



# The 7 Fingers: *Reversible*

Using Tension & Balance to Tell Family Stories



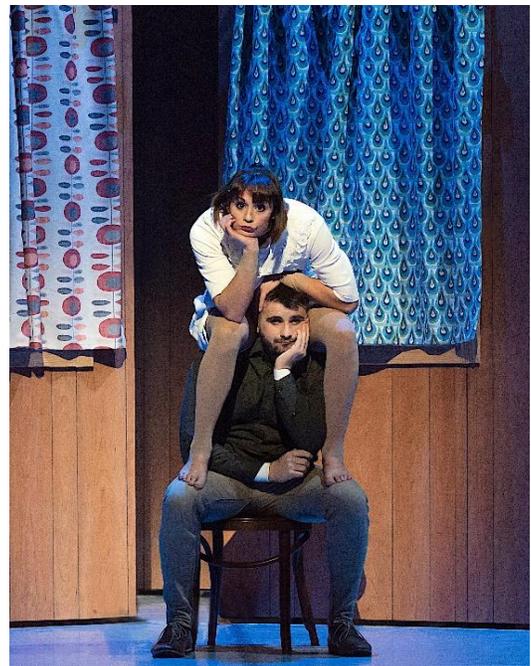
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# Table of Contents

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

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# 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.

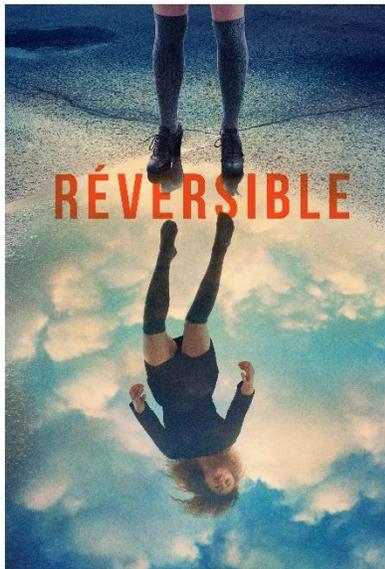
**R = Respect** the performers and other audience members. At a performance, you, the others in the audience and the artists are sharing this experience together and are part of a performance community. Think about ways you can best support the community's performance experience.

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 and living rooms, 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 Tétréault) 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, "Reversible" is a playful and moving exploration of the role each of our ancestors play in our lives. To create the performance, each of the company's cast members researched their own family histories, interviewing older generations about their dreams, struggles, and secrets. Then, they wove them together into a unique mix of theater, circus arts, dance, music, and acrobatics. The performers of The 7 Fingers take us on a vibrant journey through space and time to a world filled with beauty, wonder, and hope. Be prepared for the best in contemporary circus arts – moments of pure grace yielding to rushes of adrenalin – as these multitalented artists create an intergenerational bridge between past and present, then and now.

**Directed, written, and choreographed by**

Gypsy Snider

**Starring**

Jérémi Lévesque, Maria Del Mar Reyes, Vincent Jutras, Émilie Silliau, Hugo Ragetly, Emi Vauthey, Julien Silliau, Natasha Patterson

# Artistic Concept: Tension and Balance

## ***How do the performers in *The 7 Fingers* use tension and balance to tell stories about their ancestors?***

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 their families.

**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.

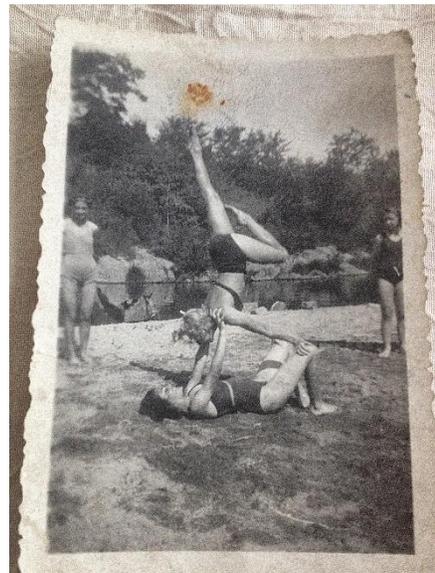
In the performing arts, **tension is akin to a feeling of suspense, a kind of uncertainty about and interest in the outcome of certain actions**. In dance and acrobatics, we see tension in the bodies of the performers as they stretch, reach, climb and move in ways we don't often see in real life. And 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: portraying family characters, the performers show us their characters' emotions and relationships. These are at times joyful, at times painful, and sometimes even ambivalent (when someone has mixed feelings.) This tension draws us into the performance, and offers rich, complicated characters we identify with and care about. Without this tension we'd just see a pleasant (but boring) story, where no one is challenged, no one feels deeply, and no one grows from experience. Tension makes a story juicy!

