

THE MARTIAL ARTISTS
& ACROBATS OF TIANJIN,
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
CHINA SOUL

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 26 2017
9:30 AM & 11 AM
WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER 27 2017
9:30 AM & 11 AM




2017 > 2018
FIELD TRIP SERIES
BROADEN THE HORIZONS
OF YOUR CLASSROOM.
EXPERIENCE THE VIBRANT
WORLD OF THE ARTS
AT THE McCALLUM!

LEARNING LINKS

McCALLUM THEATRE EDUCATION
PRESENTS

THE MARTIAL ARTISTS
& ACROBATS OF TIANJIN,
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"In Shaolin,
mistakes are the
mother of learning."

> ANCIENT CHINESE SAYING

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY > People's Republic of China

ARTS > Storytelling, mime, acrobatics

EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF LITERACY

What is a "text"? We invite you to consider the performances on McCallum's Field Trip Series as non-print texts available for study and investigation by your students. Anyone who has shown a filmed version of a play in their classroom, used a website as companion to a textbook, or asked students to do online research already knows that "texts" don't begin and end with textbooks, novels, and reading packets. They extend to videos, websites, games, plays, concerts, dances, radio programs, and a number of other non-print texts that students and teachers engage with on a regular basis.

We know that when we expand our definition of texts to the variety of media that we use in our everyday lives, we broaden the materials and concepts we have at our disposal in the classroom, increase student engagement, and enrich learning experiences.

Please consider how utilizing your McCallum performance as a text might align to standards established for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

How do we help students to use these texts as a way of shaping ideas and understanding the world?

Please use this material to help you on this journey.

NON-PRINT TEXT > any medium/text that creates meaning through sound or images or both, such as symbols, words, songs, speeches, pictures, and illustrations not in traditional print form including those seen on computers, films, and in the environment.

THE WORK OF ART

A NON-PRINT TEXT FOR STUDY

WHAT'S IT MADE OF? HOW CAN THIS WORK SERVE AS A COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS-MANDATED "TEXT" FOR STUDENT STUDY IN THE CLASSROOM?



Picture this. The stage floods with light. A hush falls over the audience. Acrobats tumble on from the wings and go rolling across the boards. They send bowls spinning through the air; these seem to hover, catching the light. We rub our eyes. Are these spinning orbs stars? Is this the sky? We check the program and discover the title of this first scene is *Water Meteors*.

Next up, plates! You've seen spinning plates before, but these guys contort their bodies in the most eye-popping way while they send those plates careening.

Then it's time for Ballet Adagio. You know what ballet is. Adagio is Italian for slow. Here the artists interweave ballet, acrobatics, and gymnastics among the exciting and challenging stunts. Why? *Holding the Toe by One Hand*, of course! There's also *Shoulder Based on One Leg Turning 360 Degrees*. Ow! And, let us not leave out *One Hand Pulling an Arm into a Handstand*.

Now, if Act I is all about *Starry Nights of Peace and Harmony*, Act II delves into the *Soul of Chinese Martial Arts*. And so in a rapid one-two punch we are treated to *Jars Juggling on Heads* and *Diabolo Girls*. The former riffs off the theme of harvest. Jars were historically used to house rice and wine. Four breathtaking artists show what it's like to catch, juggle heads, and pass jars. The second of these scenes focuses on that North China folk game, diabolo. This is all about true Tianjin local style and character. These girls and their fancy tricks! The warmth and joyousness of the Chinese people come to the fore!

From here it's on to pyramids and lassos. Then a Chinese specialty: contortion with carpets spinning. Traditionally, Chinese cross talk artists on the stage tell and sing humorous stories. In this version, however, the performers focus on contorting their bodies, standing on their hands, and forming pyramids, all while spinning carpets on their hands and feet.

Next up is the hand juggler who does nine balls at a time. He seems to be everywhere at once, throwing and catching. No sooner has the rhythm of the audience's breathing returned to normal than the foot juggler with umbrellas bursts onto the scene, stirring us up with such tricks as "turning umbrellas 270 degrees and catching their knife edges on feet" and "360 degree flipping and catching." After that, where does a foot juggler with umbrellas go next? Why, juggling five umbrellas by feet, leaving the observer's cornea seared with the image of stacked umbrellas in balance.

