

## Program 1. What Is Art?

### Description

Are there universal elements that distinguish what we call “art” from other objects or experiences? How can we recognize art when we see it?

In Program 1, you will

- explore the nature of art by examining each of four art forms — theatre, music, dance, and visual art;
- begin to develop a definition for each of the art forms and consider how you might determine whether or not a particular item *is* art; and
- investigate how these art forms work together in a multi-arts performance piece.

The program includes five lessons, in which Learner Teams and students

- use a game called “Hunter and Hunted” to demonstrate how theatre uses plot, characters, and imagery to involve an audience;
- listen to a variety of sounds to create their own definitions of music;
- use their bodies to create a dance by varying the elements of shape, space, and time;
- analyze an assortment of objects to determine whether they fit their own personal definitions of art; and
- view the opening sequence of *Quidam* and discuss how the four art forms are used in it.

In this session, you will reflect on these lessons as a group and begin to make connections among the four art forms.

### Learning Objectives

- Engage in discussion and activities leading to the discovery of some basic characteristics of theatre.
- Investigate musical elements and create a basic definition of music.
- Experiment with movement and identify essential elements of dance.
- Formulate, discuss, and revise personal definitions of visual art.
- Examine ways in which fantasy impacts perceptions of reality in Cirque du Soleil’s *Quidam* and in everyday life.

### Guiding Questions

These are questions for your group to consider as you work through the session.

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

- What is art?
- How do the arts connect with each other?
- How can the arts be integrated into every classroom?

**Key Concepts/Vocabulary**

*Theatre*

There are many different definitions of theatre that include everything from a formal production on a stage before an audience to group improvisations conducted in school classrooms. However, there are three essential elements present in all forms of theatre: an actor, a story with a conflict, and an audience.

- *Acting*: the process of creating roles and characters in dramatic context
- *Audience*: one or more persons who observe actors in a scene or play
- *Conflict*: when the desires of two or more characters are opposed to each other
- *Costume*: an actor's stage clothing
- *Dialogue*: words spoken by the characters in a play to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and actions
- *Elements of drama*: according to Aristotle, plot, character, theme, dialogue, music, and spectacle
- *Plot*: the structure of the action of the play
- *Script*: the written dialogue, description, and directions provided by the playwright
- *Setting*: the time and place in which the dramatic action occurs
- *Theatre*: the imitation or representation of life, performed for other people; the performance of dramatic literature

*Music*

Music is organized sound created to communicate an idea, feeling, or process.

- *Articulation*: how individual notes are attacked
- *Design*: the arrangement of musical parts; the form of the music
- *Duration*: music in time; the length of the sounds
- *Dynamics*: loudness and softness in music
- *Expressive qualities*: variables within performance parameters
- *Melody*: a planned succession of pitches; the tune
- *Pitch*: the high and low qualities of music
- *Rhythm*: the patterns of sounds in relation to the steady beat
- *Steady beat*: the regular pulse of the music
- *Tempo*: the speed of the music
- *Timbre*: tone color; the distinctive quality of a given instrument, voice, or sound source
- *Tonality*: the combination of pitches as they function together

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

*Dance*

All dance — whether it is about a story, a culture, a specific style, a feeling, or movement for movement's sake — involves a body in motion. All styles of dance communicate using the basic elements of shape, space, and time.

- *Chant*: singing or speaking that repeats itself
- *Choreographer*: person who creates the dance
- *Choreography*: the dance movements
- *Cue*: a signal
- *Freeze*: stopping all movement
- *Shape*: using the body to create lines
- *Space*: the locations occupied by the body; for example, low, middle, and high levels or negative and positive space
- *Time*: the cadence or meter that determines the motion. It can be slow, medium, or fast
- *Transition*: the passage among ideas, places, thoughts, and stages

*Visual Art*

This lesson models a method of inquiry called aesthetics. As the Learner Teams and students create their own definitions of art, they are engaging in philosophical inquiry. Definitions of visual art vary depending on cultural context and personal viewpoints. As students develop a personal understanding of art, it is important that they support their viewpoints with evidence.

