



Theatre Project

Owl - Saint John Paul II: Jr. Camp

Background

Our theatre project began in mid-July-2018 and ended late-August 2018. The children were between the ages of 4 and 6. The staff at the time were Sheri Holland, Kaitlin Annu, RECE and Kara Mosher, RECE.

Phase 1: Beginning the Project

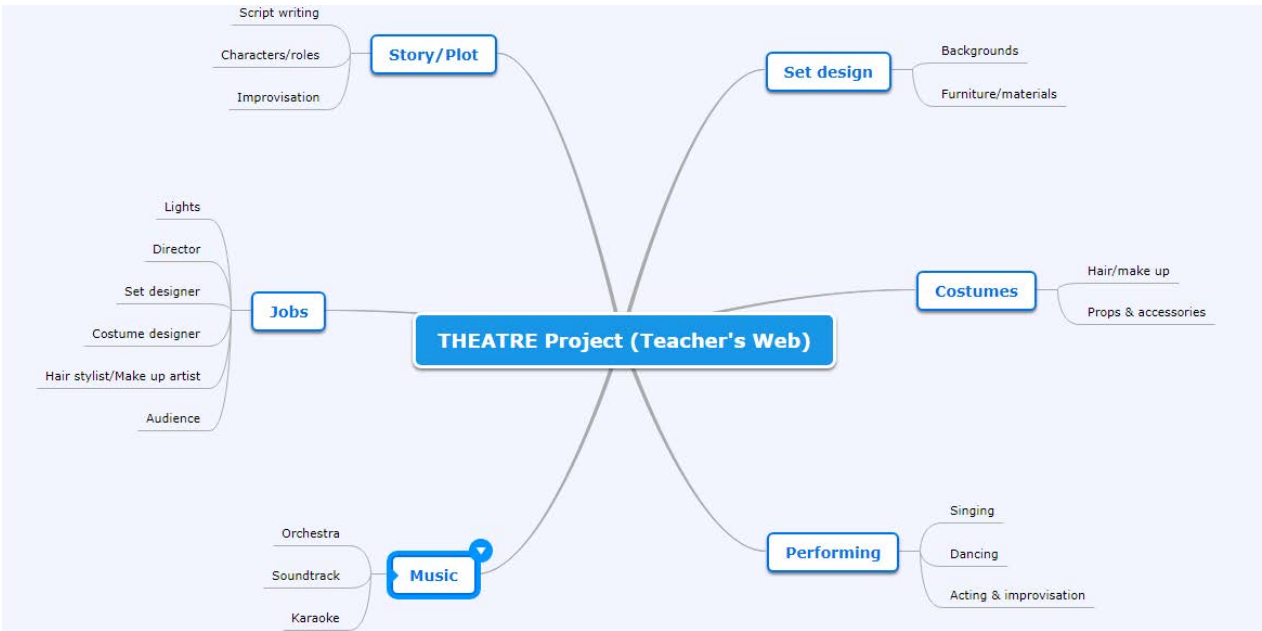
The theatre project began as we observed the children's interest in dressing up and acting out dramatic play scenarios in which they would set up an audience and be the performers. We provoked this developing interest as we provided a wider variety of dress up materials including costumes, accessories and props such as microphones. Initial questions posed to the children included, "Have you been on a stage?" and "What do you like to do on a stage?" as well as "Have you been to a show?" and "What kind of show have you been to?"

The children shared some of their performing and audience experiences as we explored what facts we know about theatre and what questions we may have.

What Do We Know?	What Do We Want To Know?	Whom can we ask?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- sit, quiet, watch a show, movie or people on stage- acting, singing, dancing, gymnastics- dress up (in costumes)- characters- popcorn, treats and drinks!- theatre is dark, lights on stage- microphones- screen (movie)- music	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What jobs are at the theatre?- What kinds of theatre are there?- How can we do improvisation?- What kind of music is there? What happens backstage / behind the scenes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Charlotte, Abby: gym teacher- Millie: school teacher or music teacher- Aleksa: dance teacher- Teachers: a performing arts centre

Phase 2: Developing the Project

We began working on our theatre project by brainstorming the areas that we could explore. The staff and the children used mind maps (webs) as a tool to help with this.



The staff and children thought we could explore different categories such as:

Staff Thoughts	Children's Thoughts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story/Plot (script writing, characters/roles, improvisation) • Set design (backgrounds, furniture/materials) • Jobs (lights, director, set designer, costume designer, hair stylist/makeup artist) • Costumes (hair/makeup, props/accessories) • Music (orchestra, soundtrack, karaoke) • Performing (singing, dancing, acting/improvisation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story • Music • Set up • Show/movie • Play/performance • Kids shows (genres such as monsters, funny movies, superheroes...) • Audience's jobs

Informal & Formal Definitions

Some “theatre” terms came up during our brainstorming. To help us understand the meanings of the terms, we had the children tell us what they know about the following (i.e. “informal” definitions).