Of course, no performance by The Martial Artists and Acrobats of Tianjin can be complete without a tribute to the Shaolin and their world-renowned kung fu!



THE ARTISTS

WHO HAS PRODUCED
THIS TEXT FOR STUDY?

The Martial Artists and Acrobats of Tianjin, People's Republic of China was established in 1957, developing out of the former China Circus & Acrobats (founded in 1948). Today, its acrobats, magicians, and martial artists number around a hundred. The troupe sports over 30 different acts. They win prizes all the time in national and international festivals and competitions. *Leather Straps*, for example, won the Silver Clown Award. Silver awards have been won for *Double Poles*, *Comic Music*, and *Jar's Head Juggling*. *Contortion with Cups by Three Girls* won the Golden Lion Award. They have toured Europe, Asia, and the U.S. extensively. They've performed with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and Cirque du Soleil.



"Seven minutes
on stage is equal to
ten years of training."

> COMMON SAYING
IN ACROBATIC TRAINING
SCHOOLS

CONTEXTS

WHAT INFORMATION SURROUNDS THIS TEXT FOR STUDY & COULD HELP MAKE STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH IT MORE POWERFUL?

There is no final agreement on just when acrobatics first showed up in Chinese history. Some say it was during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), when working folks from the county of Hebei Province developed their acrobatic skills. Others cite historical records from the Xia Dynasty (4,000 years ago) as evidence of the art form's earliest stirrings. In the 1950s, archaeologists found stone engravings in the province of Shandong showing acrobatic performances – with what looks like musicians playing accompaniment. These engravings

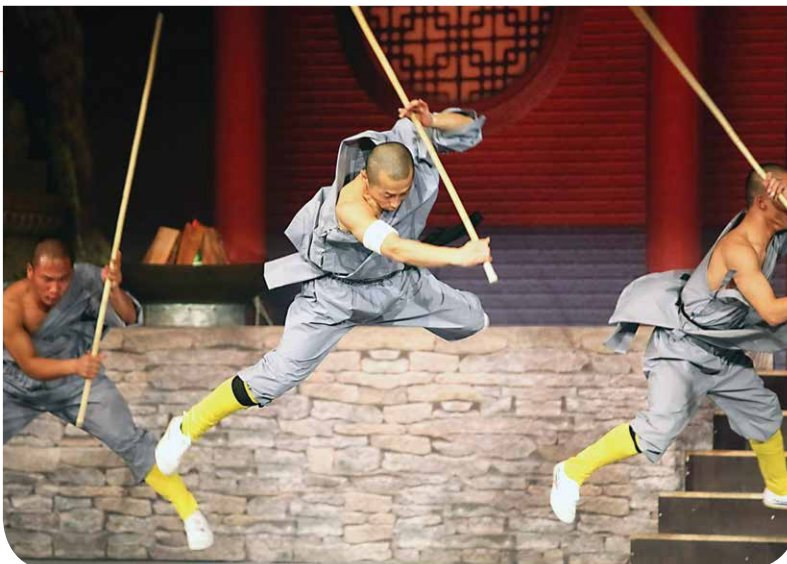
are over 2,000-years-old. So, whenever and wherever Chinese athletes first tumbled, juggled, balanced on one another's shoulders, or went walking on their hands – the practice of acrobatics and those who engaged in it have taken front row seats in the cavalcade of Chinese culture.

The Han Dynasty saw further refinements, and in the Tang Dynasty – an era of fertile cultural flowering – the art of the acrobat grew more elaborate and demanding. More and more, you saw images of these athletes in paintings, while poets paid their own form of homage in the literary arts.

Throughout much of this tumultuous history, acrobatic troupes were family-run affairs. Clan secrets were guarded jealously. However, with the rise of communism in the 1950s, much of that changed. Across the spectrum, private enterprise gave way to government regulation. This was not perhaps bad news for acrobatics, which those in power embraced as an “art for the people.” Under the People’s Republic, it has flourished!

As far as martial arts are concerned, this work of art focuses on Shaolin kung fu. Kung fu, of course, is a fighting style that developed over many eons in China. You might hear it called Gongfu or Wushu. With the years it has only gained in popularity. The Chinese people lay great store by this symbol of Chinese culture. Shaolin is a particular style; another is Wudang. The Shaolin tradition came mainly from the Tang Dynasty in the 6th century when Buddhism rose as a dominant philosophy in China. It was the duty of martial monks at the Songshan Mountain in Chinese province of Henan to protect the renowned temples in the legend of Shaolin.