- *Art*: the conscious production or arrangement of sounds, colors, forms, movements, or other elements in a manner that affects the sense of beauty
- *Composition*: design manipulation, including balance, repetition, movement, unity, and center of interest
- *Craftsmanship*: quality of design and technique
- *Elements of art*: components artists often manipulate — line, color, shape/form, value, texture, and space
- *Intent*: the mood, message, or meaning desired by the artist
- *Performance art*: a form of theatrical art in which thematically related works in a variety of media are presented simultaneously or successively to an audience
- *Technique*: materials and working methods used by artists

## **Four-Hour Workshop Session**

Times are approximate. Actual length of sessions may vary, depending on the size of the group and the length of discussions.

### **Materials and Resources**

- Videotape or broadcast of Program 1 — What Is Art?
- Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape
- Samples of music and other sounds; the listening samples used in Program 1 can be found on the Classroom Demonstration Materials tape; you also can create your own selection of sounds
- Handout: Listening Guide for “Is This Music?”
- Handout: Viewing Guide for “Is This Visual Art?”
- Handout: Teacher Notes
- Two scarves for blindfolds
- Hand drum
- Samples of visual images (from Classroom Demonstration Materials tape or your own)
- Painting (from the tape or your own)
- Family photograph (from the tape or your own)
- Tree branch (from the tape or your own)
- Magazine cover
- Reading: *Cirque du Soleil*
- Reading: *Quidam*

### **Introduction**

(15 minutes)

Distribute the workshop guide, available on this Web site, to participants.

Distribute materials for Program 1.

Introduce *The Arts in Every Classroom* workshop.

Discuss the question “What are the arts?”

Watch the beginning segment of the videotape, noting how interviewees responded to the question “What are the arts?” Continue watching as the workshop host introduces the series. Pause the videotape when you see the title “What is Theatre?” (running time approximately 5 minutes).

Discuss your expectations for this professional development series. Challenge yourself to think about these questions as you work through the television programs:

- How will you make demonstration activities relevant, purposeful, and integrated into your existing curriculum?

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

- As you participate in each workshop session, how will you assess your own understanding of the concepts presented?

**Lesson 1: What Is Theatre?**

(50 minutes)

In this lesson, you will explore the question, “What is theatre?” Through discussion and activities, adult and student learners will be challenged to explore their perceptions about theatre and deepen their understanding of the art form.

Objective: You will engage in discussion and activities leading to the discovery of some basic characteristics of theatre.

*View and discuss*

(30 minutes)

Discuss the following questions:

- What is theatre?
- What elements or characteristics have to be present for theatre to exist?

Watch the “What Is Theatre?” lesson on the videotape. Pause the tape when you see the title “What Is Music?” (running time approximately 13 minutes).

Divide into small groups and discuss the following questions:

- How does Kathy help students build accurate vocabulary as they create their own definition of theatre?
- What kinds of classroom management issues could arise in your classroom during the “Hunter and Hunted” activity? How could you anticipate them? What strategies could you employ to alleviate possible problems?
- What strategies does Kathy use in redirecting “wrong” answers and accepting personal opinions as students reflect on their own work and evaluate video examples?
- How do you define “inquiry-based instruction”? How does Kathy’s method exemplify it?

Share your findings with the group.

*Experience and discuss*

(20 minutes)

Engage in your own experience with “Hunter and Hunted.”

Form a large circle. Select two volunteers — the Hunter and the Hunted. A facilitator blindfolds both volunteers and leads them to different places in the circle. The goal is for the Hunter to “get” the Hunted by tagging him or her.

Everyone in the group must be very quiet so the players in the middle can use their sense of hearing to find or avoid one another. The group also will act as spotters, gently using their hands to make sure the Hunter and the Hunted don’t leave the circle.

Play until the Hunted is tagged. Then replay “Hunter and Hunted” again with two different volunteers. Enhance the game by adding story elements of character, plot, and setting.

Discuss the following questions:

- How was the second playing of the activity different from the first?
- Is this activity theatre? Why or why not?
- How did actively engaging in the experience enrich your understanding of what constitutes theatre?

“Hunter and Hunted” is a theatre game that can be used to help students experience the elements of theatre. The hunt creates a *dramatic conflict* with an *antagonist* and *protagonist*. Their *objectives* are to hunt and to remain free. How the characters behave is the *dramatic action*. *Tension* is created as they approach each other, and *release* comes if they pass each other without making contact. The *climax* is reached at the moment of contact. It is through their engaged participation that students build relevant understanding and new vocabulary becomes meaningful.

