

Japanese Kabuki Theater

Residency Lesson Plan, by Kent Williams

OBJECTIVE: Provide a multi-cultural learning experience through the introduction of the traditional Japanese *kabuki* style of theater in an engaging, hands-on residency in which students explore the use of paper fans, character movement, costuming and *kabuki* makeup and culminating in a performance before an audience of peers or PTA.

RESIDENCY: In a 4-5 multi-day residency, students learn the art of traditional Japanese *kabuki* theater by rehearsing and performing a Japanese folktale in costume and *kumadori* makeup.

- **Day 1 – Kabuki 101**
 - Students are introduced to the concept of Japanese *kabuki* theater and explore the art form as described in the MASTER CLASS lesson. The teaching artist explains to the students that they will then begin rehearsing over the next few days for a performance in which they will wear costumes and *kumadori* makeup.

- **Day 2 – Casting & Staging**
 - Students select from among a variety of Japanese folktales such as
 - *Momotaro* (The Peach Boy)
 - *Issun Boshi* (The One-Inch Boy)
 - *Jiro* (The Boy Who Drew Cats)
 - *Yuki Onna* (The Snow Bride)
 - *Ota Hime* (The Sea Princess)
 - Segment from a *kabuki* style version of “Sleeping Beauty”.

 - Students select their roles by shows of hands and are then directed to sit in character groups to await further instruction. No one is a *koken*; everyone must choose a role, lead or supporting.

 - The teaching artist or classroom instruction will draft a simple cast list for reference. Any absent students will be accounted for.

 - With fans, students practice the basic character walks and gestures learned on Day 1 as they pertain to their chosen character for the play.

 - Fans are put away. Fans are now earned.

 - In a follow-the-leader format, character groups learn choreography as the teaching artist demonstrates.

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- All choreography is scored by the Chanter's (narrator) *ki*, his percussive instrument. The Chanter is played by the teaching artist and is the only speaker in the production apart from characters' laughter and roars.
- As students learn choreography scene-by-scene and group-by-group, they can practice choreography in small groups while the teaching artist stages the whole play.
- This process is refined and repeated, spanning Days 2-4.
- **Day 3 – Rehearsal**
 - The teaching artist will determine if the cast should run what has already been choreographed or continue staging while character groups rehearse in small groups until called upon.
 - Choreography is set and rehearsed.
 - Students demonstrating best practices may choose a fan for rehearsal. All other fans must be earned. "Best practices" refers to self-discipline; students who are quick to focus and retain choreography are rewarded with fans for rehearsal and hopefully serve as inspiration for the remaining cast. Character groups are often rewarded together. And the reward may be taken away as well, so students are urged to mind themselves.
 - Students may choose their own fan color, but the performance will require color unity based upon symbolism.
- **Day 4 – Final Dress Rehearsal**
 - Rehearsal should take place in the performance space, if it has not already, allowing students to acclimate to a new environment and perspective. A change of space is confusing.
 - If not already occurring on Day 3, costumes are distributed and worn for the remainder of the rehearsal period. Students are responsible for the care of their assigned costume and must either return them folded, customary for kimonos, or hang them properly. Like fans, costumes are a privilege.
 - Students rehearse with fans and costumes, refining individual gestures and an emphasis on timing and coordination.

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- Areas are assigned for props or any costume changes.
- **Day 5 - Makeup and Performance**
 - With at least 1-2 assistants along with the teaching artist, the *kumadori* requires approximately 45-60 minutes per cast of 25 students. It is time-consuming and worth it. Teachers may choose to assist one another with classroom monitoring and/or provide work to occupy those students waiting their turn.
 - A makeup station may be set up in a classroom, library or cafeteria, amidst or apart from the cast(s).
 - The teaching artist and any adult volunteers apply all makeup, which is professional grade, washable face paint.
 - Rarely is there an opportunity for a full cast rehearsal, but character groups are encouraged to rehearse their choreography as makeup is applied by character.
 - Performances may take place in a cleared library space or multi-purpose room but a school auditorium or cafeteria is certainly preferable.