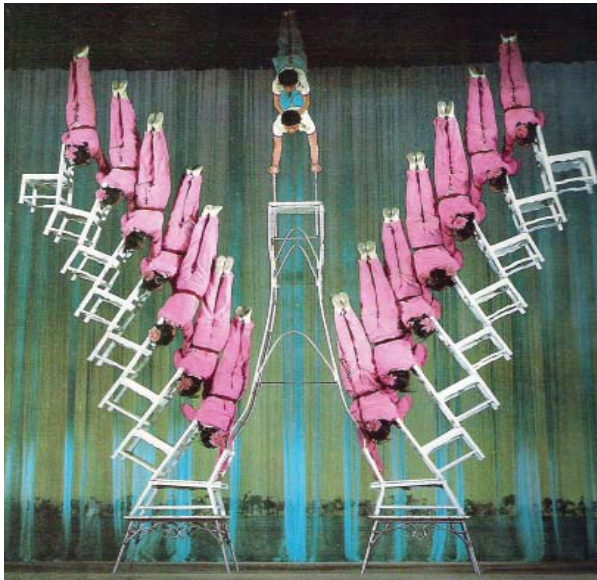
Acrobatic acts are performed either solo or in groups. Group acts require team cooperation, trust and constant communication. The disadvantage of a group act is that when one performer becomes incapacitated or decides to leave the group act, it puts the other acrobats at risk in their careers. It often happens that acrobats need to start over again. However, in creating a new act or learning a new specialty, an acrobat has already mastered the four basic acrobatic skills; tumbling, flexibility, handstand, and dance.

Hoop Diving: This act is over 2,000 years old. Also called “Dashing Through Narrows,” it was once known as “Swallow Play” because the performers imitate the flying movements of swallows (birds) as they leap nimbly through narrow rings.

Unicycle bowl flip: In a relatively new feat, an acrobat rides a very tall unicycle on a round table, kicking up objects such as bowls, kettles and spoons with perfect ease, and piling them on her head.



Chinese Vase: Acrobats playfully squeeze into tiny brightly colored vases as they perform tricky acrobatics—smiling all the while.



Rolling Balance Contortionist: Performers gracefully bend and twist into unbelievable knots, frequently while balancing precariously perched objects on every limb.



Double Pole: A group of acrobats climb up and down thin poles demonstrating agility and strength to execute a variety of dangerous movements. This act requires a considerable amount of upper body and abdominal strength.



Chinese Diabolo: Performed in China for over 1000 years, two sticks of bamboo are connected with string to spin an additional piece of wood (like a yo-yo) back and fourth in a variety of timed movements. The Chinese diabolo makes a whistling sound when it spins.

Spinning plates: Performers use numerous long, pencil-thin sticks to support spinning plates that look like lotus leaves facing the wind or colorful butterflies flitting and dancing. This act is often combined with balancing and tumbling, as when a performer spins 12 china plates with both hands while in a headstand on a rubber ball.

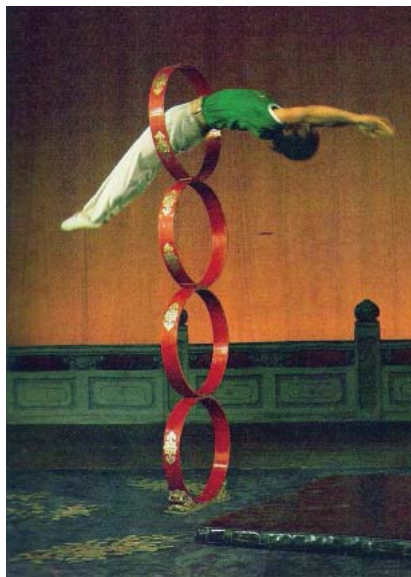


Chair stacking handstand: A collective act involving two to seven acrobats and as many or more chairs. While on a pagoda or ladder of chairs, the performers practice handstands and other stunts requiring tremendous arm strength, as well as superior balancing skill.

Bicycle: Acrobats ride together on a single bicycle, take it apart, turn it over a table and display a variety of postures, notably the beautiful tableau of a peacock fanning its feathers.