## **Lesson 2: What is Music?**

(35 minutes)

In this lesson, you will explore the question “What is music?” Through discussion and activities, adult and student learners will be challenged to explore their perceptions about music and deepen their understanding of the art form.

Objective: You will investigate the elements of music and create a basic definition.

*View*

(10 minutes)

Watch the “What Is Music?” lesson on the videotape. Pause the tape when you see the title “What Is Dance?”

*Experience and discuss*

(25 minutes)

Create your own definition of music.

Engage in a brief version of the listening activity you saw on the videotape. Play musical excerpts 3 and 4 from the Classroom Demonstration Materials tape (on-screen time counter at 14:14 and 14:29) or play your own selection of music and other sounds.

Using the “Listening Guide for ‘Is This Music?’,” make a list of what you hear, and identify as many musical elements as you can.

After each excerpt, discuss these questions:

- What do you hear?

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

- What musical elements are present?
- Is it music? Why or why not?
- Which elements from your definitions are present? Which are missing?

Review your personal definition of music and revise it if you like.

Divide into small groups. Reflect on the lesson you saw on the videotape and discuss these questions:

- Why is it a valuable teaching strategy to have students create their own definition of music before they engage in the listening activity, and then go back to it after they have reflected on what they heard?
- How does Susanne help students build accurate vocabulary as they create their own definition of music?
- Why do you think the students laughed when they heard the Women's Slavic Chorus? How would you handle it if this happened in your classroom?
- How does Susanne encourage higher-order thinking skills on the part of the students?

Share your findings with the group.

**Lesson 3: What Is Dance?**

(45 minutes)

In this lesson, you will explore the question "What is dance?" Through discussion and activities, adult and student learners will be challenged to explore their perceptions about dance and deepen their understanding of the art form.

Objective: You will experiment with movement and identify essential elements of dance.

*View and discuss*

(30 minutes)

Discuss these questions:

- What comes to mind when you think of dance?
- What do various types of dances have in common?

Watch the "What Is Dance?" lesson on the videotape. Pause the tape when you see the title "What Is Visual Art?" (running time approximately 11 minutes).

Divide into small groups. Reflect on the dance lesson you saw on the videotape and discuss these questions:

- How does Kathy tailor her questions to the specific age group with which she is working and direct their focus toward movement?
- What kinds of classroom management issues might arise with your students during this movement activity? How could you anticipate them? What strategies could you employ to alleviate possible problems?

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

- How does the classroom teacher help the students confirm vocabulary?
- What elements of team teaching do you see exemplified in the work between Kathy (the dance teacher) and Megan (the classroom teacher)?
- How does Kathy help to focus students' work as they are moving?

Share your findings with the group.

*Experience and discuss*

*(15 minutes)*

Move into an open space and explore the essential elements of shape, space, and time. Designate one person to provide drum beats and call out the following prompts:

- Move randomly around the space, being careful not to bump into anyone.
- Create a shape with your body and freeze.
- Continue moving. When the word “shape” is called, change your shape and freeze.

Follow the same procedure in response to the cue “space” by changing your space in the room. Think of space as low, middle, and high as well as near and far away.

In response to the cue “time,” change your timing, moving slower or faster to the drumbeats while using shape and space.

Discuss and compare individual choices and feelings you experienced as a performer. Did any of the movement phrases tell a story?

**Lesson 4: What Is Visual Art?**

*(40 minutes)*

In this lesson, you will explore the question “What is visual art?” Through discussion and activities, adult and student learners will be challenged to explore their perceptions about visual art and deepen their understanding of the art form.

Objective: You will formulate, discuss and revise your personal definition of visual art.

*Experience and discuss*

*20 minutes*

Construct your own definition of visual art.

Distribute the “Viewing Guide for ‘Is This Visual Art?’” and display an assortment of objects (e.g., painting, family photograph, tree branch, magazine cover). Use the examples on the Classroom Demonstration Materials tape (on-screen time counter at 19:40) or choose your own selection of similar items.

Using the “Viewing Guide,” describe each object and use your personal definition to decide if the object is art, is not art, or might be art.



*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

As a group, look again at each object and discuss how various definitions worked and what refining is needed.

