

Photo by Florence Montmarie.

2022/23 Season

Air Play
by Acrobuffos



broadstage
at the Santa Monica College
Performing Arts Center

broadstage
Learning Guide



Photo by Florence Montmare.

Go behind the scenes! Explore our creative Learning Guides with insights, fun facts and activities to enrich and inform your performance experience at BroadStage. For families, students and learners of all ages, Learning Guides place arts education center stage.

Inspiration

Air Play is what happens when two talented clowns and street performers come together to create a highly visual and physical journey up in the air. Seth Bloom and Christina Gelsone bring their extensive background in comedic arts and physical theater together as the performing duo, Acrobuffos; a clever hybrid of the Italian acrobata (acrobat) and buffone (clown). Engaging audiences through a wordless spectacle paired with science and the whimsy of Daniel Wurtzel's air sculptures, *Air Play* is visual poetry that ebbs and flows from laughter to wonder and everything in between. Prepare to witness the ordinary turn extraordinary as packing peanuts, umbrellas, balloons and more soar through the air as if by magic. Defying gravity and the physics of air currents has never been more epic.



Photo by Florence Montmare.

“Fun for all ages’ is a common puff in the arts, but with *Air Play* it’s strictly true. From the minute the curtain goes up on this buoyant fusion of wordless clowning and aerial spectacle, you feel as if you’ve stepped into an enchanted world somewhere between childhood and what comes afterwards, where normal rules (gravity included) have been temporarily held at bay.... A joy from start to finish, *Air Play* will entrance children, and will act as a great reset button for stressed adults.” —*Sydney Morning Herald*

Investigation



Photo by Florence Montmare.

What Is Kinetic Art?

Art that moves is called kinetic art. Kinetic means in motion, active or lively. Kinetic art can be moved by the viewer (that's you!); nature, like wind and water; or a motor. A mobile that dangles over a baby's crib or a pop-up book are examples of kinetic art. Sometimes we can clearly identify what is physically moving, but sometimes the art tricks the eye and creates an **optical illusion**. As if by magic, a kinetic **sculpture** or painting can appear to be in motion. In *Air Play*, the artists use large fans to blow lightweight materials that move through the air, creating a stage full of kinetic art.

Fun Facts

Acrobuffos has performed in over 30 countries around the world. For every show, a truck (and sometimes a plane) helps deliver 29 large cases of costumes, props and equipment, totaling around 2,000 pounds. That is the weight of two grand pianos! The load includes: 25 fans with extension cords, 8 umbrellas, 6 large pieces of fabric, 4 prop suitcases, a fog machine and balloons of various sizes. How long do you think it takes them to pack for their trip?

One of the largest balloons that exists is a hot air balloon. Passengers of this aircraft ride in a large basket and are lifted up by the heated air in the balloon, which is called the envelope. The flames from a burner heat the air inside the envelope. This heat makes the air lighter than the cooler air on the outside. You may already know that heat rises. It is the rising heat inside the balloon that makes it float upwards. Did you know that you can't steer a hot air balloon? The pilots rely on the direction of the wind. They turn the burner on and off to raise or lower the balloon in order to catch a ride on an air current. Hopefully, the air current goes in the direction that they want to go!

How Do They Do That?

Air Play combines art, science, theater and circus. Artists Seth Bloom and Christina Gelsone use clowning techniques on stage as they create magical kinetic art with electricity and air. Not only are they super creative, but they have also developed their

scientific knowledge of **fluid dynamics**, to help them perform. They had to calculate the **velocity**, pressure, **density** and temperature of the fluid (in this case air), because these affect the way the air will flow. Daniel Wurtzel is the artist who helped with these calculations, and is known for creating kinetic sculptures. Together they measured and experimented to make air sculptures fly on stage. Air moves different materials in different ways so the fluid dynamics are different for each air sculpture. Another part of the calculation is the theater itself. Each theater is different in size and design, and this will affect the airflow. The number of people in the audience is also important because warm air is generated by each body in the audience and more people equals more heat. More heat means that more electric fans are needed in order to have the desired air currents to create the air sculpture.

The Acrobuffos duo learned all of this by experimenting with their calculations over and over again. Sometimes it was not easy. As Christina says in an interview, "I have a scene with a delicately-balanced balloon, which I push out over the audience. One of the first times we had a crowd of a couple of hundred people, because of their body heat it just went up and didn't come back down! There's no way to rehearse that!" (see Resources).

Vocabulary

Air: The invisible gases surrounding the earth, a mixture mainly of oxygen and nitrogen

Density: The measurement of how heavy and tightly packed together a substance is

Fluid Dynamics: In science (physics and engineering), describes the movement of fluids (air, gases, etc)

Optical illusion: Something that deceives the eye by appearing to be other than it is

Sculpture: A three dimensional artwork created by shaping or combining materials

Velocity: A measure of how fast something moves in a given direction

Exploration



Try This

KINETIC SCULPTURE/MOBILE

Think of a theme for a wind sculpture. What kinds of images or objects would you like to dangle in the air? Family photos, magazine images, small drawings or pictures of animals are some possibilities. Remember to keep your choices lightweight!

