



GOLDEN DRAGON ACROBATS

Applause Series CURRICULUM GUIDE
CIVIC CENTER OF GREATER DES MOINES

MAY 17-18, 2012

GOLDEN DRAGON ACROBATS

FROM CHINA

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for joining us for the Applause Series presentation of the Golden Dragon Acrobats. The Golden Dragon Acrobats represent the best of Chinese acrobatics — a cultural art form that has held a prominent place in Chinese culture for well over 2,500 years. Rooted in ancient traditions, Chinese acrobatics continue to thrill audiences worldwide. It is our hope that your students will not only be amazed at the astonishing balance, flexibility and strength of the Golden Dragon Acrobats but will gain new appreciation and interest in China's rich culture and history.

We hope that this guide helps you connect the performance to your in-classroom curriculum in ways that you find valuable. In the following pages, you will find contextual information about the performance and related subjects, as well as a variety of discussion questions and activities. Some pages are appropriate to reproduce for your students; others are designed more specifically with you, their teacher, in mind. As such, we hope that you are able to “pick and choose” material and ideas from the study guide to meet your class's unique needs.



A member of the Golden Dragon Acrobats catches bowls on his head while balancing on a rolling board.

See you at the theater,

Civic Center Education Team

Support for Civic Center education programs and the Applause Series is provided by:

Alliant Energy, American Republic Insurance Company, Bradford and Sally Austin, Bank of America, EMC Insurance Companies, Greater Des Moines Community Foundation, Hy-Vee, John Deere Des Moines Operations, Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, Richard and Deborah McConnell, Pioneer Hi-Bred - a DuPont business, Polk County, Prairie Meadows, Sargent Family Foundation, Target, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo & Co., Willis Auto Campus, Windsor Charitable Foundation and more than 200 individual donors.

GUIDE CONTENTS

About the Civic Center
Page 3

Going to the Theater and Theater Etiquette
Page 4

Civic Center Field Trip Information for Teachers
Page 5

Vocabulary
Page 6

About the Performance
Pages 7

About the Golden Dragon Acrobats
Page 8

Popular Acts in Chinese Acrobatics
Page 9

Training to Become a Chinese Acrobat
Page 10

History of Chinese Acrobatics
Page 11

About China
Pages 12-13

Pre-Show Exploration
Page 14-15

Post-Show Assessment and Discussion
Page 17

Exploration Activity Worksheet: Chinese Performing Arts
Page 18

Resources and Sources
Page 19

This study guide was compiled and written by Karoline Myers; edited by Kristen Darrah.
Based on Cal Performances' Golden Dragon Acrobats *SchoolTime* Study Guide.

ABOUT THE CIVIC CENTER



The Civic Center of Greater Des Moines is a cultural landmark of central Iowa and is committed to engaging the Midwest in world-class entertainment, education, and cultural activities. The Civic Center has achieved a national reputation for excellence as a performing arts center and belongs to several national organizations, including The Broadway League, the Independent Presenters Network, International Performing Arts for Youth, and Theater for Young Audiences/USA.

Five performing arts series currently comprise the season— the Willis Broadway Series, Prairie Meadows Temple Theater Series, Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield Family Series, the Dance Series, and the Applause Series. The Civic Center is also the performance home for the Des Moines Symphony and Stage West.

The Civic Center is a private, nonprofit organization and is an important part of central Iowa's cultural community. Through its education programs, the Civic Center strives to engage patrons in arts experiences that extend beyond the stage. Master classes bring professional and local artists together to share their art form and craft, while pre-performance lectures and post-performance Q&A sessions with company members offer ticket holders the opportunity to explore each show as a living, evolving piece of art.

Through the Applause Series— curriculum-connected performances for school audiences— students are encouraged to discover the rich, diverse world of performing arts. During the 2011-2012 season, the Civic Center will welcome more than 40,000 students and educators to 13 professional productions for young audiences.

Want an inside look? Request a tour.

Group tours can be arranged for performance and non-performance dates for groups grades 3 and above.

Call 515-246-2355 or visit CivicCenter.org/education to check on availability or book your visit.

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 250,000 patrons visit the Civic Center each year.

The Civic Center opened in 1979.

The Civic Center has three theater spaces:

- *Main Hall, 2744 seats*
- *Stoner Studio, 200 seats*
- *Temple Theater, 299 seats (located in the Temple for the Performing Arts)*

No seat is more than 155 feet from center stage in the Main Hall.

Nollen Plaza, situated just west of the Civic Center, is a park and amphitheater that is also part of the Civic Center complex. The space features the Brenton Waterfall and Reflection Pool and the Crusoe Umbrella sculpture.

The Applause Series started in 1996. You are joining us for our 16th season of school performances.

GOING TO THE THEATER . . .