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.

# 12 Things You Should Know about *Reversible*

- ❖ The inspiration for the final scene of the show came during Gypsy's trip to her family's farm in Massachusetts. She was hanging laundry on a clothesline. There wasn't anyone for miles around her.
- ❖ Natasha started performing professionally when she was nine.
- ❖ Six of the eight performers graduated from *École Nationale de Cirque*, five of whom got their diplomas one month before creation of *Reversible* began.
- ❖ To create the characters for *Reversible*, The artists researched their family histories for almost a year. Prior to this research, many among them weren't aware of the dark pasts of some of their ancestors.
- ❖ Hugo hadn't ever hung a piece of laundry on a clothesline before this production.
- ❖ Two of our performers play a married couple on stage and they are married in real life.
- ❖ The aerial scene symbolizes determination, resilience, and sisterhood. It tells the story of two women who, at a specific moment during their lives, decided to take a leap to live the way they wanted to live. The choice first caused them incredible loneliness, but proved emancipating and liberating as they opened up to the world and took part in a global movement.
- ❖ All four of the beautiful and talented women in the show created comedy routines based on their grandmothers' true life stories.
- ❖ Jérémi is the most agile of all on stage and the clumsiest of all offstage.
- ❖ Three doors were destroyed during the show's creation.
- ❖ Vincent studied to be a baker.
- ❖ Julien has performed in several other 7 Fingers shows: *Traces*, *PSY*, *Amuse*, and *Queen of the Night*.
- ❖ The carousel in the final scene is a time machine for Natasha. Every room that she visits represents a specific era inspired by the lives of her ancestors. Using the juggling balls, she is able to delve into different memories.
- ❖ All the clowning/physical comedy scenes are played by the four females in the cast.
- ❖ There is an act that combines juggling fans and cracking whips with dialogue from Ionesco's play *Bald Soprano* which originally premiered in 1950.
- ❖ The completely original soundtrack of *Reversible* features over 15 of Montreal's finest musicians and singers.



# 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://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrdIOHYmxJY>

**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 the tension shown in the characters' emotions and relationships 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 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 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 7 Fingers characters related to one another?
  - c) What role did the characters' emotions play 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

## “Family Stories” Options

### a) Discussions

- What’s a story your family likes to tell? (Maybe your great aunt always talks about the time your grandmother and grandfather met by accident, or your dad complains about how he had to walk uphill in the snow to get to school each day as a child.)
- Read stories about families set during eras when your parents or grandparents were children, like:
  - Lakas and the Manilatown Fish* by Tony Robles
  - The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros
  - Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai
  - Brown Girl Dreaming*, by Jacqueline Woodson
  - One Crazy Summer*, by Marjorie Priceman
  - American Born Chinese*, by Gene Luen Yang

### b) Ask each student to bring in a photo of an older family member and:

- Post the photos on the wall, or create a class photo book. Have each student share a memory of their family member.
- Create a Day of the Dead altar honoring family members who have passed and invite students to share about these family members.
- Ask students to interview an older family member about what life was like when they were children. Students may then write it up as an essay and include a photo of the family member as a child.

### 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://7fingers.com/the7fingers>

### Video Clips of The 7 Fingers:

*Reversible* trailer:

<https://tinyurl.com/yaeboxmg>

Interview with *Reversible* Director Gypsy Snyder:

<https://tinyurl.com/ychu2zd5>

*Reversible* preshow training:

<https://tinyurl.com/y9ssl2mj>

Video Blog of *Reversible*:

<https://tinyurl.com/ya6xrlna>





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And thanks to our many individual donors for their generous and continued support!

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