- **Orchestra** – unsure
- **Audience** – they sit down, listen, be quiet, clap, eat snacks and have drinks
- **Applaud** – clap
- **Rehearsal** – a practice
- **Genre** – unsure
- **Comedy** – funny, silly show
- **Action** – unsure
- **Drama** – unsure
- **Performance** – a show
- **Costume** – clothes, dress up
- **Improvise** – unsure
- **Director** – unsure

The dictionary (i.e. “formal” definitions) helped us to understand our theatre terms and some of our questions, such as “What kinds (genres) of theatre are there?” and “How can we improvise?”

- **Orchestra** – a group of instrumentalists, especially one combining string, woodwind, brass, and percussion sections and playing classical music
- **Audience** – the assembled spectators or listeners at a public event, such as a play, movie, concert, or meeting
- **Applaud** – show approval or praise by clapping
- **Rehearsal** – a practice or trial performance of a play or other work for later public performance
- **Genre** – a category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter
- **Comedy** – professional entertainment consisting of jokes and satirical sketches, intended to make an audience laugh
- **Action** – a performance that involves high intensity and fast-paced entertainment sequences such as a battle or car chase
- **Drama** – an exciting, emotional, or unexpected series of events or set of circumstances
- **Performance** – an act of staging or presenting a play, concert, or other form of entertainment
- **Costume** – a set of clothes in a style
- **Improvise** – create and perform (music, drama, or verse) spontaneously or without preparation
- **Director** – a person who supervises the actors, camera crew, and other staff for a movie, play, television program, or similar production

Dramatic & Theatrical Play – Creative & Social

Throughout the project, the children have continually shown interest in creating performances using our dramatic play centre and dress up materials. The children have enjoyed dressing up as different characters, acting out roles, singing and dancing. They created an audience area by setting up chairs in front of the dramatic play centre and inviting their friends to come watch. As the children prepared their shows, they set up a “curtain” by draping blanket and sheet materials. The “set” included decorations and props such as beaded necklaces and feather boas. Alex, age 5, is showing off his creativity with a variety of costume and accessory materials.





Everett (age 5), Emma (age 6) and Kayla (age 5) decorate their set and prepare for a performance using microphone props.



Ayden (age 5) poses, looking dapper with his bow tie.

First Drawings/Representations – Creative & Literacy

We were curious to see how the children pictured theatre. We asked, “What would you do on stage?” Some of the children illustrated this then wrote their type of performance into a sentence. Many children illustrated a stage, wearing a costume, even an audience in front of the stage. Some chose singing or dancing as their favourite on stage experience.



Sophia's (age 6) dancing show, Everett's (age 5) action show, and Molly's (age 6) dancing show

3D Representations – Creative & Construction

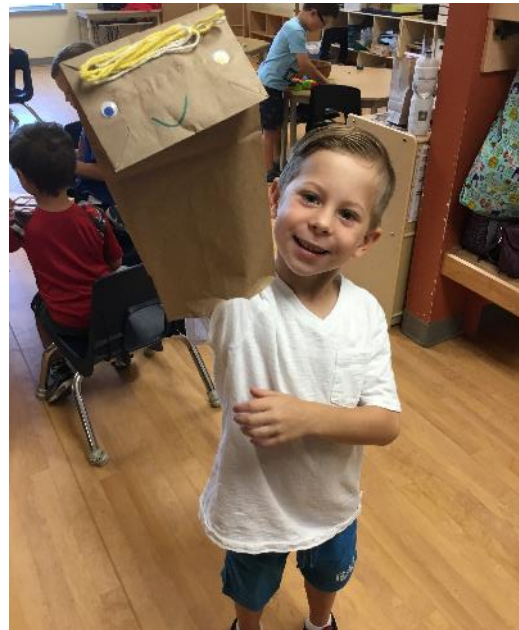
To offer a hands-on, creative activity of interest to the children, we set out various puppet-making provocations. Materials included various colours of fabric, brown paper bags, googly eyes, coloured yarn, Popsicle sticks, glitter, markers, scissors and glue. Our group created an abundance of puppets of all materials, shapes and sizes. Some were representations of themselves; others were characters such as monsters or a giant ladybug.



Avery, age 5, uses yellow string to represent her hair



Daniel, age 4, uses concentration and hand-eye co-ordination to cut yarn for his creation.



Everett displays his work - a puppet of himself.