YOUR ROLE AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

Attending a live performance is a unique and exciting opportunity. Unlike the passive experience of watching a movie, audience members play an important role in every live performance. As they act, sing, dance, or play instruments, the performers on stage are very aware of the audience's mood and level of engagement. Each performance calls for a different response from audience members. Lively bands, musicians, and dancers may desire the audience to focus silently on the stage and applaud only during natural breaks in the performance. Audience members can often take cues from performers on how to respond to the performance appropriately. For example, performers will often pause or bow for applause at a specific time.

As you experience the performance, consider the following questions:

- * What kind of live performance is this (a play, a dance, a concert, etc.)?
- * What is the mood of the performance? Is the subject matter serious or lighthearted?
- * What is the mood of the performers? Are they happy and smiling or somber and reserved?
- * Are the performers encouraging the audience to clap to the music or move to the beat?
- * Are there natural breaks in the performance where applause seems appropriate?

A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE

Seeing a live performance is a very special experience. Although it is not required, many people enjoy dressing up when they attend the theater.

THEATER ETIQUETTE

Here is a checklist of general guidelines to follow when you visit the Civic Center:

- * Leave all food, drinks, and chewing gum at school or on the bus.
- * Cameras, recording devices, and personal listening devices are not permitted in the theater.
- * Turn off and put away all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices before the performance begins.
- * Do not text during the performance.
- * Respect the theater. Remember to keep your feet off of the seats and avoid bouncing up and down.
- * When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- * **Talk before and after the performance only.** Remember, the theater is designed to amplify sound, so the other audience members and the performers on stage can hear your voice!
- * Use the restroom before the performance or wait until the end. If you must leave the theater during the show, make sure the first set of doors closes before you open the second — this will keep unwanted light from spilling into the theater.
- * Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists on stage — they will let you know what is appropriate.
- * Open your eyes, ears, mind, and heart to the entire experience. Enjoy yourself!

GOING TO THE THEATER information is adapted from the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts study guide materials.

CIVIC CENTER FIELD TRIP INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS



**Thank you for choosing the Applause Series at the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines.
Below are tips for organizing a safe and successful field trip to the Civic Center.**

ORGANIZING YOUR FIELD TRIP

- * Please include all students, teachers, and chaperones in your ticket request.
- * After you submit your ticket request, you will receive a confirmation e-mail within five business days. Your **invoice will be attached to the confirmation e-mail.**
- * Payment policies and options are located at the top of the invoice. **Payment (or a purchase order) for your reservation is due four weeks** prior to the date of the performance.
- * The Civic Center reserves the right to cancel unpaid reservations after the payment due date.
- * Tickets are not printed for Applause Series shows. Your invoice will serve as the reservation confirmation for your group order.
- * Schedule buses to arrive in downtown Des Moines at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the performance. This will allow time to park, walk to the Civic Center, and be seated in the theater.
- * Performances are approximately 60 minutes unless otherwise noted on the website and printed materials.
- * All school groups with reservations to the show will receive an e-mail notification when the study guide is posted. Please note that study guides are only printed and mailed upon request.

DIRECTIONS AND PARKING

- * Directions: From I-235, take Exit 8A (Downtown Exits) and the ramp toward 3rd Street and 2nd Avenue. Turn onto 3rd Street and head south.
- * Police officers are stationed at the corner of 3rd and Locust Streets and will direct buses to parking areas with hooded meters near the Civic Center. Groups traveling in personal vehicles are responsible for locating their own parking in ramps or metered (non-hooded) spots downtown.
- * Buses will remain parked for the duration of the show. At the conclusion, bus drivers must be available to move their bus if necessary, even if their students are staying at the Civic Center to eat lunch or take a tour.
- * Buses are not generally permitted to drop off or pick up students near the Civic Center. If a bus must return to school during the performance, prior arrangements must be made with the Civic Center Education staff.

ARRIVAL TO THE CIVIC CENTER

- * When arriving at the Civic Center, please have an **adult lead your group** for identification and check-in purposes. You may enter the building through the East or West lobbies; a Civic Center staff member may be stationed outside the building to direct you.
- * Civic Center staff will usher groups into the building as quickly as possible. Once inside, you will be directed to the check-in area.
- * Applause seating is not ticketed. Ushers will escort groups to their seats; various seating factors including group size, grade levels, arrival time, and special needs seating requests may be used to assign a group's specific location in the hall.
- * We request that an **adult lead the group into the theater and other adults position themselves throughout the group**; we request this arrangement for supervision purposes, especially in the event that a group must be seated in multiple rows.
- * Please allow ushers to seat your entire group before rearranging seat locations and taking groups to the restroom.
- * As a reminder, children under the age of three are not permitted in the theater for Applause performances.