*View and discuss*

*(20 minutes)*

Watch the “What Is Visual Art?” lesson on the videotape. Pause the tape when you see the title “Combining Art Forms” (running time approximately 9 minutes).

In small groups, discuss these questions:

- How does Hazel’s visual art lesson differ from the processes you saw used with the other art forms?
- Why does she ask students to defend their decisions?

*Synthesis of All Four Lessons*

*(15 minutes)*

In small groups, reflect on the lessons on theatre, music, dance, and visual art:

- What are the similarities and differences among the art forms themselves?
- How have the workshop leaders presented diverse styles and methods of instruction?
- Which activities challenged you most? Why?
- What questions do you have about teaching the lessons you've seen in this program?
- What interdisciplinary connections can you make between these activities and your existing curriculum?

Share your findings with the group.

**Lesson 5: Combining the Art Forms**

*(20 minutes)*

In this lesson you will be introduced to Cirque du Soleil (Circus of the Sun). This world-renowned organization is known for its striking, dramatic mix of the circus arts and street entertainment, featuring fantastical costumes, magical lighting, and original music. Its production of *Quidam* is a surrealist and highly theatrical circus event that has been performed worldwide since 1996.

*Quidam* is the story of Zoe, a young girl who feels her world is meaningless until a headless stranger invites her on a journey through a fantastic world where gravity is irrelevant and the impossible is possible. Like Alice’s adventures in Wonderland and Dorothy’s quest through Oz, *Quidam* demonstrates the enduring idea that fantasy impacts our perception of reality.

Programs 2 and 3 will explore research, criticism, and historical precedents. You will discover how Cirque du Soleil has integrated the arts to create a contemporary art form all its own.

Objective: You will watch the first three minutes from a videotape of *Quidam* and discuss your initial impressions.

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

*View and discuss*

*(20 minutes)*

Watch the concluding section of the videotape, “Combining Art Forms,” which presents the opening sequence of *Quidam* and a preview of the next program (running time approximately 6 minutes).

Discuss these questions:

- In what ways did *Quidam* meet the expectations you formed from hearing it described? What surprised you?
- What kinds of movement did you see? Would you call this dance?
- How did the music communicate an idea, feeling or process?
- How were dramatic and visual elements used to juxtapose reality and fantasy?
- What are some big questions you have about this work?
- What is your understanding of the enduring idea/understanding that fantasy impacts our perception of reality?

## **Between Sessions (On Your Own)**

### **Homework Assignment**

To understand fully *Quidam* and its role in this workshop, it is strongly recommended that you view the show in its entirety on videotape (see Materials Needed in the About the Workshop section of this Web site). Look for examples of fantasy and reality and the interaction of theatre, music, dance, and visual art.

Based on the lesson plans and handouts for Program 1, think about how you might adapt these lessons in your own teaching and write some notes in your journal. You can find the complete lesson plans and handouts on the workshop Web site at [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom).

See the handout, Teacher Notes for Program 1, at the end of this document for ideas and observations to help you apply the lessons from this program to your classroom.

Other enrichment activities can significantly boost your learning between workshop sessions. Consider the recommended activities below and choose those that best meet your needs. Time permitting, you might plan to share the results of your homework with other participants informally before or after your next workshop session.

Watch some or all of these programs from *The Arts in Every Classroom: A Video Library, K-5*:

- What Is Arts Education?
- What Are the Arts?
- Teaching Dance
- Teaching Music
- Teaching Theatre
- Teaching Visual Art

To learn more about Cirque du Soleil and its many productions, including *Quidam*, visit the Cirque du Soleil Web site at [www.cirquedusoleil.com](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com).

Research reviews, feature articles, or other material on *Quidam* at your public library or on the Web.

### **Reading Assignment**

To support your understanding of Program 1, see the following readings:

- Cirque du Soleil
- *Quidam*

To prepare for Program 2, study the following additional readings:

- *Parade*
- Vaudeville

To be distributed at the end of this session

## Teacher Notes

### *Theatre*

“Hunter and Hunted” is a theatre game that can be used to help students experience the elements of theatre. The hunt creates a *dramatic conflict* with an *antagonist* and *protagonist*. Their *objectives* are to hunt and to remain free. How the characters behave is the *dramatic action*. *Tension* is created as they approach each other, and *release* comes if they pass each other without making contact. The *climax* is reached at the moment of contact. It is through their engaged participation that students build relevant understanding and new vocabulary becomes meaningful.

