

TEACHER GUIDE

THE CRYSTAL AND THE SPHERE

2008

This show is built upon the staging device of “**black light.**” Actually your students could build their own black light show. The tube lights are not too expensive to buy. One tube might cost about \$18.50 and two would work as illumination for a student performance, but four would be better. There are a lot of magical effects that can be generated using black light.

This teacher guide will concentrate on using this staging device, but many of the ideas could also work in the classroom without the lighting. This guide can also be used as an introduction or a pre-performance guide. Then after the show, the same dances could be reviewed with more in-depth understanding on the part of the students.

Alwin Nikolais credo, which follows, is well illustrated by this show: “When children come to the theatre they come to see theatrical magic, not dramatic or political problems, but magic.”

TO BEGIN: All Nikolais performances begin with AN OVERTURE. The purpose of an overture is to set the mood. To get the audience to settle down and concentrate on what is about to happen. Since Alwin Nikolais is a renaissance man who had complete control over his work, all choreography, costume and light design, sound scores and staging comes from his fertile mind and imagination. So the OVERTURE was composed by him to get you in the mood of what is to come.

I. THE CRYSTAL AND THE SPHERE

We are introduced to the stage setting, which will remain throughout the performance. A CRYSTAL, which is a triangular piece of Plexiglas, upon which slides are projected from overhead, and the SPHERE, which is a ball-like formation that changes its colors and forms also from slide projections. The background also has projections at times. A student show would not need projections.

In the first dance, the dancers have narrow scarves in their hands. All you see is the body part THE HANDS.

QUESTION A. How is it that only the hands and the scarves can be seen? It would be good to see if any student has had experience with black light. After this discussion the students will realize that any body part that is covered in black, or is not illuminated because of the darkness of the stage will not be seen. So the hands and scarves appear because they are a light color that picks up the black light.

QUESTION B. What kind of “BODY PART” dances could you make that would be interesting. Experiment with a few of them Have the whole class try variations.

You might choose the feet, the head, elbows and knees, fingers. How could those body parts be costumed so only they would show up in the black light?

II. DANCE OF THE CRYSTAL AND THE SPHERE

This dance is built on the principal of a costume that is brightly colored on one side and black on the other side, so when the dancers turn to face backwards, they disappear. There are many clever variations on this theme in the dance.

EXPLORATION A. Practice making movements where the facing is all-frontal. Realize that if you twist your arms, head, body or legs that they will show a black side and will not show in the black light. Practice this in twos. One person will watch to catch movements that would not show in the black light. See if the two of you can make a phrase of movements that are sure to show up in the light. Rhythmatize this phrase and share with the rest of the class.

EXPLORATION B With your partner, think up some devices that would be very surprising when you work with this idea of back and front, appear and disappear.

III. WADDLE BIRDS AND POLE DANCE

These two dances are very interesting. The WADDLE BIRDS look like two strange chickens and the dance is built around the image the costume gives. The POLE DANCE is like a creature tied to a pole who does tricks and is based upon the prop of the pole and the ties that tether the “monkey” dancer to the pole. These dances might be catalysts to create costumes or props that would generate dance ideas.

IV. LADY OF THE SEA

This dance uses a device that would be a lot of fun for the children to create. The “fish” is a puppet that is manipulated by a dancer dressed all in black. So the manipulator does not show. In an earlier children’s show, Ririe-Woodbury used the idea of cardboard pieces that were brightly painted and manipulated by dancers. One idea was cardboard whirligigs that could be spun and the motion, sort of like a windmill was very exciting as it moved through space. Another idea was a person made of separate body parts. The arms, legs, head, body was separated at first and after dancing around they came together to work like a puppet. The children loved this image.

QUESTION: What kind of cardboard images could you make to be used in a black light performance? What could happen to these cardboard pieces to make a statement? Small drawings could be made and then by vote, the class could manufacture the chosen pieces and a dance could be made to be used in the black light performance. Use your imagination, some of the other dances might start your students thinking, or new ideas might emerge.

NOTE: Black Light tubes can be purchased at Oasis Stage Werks 363-0364

Refer to past teacher’s guides at www.ririwoodbury.com for more creative ideas!