IN THE THEATER

- * In case of a medical emergency, please notify the nearest usher. A medical assistant is on duty for all Main Hall performances.
- * We ask that adults handle any disruptive behavior in their groups. If the behavior persists, an usher may request your group to exit the theater.
- * Following the performance groups may exit the theater and proceed to their bus(es).
- * If an item is lost at the Civic Center, please see an usher or contact us after the performance at 515.246.2355.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact the Education department at 515.246.2355 or education@civiccenter.org.
Thank you!

VOCABULARY

acrobat: a performer who performs gymnastic and tumbling feats.

act: a part of a performance. In acrobatics, an act often refers to a specific trick or stunt performed by the acrobats.

ancient: a historical reference to all history before the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D. Chinese acrobatics, which evidence suggest started at least 2,500 years ago, is an ancient art form that is still performed today.

agility: the ability to move quickly and easily.



balance: steadiness or equal distribution of weight. Acrobatic feats require great balance.

An acrobat balances on the arm of a fellow performer.

choreographer: a person who creates movement compositions and plans and arranges patterns of movements. Choreographers often plan and design dances. Acrobatic acts also are designed by a choreographer.

Communism: an economical system in which the community collectively owns all resources and products. The government then decides how the resources and products will be distributed to members of the community.

contortionist: a flexible performer able to move muscles, limbs and joints into unusual positions. Acrobatic troupes feature contortionists.

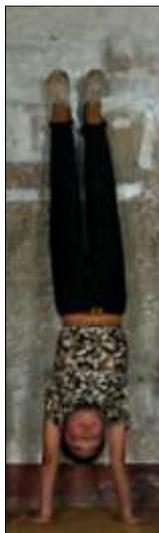


Contortionists create a pyramid.

dynasty: a succession of rulers from the same family or group. Dynasties ruled China until 1911.

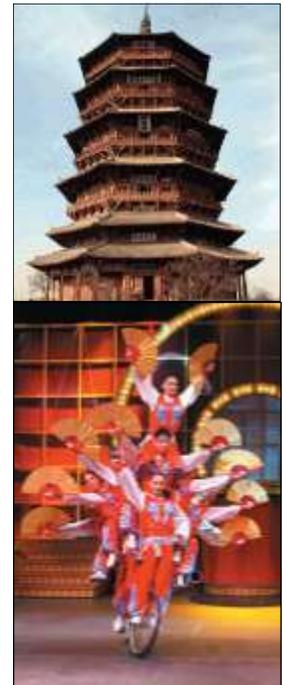
feat: an act or product of skill. In acrobatics, a feat often refers to a difficult stunt or trick.

flexibility: ability to bend easily. Acrobats' bodies must be very flexible.



handstand: an act where the body is supported in a vertical position by balancing on the palms of one's hands. The handstand is the most important skill for acrobats to master. Children studying to become an acrobat often spend the first year of their training just working on handstand skills.

pagoda: a particular style of building that is popular through Asia. Acrobats imitate the pagoda's shape by forming human pyramids and using props (such as fans) to mimic the detailed roof lines.



TOP: A Chinese pagoda building. BELOW: An acrobatic act called a bicycle pagoda.

props: items used on stage during performances. Examples include plates, porcelain vases, or chairs. In acrobatics, props are most often common, everyday items. This stems from acrobatics' origins, when peasant people would use items around themselves to try to perform new tricks and stunts for their own entertainment.

symmetrical: two sides of something are identical or balanced. To create a bicycle pagoda, for instance, the acrobats must have complete symmetry.

tumbling: gymnastic acts that consist of leaps, somersaults and other flips.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE



ABOVE: Golden Dragon Acrobats perform the Wheel Act.

The Golden Dragon Acrobats performance will feature astounding acrobatics and Chinese traditional dance. Contortionists, tumblers and jugglers may spin plates, create a bicycle pagoda and juggle everything from balls to umbrellas using not only their hands but also their feet and entire bodies.

Run Time: Approximately 1 hour

LIST OF ACTS

The Golden Dragon Acrobats' performance will likely include the following acts:

- ◇ Thousand Hand Dance
- ◇ Contortion
- ◇ Swaying Board Balancing
- ◇ Swaying Tube
- ◇ Kick Bowl
- ◇ Table Hoop
- ◇ Ball Juggling
- ◇ Hat Juggling
- ◇ Power Act
- ◇ Spinning Wheel
- ◇ Foot Juggling
- ◇ Diablo Yo-Yo
- ◇ Tower of Chairs
- ◇ Flags
- ◇ Finale

MUSIC

The Golden Dragon Acrobats' performance will be accompanied by a musical score inspired by traditional Chinese music.

COSTUMES

The acrobats will have several costume changes during the show. Pay attention to the bright, vibrant colors and how the costumes contribute to the feel of each act.

