Air Play

Fri • December 1 • 9:15 & 11:15 am
Welcome to the Hop
A performance needs an audience, so be prepared to play your part!

Theater Etiquette
When entering the Hopkins Center, show consideration for all those sharing the building by remaining quiet and respectful in common areas.
Be aware and use quiet voices. Remember that live theater differs greatly from watching television or movies or attending a sporting event. Live performers can hear and see you and are easily distracted by any talking or moving around in the audience. Even the smallest sounds can be heard throughout the theater, so it’s best to be quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance. Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation!
Important to remember: Backpacks, food, drink, and gum are not allowed in the theater. Please turn off all cell phones and note that recording the performance or taking any photos is strictly prohibited. Hats off! It is respectful to remove hats during your time in the theater.

Information For Teachers
Prepare—review this study guide for context that will help your students engage with the performance. Check in with the Hop if you have any questions or concerns about content. Read the letter that accompanies this guide—Hop staff often requests details about your visit including how many buses you’ll be bringing and what accommodations you need.
Arrive—arrive 30 minutes prior to start time to allow time for Hop staff to check you in and escort students to their seats. Hop staff will ask you for a head count of students. Please review our bus policy before arrival: hop.dartmouth.edu/online/plan_a_successful_visit
Lunch—sometimes we are able to offer a space for schools to eat bag lunches following the show. Check the letter that accompanies this guide to confirm. If staying for lunch, please confirm with Hop staff one week prior to show. The day of the show, please bring lunches in boxes or tubs labeled with school’s name. Hop staff will take lunches to the lunch space and escort school group there following the show. Schools are responsible for calling their own bus back to the Hop when they are ready to leave.
Ticketing Policy—no tickets are issued for school matinee performances. Seating placement for each school group is determined by Hop staff. Please let them know if you have a seating request or accommodation; we do our best to keep each school group seated together. Payment is required 30 days before the performance regardless of whether all students are able to attend on the day of the show—please feel free to bring extra chaperones or school staff to fill any empty seats.
Photography—though photography by the audience is prohibited, the Hopkins Center may take photographs during the performance for use on our website or other promotional materials. If you or your students do not wish to be photographed, please let Hop staff know.
The Show Must Go On!—we do not cancel events due to school closings for inclement weather. Performances will only be cancelled if the artist is unable to reach the theater. Schools will be notified by phone if this occurs. We do not issue refunds for performances missed due to school closure. Please contact Hop staff if you find your school unable to attend for this reason.

This study guide was created by the Hop’s Outreach and Arts Education team. To download copies of this and other guides, visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach

Enjoy The Show!
Hopkins Center Outreach Department:
Stephanie Pacheco, Outreach Manager
Mary Gaetz, Outreach Coordinator
The Hopkins Center Outreach & Arts Education department embodies the Hop’s mission to “ignite and sustain a passion for the arts.” It provides Dartmouth, the community and beyond rare personal contact with artists and a broad context for the performing arts. Unveiling the creative process of extraordinarily diverse artists, Outreach programs touch more than 14,000 lives each year.

Did You Know?
• The Hopkins Center opened in 1962.
• The Hopkins Center was designed by Wallace Harrison, architect of Lincoln Center and the United Nations Building in New York City.
• The first three rows of The Moore Theater are on an elevator that goes eleven feet below ground to create an orchestra pit and can also be raised to the height of the stage to make it larger.
• In The Moore Theater, the area over the stage, called the “fly loft,” is 63 feet tall.

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About the Show

*Air Play* is a modern *spectacle* that brings to life the very air we breathe. Flying umbrellas, larger-than-life balloons, giant kites floating over the audience and the biggest snow globe ever seen! A “visual poem,” *Air Play* is the circus-style adventure of two *siblings* traveling through a *surreal* world of air, transforming ordinary objects into works of *uncommon* beauty. These two characters do not have names, but they wear two different colors so they are simply known as Red and Yellow. They interact with a variety of air sculptures: fabric dancing in the wind, balloons that have a mind of their own and confetti that turns into the night sky.

