

primary education kit

australian theatre of the deaf

LEAPING

off the page



ATOD

Performing
quality
school shows
for 20 years

Australian Theatre of the Deaf

In 1999 Australian Theatre of the Deaf (ATOD) celebrates its 20th birthday as a professional theatre company. Supported by the Australia Council for the Arts, NSW Ministry for the Arts, sponsors, members and donations, ATOD produces mainstage productions, school shows for all levels of education and community shows.

Renowned for its unique and accessible visual style, the company tours throughout Australia and supplements its program with workshops in visual theatre and non-verbal communication, performances at corporate events, launches, fundraisers and festivals. ATOD also organises Auslan (Australian Sign Language) Interpreted performances for other theatre companies.

'Leaping off the Page'

With a reputation for presenting high quality, educational shows at schools, Australian Theatre of the Deaf has designed 'Leaping off the Page' to introduce young readers to the magical world hidden within books as they witness stories leaping into three dimensional performances.

For the children 'Leaping ' will create a new appreciation of books that they have already read (teachers are asked to choose three books from the list of twelve to read and concentrate on in class). 'Leaping' also creates an interactive show where children can select the remainder of the books to be performed.

'Leaping off the Page' is not about Deafness or Sign Language per se, rather it presents a style of theatre that is inherently 'deaf' performed by professional Deaf actors - ie the style has its origin in the way deaf people communicate with gestures, mime and facial expressions to complement Sign Language.

Education Kit

This education kit introduces the books available for the performance, information about Deafness, Sign Language and Visual Communication. We have accompanied the information with activity ideas to enhance your classroom preparation for the show. These activity ideas are starting points and can be adapted to suit different grades.

For further activities regarding visual theatre and non-verbal communication, Australian Theatre of the Deaf can run the workshop 'Playing With Drama' at your school. 'Playing with Drama', explores theatre skills, acting games, movement & other aspects of drama. Our professional Deaf actors lead children through a program designed to develop skills, increase confidence and have fun. Special discounts apply for schools that have booked a performance of 'Leaping off the Page'.

Additional resources are listed on the back of this kit and you are also welcome to contact the ATOD office to discuss ideas further.

Book List

Teachers are to choose **three** books from this list for the performance of 'Leaping off the Page'. Please tell the actors when they arrive which **three** books have been selected (as our actors are Deaf please write these three books on a sheet of paper).

Throughout the 50 minute performance children will choose other books from this list to be performed to create an interactive atmosphere for the audience.

To maximise enjoyment and understanding for the children, we recommend teachers read in class the three books selected. Studying the books can include asking children what is going to happen next during the first reading, talk about what happened in the plot and/or organising children to draw a favourite scene (this will help establish a visual connection with the story). Many of the books have issues and themes that can complement areas of the primary syllabus with further activities.

1. 'Sophie' by Mem Fox.

A beautifully touching story that concentrates on Sophie's special bond with her grandfather. The story traces the circle of generations from birth through to death and covers issues of love, relationships, growing up, growing old, grieving and the continuation of life and families with new birth. ★ **Activity idea:** Children draw their own family tree.

2. 'Brown Felt Hat' by Richard Tulloch.

A beautiful brown felt hat takes us on her journey of dashed expectations. Convinced that she is "fit for a queen" we experience her disappointment as each new owner recycles the hat for a purpose that is not fitting to her expectations and in the process she becomes more shabby and spoilt. But appearances are deceiving and the hat finally discovers that her unusual adventures have enhanced and enriched her value. ★ **Activity ideas:** Discuss recycling objects. Decorate old hats with recycled objects.

3. 'The Echidna and the Shade Tree' told by Mona Green & retold by Pamela Lofts.

A traditional Aboriginal story of the Djaru tribe's dreamtime history of how the echidna came to have 'spears' on their backs, shuffle about on bent feet and hunt for ants.

★ **Activity idea:** Discuss Australian Indigenous culture and dreamtime philosophy.

4. 'One Wolly Wombat' by Rod Trinca & Kerry Argent.

A quick fun story that employs Australia's native animals and their unique characteristics to count to fourteen ★ **Activity idea:** Make up you own class signs/ action for each animal

5. 'John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat' by Jenny Wagner.

A well loved children's story of a dog named John Brown, and his reluctance to accept change, especially when that change is a cat. The love and friendship of his owner and companion, Rose, encourages John Brown to finally accept the Midnight Cat. ★ **Activity ideas:** Children list or draw animals that make good pets or animals that would not be good pets and why.

Book List cont...

6. 'I Want My Potty' by Tony Ross.

A fun little story about a princess who reluctantly starts using the potty and finally cherishes it. The whole kingdom is involved when it becomes desperate to get the potty to the princess.

7. 'Who Sank the Boat?' by Pamela Allen.

Five farmyard animals (a cow, a donkey, a sheep, a pig and a tiny mouse) decide to go on a beautiful boat ride. But these crazy animals have a little problem with balance and combined weight. The oversight leads to the boat sinking. ★ **Activity ideas:** Experiment with different found objects (eg stones, bark, paper, plastic) to see what sinks and floats. Discuss concepts of weight, heavy versus light and ordering of weight (ie heavy, heavier, heaviest).