CRITICS' REVIEWS

"The Cat in the Hat with his cake on a rake, has nothing on the Golden Dragon Acrobats. Kids have every reason to love the Golden Dragons."

-Newsday

"The powerful music, simple themes, and explosive choreography are about something that transcends culture — absolute joy in exploring the full potential of the human body."

-NYtheatre.com

"Juggling everything from umbrellas to soccer balls — and with props as varied as ladders and giant spinning wheels — the performers show just why they're world famous."

-The New York Post

"The impossible can be achieved, and once achieved surpassed, then surpassed again."

-Associated Press



The Golden Dragons perform a variation of the Tower of Chairs.

ABOUT THE GOLDEN DRAGON ACROBATS



The award-winning Golden Dragon Acrobats hail from Cangzhou on the east coast of China, within Hebei province, in the People's Republic of China. They have toured the United States continuously since 1978. The 25 troupe members are athletes, actors and artists who have studied and trained for their craft since early childhood.

FOUNDER

Founder and director of Golden Dragon Acrobats, Danny Chang is a leading promoter of Chinese acrobatics. He began training at the age of eight with his family's acrobatic school in Taipei and started performing with the Golden Dragon Acrobats at age ten. He is the recipient of many awards, including the Medal for International Faith and Goodwill by the Republic of China's Coordination Council for North American Affairs.

STYLE

Danny Chang, along with choreographer and costume designer Angela Change, create "colorful ways to use [the troupe's] skills and take advantage of their apparent total lack of fear" [*The New York Times*]. The Golden Dragon Acrobats combine astounding acrobatic feats with theatrical techniques and traditional Chinese dance. The show features contortionists, tumblers and jugglers in breathtaking acts like the bicycle pagoda and the traditional Chinese Lion Dance.

ACCLAIM

The Golden Dragon Acrobats have performed in all 50 of the United States and in over 65 countries around the world. The troupe had its Broadway debut at the New Victory Theater in 2005, for which it was nominated for two Drama Desk Awards. In recent years, individual members of the company have received awards at the Henan Regional Acrobatic Competition, the China National Acrobatic Competition, and the Presidents Award at the International Acrobatic Competition.



LEFT: Hebei province, shown in red, is the home of the Golden Dragon Acrobats. Hebei province is considered to be the birth place of the art form of acrobatics — a 2,500 year old cultural tradition. Map courtesy of gochina.about.com.

POPULAR ACTS IN CHINESE ACROBATICS



HOOP DIVING

This act is over 2,000 years old. Also called “Dashing Through Narrows,” it was once known as the “Swallow Play.” The performers imitate the flying movements of swallows [birds] as they leap nimbly through narrow rings.

DOUBLE POLE

A group of acrobats climb up and down thin poles demonstrating agility and strength to execute a variety of dangerous movements.

ROLLING BALANCE CONTORTIONIST

Performers gracefully bend and twist into unbelievable knots, frequently while balancing precariously perched objects on every limb.



SPINNING PLATES

Performers use numerous long, pencil-thin sticks to support spinning plates that look like lotus leaves facing the wind or colorful butterflies flitting and dancing. This act is often combined with balancing and tumbling.

CHINESE DIABOLO

Performed in China for over 1,000 years, two sticks of bamboo are connected with string to spin an additional piece of wood (like a yo-yo) back and forth in a variety of timed movements.

BICYCLE: Acrobats ride together on a single bicycle, take it apart, turn it over a table and display a variety of postures, including the beautiful tableau of a peacock fanning its feathers.

FOOT JUGGLING

Performers lie on a special seat and juggle and catch objects with their feet. Objects may include tables, umbrellas, rugs and other household items.

LION AND DRAGON ACTS

The lion represents the spirit of renewal and is revered for dispelling bad luck. Big Lion is played by two acrobats, while Small Lion is played by one. The lion rolls and jumps, exhibiting attributes such as strength, agility, and tranquility.



CHAIR STACKING HANDSTAND

While on a pagoda or ladder of chairs, the performers practice handstands and other stunts.

TRAINING TO BECOME A CHINESE ACROBAT



Acrobatic acts have evolved throughout the history of China, a country credited with producing some of the best acrobats in the world. Chinese acrobats maintain a notable style and standard routines. Chinese acrobats learn handstands, juggling, trapeze, and balancing. Read on to learn more about acrobats' intense training.

ACROBAT SCHOOLS

Most Chinese acrobats are selected to attend special training schools at around six years of age. Students work long and challenging hours to hone their craft. Six days a week they practice gymnastics, juggling, martial arts and dance in the mornings. The children then take general education classes in the afternoons.

BASIC SKILLS

The first two years of acrobatic training are the most important for aspiring acrobats. Acrobatic students work daily on basic skills. The four core foundational skills for Chinese acrobats are mastering the handstand, tumbling, flexibility and dance.