There are a lot of beautiful and funny things in *Air Play*, but there is no talking by the performers. This is a non-verbal show, meaning there is no speaking. Instead, the performers rely on their physical movement and the *imagery* they create with their faces, bodies and the air sculptures.

Since no language is used in the story, everyone can fully understand it based on what they see. Each person will see something a little bit different and that is good. It means you are using your *imagination* and seeing not only the story on stage, but a little bit of your own story as well. Recorded music played during the show helps you use your imagination.

A scene from *Air Play* where fabric flies out over the audience.
About the Artists

Though they play brother and sister in the performance, Seth Bloom and Christina Gelsone are married in real life. They met while doing street performance in Scotland and became life and clown partners soon after. They have created six shows together and have performed on The Late Show with David Letterman and with the Big Apple Circus. They live in New York City and are both trained as clowns and circus performers. For Air Play they team up with sculpture artist Daniel Wurtzel. Daniel has worked with heavy stone, wood and bronze but recently began creating work using visible air streams, transforming everyday materials into art. His air sculpting has appeared in many places, including Finding Neverland on Broadway (which included a glitter vortex!), the Sochi Olympics in Russia and Cirque du Soleil.

What’s in a Name?

When Christina, Seth and Daniel started working on the show, they didn’t have a name for it. They tried using Ka-Boom and Bull’s Eye Squall. One day, a friend remarked that the beautiful music in the show was like “airplay” on the radio. Since they play with real air, the word became the title for the show.
Contextual Background

Clowns + Sculptor = Theater

No one knew what Air Play would be when Christina, Seth and Daniel began working on it. They spent many months talking, experimenting and brainstorming to develop the air sculptures used in the show. Once they had the air sculptures, they began working on how the characters related to the sculptures—why were they there? How did they change what was happening, or make something new happen? This process is called workshopping—just like you would build something from wood or metal in a workshop, you do the same with the performing arts. Christina and Seth came to see the air sculptures as acrobats in the circus—moving in breathtaking, gravity-defying ways like a trapeze artist. They added their clown training and soon were telling the story through movement—both theirs and the objects being moved by air. After rehearsing and revising, the final performance came together into a beautiful theater piece.

Break the Wall

In most plays and musicals in the theater, the actors are trained not to directly interact with or react to the audience. Most actors use their imagination to pretend there is a wall between themselves and the audience. This wall is known as the fourth wall. Though actors are trained to ignore the audience, clowns are taught the opposite. In circus, an acrobat does not pretend to do a handstand, she is actually doing it. Likewise, clowns look right at the audience and often go into the audience. This allows the clown to share their emotional reactions directly with the people who see the show. It’s one thing if someone puts their hand in the cookie jar. It’s quite different if they put their hand in the jar and then realize someone is watching. That “uh-oh!” moment is what is funny and it is important that the audience is invited to laugh along.

Give and Take

Clowns have many words for looking at someone or reacting in a specific way. These looks and reactions are called “takes:"

Take to the audience: when a clown looks at the audience, including them in the reaction

Double take: looking at something or someone, looking away, then quickly looking back again with more emotion or a bigger reaction

Spit take: when hearing or seeing something makes a clown that has just taken a drink of water spit all the water out in surprise

Slow burn: when one clown turns slowly to another out of anger

See a demonstration of these takes at dictionary.tdf.org/double-take/

As you can see from the photos on this page, the clowns in Air Play don’t wear wigs, heavy makeup or big shoes. The word “clown” indicates that Christina and Seth are trained to use their bodies and movement to tell comical stories without needing to speak. Though they sometimes wear goofy clothes and they like to dye their hair bright colors, they are not clowns in a traditional sense—they just like fun clothes and hair!
Red and Yellow

As Christine and Seth worked on the show, they decided they wanted to keep the scenery very simple—the show was about air which is also simple. They were inspired by the art of Surrealist painter Joan Miró. His painting *The Magic of Color* provided the inspiration they needed. The Surrealists sought to reveal the true nature of humanity using art, often turning dreams and subconscious thoughts into works of visual art. Surrealist artwork shares these ideas, though the style varies greatly from artist to artist. Another word that describes Miró’s painting is abstract. When something is abstract, it requires use of imagination to understand it. It is also open to interpretation, meaning different people have different ideas about what it looks like and what it means. The bright, bold colors of this painting took on new meaning for Christina and Seth and they incorporated it into the overall look of the show.