You may be wondering about Tianjin too. It's a metropolis on the northern coast of mainland China, formerly known in English as Tientsin. Its population numbers around 15,469,500, making it the world's 6th most populous city. It is the fourth largest city in China, after Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. The walled city of Tianjin was built in 1404. Tianjin is a major seaport and gateway to Beijing, its status as a treaty port going back to 1860.



TO GET READY FOR THE PERFORMANCE, STUDENTS COULD RESEARCH THESE:

- > ACROBATICS
 - > CHINESE HISTORY & CULTURE
-

HERE'S A 60-MINUTE LESSON IN COLLABORATION & PROBLEM-SOLVING YOU COULD TEACH TO HELP PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THIS WORK:

LINE OF INQUIRY – LOI is an essential question that generates a lesson:

How do the Martial Artists & Acrobats of Tianjin, People's Republic of China, in this work of art, use precision of execution and finely-tuned collaboration?

ASK STUDENTS

What do we know about acrobatics? What skills are needed? What personal qualities? (For example, discipline, courage, patience)

Assemble a list on the board.

SHOW A CLIP

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SqtcdmDoHo

(This provides a look at an excerpt from the work of art.)

Have students describe what they see. Show it a second time. This time look for all the ways in which the acrobats work together. How do they?

ASK STUDENTS

Any qualities or skills we want to add to our list?

IN PAIRS

Decide who will be "A" and who will be "B." Each has pipe cleaners which they form into a simple human figure. Together, think of one move you saw in the clip. Then "A" bends & shapes his/her figure into a shape that suggests the beginning of that move, while "B" adapts her/his figure to show the completion of the move. Try this several times with several different moves, if possible. Keep a written record of each. Draw them perhaps?

Each pair then shares one of their choices, showing the pipe cleaner figures. Observers describe lines, shapes, posture etc.

ASK

What movement would connect these two poses? Who can show us that?

SHARE SOME CONTEXT

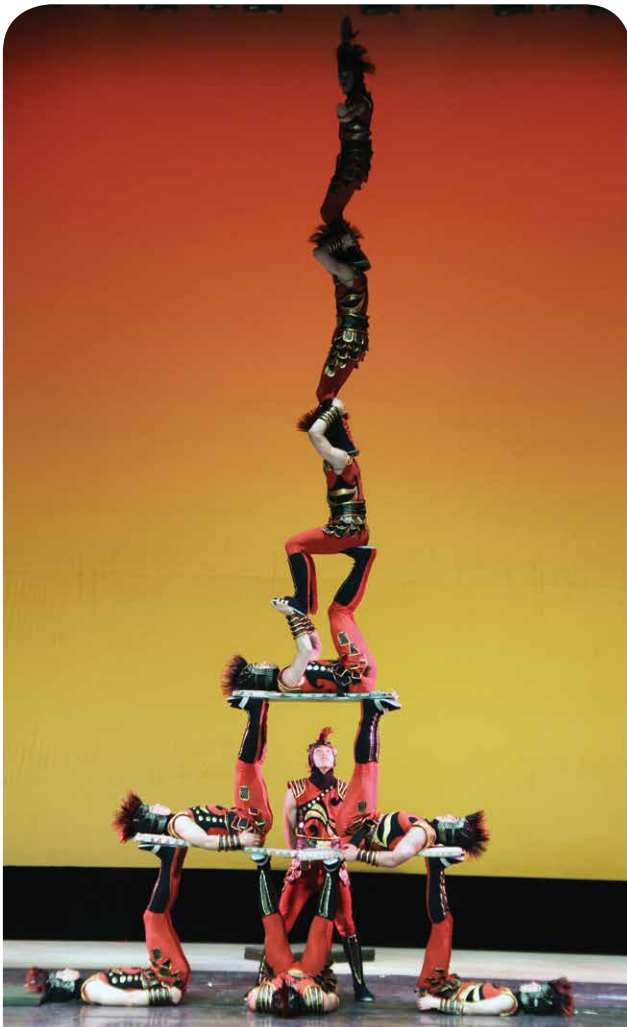
- > Chinese acrobats tend to be fairly young, because of the physical demands involved.
- > They can start training as young as age 6.
- > They train for a number of years.
- > The company itself came into being in the 1950s.
- > The company works together like a family.
No one gets star treatment.