Foot Juggling: Many different objects can be used in juggling. Jar juggling demonstrates simplicity and steadiness. Originally, peasants used grain containers to perform various feats in celebration of a bumper harvest. Later, jar tricks were adapted by acrobats and became one of their most popular entertainments. Performers lie on a special seat and juggle and catch objects with their feet. Long ago, in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), jugglers manipulated bottles, plates and jars with their feet. Now performers toss tables, umbrellas, rugs and any number of household items.

Lion and Dragon acts: This act comes from Chinese folk dance developed from Buddhist beliefs. The lion represents the spirit of renewal and is revered for dispelling bad luck. Big Lion is played by two acrobats, while Small Lion is played by one. The lion rolls and jumps, exhibiting attributes such as strength, agility and tranquility. Accompanied by traditional percussion instruments, this act creates a jubilant and festive atmosphere.



5 History of Chinese Acrobats

Guiding Questions:

- ◆ What factors influenced the popularity of acrobatics?
- ◆ What are some common traits of acrobatic troupes?
- ◆ How did communism impact acrobatics in China?

The art of Chinese acrobatics is an ancient tradition. Over its long and rich history, acrobatics has become one of the most popular art forms among the Chinese people. While many historical records provide evidence for the development of this art form as far back as the Xia Dynasty (**4,000** years ago), it is most commonly believed that acrobatics did not become wildly popular until approximately **2,500** years ago when it began to capture the attention of the country's powerful emperors.

Acrobatics first developed during the **Warring States Period** (475BC-221BC), evolving from the working lives of people in Wuqiao (pronounced oo-chow) county, located in Hebei Province. Acrobats first used the everyday things around them—instruments of labor such as tridents, wicker rings and articles of daily use such as tables, chairs, jars, plates and bowls—as performance props, to experiment with balancing and performing other acrobatic tricks. In a time when China was traditionally an agricultural society, where there were no electronic gadgets or telephones, people used their imaginations to learn new skills such as acrobatics. These

acts were incorporated into community celebrations, for example, to celebrate a bountiful harvest. These acts of entertainment and leisure eventually evolved into a form of performance that became recognizable to the Chinese people.

During the Han Dynasty (221BC-220AD) the rudimentary acts of acrobatics developed into the “Hundred Entertainments.” Many more acts soon developed. Music accompaniment and other theatrical elements were added as interest in the art form grew among the emperors. According to the stone engravings unearthed at Yinan County of Shandong Province in 1954, there were superb acrobatic performances with music accompaniment on the acrobatic stage of 2,000 years ago, including acts that are familiar to this day, such as Pole Climbing, Rope-Walking (the present day Tight-Wire Feats), *Fish Turned into Dragon* (present day Conjuring) and Five Tables (like the present *Balancing on Chairs*).





The mural *An Outing* by the Lady of Song of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) depicts the grand scene of a Peeress's outing. Walking in front of the large procession is an acrobat doing pole balancing with four young boys doing stunts. These figures are vivid, lively and vigorous, and is considered the most complete extant Chinese mural containing images of acrobatics.

In the Tang Dynasty, known for its extraordinary flourishing of Chinese culture, the number of acrobats greatly increased and their performing skills improved through prolonged practice. The famous poets of that time, Bai Juyi and Yuan Chen, wrote poems on acrobatic performances. In the Dunhuang mural painting "Lady Song Going on a Journey," there are images of acrobatic and circus performers.

Since these early times, acrobatics have been incorporated into many forms of Chinese performance arts, including dance, opera, *wushu* (martial arts) and sports. Acrobatics have gone beyond the boundaries of performance, serving an important role in the cultural exchange between China and other Western nations including the United States. Today, China presents acrobatics in the international arena as an example of the rich traditions of Chinese culture and the hard-working nature of the Chinese people.