Kathy Blum is modeling active involvement with the students during “Hunter and Hunted.” She is creating with the students rather than directing them to create.

Theatre education in the classroom is more about the process of learning through theatrical experiences than rehearsing to polish a final performance.

### *Music*

It is important that students listen to musical excerpts silently — for their own listening acuity as well as for the others around them. Students who are able can make notes for themselves as they listen in order to share their thinking in later discussion. For very young students, music can be paused whenever hands go up so that those great ideas aren’t lost because they couldn’t be held inside for long.

This lesson is about careful listening and thoughtful responses. It can be a diagnostic tool as you become familiar with your students’ musical knowledge. Depending on their background, your students may incorrectly identify some of the musical instruments they hear or terms may be incorrectly used. Take note of these errors and give your students more listening opportunities.

### *Dance*

Kathy DeJean works in the midst of the students, creating a positive climate for creative ideas and establishing a presence that provides both parameters and freedom.

Kathy’s drum phrases are long enough for students to “think on their feet.” She bases the length of each phrase on the work the students are doing. Watch students as you play for them, and adjust your musical support based on their needs.

“Snapshot” and “freeze” are code words for “Stop where you are and hold your position.”

Kathy’s students think and move without talking. Establish a working climate that engages students in discussion after movement exercises rather than while they are moving.

### *Visual Art*

Hazel Lucas accepts all student opinions when they are supported with evidence.

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

Students are encouraged to listen to one another, and offer their opinions in response to the statements of others. Hazel encourages students to use specific terminology and art vocabulary as they defend their choices.

**Listening Guide for “Is This Music?”**

Your definition of music: \_\_\_\_\_

	List all the sounds you hear.	What musical elements are present?	Is this music? yes/no/maybe
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

**Viewing Guide for “Is This Visual Art?”**

	Object	Is this art?			Why?
		Yes	No	Maybe	
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					

## Reading

### Cirque du Soleil

In the early 1980s, a group of young street performers in Quebec, Canada, pooled their talent and dreams and founded the “Club des Talons Hauts” or “High-Heels Club,” aptly named because most of them were stilt-walkers. The club also featured fire-eaters, jugglers, and other performers, who were known collectively as buskers. At that time, Quebec did not have a circus tradition, so the club organized a festival where street performers could come together to exchange ideas and techniques. They called it the “Fête Foraine de Baie St-Paul” (the Baie Saint-Paul Fair). That was all a few visionaries needed to hatch the idea of bringing all this talent together under one roof, or — why not? — a big top! Cirque du Soleil was born.

Cirque du Soleil was officially created in 1984 with the assistance of the Quebec government, as part of the celebrations surrounding the 450th anniversary of Jacques Cartier’s arrival in Canada. Cirque was based on a totally new concept: a striking, dramatic mix of the circus arts and street entertainment, featuring wild, outrageous costumes, staged under magical lighting, and set to original music. With not a single animal in the ring, Cirque’s difference was clear from the very start. The show debuted in the Quebec town of Gaspé and was then performed in 10 other cities throughout the province. The first blue and yellow big top seated 800.

Since its creation, millions of people from around the world have seen Cirque du Soleil’s productions. In 1996, the Cirque du Soleil International Headquarters was completed in Montreal. This \$40 million project made it possible for more than 500 permanent Montreal employees to work together. It is here that all of Cirque du Soleil’s shows are created and produced.

Cirque today runs several simultaneous productions worldwide. Some of the productions, such as *Mystère* and *O* in Las Vegas, *La Nouba* at Walt Disney World, and *Alegria* in Biloxi, Mississippi, enjoy permanent runs. Others, including *Quidam*, *Saltimbanco*, and *Dralion*, are touring in both the United States and Europe. Cirque du Soleil also has released its first feature film, *Alegria*, inspired by the show of the same name, and its first-ever large-format (IMAX) production, *Journey of Man*.

Cirque du Soleil also is known for its commitment to social causes, particularly youth at risk. One percent of potential revenues from ticket sales every year is devoted to outreach programs. Cirque du Soleil can identify with the situation at-risk youth are facing because, in its own way, the Cirque lifestyle is also a wandering, marginal one. The creators of Cirque du Soleil were young self-taught artists who couldn’t be pigeonholed, and before they began playing under sumptuous big tops, their only stage was the street.

