STOMP
THE INTERNATIONAL SENSATION

STATE THEATRE
NEW JERSEY

KEYNOTES
State Theatre New Jersey welcomes you to the performance of STOMP, the Broadway sensation that creates an extraordinary theater experience out of ordinary objects and lots of imagination.

These Keynotes provide information to help you prepare for the performance. Included are discussion questions and suggested activities to help you make the most of your experience.

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STOMP is an inventive and witty stage show that uses choreography and theater to transform a percussion concert into an electrifying stage performance. You won’t see any of the usual percussion instruments you’d find in a band or orchestra; instead, the eight-member cast makes music out of ordinary objects: matchboxes, wooden poles, brooms, garbage cans, Zippo lighters, hubcaps, and more, filling the stage with rhythm.

In STOMP, the musicians work together using simple objects to build complex rhythms. Each performer takes on an individual personality; the differences between them, and the competition that develops, create little stories without using any words. The audience is invited to participate in the show, demonstrating that anyone has the ability to STOMP!

STOMP was created by Luke Cresswell and Steve McNicholas in Brighton, England in 1991. (The two had been working together since 1981, as part of a street band called Pookiesnackenburger and a theater group called Cliff Hanger.) The original production played to sold-out audiences around the world. It opened at the Orpheum Theatre in New York in 1994 and won an Obie Award and a Drama Desk Award for Most Unique Theatre Experience. In 2014, the show celebrated its 20th anniversary at the Orpheum. There are currently several STOMP companies performing around the world: up to three working from the UK and two in North America. Each company has its own style, its own feel; even though the show is very tightly choreographed and orchestrated, there is a lot of room for each performer’s own personality to shine through.

FUN FACTS:

- STOMP has been performed more than 20,000 times in 53 countries on six continents to an audience of more than 12 million people.
- Since their first performance in 1991 the group has gone through 50,000 boxes of matches, 30,000 brooms, 20,000 garbage cans, 10,000 drumsticks and 25,000 liters of black paint.
- STOMP performed at the Academy Awards ceremony in March 1996, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC in 1999 as part of America’s Millennium celebrations, and at the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics.
- STOMP performed with the Muppets from Sesame Street in their special Let’s Make Music.
- Their IMAX movie, Pulse: A STOMP Odyssey, was released in 2002.
- In 2014, the cast of STOMP flipped the switch to light the Empire State Building in red and white, in celebration of the show’s 20th anniversary in New York City.
- The show has been featured in advertisements for products such as Coca-Cola, the American store Target and car brands Toyota and Seat.
- A 1997 HBO special, STOMP Out Loud, was nominated for four Emmy Awards.
Q: How would you describe STOMP?

STEVE: It is a piece of theatre that's been created by musicians. It doesn't have narrative and it doesn't have dialogue, and it doesn't have melody particularly, but it is totally rhythmically based. The prime directive for all the performances is: rhythm comes first. Movement comes second, and we try to make that mixture more interesting by adding comedy to it.

Q: What was your inspiration for the show?

STEVE: There wasn't really a single moment of inspiration for the show. There were a lot of artists, musicians, and films that influenced our thinking. We were definitely inspired by groups like Kodo, the Japanese drumming group. Seeing them made us realize that it was possible to hold an audience's attention for an entire show using predominantly drums and percussion. We were also inspired by the choreography in the film Stormy Weather, which featured amazing performances by the tap dancing duo the Nicholas Brothers. Some of the routines in that film obviously inspired routines created by Fred Astaire, dancing with coat stands or brooms, or kicking a drum set. Another big influence was a company called Moving Picture Mime, who created wonderful rich, funny, theatrical experiences with no words and very little props. They certainly inspired us to keep dialogue out of STOMP.

Q: What is your favorite part of the show?

STEVE: Personally it's always been the "Pipes" routine: several pieces of radiator hose cut to different lengths and sounding like pizzicato strings. Tuned percussion on the move! I know Luke's favorite will always be "Hands and Feet," because it's all about making rhythms without any kind of instrument at all, just your own body.

