

The  
**Ballad of  
Pondlife**  
M<sup>c</sup>Gurk

Years 4 - 6

21 - 25 Nov



**SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE** 



## Introduction

### A. Introduction

These Teacher's Notes have been designed to assist you with classroom preparation and extension work in relation to the production of *The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk*. We hope that this resource will assist your students to further enjoy and enhance their performing arts experience back in the classroom. The activities are designed for students from Years 4 to 6.

The activities included in this resource provide opportunities for students to explore the broad themes and style of the performance. The NSW Board of Studies syllabi have been used as guides for the planning of these activities. You should consider adapting and rephrasing the questions and activities to suit the particular terminology, curriculum foci and outcomes used in your school.

Some websites are suggested throughout this resource. It is recommended that you first visit the sites and assess the suitability of the content for your particular school environment before setting the activities based on these.

### B. Classroom Context and Curriculum Links

The Catherine Wheels Theatre Company production of *The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk* is an engaging and highly relevant exploration of the complexities of friendships, peer groups and school life. Performed skillfully by Andy Manly, *The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk* is a memorable example of the power of theatrical storytelling without the need for excessive production elements like set, costume and lighting. *The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk* provides excellent opportunities for classroom activities and discussions with links to various curriculum areas including:

Creative Arts: Drama - (Role, Elements of Drama)

PDHPE: Communicating, Interpersonal Relationships,  
Growth and Development, Problem Solving

HSIE: Time and Change



## C. Performance Event Description and Synopsis

*Look! It's Pondlife ... Pondlife McGurk!*

Everyone has endured the awkward and unpleasant school experience of being on the outside. This all too familiar moment of not fitting in is the moment of dramatic action that begins the play *The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk*. Playwright, Rob Evans and director, Gill Roberston, have adeptly crafted a performance that, while comic in its portrayal of the trials of the school yard, also confronts the audience with some difficult moments where choices about friendship and popularity lead to unpleasant consequences.

This play tells the story of two unlikely friends who, through their friendship, build a defence against 'Neanderthal' class mates, bullying and other unpleasant school experiences.

They spend an entire summer together; climbing, hiding, running and starting their first comic. They swear an oath to stick together, to never join the dark side with the bullies at school.

Then, one day, Martin does something that will poison their friendship forever and land Simon with the nickname Pondlife McGurk.



## Pre Production

## Activity One: What Makes a Good Friend?

### Curriculum Links: Drama /PDHPE

1.1 This activity asks students to reflect on the factors that contribute to quality personal relationships. Depending on the context of your classroom, you may wish to omit or alter aspects of this activity to best suit your students.

Ask students to respond to the following questions:

1. Who are your friends?
2. Without telling anyone, think of the person/s who is/are your closest friend/s.
3. What describing words would you use when talking about these friends?
4. List all the people in your family and name some of the friends they have.
5. Why is it important to have friends?

1.2 Ask students to find somewhere in the space to work individually. As a class, list some of the things good friends do together. Some examples are; playing sport, helping with a project, walking to school, sticking up for each other, going to the movie, playing dress-ups, supporting each other in hard times, having a sleep-over etc.

Once a list of about ten actions has been created, ask the class to work with a partner. Each pair is to stand and hold a frozen pose that shows friends having a good time together. Ask the class to repeat the poses but to add a repeated movement to show the situation in action. Each pair then share their work with the class.

1.3 As a class, create a 'friendship machine'. Each person from the class will create a repeated sound/word and movement to represent the good things that are part of friendships. Ask for a volunteer to begin the activity and, after they have had a short time to show their repeated movement and sound/word, ask them to freeze. Another volunteer then joins the first person by adding their repeated sound/word and movement to the movement and sound of the first person. As volunteers are added they will need to listen to each other and work together to build a common rhythm. They will also need guidance in using space and levels to create a visually interesting machine.

Each machine can stop after about ten of first volunteering. You can then start a new machine using new volunteers. After each machine has been created, ask the class to reflect on the messages about friendship that are conveyed through the movement and sound.