HANDSTAND TRAINING

Among the four basic skills, handstand is the most important. It is considered to be the essence of Chinese acrobatics. Many signature acrobatic acts include some form of handstand. Master teachers have commented that “handstand training is to acrobats what studying the human body is to a medical student.”

An acrobat goes through progressive steps to learn basic to advanced handstands. Training directly affects three areas of the body – shoulders, lower back, and wrists. A weakness in any one of these areas will compromise the acrobat's ability. In China, the basic handstand is learned by the youngest, beginning students, starting against the wall. In three to six months of full time training, students build up to one half hour of wall handstands. During this time, the three areas of the body become stronger until at last students are able to hold the free handstand.

Young acrobats intensely dislike handstand training. In a basic handstand, one is upside-down with all the body's weight on the

ABOVE: Children studying acrobatics at Zai Ming Acrobatic School in Wuqiao, China practice handstands against the wall. Photo by Chang W. Lee, courtesy of The New York Times.

wrist, shoulders, and lower back. There is natural pressure to want to come down and the hands are the only support for the body.

After the initial two-year training, only a few acrobats will specialize in the handstand. However, handstand training is essential to all acrobatic work due to the role it plays in strengthening the body, mind, and spirit of the acrobat.

ONGOING STUDY

Acrobatic acts are performed either solo or in groups. Group acts require team cooperation, trust, and constant communication. When one performer leaves the group act, it puts the other acrobats at risk in their careers. It often happens that acrobats need to start over again. However, in creating a new act or learning a new specialty, an acrobat has already mastered the four basic acrobatic skills.

TRAINING TO BECOME A CHINESE ACROBAT is adapted from the CAL Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide: Golden Dragon Acrobats.

HISTORY OF CHINESE ACROBATICS

The art of Chinese acrobatics is an ancient tradition. Read on to learn more about the factors that influenced the art form's popularity and how the art form has evolved over the years.

FIRST RECORDS

Over its long and rich history, acrobatics has become one of the most popular art forms among the Chinese people. While many historical records provide evidence for the development of this art form as far back as the Xia Dynasty (**4,000** years ago), it is most commonly believed that acrobatics did not become wildly popular until approximately **2,500** years ago when it began to capture the attention of the country's powerful emperors.



ABOVE: One of the earliest emperors from the Xia Dynasty. For most of its history, China was ruled by a series of emperors, who held supreme power. Emperors from the same family are classified into historical periods known as dynasties that refer to the period of when they ruled. Image courtesy of factsanddetails.com.

EARLY INFLUENCES

Acrobatics first developed during the **Warring States Period** (475BC-221BC), evolving from the working lives of people from Wujiao (pronounced oo-chow) county, located in Hebei Province.

Acrobats used everyday things around them – instruments of labor such as tridents, wicker rings and articles of daily use such as tables, chairs, jars, plates, and bowls – to experiment with balancing and other acrobatic tricks.

In a time when China was traditionally an agricultural society – where there were no electronic gadgets or telephones – people used their imaginations to learn new skills such as acrobatics. These acts were incorporated into community celebrations, such as to celebrate a bountiful harvest.

During the **Han Dynasty** (221BC-220 AD), the basic acts of acrobatics developed into the “Hundred Entertainments.” Many more acts soon developed. Music accompaniment and other theatrical elements were added as interest in the art form grew among the emperors. Many of these acts are still performed today – such as Pole Climbing, Rope-Walking, and Conjuring.

Did you know?

Acrobatic troupes were traditionally family-owned. Many famous acrobatic families in China continued this tradition through many generations. It was common practice that acrobatic troupes would teach only their own children and close relatives the secrets of their acts in order to keep their mysterious technique and traditions within the family.



ABOVE: This print from the Han Dynasty depicts acrobats performing handstands. Image courtesy of en.cnci.gov.cn.

EVOLUTION OF CHINESE ACROBATICS

Since these early times, acrobatics have been incorporated into many forms of Chinese performance arts, including dance, opera, *wushu* (martial arts), and sports.

Today, acrobatic acts are designed and directed with the goal of creating graceful stage images. Harmonious musical accompaniment and the added effects of costumes, props and lighting turn these acrobatic performances into exciting full-fledged stage art.

AMBASSADOR ROLE

Acrobatics now serve an important role in the cultural exchange between China and other Western nations including, the United States. Today, China presents acrobatics in the international arena as a living example of the rich traditions of Chinese culture and as evidence of the hard-working nature of the Chinese people.

HISTORY OF CHINESE ACROBATICS is adapted from the CAL Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide: Golden Dragon Acrobats.

ABOUT CHINA, pg. 1 of 2



The Golden Dragon Acrobats are from Hebei province in China. China has a long and rich history dating back thousands of years. Throughout its history, it has played a major influence on culture, technology and the arts both within its borders and around the world. Learn more about China prior to the show.