In later weeks, the children rekindled their interest in puppet making – they began by using animal stencils for the outline and then designed their creations with markers and glitter. Kayla, Molly and Karisa (age 5) asked for Popsicle sticks and tape for puppet holders. We had many glittery unicorn puppets!



Construction Continued! – Prop Making

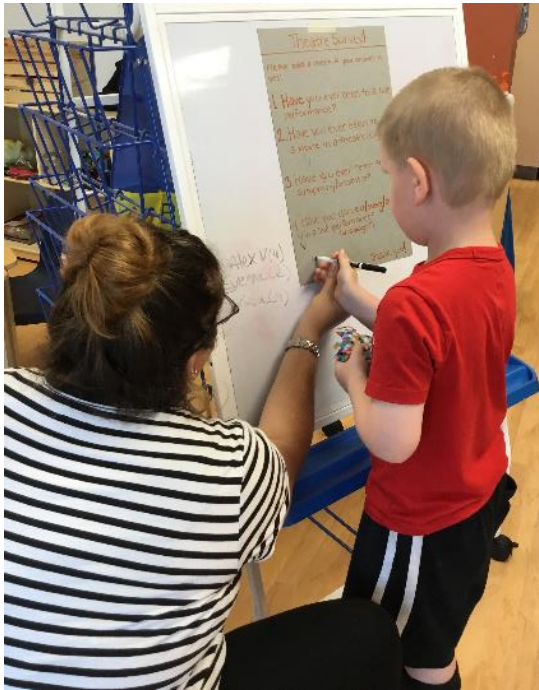
Using a provocation with cardboard, tape and markers, the children chose to create a “rocket ship”, “house” and “car.” Everett, Ayden and a few other children asked for help to tape the cardboard together in a big box shape, then added a roof of cardboard on top. The boys decided that once the rocket ship had a roof, it was a house. Everett and Ayden crawled inside to see if they could both fit.



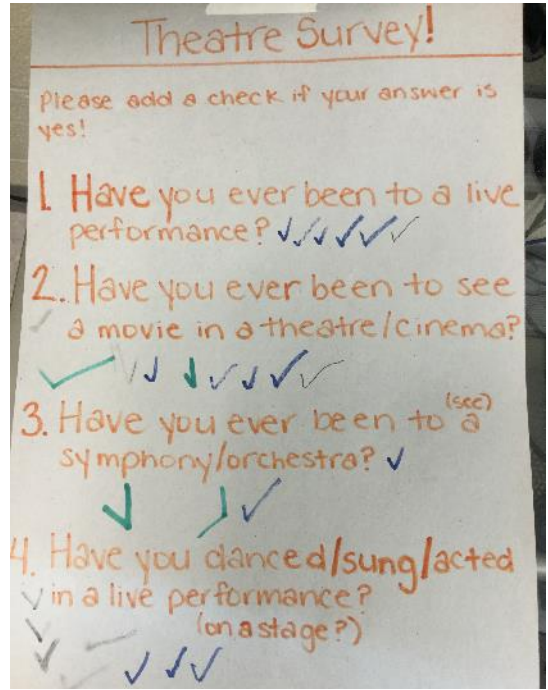
The boys then had the idea to add another smaller box, which previously was a car, on top of the house. They designated it the “oven”. The boys put blocks inside and said that they were cooking chicken! Once the oven had transformed back into a car, they had fun sitting inside and pushing each other around in it! This dramatic play activity demonstrated the children’s creativity by using simple materials along with their imaginations.

Survey – Parent Participation

We wanted to know about our group’s experience with theatre and on-stage performances. To learn more, we created a survey to offer to the children and their families. We asked the children the questions as a group then had them individually mark their answers. Out of the children and parents who chose to participate, the most common type of theatre experience was going to the movies, while the least common was going to a symphony or orchestra show. A handful of the children marked that they had experience performing on a stage for an audience!

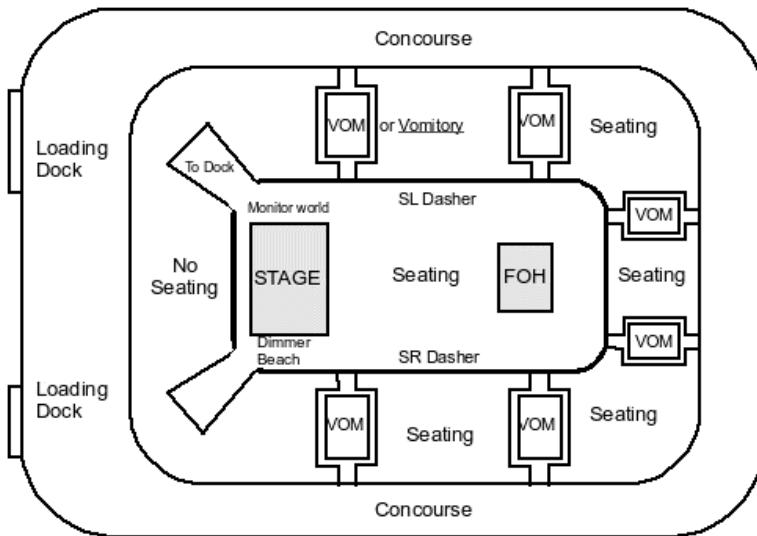


Joey, age 6 checking off his answers



What does the inside of a theatre look like?