Family Acrobatic Troupes

Acrobatic troupes were traditionally family-owned, and members made their living roaming the countryside as street performers for their livelihood. Many of the famous acrobatic families in China continued this tradition through many generations. Two famous acrobatic families were the Dung family and the Chen Family. Throughout China, the Dung Family was known for their magic. The Chen Family was famous for their unique style of juggling, with a signature program using as many as eight badminton rackets at one time. Other acrobatic troupes have tried to match the skill level of the Chen family's juggling feats with little success. It was common practice that family acrobatic troupes would teach only their own children and close relatives the secrets of their acts in order keep these mysterious techniques and traditions within the family last name.

Note: This was also the case in European circus families, where circus families were continued through many generations.

Acrobatics in China after 1949

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was formally established, with its national capital at Beijing (known in the West as "Peking"). All the companies and businesses in the nation became government property, including the acrobatic troupes. Generally, the Communist government approved of acrobatics because it was considered an art of the people, not an elite art form. The "people's government" made great efforts to foster and develop national arts, and acrobatics gained a new life as every province, municipality and autonomous region set up their own acrobatic troupes.

In Communist theory, everyone is provided for and taken care of equally: the term "Iron Rice Bowl" means all eat out of the same rice bowl. For acrobatic troupes, this meant that the government took care of their operational costs, so performers didn't need to worry about meeting annual financial earnings. However, some in China saw inconsistencies between Communist theory and practice, as people in powerful government positions appeared to be better off financially and receive many perks.

In the "new" China, there have been great improvements in the contents and skill of acrobatics. Acrobatic acts are designed and directed with the goal of creating graceful stage images. Harmonious musical accompaniment and the added effects of costumes, props and lighting turn these acrobatic performances into exciting full-fledged stage art. At present, Chinese acrobatics is full of optimism, determined to reflect the industry, resourcefulness, courage and undaunted spirit of the Chinese people.

Recent changes within China's government allow artists more freedom to create and build, and have led to dramatic improvements in the working lives of acrobats. Now, acrobats are permitted to form their own performing groups, and to seek opportunities to perform for their own financial gain. Acrobats can now perform later into adulthood. Currently, there are over 100 acrobatic troupes operated by the Chinese government and hundreds more family and private troupes performing in China.



Mao Tse-Tong (1893–1976), founder of the People's Republic of China, greets Chinese acrobats.

6 Facts about China

Reprinted with permission from the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts



Size

The fourth largest country in the world, China's land mass is only slightly smaller than the United States. Its population of 1.3 billion is the largest in the world— more than four times the size of the U.S.

Population Control

Married people of the Han majority (92% of the population) are allowed to give birth to only one child—unless the couple are both only children themselves, and then the couple may have two. Minority families may have as many children as they wish.

Changes in Government

The earliest and most enduring system of government in China began around 1111 B.C.. It was dynastic in structure which means that an emperor ruled until he died or passed it on to a son or nephew. Ancient Chinese history is recorded by the family names of the dynasties. During most of human history — and until the 15th century — China was the most advanced country in the world in terms of technological development and culture.

In 1911, a revolution ended over 2000 years of imperial rule. By 1921 the Communist Party of China was founded. In a Communist state, all businesses, property, foods, goods and services are owned and operated by the government and distributed to the people by the government.

Over the last 30 years, the Chinese government has changed to a unique political blend. China maintains a communist government within a socialist society and a capitalist economy. The opening up of China to Western ideas has dramatically affected its people. A gap is widening between rich and poor, rural and urban, and eastern and western China. As more and more of the world's products are being manufactured there, China's gross national product has grown as much 10% over the last few years. After the United States, China now is the second largest economy in the world.

Pollution

No country in history has emerged as a major industrial power without creating a legacy of environmental damage. Because of its unprecedented economic growth over the last three decades, China's pollution problems have shattered



Left to right: Temple of Heavens in Beijing; 2008 Olympic logo; Chinese students

all precedents. 70% of the water in China is polluted and only 1% of the 560 million city dwellers breathe air that it considered safe. The Chinese are working hard to counter the affects of this tragic situation.

Symbols of Old and New China

The Great Wall of China was built and rebuilt between 5th c. B.C. and 16th c. to protect the northern borders of the Chinese Empire, and is the world's largest man-made structure. Some of its stretches have been restored enough for people to walk along today.