Pre Production

## Activity Two: My Room

### Curriculum Links: Drama/PDHPE

2.1 In this activity your students will use drama skills to pretend to be objects and furniture. The aim of this activity is to explore identity and how the objects, colours etc. of a person's bedroom can be a symbolic reflection of their identity. They will then work in groups using drama skills to create representations of the 'character' of group member's bedrooms.

2.2 Ask your students to walk through the space until you give the command to freeze. On this command all students should be completely still. Now, ask the students to move through the space again and repeat the 'freeze' command. You can test student skills of control and concentration by asking them to hold the freeze for longer periods of time.

Ask students to move through the space again and call out random groupings of numbers, for example 'groups of three' or 'groups of six' and so on. Each time the class forms groups, ask them to create the following objects and items of furniture as frozen images:

A bed, an iPod, a skateboard, a doll house, a computer, a football, a trophy, a pile of laundry, a pair of shoes, a jewelry box etc.

2.3 Extend on the previous activity by asking students to add repeated movement and sound to represent the qualities of objects. For example

A messy bed, a brand new iPod, a funky skateboard, a neglected doll house, a frustrating computer, a champion's football and so on. Ask your students to create objects of their own. Allow them time to rehearse and offer feedback on how to best use voice and movement to represent abstract qualities.

2.4 Sit the class in front of a space where students can perform. As a class, create a living room where all the objects and furniture are made by the students using their bodies, sound and movement.

2.5 Divide the class into groups of eight. Each group is to choose one group member to interview about their bedroom. The group will then create the interior of the group member's bedroom to best represent it. If the group works quickly they can choose other group member's rooms to represent.



Pre Production

## Activity Three: All About Me!

### Curriculum Links: Drama/English

3.1 This activity asks your students to reflect on and represent their understanding of their identity. In *The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk*, the characters Simon and Martin become friends even though each boy has very different likes and interests. This theme of valuing difference in others is explored in moments throughout the performance, in particular at the conclusion of the play. Some of the exercises in this activity ask students to use the drama skill of mime.

3.2 Ask students to work with a partner. Each person is to interview his or her partner and find out as much information about them as they can. Once each pair has finished interviewing, sit the class in a circle and ask for volunteers to share one piece of information about their partner.

3.3 Working with the same partners, each pair must choose three activities that both individuals likes to do when on school holidays. They will then present these activities to the class with one person telling the class (for example “Erminia likes to draw”) and the other miming the activity.

3.4 Divide the class into groups of eight. Each person in the group will take turns being the focus of the activity. Allow the group time to ask each person questions about their likes and dislikes. By the end of the questions, each group member will need to remember one piece of information for every other group member - seven in total. The group will then need to prepare a presentation for the class like playing charades. One group member will stand and the other seven group members will each mime an activity to represent the information they have about this person. The class is to try and guess all seven likes/dislikes.

3.5 As a class, create a ‘What We Like and Don’t Like’ wall. See if the class can group the shared likes and dislikes into categories or identify the most common likes and dislikes.



Pre Production

## Activity Four: Stories About Friendship

### Curriculum Links: English/PDHPE

4.1 Note: You may need to adjust aspects of this activity to suit the age group. Students can draw on their knowledge and understanding of friendships through their reading. Ask your school librarian to recommend age appropriate books for your students to read that explore themes of friendship.

4.2 Give your students a research task for homework. Ask them to interview a family member about a very close friendship they have. The following questions can be used as a guide for the interview:

- Who is your closest friend?
- When and how did you meet them?
- What made you like your friend when you first met them?
- What other things did you learn about your friend later that also made you like them?
- What does your friend like about you?
- How are you and your friend different?
- Have you and your friend ever had a fight? What was it about and how did you make up?

4.3 Divide the class into pairs each pair is to share their interview information with their partner. Ask each pair to come up with answers to the following questions:

- What did you learn about the family members and their friendships?
- What was the most memorable answer to the interview questions?
- Why was this memorable?
- What similarities can you see in your friendships and the friendships of your family members?
- What are the differences?

Ask each pair to give feedback to the class on their answers.

4.4 Display the following quotation as a discussion starter:

"Your friend is the person who knows all about you, and still likes you."