To create a mobile you will need a base from which to hang your objects or art pieces (a twig or clothes hanger will work well). Other supplies are string, yarn or wire and a hole punch. Tie various lengths of strings to your base. At the other end of each string tie your objects. Space them apart so that the mobile is balanced and the objects can blow with the air currents. Hang your mobile in a place that allows all of your objects to dangle and move freely. Enjoy watching the wind blow your homemade kinetic art.

DESIGN YOUR OWN VISUAL POEM

The artists call *Air Play* a visual poem. Visual poetry is meant to be seen by an audience rather than only heard. Try creating your own visual poem with this easy & fun technique.

Using the book titles on the spines of books you can compose your own visual poem. Take a variety of your own books, stack the books horizontally so that the spines face you. Now combine all the titles of the books, moving them as needed, to create a poem. The mixture of words, fonts, book colors and sizes creates your visual poem. Take a picture of your visual poem and send it to your friends and to us at BroadStage. We would love to see what you came up with!

Who Has Seen the Wind?

Acrobuffos creates visual poetry using wind.
Read this verbal poem and reflect on the magic of wind.

Who Has Seen the Wind?

By Christina Rossetti

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling,
The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads,
The wind is passing by.

Source: *The Golden Book of Poetry* (1947)

Take It Further

Check out our [Resources Page](#) with website links and relevant state standards to use for the classroom.

Resources

Website and Research Links

Artist Daniel Wurtzel

Interview with Acrobuffos

Create a Kinetic Sculpture

Hot Air Experiment

*Bill Nye the Science Guy —
Fluid Dynamics*

*Bill Nye the Science Guy —
Atmospheric Pressure*

What is a Poem?

Suggested CA State Standards

SIXTH GRADE STANDARDS

CA VAPA Theatre 6. 2.1 Participate in improvisational activities, demonstrating an understanding of and context.

CA VAPA Theatre 6. 2.2 Use effective vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, and timing to create character.

CA VAPA Theatre 6. 2.3 Write and perform scenes or one-act plays that include monologue, action, and setting together with a range of character types.

CA VAPA Theatre 6. 4.1 Develop and apply appropriate criteria for evaluating sets, lighting, and props.

CCSS ELA-Writing 6. 3.a,b,c,d,e Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS WHST 6-8 1.a,b,c,d,e Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

CCSS WHST 6-8 2.a,b,c,d,e,f Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

CCSS WHST 6-8 7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

DI.6-8.8 I am curious and want to know more about other people's histories and lived experiences, and I ask questions respectfully and listen carefully and non-judgmentally.

AC.6-8.16 I am concerned about how people (including myself) are treated and feel for people when they are excluded or mistreated because of their identities.

SEL COMPETENCIES

Self-Management: Impulse Control, Stress Management, Self-Discipline, Self-Motivation, Goal Setting, Organizational Skills.

Relationship Skills: Communication, Social Engagement, Relationship Building, Teamwork

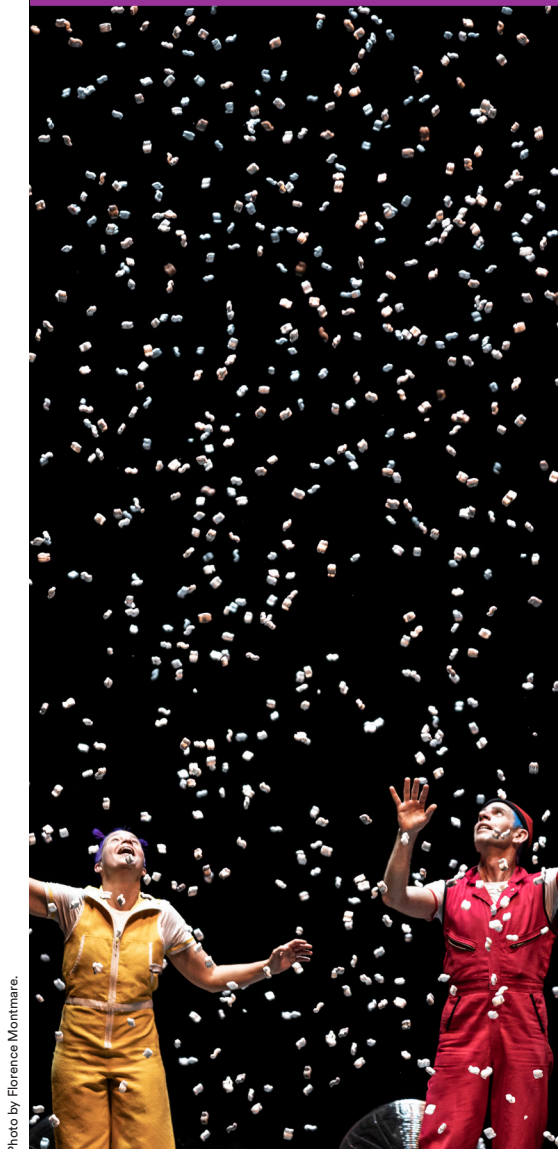


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