TECHNOLOGY

During most of human history – and until the 15th century – China was the most advanced country in the world in terms of technological development and culture.

Chinese inventions include:

- ◇ Paper
- ◇ The compass
- ◇ Gunpowder
- ◇ Printing
- ◇ Bell
- ◇ Fork
- ◇ Noodles, including spaghetti
- ◇ Oars
- ◇ Kite
- ◇ Cultivation of rice
- ◇ Fireworks
- ◇ Matches
- ◇ Tea

SIZE

China is the fourth largest country in the world. Its land mass is only slightly smaller than the United States. Its population of 1.3 billion is the largest in the world – more than four times the size of the U.S.

China has such a large population that strict laws regulating population growth have been instituted. Married people of the Hun majority (92% of the population) are allowed to give birth to only one child – unless the couple are both only children themselves, and then the couple may have two. Minority families may have as many children as they wish.



ABOVE: The Diamond Sutra, the oldest printed book, published an AD 868. China invented both paper and printing. Image courtesy of Wikipedia.

ABOVE: China, shown in orange, is located in Asia. Image courtesy of vbjmap.org.

GOVERNMENT

The earliest and most enduring system of government in China began around 1111 B.C. It was dynastic in structure, which means that an emperor ruled until he died or passed it on to his son or nephew.

In 1911, a revolution ended over 2,000 years of imperial rule. By 1921, the Communist Party of China was founded. In a Communist state, all businesses, property, foods, goods, and services are owned and operated by the government and are distributed to the people by the government.

Over the last 30 years, the Chinese government has changed to a unique political blend. China maintains a communist government within a socialist society and capitalist economy. The opening up of China to Western ideas has dramatically affected its people. A gap is widening between rich and poor.

ABOUT CHINA is adapted from the CAL Performances SchoolTime Study Guide: Golden Dragon Acrobats.

ABOUT CHINA, pg. 2 of 2



(cont. pg. 13)

ECONOMY

More and more of the world's products are being manufactured in China. The country's gross national product has grown as much as 10% over the last few years. After the United States, China now is the second largest economy in the world.

POLLUTION

No country in history has emerged as a major industrial power without creating a legacy of environmental damage. Because of its unprecedented economic growth over the last three decades, China's pollution problems have shattered all precedents. 70% of water in China is polluted and only 1% of the 560 million city dwellers breathe air that is considered safe. The Chinese are working hard to counter the effects of this tragic situation.

RIGHT: The logo for the 2008 Olympic Games which were hosted by China. The games were centered in Beijing with many events hosted in other parts of the country. China viewed the Olympic games as its re-introduction to the rest of the world and took great pride in serving as the host.

SYMBOLS OF OLD AND NEW CHINA

The Great Wall of China was built and rebuilt between 5th century B.C. and the 16th century to protect the northern borders of the Chinese Empire. It is the world's largest manmade structure.

The Chinese were excited to host the 2008 Olympic Games. Because the government knew that the games would allow many of the world's people to see inside China for the first time, many improvements were made – thousands of trees were planted, new hotels were build, and old sites were renovated for tourists.



ABOVE: The Great Wall of China. The wall is the largest manmade structure ever built – stretching over 3,700 miles. It is the only manmade object that can be seen from space.
Image courtesy of allposters.com

SCHOOLS IN CHINA

China has the largest educational system in the world. Over 1,170,000 schools of various kinds enroll more than 318,000,000 students. The entire education system is run by the central government.

In China, children start school at six years old and must attend for nine years. Primary education is free, but the parents pay for everything from the children's paper to the school's electric bills. Secondary education is paid for by the parents, with scholarships available for those in need. To continue into high school, students must do well on a series of tests and it is steeply competitive to get into the best schools.

Every student in China does morning exercises before school and at a set time during the school day. The exercises are done in unison and are accompanied by recorded music.

ABOUT CHINA is adapted from the CAL Performances SchoolTime Study Guide: Golden Dragon Acrobats.

PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION, pg. 1 of 2

1) OBJECT BALANCING

Best for: Grades 1-12

Explanation: Acrobats train for years to develop strength, flexibility and balance. In this activity, students will practice balancing a stick made from rolled up newspaper on their palm.

Goals: To explore balance

Materials:

- ◇ Open area
- ◇ Newspaper
- ◇ Tape

Activity:

1. Have students each take a large sheet of newspaper and roll it up as tight as they can.
2. Ask students to tape the newspaper roll in the middle and the ends. (Teachers can also prepare “newspaper sticks” in advance.)
3. In an open area, invite students to place their “newspaper stick” on the palm of their right or left hand and try to keep it balanced and upright.
4. Do this for a few minutes and then reflect with the following discussion questions.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What was challenging about this activity?
2. What is balance?
3. When do you use balance in your daily life?
4. What do you think acrobats’ training is like in order to develop their excellent balance skills?