- *Elbert Hubbard*

Have a class discussion about times when friendships don't work out or when friends have disagreements. Ask the class to identify the causes for these situations. If you can, use a personal example of your own to help explain how friendships can change.

4.5 Ask your students to work in small groups. Each group is to create a list of friendship tips or advice for helping friendships last a long time. This could be in digital form or completed as an art work or a drama performance.



Post Production

## Activity Five : Performance Reflection

### Curriculum Links: English/Drama

5.1 Before your students complete the following drama activity, instruct them to recount the performance. In their recount, ask them to identify and describe the moments they liked the most. Have the class form groups of four or five. Instruct each group to create a series of freeze frames (no more than six) that recount their excursion to the performance. They can show the journey to the Opera House, the expectations of the audience, some key moments from the performance and the journey back to school. Ask each group to present their work to the class. As a challenge, groups could attempt to present their freeze frames in the style of the performance.

5.2 The following questions can be used as guidelines for a discussion of the performance.

1. What was the play about?
2. How did the performance start and how did it finish?
3. What characters did the performer play?
4. Describe how the performer changed his voice and use of movement to play these characters.
5. Can you remember one moment you thought was funny? Describe what happened and why it was funny.
6. Tension is a very important part of drama and theatre performances. Describe what was happening in two moments from the performance when tension was very high.
7. What moments in the performance made you feel excited or happy? Why?
8. If you could say the message of the play in one sentence what would that sentence be?
9. How did the seating arrangement for the performance make the play more interesting to watch?



Post Production

## Activity Six: Images from the Play

### Curriculum Links: Drama

6.1 Ask students to close their eyes and recall moments from the performance that were memorable for them, Ask volunteers to share their recollections with the class.

6.2 Ask your students to form groups of three or four. Explain that although in the performance of *The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk* there was only one actor who played all the characters, in this activity each group member will play a character from the play.

6.3 Allow each group time to create a short scene that is a dramatisation of one moment from the play. As the groups rehearse, offer feedback and advice to groups to help them shape the dramatic action of the scene so that it has a clear beginning, complication and resolution.

6.4 When the students are ready, ask each group to present their scene to the class. Encourage feedback and discussion about the portrayal of characters, the group members' ability to use focus and concentration and the presentation of the dramatic action.



Post Production

## Activity Seven: Bullying. No Way!

### Curriculum Links: PDHPE

7.1 This activity is more suitable for upper primary students. As with activity one, you may wish to modify the way you deliver this activity depending on the social context of the class room. Begin the class with a discussion about what bullying is. Define bullying and ask the class to suggest some examples of bullying behavior. You may have a school policy document on bullying to refer to.

7.2 Divide the class into pairs. Ask each pair to visit the following website and find three important facts about bullying to share with the class:

Bullying. No Way!

<http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/>

7.3 Ask the class to participate in a physical warm up. Instruct your students to stretch both arms up to the ceiling while keeping their feet flat on the floor. Show students how to gently stretch neck muscles by tilting their head to one side and then the other. Divide the class into groups of four or five.

Each group is to create three frozen images of incidents of bullying. In each tableau, the group must clearly show the victim, the oppressor/s or bully/bullies and any bystanders or witnesses. Ask each group to show their tableaux to the class. Ask the class to name the bullying action. Then ask for volunteers to describe how each of the participants might be feeling at this moment.

7.4 Ask the groups to choose one of the three situations they showed to the class as a frozen image. Their task is to create two images that show what happened after the bullying incident. These moments can be separated by periods of time. Allow the groups the freedom to consider the consequences of the bullying action for any or all of those who were present.

Ask the class to watch each group's series of images without commenting or asking questions. Once the group has shown their tableaux, ask the class to discuss with the group what happened to each person involved in the incident. Encourage discussion around issues of justice, consequences for actions, the role of the observer etc.



Post Production

## Activity Four: Stories About Friendship (continued)

7.5 Ask students to work individually. Each person is to write a one or two minute scene where Simon and Martin meet at the airport. Before the students write their scenes, ask them to think about the sorts of possibilities that could happen in the meeting between Simon and Martin. Once students have completed their scenes either ask for volunteers to read their scene aloud or allow time for students to work with a partner and rehearse one scene to show the class.

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