The Temple of the Heavens in Beijing is one of the few antiquities that were saved during the Cultural Revolution. This temple was the site of annual ceremonies of prayer for good harvest during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Today its lush and extensive grounds are heavily used as a public park.

The Chinese were excited to host the 2008 Olympic games. Because the government knows that the games would allow many of the world's people to see inside China for the first time, many improvements were made: from thousands of new trees planted and new hotels built to old sites renovated for tourists. Based in Beijing, portions of the Olympic games were played in other regions of China.

Some still commute to work or school by bicycle or bus. Increasingly, the influence of the West can be seen in the growing number of cars — and the resulting traffic problems in cities.

Schools in China

China has the largest educational system in the world — over 1,170,000 schools of various kinds, enrolling over 318,000,000 students — and it is run by the central government. Since 1970's, many changes have resulted in an increasingly literate populace (recorded in 2001 as 90%). Educational change has been most rapid in the urban areas such as Beijing and Shanghai because of their greater resources. Since 2001, there has been a curriculum reform effort towards more student-centered programs and thus the government has allowed regions to set some of their own courses.

In China, children start school at six years old and must attend for nine years. Primary education is free, but the parents pay for everything from the children's paper to the school's electric bills. Secondary education is paid for by the parents, with scholarships available for those in need. To continue into high school, students must do well on a series of tests and it is steeply competitive to get

into the best schools. Vocational schools have been recently developed for students who do not want to go on to universities.

The average size class — even in elementary school — is 60 students. According to the Chinese, discipline problems are few due to the widespread teaching by parents that children must listen to their teachers. In such large classes, the instruction is necessarily largely didactic and teacher-centered. Every student in China does morning exercises before school and at a given time during the school day. The exercises are done in unison and accompanied by recorded music. Students in secondary schools all wear unisex school uniforms. Art is taught in Chinese schools where students learn the craft of painting and drawing.

Chinese Folk Tales

Because Chinese acrobatics grew out of a folk custom, reading a selection of folktales can give students a broader context from which to understand the folkways of the Chinese people.

Bedard, Michael. *The painted wall and other strange tales*. Tundra Books, 2003. This delightful collection of traditional Chinese tales is told by a master storyteller.

Demi. *The greatest treasure*. Scholastic Press, 1998. In this traditional Chinese tale, a poor man receives a treasure of gold and discovers the true value of simple pleasures.

Jiang, Ji-li. *The magical Monkey King: mischief in heaven*. Harper Trophy, 2002. These hilarious stories bring the Monkey King, the irrepressible trickster hero of Chinese legend, and his friends to life.

Kimmel, Eric A. *Ten suns: a Chinese legend*. Holiday House, 1998. When the ten sons of Di Jun walk across the sky together causing the earth to burn from the blazing heat, their father looks for a way to stop the destruction.

Louie, Ai-Ling. Yeh-Shen. *A Cinderella story from China*. Philomel Books, 1982. This version of the Cinderella story, in which a young girl overcomes the wickedness of her stepsister and stepmother to become the bride of a prince, is based on ancient Chinese manuscripts written 1000 years before the earliest European version.

Mahy, Margaret. *The seven Chinese brothers*. Scholastic, 1989. Seven Chinese brothers elude execution by virtue of their extraordinary individual qualities. When honest Chang is tricked out of his magic boat, he and his friends venture to win it back from wicked Ying and the greedy Emperor.

San Souci, Robert D. Fa. *Mulan, The story of a woman warrior*. Hyperion Books for Children, 1998. A retelling of the original Chinese poem in which a brave young girl masquerades as a boy and fights the Tartars in the Khan's army.

Young, Ed. *The sons of the Dragon King: a Chinese legend*. New York, 2004. This Caldecott Medalist tells the legend of a parent recognizing the potential in his very special children, and in doing so, shows how a simple folktale has shaped a visible part of Chinese culture.

Young, Ed. *The lost horse: a Chinese folktale*. Silver Whistle/Harcourt Brace, 1998. A retelling of the tale about a Chinese man who owned a marvelous horse and who believed that things were not always as bad, or as good, as they might seem.