8. 'Jeremy's Tail' by Duncan Ball.

Jeremy is very determined to pin the tail on the donkey. Blindfolded and dizzy from the customary three spins, Jeremy embarks on a journey across the globe in search of the donkey. Oblivious to his amazing adventures Jeremy finally achieves his goal.

★ **Activity idea:** Creative writing exercise... 'where will Jeremy's next turn take him?'

9. 'The Two Bullies' by Red Fox.

A story of two giants who are determined to be the best. Their fight to establish supremacy, however, is called off as each giant becomes nervous when assuming their opponents strength is far greater by piecing together half truths. ★ **Activity idea:** Play chinese whispers to demonstrate how information can become confused.

10. 'Big Dog' by Libby Greder.

The big dog down the street (behind the fence) poses a scary obstacle for some children. The advice from their parents doesn't solve the problem, so the children decide to scare the dog back. When bravely walking down the street to execute their plan, the children come across the dog out on the street and learn to overcome their fear and become friends with the dog.

★ **Activity idea:** Discuss general safety around the neighbourhood (ie how to behave around stray dogs, cars backing out of drive ways etc)

11. 'A Bit of Company' by Margaret Wild.

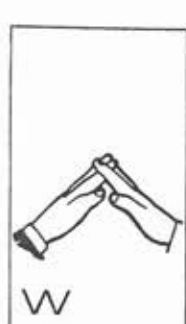
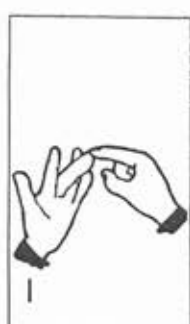
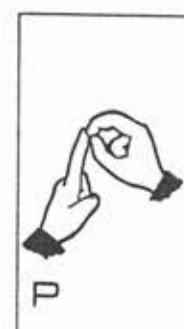
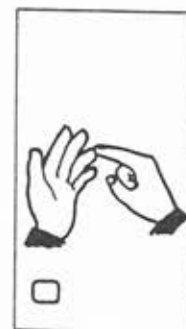
Every one in Christopher's life is too busy... and he is very lonely. Sometimes he wants to say hello to the neighbour Molly but he assumes she is too busy. But Molly is not busy and is also very lonely. The story explores the important elements of friendships as Christopher and Molly become the best company for each other.

12. 'Danny in the Toybox' by Richard Tulloch.

Danny is cross. So cross that he has shut himself away in his toybox and has decreed that he will never come out for the rest of his life. His family try and coax him out with many different tactics but in the end, leaving Danny alone to cool off is the only solution. ★ **Activity ideas:** Discuss different emotions and how these effect others. See also activity idea number 3 on page 6.

THE FINGERSPELT ALPHABET:

For 'H' and 'J' the right hand only moves in the direction of the arrow.
Left handers reverse all formations.



Deafness

More than **one and a half million** Australians have some sort of hearing loss. People with **mild** losses have difficulty hearing speech in noisy conditions. **Moderate** and **severe** losses result in people only being able to hear when the speaker is close by. All of these sorts of losses can be greatly helped by hearing aids. A small number of people have profound hearing loss. Even with hearing aids these people hear only limited parts of speech. They may therefore need to communicate through **lipreading** and/or **signing**.

There are two types of hearing loss:

Conductive Hearing Loss: This is due to damage to the eardrum or the small bones of the middle ear. This sort of hearing loss is common in young children following ear infections and can also result from illness or accident. Conductive hearing loss can often be treated by doctors.

Sensorineural Hearing Loss (or Nerve Deafness): This type of hearing loss is due to damage to some or all of the "hair cells" - the numerous nerve endings on each ear's single nerve ending. Damage to the nerve of hearing cannot be treated. Sensorineural hearing loss can be caused by a number of factors: old age, loud noise (several rock musicians have hearing losses caused by noise) or the effects of illness such as Rubella and Meningitis. Sensorineural hearing loss can also be inherited, though the factors are not yet determined.

In Australia, more than two children in 1,000 are born with hearing impairment. Because hearing deteriorates, however, one in four (25%) of people over 65 years of age need hearing aids.

Acknowledgement: Paul Cameron, Assistant Manager, Australian Hearing Service, Victoria

ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. What is it like to be Deaf ?

Give each child some cotton wool or earplugs to put in their ears, in order to muffle sounds. Keeping the classroom as quiet as possible, let them try to communicate without using their voices, either through lip reading or through body language. Talk about the experience afterwards

2. What are they talking about? (lipreading)

Videotape a television program. Play the program to the class with the volume off. Ask the class to write down or discuss what they think the program was saying. Then replay the tape with the volume on. See how accurate the students were in their understanding.

3. Some sounds are easier to hear than others

[suggested for upper primary: utilises practical applications of maths in measurements & graphing].

Divide students into small project groups. Allocate each group objects/ activities that make different noises of varying levels (eg: stop watch, sports whistle, jangling keys, clapping hands, spoken and whispered words etc).