Cirque du Soleil’s social action knows no borders, reaching out to youth worldwide. This outreach is proactive and committed, since Cirque chooses its partners and undertakes to work with them long term for a common goal. Just as their shows seek to stimulate the imagination and inspire dreams, so they strive to work creatively with youth at risk, opening



*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

up new avenues to help them find their place in the community without forcing them into highly structured and disciplined roles.

Cirque du Soleil wants to achieve a multiplier effect for its social action by building a solidarity network centered around its chosen cause. Alliances have been forged with numerous partners from all sectors of society that share in the commitment to helping youth in difficulty.

The international success story known as Cirque du Soleil is above all the story of a remarkable bond among performers and spectators the world over. For at the end of the day, it is the spectators who spark the creative passions of Cirque du Soleil.

Adapted from the Cirque du Soleil Web site, [www.cirquedusoleil.com](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com)

## *Quidam*

In 1996, Cirque du Soleil premiered a work entitled *Quidam*. According to Cirque du Soleil's Web site, the character *Quidam* is meant to be "a nameless passer-by, a solitary figure lingering on a street corner, a person rushing past. It could be anyone, anybody. Someone coming, going, living in our anonymous society. A member of the crowd, one of the silent majority. One who cries out, sings and dreams within us all. This is the *Quidam* that Cirque du Soleil is celebrating."

This work is different from previous productions in that it contains a narrative story line. The performance opens with Zoe, a young, angry girl who already has seen everything there is to see. *Quidam*, the anonymous character, invites Zoe into a mysterious, magical world, and she discovers that there is a lot more out there than she ever could have imagined. She meets John and Fritz, who befriend her and dazzle her. She is very excited about her new discoveries in this world, but then she sees her parents. Her parents, though, cannot see her, just as they don't notice her in the real world. In the end everything works out for Zoe. She is reunited with her parents and is glad to see them again. She is much appreciated in the real world now, but is sad to leave the excitement of *Quidam* behind. For just a second, Zoe is reluctant to leave and looks to John for advice. He hates to say good-bye to her, but he knows she must return to her own world and her own life.

*Quidam* was written and directed by Franco Dragone, who has been working with Cirque du Soleil since 1985. Dragone came to the circus from a background in theatre, working with several theatrical companies across Europe. It was his experiences in Europe that led Dragone to propose an integration of theatre and circus that is now the trademark of Cirque du Soleil. The rest of the creative team included Michel Crete, set designer; Dominique Lemieux, costume designer; Benoit Jutras, composer; Debra Brown, choreographer; Luc Lafortune, lighting designer; and Francois Bergeron, sound designer. *Quidam* has more than 50 performers, ranging in age from 12 to 43. The current cast members hail from Canada, United States, France, Russia, Ukraine, China, England, Argentina, Belgium, Australia, and Israel.

Cirque du Soleil means "circus of the sun." *Quidam*, like all of Cirque du Soleil's shows, can be considered a circus performance. A circus is a type of performance staged in a circle surrounded by tiers of seats, usually under a tent. While the tradition of travelling performers can be traced back to the middle ages, the first modern circus was staged in London in 1768 by Philip Astley. His circus included only one act — a show of trick horsemanship. Over time, circus performances expanded to include many different kinds of acts. Today, a circus performance typically includes displays of horsemanship; exhibitions by gymnasts, aerialists, wild-animal trainers, and performing animals; and comic pantomime by clowns. The founders of Cirque du Soleil loved the circus, but wanted to change it. Cirque du Soleil is not about elephants and lion tamers. It is more the circus of the future, a fusion of street performance and theatre.

The structure of *Quidam* (circus acts linked by a storyline) imitates the style called vaudeville. The American tradition of vaudeville grew out of saloon entertainment during

*The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers*

Extended Workshop Session

Program 1: What Is Art?

the late 1800s. The pattern of a vaudeville performance was always the same: separate acts to musical accompaniment by comedians, serious and comic singers, jugglers, dancers, magicians, trick cyclists, etc., all structured in a single program or “bill” to be performed twice nightly.