2) HUMAN SCULPTURES

Best for: Grades 3-12

Explanation: Acrobats use strength, flexibility and balance to create an astonishing assortment of shapes with their bodies. In this activity, students will explore making sculptures with their bodies — both singly and in pairs.

Goals: To prepare to observe the acrobats create complex shapes with their bodies and to understand the flexibility and cooperation such feats require.

Materials:

- ◇ Open area

Activity:

1. Ask students to spread out in an open space. Each person should find their own personal space bubble.
2. Ask students to imagine that they are like clay and can mold their bodies into different shapes like triangles, circles, and squares or into objects like tables, flowers, ladders, etc.
3. Ask students to experiment with using high, medium and low levels as they make shapes with their bodies.
4. Encourage them to try to use their entire bodies when making their shapes. If students need direction, you may call out different shapes (geometric shapes, letters, numbers, objects, etc.) for them to try to make with their bodies.
5. Next, ask students to work in pairs to continue to try to make different shapes and object sculptures.
6. When students are done experimenting in pairs, provide time for reflection about the difference between making shapes by yourself or with others.
7. To conclude, encourage students to look for shapes that the Golden Dragon Acrobats make with their bodies during the performance.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What skills do you need to make different shapes or sculptures with your body?
2. What was challenging about this activity?
3. What was it like making shapes by yourself?
4. What was it like making shapes with a partner?
5. What sort of shapes do you think you will see the acrobats make with their bodies during the performance?

OBJECT BALANCING and HUMAN SCULPTURES activities are adapted from the CAL Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide for the Golden Dragon Acrobats.

PRE-SHOW EXPLORATION, pg. 2 of 2

3) CHINESE PERFORMING ARTS

Best for: Grades 1-12

Explanation: Acrobatics is one of the oldest forms of performing arts in China. In this activity, students will watch video of other Chinese performing arts, take notes on their observations, and use it as a catalyst for their own writing.

Goals: To understand that there is a wide variety of Chinese performing arts and to write reflectively about experiencing a cultural art form.

Materials:

- ◇ Computer(s) with internet access
- ◇ Speakers connected to the computer
- ◇ Paper
- ◇ Pencils

Activity:

1. Visit the John F. Kennedy Center's ArtsEdge website and search for the "China: Arts & Culture Video Series". (Full link at right.)
2. Either individually or in small groups, ask students to carefully watch one of the following videos:
 - ◇ Beijing Traditional Music Ensemble
 - ◇ Tornado by Cai Guo-Qiang
 - ◇ Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra
 - ◇ Shaanxi Folk Art Theater
 - ◇ Yunnan Singers
3. As they watch, ask students to fill in the "Critical Response Worksheet"* on page 17. The worksheet asks them to record what they notice in the video, what it reminds them of, what questions they have as they watch, what emotions they feel or see, and what they think the meaning of the art is. (Teachers of younger grades may choose to facilitate this as a group conversation rather than individual writing. Use the worksheet to guide the conversation step-by-step.)
4. After the video ends, give students additional time to continue to fill in their Critical Response Worksheet.
5. Video by video, invite students to share one of their top observations, questions, memories, feelings or speculations.
6. Last, provide students with time to free write using their notes and the video as inspiration. They may write a story, a journal entry about an experience the video reminded them of, a poem, etc.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What, if anything, surprised you about the video that you watched?
2. Have you ever seen or experienced anything similar?
3. Do all cultures create art? Why?
4. Why do you think the Chinese people created this art form? What does it help them to express?
5. What ways do you express yourself?

China: Arts & Culture Video Series

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/series/VideoStories/china.aspx>

*Critical Response is an artful tool developed by the Perpich Center for Arts Education.

4) HEADLINES FROM CHINA

Best for: Grades 3-12

Explanation: In this activity, students will research current events in China.

Goals: To develop understanding of what life is like in China today.

Materials:

- ◇ Newspapers, magazines

Activity:

1. There are regularly news stories about events in China. Have students look for news about China either on the television or radio, or in newspapers or magazines.
2. Ask students to bring in articles or to write a paragraph version of the stories they heard in the media.
3. Invite students to share their news stories about China with each other and discuss the current events and topics.
4. As a class, choose a handful of articles that most interest you. Then in groups of 4 or 5, have students research a topic more in-depth.
5. Have students give a brief presentation on their findings to the class.

Follow-up Questions:

1. Which news story most interested you about China? Why?
2. Based on your research, in what ways is China different than the U.S.? In what ways is it similar?