With one child blindfolded, others in the group make the 'sound' starting close to the blindfolded child and moving further away until the sound cannot be heard. Measure the distance when the sound cannot be heard. Repeat for other 'sounds' and other children. Plot results on a graph and discuss the results, ie: pitch and volume.

Sign Language

Sign language is a vibrant, dynamic, expressive language with strong cultural significance for the Deaf community. There is no universal sign language in the same way there is no universal spoken or written language. Different countries and deaf communities have different sign languages.

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the name given to the sign language of the Australian Deaf community. The language is used by Deaf children and adults to communicate at school or work, and with their family and friends. With the aid of sign language interpreters Auslan is used to enable deaf people to access and participate equally in a wide range of activities and situations from universities, meetings, conferences, legal, training, church services and medical consultations.

Many hearing people are aware of fingerspelling. This is a system of different hand shapes used to represent each of the 26 letters of the alphabet (you can find this in the front of the phone book and copy supplied in this kit). Deaf people use fingerspelling to spell out names for people and places. Auslan however includes far more than just fingerspelling. Auslan consists of a rich system of gestures and signs to represent concepts, ideas and things. Auslan is a complete language onto itself with its own grammar and syntax, the same as any of the hundreds of spoken and written languages throughout the world.

Auslan operates on a three dimensional plane utilising space and movement to convey different types of meaning. The use of facial expression is a vital part of the grammatical emphasis in Auslan. For example when you ask a question you usually have a quizzical look on your face (ie you open your eyes wide and lift up your eye brows) as well as use of a questions sign (ie: who, where, when, etc), in the same way spoken languages utilise inflections and tone to enhance expression.

Also many signs are iconic. That is, they 'look like' or are obviously connected to a concept, idea or thing. In similar way to onomatopoeia words 'sound like' what they mean (eg: 'bang', 'cock - a - doodle' -do or 'whoosh'). However for the vast majority of signs the connection is not obvious at all.

Acknowledgement: Dr Trevor Johnston, Senior Research Fellow, Renwick College - University of Newcastle, NSW

ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. Design your own classroom sign language

Write a list of simple words on the blackboard (ie: drink, sleep, house, dog, eat, apple etc). Ask the students to try to make up a sign for each word. Discuss why they think the word would be signed that way.

2. Added facial expression & gesture

You can try activity number 2. on page 4 with different types of programs to demonstrate how important facial expressions and gestures are to enhancing comprehension (eg a newsreader versus Play School)

3. What is your name ?

Hand out the fingerspelling alphabet sheet (provided in this kit) and encourage students to learn to fingerspell their name and other simple words. Once students have an understanding of the fingerspelling alphabet you can try simple games like eye spy to practise the recognition of the letters.

Visual Communication

There are many forms of visual communication that are used in every day life. In some cases these are used to enhance clarity of verbal information (eg: sports referees, body language, facial expressions) but in the majority of instances they are the only effective means of communication for the situation (eg: policeman directing traffic, road signs, semaphore, gesturing with someone who speaks a different language, friends waving hello etc).

Apart from symbols and gestures, colours are also used to visually communicate information. For example the colour red represents danger in both man-made environments and in nature (eg: red fire engines, red traffic lights, red poisonous frogs, redback spiders etc).

ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. Everyday visual communication

Ask students to list or demonstrate examples of visual communication and body language in every day life. Or create a collage of symbols and colours with drawings and pictures from magazines etc.

2. Imaginary Clay

Mime relies on the imagination of the audience and the artist to create a pretend environment and objects. This exercise will help children both perform and comprehend mime. Sit children in a circle. One by one, each student mimes creating an object out of imaginary clay. The student then shows how the object is used. When the object has been demonstrated clearly, so that someone can guess what it is, the student can then squash the object back into a ball of clay and pass the ball on to the next student.

3. How do you feel?

Ask students to walk around the room, and as they do so, call out an emotion to them (eg angry, sad, frightened, happy etc). The students must attempt to express that emotion using their faces, bodies and hands.

4. We are visual creatures

With our eyes in the front of our head, humans are creatures that rely on visual information. You can explore this idea further by asking students to collect pictures of animals and group them by where their eyes are, how large their eyes are etc.

5. Take a line for a walk and create some fun art

Read a story to the class. Using different lines and colours ask students to record the emotions and plot. For example jagged lines can represent tension or fear, and a smooth gentle curve on the bottom of the page can be sadness, or a bright line positioned high on the page can be happiness. The result is an unique visual map of the story.

More information

Resources: Deafness Resources Australia
33 Argyle St, Parramatta, NSW, 2150
ph: (02) 9204 2970
fx: (02) 9204 2972
tty: (02) 9204 2993
email: dra@aceinfo.net.au

Sign Language: Deaf Education Network
PO Box 500, Strathfield, NSW, 2135
ph: (02) 9764 4600
fax: (02) 9746 8426
tty: (02) 9764 4972
email: den@deaf.nsw.edu.au



AUSTRALIAN THEATRE OF THE DEAF

6/245 Chalmers St, Redfern, NSW, 2016. ph: (02) 9310 1255 tty: (02) 9318 2835
fax: (02) 9318 2186 email: atod@mpx.com.au

australian theatre of the deaf