Air

Just like the title says, *Air Play* is all about playing with air. The air is generated by many fans that are placed very carefully in various places on the stage and in the auditorium. In some cases, you will see the fans; other times, you may not. To “sculpt” the air, the team must carefully control the amount of air, the force behind the air and direction from which it comes. It is also important to practice with the items that the air will be moving to figure out how much air is needed to move a piece of fabric or an umbrella. For *Air Play*, over 20 different types of umbrellas were tested, but only three worked the way the team needed them to work.

Aerodynamics

While air is an important part of our everyday lives, we don’t always think about how we are interacting with it, or how it interacts with us. Often, we are not even aware of the air around us, even though we need it to survive.

Aerodynamics is the way air moves around things, and anything that moves through air reacts to aerodynamics. A rocket blasting off the launch pad and a kite in the sky react to aerodynamics. Aerodynamics even acts on cars, since air flows around cars. In *Air Play*, aerodynamics reacts to umbrellas, large pieces of fabric, Styrofoam peanuts. In order to get each item to move in a specific way, it is important to understand how it reacts to aerodynamics.

There are four forces that allow items to take flight. They are weight, lift, drag and thrust. These forces make an object move up and down, faster and slower. The amount of each force changes how the object moves through the air.
What is Weight?

Everything on Earth has weight. This force comes from gravity pulling down on objects. To fly, an aircraft needs something to push it in the opposite direction from gravity. The weight of an object controls how strong the push has to be. A kite needs a lot less upward push than a jumbo jet does.

What is Lift?

Lift is the push that lets something move up. It is the force that is the opposite of weight. Everything that flies must have lift. For an aircraft to move upward, it must have more lift than weight. A hot air balloon has lift because the hot air inside is lighter than the air around it. Hot air rises and carries the balloon with it. A helicopter’s lift comes from the rotor blades at the top of the helicopter. Their motion through the air moves the helicopter upward. Lift for an airplane comes from its wings.

What is Drag?

Drag is a force that tries to slow something down. It makes it hard for an object to move. It is harder to walk or run through water than through air. That is because water causes more drag than air. The shape of an object also changes the amount of drag. Most round surfaces have less drag than flat ones. Narrow surfaces usually have less drag than wide ones. The more air that hits a surface, the more drag it makes.

What is Thrust?

Thrust is the force that is the opposite of drag. Thrust is the push that moves something forward. For an aircraft to keep moving forward, it must have more thrust than drag. A small airplane might get its thrust from a propeller. A larger airplane might get its thrust from jet engines. A glider does not have thrust. It can only fly until the drag causes it to slow down and land.
Pre-performance discussion questions

• How do you interact with air every day? When are you aware of the air around you?
• Are you inspired by any colors in your life? What colors do you like to have around you? Why?
• What do you think it will feel like to have the performers look at you while they are performing?
• Have you seen other shows (TV, movies, etc.) that use movement as the primary way to tell a story?

Post-performance discussion questions

• Where did you see parts of Mirò’s painting *The Magic of Color* in the performance?
• In what ways did the performers interact with the audience? How did it make you feel?
• In one minute, name as many objects from the show as you can. Compare with others. What did the class find to be most memorable?
• Which air sculpture was your favorite? Which one do you think you could recreate in the classroom or at home?

Learning Activities

Clown Warm ups (grades 2–4)

Clown’s use the muscles in their face to make their reactions effective. It’s important that they warm up those muscles. Students start with their face in neutral with no expression, just relaxed. Then, have them rub their face with their hands, stretching and squishing (but not hurting). Next, have students shrink their face as small as they can, making it tiny like a raisin. Then have them open their face as big as possible, including the mouth, like a lion. Repeat three times, then repeat three more times, switching faster and faster between both faces.