7 Learning Activities

Performance and Culture

Questions for Students:

1. How long have acrobatics existed in China?
2. At what age do acrobats typically begin training in China?
3. What types of props are used in acrobatic routines?
4. Can you name three major cities in China?
5. Why do acrobats wear colorful costumes?
6. Name the 4 basic acrobatic skills learned in basic training.
7. Name 5 acrobatic acts created in China.
8. What are the “3 P’s” common to the secrets of learning acrobatics and becoming a good student?

Younger elementary students: Practice, Practice, Practice

Older students and adults: Practice, Perseverance, Patience

9. Name one word to describe acrobatics.
10. Can you remember one major Chinese holiday celebration that always features acrobats?

Visual Arts (Grades K-6)

Discussion and Activity:

Think about the Golden Dragon Acrobats performance. Which amazing act was your favorite? Discuss what you liked best about the show and why. Create an advertisement for a future Golden Dragon Acrobats performance. Make sure to incorporate an illustration and words that you think reflect the best part of the show.

English Language Arts (Grades 2-6)

Vocabulary Builder

Practice dictionary skills and build vocabulary. Look through the *SchoolTime* study guide and make a list of unfamiliar words. Check the glossary on page 14, and then use a dictionary to look up the meaning of words. Write and share sentences using your newly learned words.

Social Studies (Grades 3-12)

Headlines about China

There are regularly news stories about events in China. Look for news about China either on the television or radio, or in newspapers or magazines. Then, bring in articles, make up your own headline, or write a one paragraph version of stories you've seen on TV or heard on the radio. Share your news stories about China with each other, and together discuss these current events and topics.

Extensions:

- As a class, choose the articles that most interest you. Then, in groups of 4 or 5 people, research the topic in more depth, and share a brief presentation with the class.
- Brainstorm together what you know about China, the Chinese people, and the Chinese government. Write a few paragraphs about what it might be like to live in China today. In what ways might it be different from the way you live here?

Performing Arts (Grades K-6)

Object Balancing: Activity and Reflection (Grades K-6):

Take a large sheet of newspaper, roll it up as tightly as you can and tape it in the middle and at the ends. (Teachers can prepare these.) Place your "newspaper stick" on the palm of your right or left hand and try to keep it balanced and upright. Do this for a few minutes then reflect on what it was like. Talk about what the acrobats' training must be like for them to develop their skills.

Human Sculptures: Activity, Discussion and Kinesthetic Reflection (Grades K-8)

Imagine that you are like clay and can mold your body into different shapes like triangles, circles, and objects like tables, flowers, ladders, etc.

- First try this by yourself. Experiment with using high, medium and low levels when making shapes with your body, and try to use your entire body.
- Then, work in pairs or in groups to create more shape and object sculptures.
- Afterwards, discuss as a class the difference between making the shapes by yourself and with others.
- Look for the shapes the Golden Dragon Acrobats make with their bodies during their performance. When you return to class, stand in a circle and try to imitate the shapes you saw the performers make

Stage Picture: Discussion, Activity and Sharing (Grades 3-6):