INDIVIDUALS QUIETLY CONSIDER

What's one thing you will be looking for in the performance?
Write that down.

“One must be able
to endure suffering to
become a good acrobat.”

> COMMON SAYING
IN ACROBATIC TRAINING
SCHOOLS



AFTER COMING TO THE THEATER, STUDENTS COULD RESEARCH THESE:

- > PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
- > THE MARTIAL ARTISTS AND ACROBATS OF TIANJIN, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
- > FORMS OF HISTORICAL RECORD (STONE ENGRAVINGS, WALL PAINTINGS, PAPYRUS SHEETS, ETC.)

HERE'S A 45/60-MINUTE LESSON YOU COULD TEACH AFTER STUDENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED THE WORK:

DISCUSSION

Have students take a look back at the performance. What stood out, and why? Describe the movement. What were the different stunts – and how were they sequenced? What special skills were in evidence? What were the different groupings? How did the performers appear to communicate with each other? What evidence was there of collaboration? What emotions were conveyed – and how? What surprised you? What do you want to know more about?

PAIRS

Come up with a (safe) move you saw the performers making.

One or two volunteer pairs share. Observers describe what they see – in adjectives and verbs.

TABLE GROUPS

Imagine you are an eight year old child in China. You want to be accepted to the Institution of Acrobatic Schooling, Training, and Repertoire, located in Beijing. Collaborating on language, together write a letter to the Admissions Officers, telling why you should be given a chance. What skills and natural abilities will “you” mention?

Read these in whole group.

QUESTION

In which ways does this letter make an effective case for admittance?





WHAT'S *YOUR* READ OF THIS NON-PRINT TEXT?

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS - AND HOW COULD THEY BE ADAPTED AS GUIDING QUESTIONS TO SPARK STUDENT DISCUSSION?

- > How did the performers use their stage space?
- > What are the different ways in which the performers related to one another?
- > How would you describe the costumes? How did they appear to be made? What colors predominated? What did these costumes remind you of?
- > What are some great adjectives for describing how the performers moved their bodies?
- > Was humor present in this presentation – if so, how?
- > What different speeds were used?
- > What did lighting contribute?
- > What are some of the ways in which you responded to this work – and why? Which points produced these responses?
- > What personal qualities do the performers appear to bring to this work?
- > What were transitions between stunts like?
- > How is timing employed here?
- > What about levels in space?
- > What are some of the props used? How were they used? How did these props inform the movement? If a given prop had been replaced by some other prop, how would that change the movement?
- > How did the performers convey the story?
- > Which parts of the story seemed most gripping? Why?
- > What essential message do you carry away from this work?
- > How is this particular format an effective vehicle for conveying such a story?

BOOKS

101 CIRCUS GAMES FOR CHILDREN: JUGGLING — CLOWNING — BALANCING ACTS — ACROBATICS — ANIMAL NUMBERS

By: Paul Rooyackers

Reading level: Ages 4-12

Publisher: Hunter House, 2010

ISBN-10: 0897935160

Not a circus arts book, per se, it is instead designed as a physical activities book for children between the ages of 4 and 12 using circus related theme activities.

FLAT STANLEY'S WORLDWIDE ADVENTURES #7: THE FLYING CHINESE WONDERS

By: Jeff Brown

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Publisher: HarperCollins, 2011

ISBN-10: 0061430021

Ouch! Stanley accidentally caused twin acrobats Yin and Yang to take a tumble, right before their Chinese New Year show. Yang's foot is broken—but luckily, Flat Stanley is flexible enough to take his place. To make up for his mistake, Stanley travels to China to help out.

HAIL! ANCIENT CHINESE (HAIL! HISTORY)

By: Paul C. Challen

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Publisher: Crabtree Pub Co., 2010

ISBN-10: 0778766284

Hail! History is an entertaining look at the lives of the people who shaped ancient cultures. Each book is designed like an entertainment magazine — no stone is left unturned by Hail!'s intrepid reporters. In addition to the colorful cast of characters, everyday life in the ancient world is put under the microscope. Inquiring young minds will be fascinated by the clothes people wore, the food they ate, the houses they lived in, and how they were entertained.

INTERNET

CHINESE VARIETY ART

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_variety_art#History

ACROBATICS

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acrobatics>

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