



Cirque Éloïze: *HOTEL*

Using Tension & Balance to Tell the Story of a Place



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Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Berkeley

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How to use this Engagement Guide

If you have photos or lesson plans to share, please let us know! Use #CirqueEloize@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.

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

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.

Artistically literate student audiences come 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 Cirque Éloize, watch for how the artists use tension and balance when bringing their characters to life, and the ways in which 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 Cirque Éloize

Cirque Éloize has produced magical, groundbreaking performances since 1993. A trailblazer in the world of contemporary circus arts, Cirque Éloize was the first troupe in North America to bring a unique style of intimate, storytelling circus to audiences all over the world.

Cirque Éloize creates its shows from the ground up, crafting them with multidisciplinary artists and blending circus arts with music, dance and technology to tell stories in a whole new way. Combining breathtaking feats with engaging stories, Cirque Éloize continues to evolve, exploring resonant themes using daring, innovative circus techniques to create deeply engaging performances.

This year marks Cirque Éloize's 27th anniversary. Over the years the troupe has travelled to over 550 cities and performed over 5,500 shows.



About *HOTEL*

Cirque Éloize's *HOTEL* is the story of a place, but mainly it's a place full of stories. This is the place where we mingle with strangers for a moment. From the Maître d'hôtel, overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle, to the mischievous maid, to the devoted handyman and his inseparable dog, Carpette, the hotel's staff is like each of us, privileged witnesses to the lives of colorful individuals.

From the hotel's top floor, a guest narrates, introducing us to the characters and telling their stories. Meet the lovers still unaware of their romantic destiny, the improbable travelers on journeys of discovery, and the celebrity pursuing stardom, who also reveals her vulnerable humanity. Enter the lobby doors of this grand hotel to discover the intricately woven story of these travelers.

"There are places where everyone is a stranger to one another and a foreigner to the environs and their customs. Places that bring people in transition together, from tourists, businesswomen and a celebrity, to the anonymous, the denizens of the night and life's adventurers... Impromptu encounters that upset the everyday balance of things, draw you

into the unexpected, into extravagance and into a new lightness of being. Our hotel presents this playground and brings alive the circus maxim that “anything is possible.” Through the language of acrobatics, our artists portray these characters and tell the story of their encounters - our encounters.” – **Emmanuel Guillaume, Director**

“To express the world of *HOTEL*, I dove into my childhood memories of when we had a rooming house with a French restaurant, which was the ultimate in chic in our small rural area. My mother loved the classics of Yves Montand through to the jazz of the Hotclub of France. The swing rhythms of the speakeasy bars, in fact, have colored my creation a lot. The smooth voice of Sabrina Halde, with her mastery and passionate interpretations, has particularly inspired my writing. The thrumming gypsy guitar, the piano that seems to have a life of its own and the incandescent brass section, they sketch out the humanity that brings the music of this hotel alive.”

– **Eloi Painchaud, Musical Director, Composer & Arranger**

Starring in *HOTEL*:

Andrei Anissimov, Tuedon Ariri, Una Bennett, Philippe Dupuis, Julius Bitterling, Sabrina Halde, Cooper Lee Smith, Cory Marsh, César Mispelon, Emma Rogers, Jérémy Vitupier, Antonin Wicky





Artistic Concept: Tension and Balance

How do the performers in Cirque Éloize use tension and balance to tell stories about the hotel and its guests?

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!) When you come see Cirque Éloize 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.

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 about creative tension where artists are in conflict with one another, but tension as an artistic concept that shows up on stage as something with which the audience engages.

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 guests in a hotel, 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.

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?
- How is exploring tension and balance with a partner different from exploring it on your own?

Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive listening. Balance. Tension.

Balance is having the right amount — not too much or too little — of any quality, which leads to harmony or evenness. You might admire the *balance* someone has achieved between working hard and having fun.

Balance is also the physical steadiness that keeps you on your feet. You balance your weight between both sides of your body. Balance has a verb form that has several shades of meaning, typically involving one thing correctly weighed against another, like when you balance your budget.



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?time_continue=30&v=p542lm-Czc4&feature=emb_logo

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



Engagement Activity #2 (Post-Performance)

TENSION AND BALANCE IN CIRQUE ÉLOIZE: Reflection & Artistic Exploration

Guiding Questions

How do the 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 Cirque Éloize's 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 Cirque Éloize's performance and jot or sketch some of their memories of the performance.

- a) Where did you see tension and balance in how the characters in *HOTEL* moved?
- b) Where did you see tension and balance in how *HOTEL* 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 Cirque Éloize performers 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

“Stories of Travel” Options

a) Discussions

- Have you taken an interesting trip with your family? Or maybe you’ve heard someone in your family tell a story about a trip they took? (Maybe your grandmother tells the story of coming to America with her parents, or your dad talks about the crazy camping trip he went on as a boy.)
- In small groups or pairs, share some of these stories.
- Read stories or poems about travels to unfamiliar places, like:

Traveling the Blue Road: Poems of the Sea, by Lee Bennett Hopkins and Bob and Jovan Hansman

The Incredible Hotel, by Kate Davies

Traveling Man: The Journey of Ibn Battuta, by James Rumford

Traveling to Tondo: A Tale of the Nkundo of Zaire, by Verna Aardema

The Hotel Between, by Sean Easley

b) Ask each student to bring in a picture of a place they’ve traveled to, or a place they’d like to visit.

- Post the pictures on the wall, or create a class book of images. Have each student tell a story (true or imagined) of taking a trip to the place shown in their picture. Encourage them to use all their senses – what could they see, hear, smell, touch and taste?
- Create a map with all the places students would like to visit. (You can post the pictures on this map as well.) Ask students to research these places and share fun or weird facts about them with the class.
- Ask students to interview an older family member about a memorable trip they took as a child. 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 Cirque Éloize web site:

<https://www.cirque-eloize.com/en/>

Video Clips of Cirque Éloize:

Overview/Show reels:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InXePcrt8A0>

HOTEL in rehearsal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xVMtG_hH2k

From the show iD: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhpLEYEkBxs_j





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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 Taun Miller Wright. Phone: 510.643.7053 / Email: twright@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 or 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.