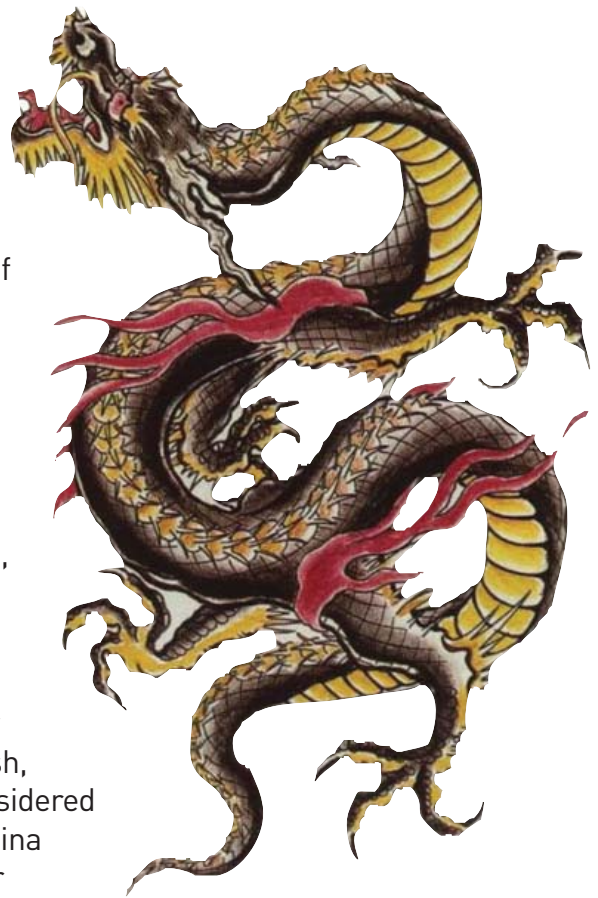
Discuss some of the acts and the stage pictures you remember. What do you think the artists were trying to show? If you were to create a frozen stage picture representing one of your own emotions or beliefs, what might it look like? Talk about this in groups of 4 or 5 people, then decide together on a frozen stage picture that is safe and easy for your bodies to create and hold. Have each group share with the class.

Dance of the Dragon (Grades K-6)

The dragon is an important symbol in China and part of one of the most important holidays, the Chinese New Year. During this festival, parades of dragons dance down the street, bringing prosperity and good fortune to the new year.

An emblem of the emperors of China, the dragon represents strength, bravery, and nobility. The Chinese people proudly call themselves “Lung Tik chuan Ren,” or “descendants of the dragon.” The dragon appears in art, literature, architecture, songs, dances, and other aspects of Chinese culture.

The Chinese dragon is different in appearance and character from the fierce, fire-breathing dragon of Western culture. It combines the features of many creatures: the body of a snake, scales and tail of a fish, antlers of a deer, and talons of an eagle. It is not considered evil, but a symbol of power and respect. In fact, in China it is forbidden to show images depicting the killing or disfiguring of a dragon.



With your class, try creating your own *Dance of the Dragon*. Here's how:

1. In groups of 3 or 4, create a dragon together with your bodies.

As you talk with your group, ask yourselves:

- What are the different parts of your dragon? Decide who will be the head, body & tail.
- How does your dragon move? (Experiment with your dragon's “energy”. For example, does it have a slow, slinky energy? Or a quick, energetic one?)
- What kind of noise might your dragon make? (You don't have to use your voice for this noise.)
- How can you work together to make your dragon seem like one creature?

Option: Using markers, paint or paper and glue, create a mask or face for the dragon with your group.

2. After you have explored ideas for moving as a dragon, make up a simple dance for your dragon. Your dance does not need to have a lot of moves; since this dance is usually done while marching in a parade, you can keep repeating your moves over and over again. Make sure your movements are clear and remember your dragon's “energy.”

3. Have each group share their Dance of the Dragon with the rest of the class. To enhance your parade, ask your teacher to play some traditional Chinese music to accompany the dances.

Common sayings in acrobatic training schools:

“Seven minutes on stage is equal to ten years of training.”

“One must be able to enduring suffering to become a good acrobat.”

“Not too fast, not too slow: you need to be patient and to follow the middle road to find success in your acrobatic skills.”

Mandarin Basics

1. How are you?

Ni3 hao3 ma5?

你好吗?

2. Hello

Ni3 hao3

你好!

3. Thank you

Xie4xie4

谢谢

4. I like your show

Wo3 xi3huan1 zhe4 chang3 xi4

我喜欢这场戏

5. Very great!

Tai4 hao3 le5

太好了

Info on tones can be found here: <http://www.pinyin.org/pinyinTones.cfm>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfC9p3CU1PQ&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qpa3NjYaEWc&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qmvDL6qlCI&NR=1>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enFBCCjT9Ms&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74xg3VUZhol&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kt3b8xYdA-A&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qmvDL6qlCI&NR=1>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enFBCCjT9Ms&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpqDgPbsVTE&feature=related>