Show and Tell—Clown Version (grades 2–5)

Collect a variety of small objects from the room—boring, weird, tasty, smelly. Have one desk that is the “hot seat” for the clown. The clown sits down in the seat with their eyes closed. Another person places one of the objects on the desk. After a count of three, the clown opens their eyes and looks at the surprise object. Immediately, the clown does a “take” to the audience that expresses how they feel about the object—happy, disgusted, scared, mad, disappointed. Clowns get to choose their reaction and must use their imagination to make the take big. The bolder and bigger the take, the better the response from the audience.

Drop and Fly (grades 3–5)

You will need a hair dryer for this activity. Have students look around the classroom and make an educated guess as to what objects might fall slowly and softly. As students name items, give permission for some students to take items and test their hypothesis. Students should hold the item above head height and drop it to the floor, observing how it falls. Was it slowly? Did it land softly? Did it fall in a straight line or in a different way? Is the object able to be altered in a way that might change the way it falls? Was the hypothesis correct? Set aside objects that fell softly and slowly. Next, get out a hair dryer. Make sure it is set to the “cool” setting and turn it on, facing directly upward. Carefully, have students place one of the selected objects above the air stream and let go. Observe what happens. Does the object fall, hover, fly away? Does changing the object in any way change the way it interacts with the air stream? Note: ping pong balls usually hover!
Drive My Car (grades 4–5)

Create a vehicle powered by air. Supplies needed are: an electric fan, drinking straws, 4 x 6 index cards, Life Savers candy, paper clips, paper cups, plastic bags, rubber bands, rulers, scissors, sheets of paper, string and tape.

Working in groups or individually, begin building the car(s) by having students insert two Life Savers on the ends of two straws and tape straws to bottom of the short side of an index card.

Next, have students brainstorm ways to modify the basic design using supplies on hand to make the car move using wind. Have them choose an idea for their windcatcher and build it, attaching to the body of the car. Next, pass out 10 paper clips and explain that the car now must carry a load while moving. Using string, students can tie the clips together and then tie or tape the string to the back of the car so the clips trail a few inches behind. Students can then test the cars by setting up a starting line and finish line and position fan to blow the car from start to finish. Using low speed on the fan, have each car take a turn to see if it can get across the finish line. If the car did not make it, give students time to make adjustments to the design and try again. Help students assess if their design can eliminate friction, increase windcatcher’s ability to harness more air, or if the wheels can move more freely.

EXTENSIONS: Adjust the start and finish lines to further challenge the vehicles. Do a monster truck challenge, adding on five more paper clips at a time to each car. Take what was learned from first vehicle and have students apply it to construction of a second wind-powered vehicle.

Vocabulary

**Brainstorming:** produce new ideas and solve problems by holding a group discussion

**Canopy:** a cloth covering held up over or covering something

**Comical:** funny

**Experimenting:** try out new concepts or ways of doing things

**Gravity:** force that attracts a body toward the center of the earth, or toward any other physical body having mass

**Imagery:** pictures

**Imagination:** ability to be creative and think of new ideas

**Revise:** make changes to

**Scenery:** also called the set, the pieces of furniture, walls and other items that create the place setting for a play or musical

**Sculpture:** to make or represent something by carving, casting or using other shaping techniques

**Siblings:** brothers and sisters

**Spectacle:** a large show for the public

**Subconscious:** something happens without complete awareness

**Surreal:** strange or bizarre

**Uncommon:** unique
Additional Resources and References

Visit the Montshire Museum of Science in Norwich, VT and interact with their amazing AirPlay exhibit! Get more info at montshire.org/exhibits/detail/air-play-exhibition

Read more about Seth and Christine’s clowning at acrobuffos.com/about

danielwurtzel.com/air.cfm

menil.org/collection/objects/1876-painting-the-magic-of-color-peinture-la-magie-de-la-couleur

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Mir%C3%B3

explainthatstuff.com/aerodynamics.html

nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/k-4/stories/nasa-knows/what-is-aerodynamics-k4.html