We researched a diagram and some images to provide a visual of what a theatre can look like. This demonstrated the different sections of a theatre: stage and seating (audience), concourse, backstage, lighting/sound box, et cetera. The images helped give a perspective of above the stage and from the audience to the stage as well as highlighting the areas the theatre employees may work.



Inventing a Story or Script – Language/Literacy / Second Representations



We did a few impromptu activities involving story telling! Kaitlin noticed the children were interested in narrating stories to each other, as well as having scary stories read to them. She invited a group to help her play a story telling game in which the children went around the circle, taking turns adding lines to a group story. The children came up with quite a silly story in the end!

For those who were interested, we recorded descriptions of the children’s story, script or plot ideas. We prompted the children into further detail with questions such as “What is your story about?” “What characters are in your story?” and “Where does your story take place?” As the children became more excited about their stories, some chose to create illustrations with art materials. Kayla (age 5), Lauren (age 5) and Benjamin (age 4) made their narrations come to life with colourful, detailed drawings, which we then labelled together. These depictions represented the children’s imaginings about their own show, acting as our “second representation” piece of the project.





Kayla, age 5, invented an under the sea world full of mermaids, seahorses, fish and seaweed She expanded on her original description by adding a beach above the water.

Everett, age 5, invented a soccer, football and wrestling competition. It even ended up with a swordfight at the end. It seemed Everett was interested in the action genre of theatre.

Lauren, age 5, seemed interested in the horror genre – she described spooky scenarios in a haunted forest and castle, complete with skeletons, monsters, zombies and many spiders!

Carson, age 4, invented a story with his favourite heroes like Spider Man, Batman and Superman.

Benjamin, age 4, added both heroes and villains into his story about The Avengers cast.

Charlotte, age 5, showed her interest in the Batman series – she said she would have Harley Quinn as a character in her story.

Phase 3: Concluding the Project

Final Activity: Dress Up Day

To engage the children in a fun concluding event, we invited them to come dressed as their favourite character or superhero. The children spent much of the day in character, indoors and outdoors!



Daniel was a "police ninja", dressed in uniform, stealthily sneaking around the classroom.



Jennifer, Karisa and Lana pose, dressed as a variety of unique superheroes.



Twins, Ayden and Gavin, showed off their superhero power poses on the playground.

Answering Our Questions

To finalize our project, we reached out to staff at a local performing arts centre, The Centre in the Square, and asked them for more information on our initial theatre questions. Their response:

There is a variety of jobs at a theatre:

- Ushers who direct patrons to their seats and resolve any problems that come up
- Box office staff who sell customers tickets to the shows
- Bar staff sell food and beverages to customers
- Stage crew who set up the stage, lighting, sound etc.

We have a wide variety of programming (types of performances) from Broadway plays, symphony concerts, rock concerts, comedy shows, lectures, etc.

As for what types of music is performed, the Symphony performs a range of music from classical music (Mozart, Beethoven) to more modern music such as soundtracks from popular movies such as ET. We also have concerts with a wide variety of genres including Rock, Blues, Country, Jazz...

Many things go on behind the scenes/backstage during a performance. There are people controlling the lighting, sound, changing sets, wardrobe and props. There is a whole army of people working back stage/behind the scenes to help the shows run smoothly.

We were appreciative of the experts' help in answering our questions and completing our project!

Teacher Reflections

Over the course of our theatre project, we explored many areas that all make up performance. Using the children's interest in dramatic play as well as their imagination and creativity, we saw how simple provocations turned into detailed stories, illustrations and representations. We felt this gave the children many different outlets for expression and representation of real life, as well as opportunities to learn in hands-on and meaningful ways. Our experiences allowed the children to practice not only the use of their imagination but many developing literacy and social skills as they communicated their dramatic ideas, created and listened to stories, or put together a performance.

It was enjoyable to see how the children expressed themselves and worked with each other during this project. We feel this is an ongoing area of interest and growth – the children continue to have the opportunity and various settings to explore their imaginations and develop their skills and confidence with various types of performance.