8 Glossary

acrobat: a skilled performer of gymnastic feats, as walking on a tightrope or swinging on a trapeze

agility: the ability to move quickly and easily

adeptness: skillful performance or ability without difficulty

autonomous: self-governing, independent, subject to its own laws only

choreographer: a person who creates dance compositions and plans and arranges patterns of movements for dances



contortionists: a flexible performer able to move muscles, limbs and joints into unusual positions.

evolve: to change and develop gradually

exaggerate: to increase or enlarge abnormally

gymnast: a person highly trained to display strength, balance and agility

jubilant: showing great joy, satisfaction, or triumph

leisure: time free from the demands of work or duty, when one can rest, enjoy hobbies or sports

novelty: state or quality of being novel, new, or unique; newness

prestigious: having a high reputation, honored, esteemed

renewal: to restore or replenish, restart

revered: to regard with awe, admiration, and devotion

rudimentary: most basic and simple

somersault: a stunt in which the body rolls forward or backward in a complete circle with the knees bent and the feet coming over the head

troupe: a company, band, or group of singers, actors, or other performers that travels about together

9 California State Standards

Theater:

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context: Students analyze the role of development of theater, film/video, and electronic media in the past and present cultures throughout the world. Noting diversity as it relates to the theater.

K.3.1 Retell or dramatize stories, myths, fables, and fairy tales for various cultures and times.

4.3.1 Identify theatrical or storytelling traditions in the cultures of ethnic groups throughout the history of California.

5.0 Connections, Relationships, and Applications: Students apply what they learn in theater, film/video, and electronic media across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and time management that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to theater.

Physical Education:

Standard 1: Students demonstrate the motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.

K.1.6 Balance on one, two, three, four, and five body parts.

1.1.6 Balance oneself, demonstrating momentary stillness, in symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes using body parts other than both feet as a base of support.

5.1.1 Perform simple small-group balance stunts by distributing weight and base of support.

6.1.11 Design and perform smooth, flowing sequences of stunts, tumbling, and rhythmic patterns that combine traveling, rolling, balancing, and transferring weight.

Standard 2: Students demonstrate knowledge of movement concepts, principles, and strategies that apply to the learning and performance of physical activities.

4.2.10 Design a routine to music that includes even and uneven locomotor patterns.

4.3.1 Participate in appropriate warm-up and cool-down exercises for particular physical activities.

Standard 3: Students assess and maintain a level of physical fitness to improve health and performance.

3.5.3 List the benefits of following and the risks of not following safety procedures and rules associated with physical activity.

Student Resource Sheet

Golden Dragon Acrobats

The Performers

The Golden Dragon Acrobats are from the People's Republic of China. They are one of the most popular Chinese acrobats in the world and have been performing all over the United States for over 20 years. The Chang family started the Golden Dragon Acrobats. Danny Chang who is the now troupe's director, started training to be an acrobat at the age of eight, and then performed with the company at the age of ten.

The Show

At the show the acrobats will perform amazing acts like spinning plates on sticks, juggling objects with their feet, balancing human pyramids on top of moving bicycles, twisting their bodies into all kinds of shapes, and much more. The acrobats perform alone (solo) or with others (in a group or "ensemble") All of the acts require strength, flexibility and concentration, but the group acts also need the performers to cooperate well with each other. If one person is careless, it puts everyone in danger.