One of the comments you will hear about *Quidam* is that it is visually breathtaking. The set for *Quidam* is stunning. One of the production’s most spectacular features is a 120-foot overhead conveyor, whose five imposing rails take up the entire interior surface of the Big Top. This system is used to bring performers onto the stage and to create a multitude of special effects in various acts. The costumes for *Quidam* are colorful, spectacular, and unique. The costumes were designed to let the individual personality of each performer and character come through.

The music of *Quidam* is of remarkable dramatic intensity. Drawing on influences that range from classical music to the most eclectic and contemporary sounds, the music accompanies, envelops, and accentuates the magic of the show. The music is played live by six musicians using violins, cellos, percussion instruments, saxophones, synthesizers, samplers, electric guitars, classical guitars, and a varied assortment of other string instruments. For the very first time at Cirque du Soleil, the voices of a man and a child add texture and unique color to the music.

Adapted from the Cirque du Soleil Web site, [www.cirquedusoleil.com](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com)

## *Parade*

In May 1917, a collaboration among famous artists from various disciplines resulted in a unique ballet entitled *Parade*. The scenario was written by Jean Cocteau, the music was created by Erik Satie, costumes were designed by Pablo Picasso, and the choreography was created by Léonide Massine.

“Parade,” according to a French dictionary, is a “comic act, put on at the entrance of a traveling theatre to attract a crowd.” Therefore, the play is based on the idea of a traveling theatre troupe whose “Parade” is mistaken by the crowd for the real circus act. The managers and performers try to get the crowd to enter the circus tent, but no one enters.

Characters in the work include a Chinese magician, a little American girl, acrobats, three managers, and a horse.

Audiences of 1917 hated *Parade*, but it is remembered today as one of the first surrealist productions. After studying *Parade*, you will notice many similarities to *Quidam*, which many call a contemporary surrealist performance.

*Parade* followed this simple story line, written by Cocteau:

*The set represents a street in front of several houses in Paris on a Sunday. A traveling theatre troupe, the Théâtre Forain, is present on the street performing three music hall acts — the Chinese Magician, Acrobats, and the Little American Dancing Girl. Together, the acts are called a Parade. Three managers of the theatre troupe organize the publicity. They communicate in their extraordinary language that the crowd should join the Parade to see the show inside and grossly try to make the crowd understand this. No one enters. After the last act of the Parade, the exhausted managers collapse on each other. Seeing the supreme effort and the failure of the managers, the Chinese Magician, the Acrobats, and the Little American Girl try to explain to the crowd that the show takes place inside.*

What was unique about this piece was the artists’ nonrealistic approach to performance. A 1917 description of the performance may help:

*Picasso painted a drop curtain — a Cubist depiction of a cityscape with a miniature theater at its center. The action itself began with the First Manager dressed in Picasso’s 10-foot-high Cubist costume dancing to a simple repeated rhythmic theme. The American manager was dressed as a skyscraper and his movements were very accented and strict. The Third Manager performed in silence on horseback and introduced the next act, two acrobats who tumbled to the music of a fast waltz played by xylophones. The ballet ended with the Little American Girl in tears as the crowds refused to enter the circus tent.*

Reading

## Vaudeville

The term “vaudeville” may derive from a part of France known as the Vau (valley) de Vire, where a certain kind of light song was popular. In the United States, however, the entertainment form known as vaudeville is a variety show that developed from the saloons of the mid-1800s, where light entertainment was provided for hard-working cowboys, lumberjacks, and miners.

While vaudeville was mostly light-hearted, performances invariably conformed to a strict structure: Up to 20 live acts by acrobats, clowns, comedians, contortionists, dancers, jugglers, magicians, mimes, singers, and trick cyclists were presented in a single program or “bill” performed twice each night. Acts were presentational, aimed directly at the audience. Anything that promised to astound or entertain — from humorous sketches and short plays to feats of strength and animal tricks — was fair game. The bill was organized to guarantee something for everyone, but acts were not related in any way.

Acts traveled from place to place, usually performing in the theatres of a single vaudeville circuit or chain, to find new audiences. Highly critical of poor performances, vaudeville audiences were known to hiss and catcall when displeased. Audience members often ate, drank, smoked, and talked during performances.

By the early 1900s, vaudeville evolved into the theatrical form of the American musical, which to this day uses a storyline and related music performances to patch together often distinct “acts.”

Adapted from *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre*, ed. J. R. Brown, Oxford University Press, 1995.