HEADLINES FROM CHINA is adapted from the CAL Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide for the Golden Dragon Acrobats.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ASSESSMENT

Discussion Questions

Training

1. What do you think these common sayings in acrobatic training schools mean?
 - “Seven minutes on stage is equal to ten years of training.”
 - “One must be able to endure suffering to become a good acrobat.”
2. What did you see in the performance that supports your interpretation of the sayings?

Trust and Teamwork

1. Where did you see examples of the acrobats trusting in one another? Trusting in themselves?
2. Who trusts or depends on you? What can you do to make yourself more trustworthy and dependable?

Balance

1. Acrobats display impressive balance skills. What does balance mean?
2. What would happen if the acrobats lost their balance? Have you ever lost your balance? How did you regain it?

Body Shapes

1. What sort of shapes did you see the acrobats make with their bodies?
2. If you had to choose a shape to represent YOU, what shape would that be? Why?

Ambassador Role of Acrobatics

1. Why do you think it is important to the Chinese people and the Chinese government to share their tradition of acrobatics with people around the world?
2. What skills or characteristics did the acrobats display that reflect well on China?

Performance Components

1. How did the lighting add to the show?
2. How did the costumes help to express the ideas or moods of each act?
3. What did the music add to the show?

Assessment Activities

Write a Review

Ask students to imagine that they are a critic for the school newspaper. They are going to write a review of The Golden Dragon Acrobat's performance to inform others about what they experienced. They should describe with detail: what they saw; what they heard; how the performance made them feel; what the performance reminded them of; and what their favorite part was and why. Remind students that they must paint a picture of the experience with their words so that others who did not see the performance can imagine it as vividly as possible.

Understanding China and Acrobatics

Review with students one of the background information sections included in the study guide (Training, History of Acrobatics, or About China). Assign small groups of students 1-2 paragraphs from that sentence. Invite students in their groups to create a tableau (frozen picture with their bodies) that they believe demonstrates the main idea of their section. Have students share their tableau for one another and explain their pose choice. Encourage students to use various levels and facial expressions.

Explore Emotion

Ask students to pick an emotion they felt while watching the performance. Allow students to draw or write about the emotion using the following questions to guide their exploration:

- ◇ What does _____ look like?
- ◇ What does _____ sound like?
- ◇ What does _____ feel like?
- ◇ What does _____ smell like?
- ◇ What does _____ taste like?

Write a Letter

After attending the performance, discuss the experience with your students. Ask them questions about what parts of the show they found to be most exciting or surprising. Next invite students to write letters to the performers or to the Civic Center's education donors about the experience. After writing their letter, students can illustrate a scene from the performance. Mail finished letters to:

Civic Center of Greater Des Moines
Attn: Education Department
221 Walnut Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

RESOURCES AND SOURCES



BOOKS

Chinese acrobatics grew out of a folk custom. Read a selection of folktales to learn more about the folkways of the Chinese people.

Bedard, Michael. The Painted Wall and Other Strange Tales. Tundra Books, 2003.

Demi. The Greatest Treasure. Scholastic Press, 1998.

Jiang, Ji-li. The Magical Monkey King: Mischeif in Heaven. Harper Trophy, 2002.

Kimmel, Eric A. Ten Suns: A Chinese Legend. Holiday House, 1998.

Louie, Ai-Ling. Yeh-Shen. A Cinderella Story from China. Philomel Books, 1982.

Mahy, Margaret. The Seven Chinese Brothers. Scholastic, 1989.

San Souci, Robert D. Fa. Mulan: The Story of a Woman Warrior. Hyperion Books for Children, 1998.

Young, Ed. The Sons of the Dragon King: a Chinese Legend. New York, 2004.

CLASSROOM RESOURCES

“ArtsEdge: China.” John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. *Online collection of lesson plans and multimedia resources for various grade levels related to different forms of Chinese arts.*
<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/search.aspx?q=china>

“Children Acrobats.”
Video of 4 impressive child acrobats competing on a Chinese television show called “Who’s the Hero”.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yo3KZPrTD5M>

“Training Tiny Acrobats in China.” New York Times.
Photo essay of children training at a Chinese acrobatic school. Narrated commentary discusses the motivation of many parents to send their children to acrobat school as a way to try to escape poverty.
http://www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2006/07/03/world/20060528_ACROBAT_AUDIOSS.html

STUDY GUIDE SOURCES

“Artful Online.” Perpich Center for Arts Education.
http://opd.mpls.k12.mn.us/perpich_center_for_arts_education/artful_online

CAL Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide: Golden Dragon Acrobats.
http://www.calperfs.berkeley.edu/learn/k-12/pdf/2008/Golden_Dragon_Acrobats_Study_Guide_0809.pdf

Golden Dragon Acrobats Official Website.
<http://www.goldendragonacrobats.com/>

Ordway Center for the Performing Arts. Shangri-La Acrobats Study Guide.
<http://www.ordway.org/education/studyguides/>