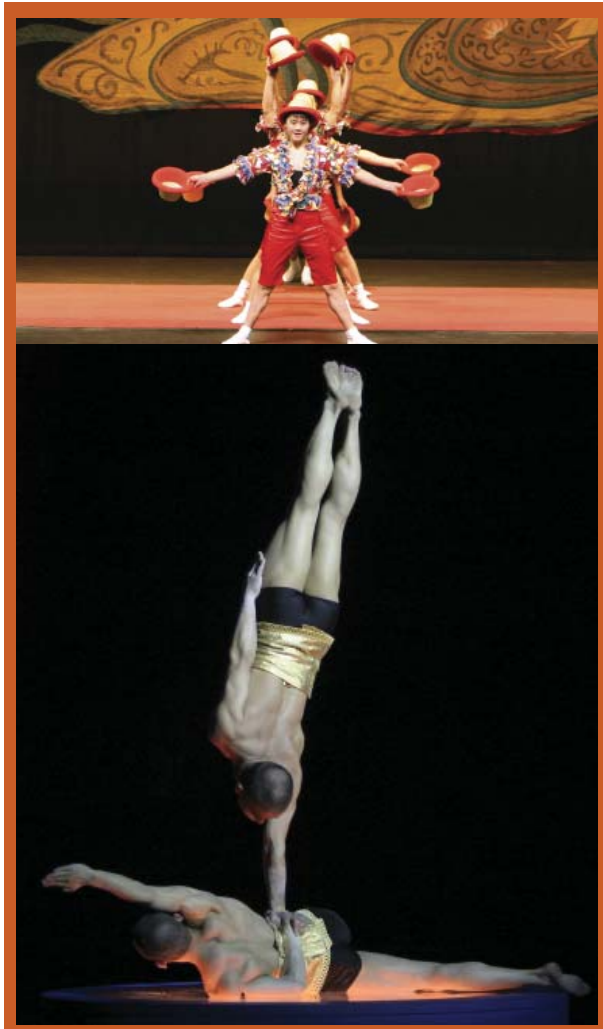
History of Chinese Acrobats

Acrobatics developed over 2,500 years ago in the Wujiao area of China's Hebei Province. As people didn't have television or other electronic inventions, they learned new skills like acrobatics. Using their imaginations, they took everyday objects like tables, chairs, jars, plates and bowls and practiced juggling and balancing with them.

Acrobatic acts became a feature at celebrations, like harvest festivals. Soon the art form caught the attention of emperors who helped spread the acrobats' popularity. As their audience grew, acrobats added traditional dance, eye-catching costumes, music and theatrical techniques to their performances to make the experience even more enjoyable.

Golden Dragon Facts

- The performers in the troupe range in age from 17 to 22. Some of them started training at five years old.
- There are 25 members of the Golden Dragon Acrobats. Following Chinese custom, the company works together like a family. No one gets special "star" treatment.
- During the show, each performer makes at least six or eight costume changes.
- It takes up to three months to create one of their costumes, from design to finished product.



China Facts

- The fourth largest country in the world
- Population over 1.3 billion people
- One of the earliest centers of human civilization
- The written Chinese language is the oldest and uses over 10,000 characters.
- Inventions include gunpowder, paper, the compass, printing, kites, clocks, the abacus and spaghetti

Acrobatic Families

Like European acrobatic troupes, many Chinese troupes were family-owned, and several still are today. Family troupes would keep the techniques of their acts secret, teaching them only to their children and other close relatives. Touring the countryside as street performers, certain families became successful for their signature acts. Two famous acrobatic families were the Dung family, known for their magic acts, and the Chen Family, known for their unique style of juggling.

Acrobatics in the People's Republic of China

In October 1949, a communist government came into power in China. China's companies and businesses became the government's property, including the acrobatic troupes. Since acrobatics was considered an art form that was popular with all people, not just the rich or educated, the government supported acrobatic troupes, and even gave money to create new troupes in different regions of the country. However, government

ownership also meant that troupes had less artistic freedom and individual acrobats didn't have a choice about where they worked or who they worked with.

Today, in the "new" China, acrobats have made great improvements in both the staging and skill of their art form. Companies use music, costumes, props and lighting to create striking and imaginative stage productions.

Acrobatic Training

There are as many as 100,000 people who attend special acrobat schools in China today. Students start training at age five or six, working from early in the morning to late afternoon, six days a week. Students learn and then continue developing the four skills which are an acrobat's foundation: handstand, tumbling, flexibility and dance. After almost 10 years of hard training, the most talented students join professional city-wide troupes, and only a few of these skilled performers are then chosen to be part of internationally known companies like the Golden Dragon Acrobats.

Questions to Think About During the Performance

- What do the Golden Dragon Acrobats have in common with other acrobats you've seen? How are they different?
- What elements of China's culture, history or everyday life do you see in the performance?
- There is a saying in Chinese acrobatic schools, "Seven minutes on stage is equal to 10 years of practice." What do you think this means?





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