Q: Where do you get your ideas from?

LUKE: Ideas come from anywhere. A lot of it is using props—like a broom or a dustbin [garbage can] or hammers—because they obviously lend themselves to rhythm and drumming. Other ideas are more surreal, like walking on oil drums... just drawing little pictures and thinking, 'Wouldn't it be great to have great platform shoes and people walking around on them?' And small things, where you want to introduce visuals as well as sound—like Zippo lighters, which tries to do something that is quiet and it makes you listen and you tune in to it. But they are all everyday objects that anybody can find, and anyone can use.

STEVE: Yes, most of the ideas come from everyday life. But whenever we put a routine together we are always thinking not just in terms of the rhythmic qualities, the sound qualities of the instruments, but also what kind of visual impact they have.

Q: How do you choose people for STOMP? Are they musicians, dancers, or both?

LUKE: I think you are looking for personalities. You can teach someone, to a level, how to drum. And you can also teach someone, to a level, how to perform. But you can't bring out a personality or someone's charisma. So you are looking for people obviously with a sense of rhythm but, also with a sense of adventure, who want to create something themselves. There is a lot of room in STOMP for people to add their own ideas and to bring their characters out, and that is very important.
Q: Can anyone do this?
LUKE: I think anyone can do STOMP. We've done shows where we have taken 15 or 20 extra people, from any walk of life, not as auditions, just as people who are keen, and worked them into a show. Some people, you give them the imagination, you give them the ammo, and they'll do incredible things. Some people will only go so far. But everybody can make rhythm out of their hands and their feet and everybody can drum. Everybody does drum all the time. That's partly what audiences get out of the show. The amount of people that come up and say, 'I bang on my kitchen table,' or 'I muck about with my broom all the time, but I never thought of making it into a show.'

Q: Does STOMP have a message?
STEVE: If there is a message, it is that you can make something out of nothing. Using junk, household and industrial objects, challenges the issue of waste and challenges the notion of culture as being highbrow or elite (you don't have to buy a cello or a drum kit to make music). There's also an element of ritual in our work: everyone generally comments that some of the pieces in the show are almost tribal. STOMP has been described as a musical without music. Even though the show is really just a succession of different pieces, there is an element of getting to know the performers' characters better through the show, so it is also about group dynamics and how wildly contrasting personalities can work together. We want to amuse, uplift and inspire. We feel we've succeeded when the audience leaves trying to play every object in their path as they leave the theater.

Q: How do you feel the production is relevant to young audiences today?
STEVE: I think STOMP has always had an implicit ecological message; how can we re-use the junk and detritus we see around us? But for me, more importantly, it is about invention and discovery, exploration of the sounds we all make every day and creating something new out of them. Invention, exploration, and discovery are timeless, and hopefully our show sows some seeds in the minds of young audiences; take something you do every day, see every day, and turn it into something new, something inspiring.
TAKE A 'SOUND WALK'

STOMP invites us to find music in noises that we usually try to block out and ignore. Discuss with your class some of the sounds in our everyday environment that we rarely ever notice.

To help students become more attuned to the sounds around them, take your class on a 'sound walk' through several areas of your school, such as the hallway, cafeteria, and playground. Have them pay close attention to all the different sounds they hear along the way. (It can be helpful to have them stop for a moment in each environment and close their eyes to listen.) Afterward, have the students discuss their experiences. What different sounds did they hear?

Have students work in pairs to observe the sounds in different parts of the school environment more closely. One partner—the listener—closes their eyes and describes all the sounds they hear, while the other partner takes notes. Then have them switch places and let the other partner be the listener.

Once everyone in the class has had a chance to be the listener, have them write short stories inspired by—and including—at least five of the different sounds they noticed. Encourage them to make their language as rich and detailed as possible so anyone reading the story will be able to 'hear' the sounds being described.

STOMP-ING AROUND THE WORLD

Many cultures have dances in which the sounds dancers make with their bodies—by stomping, clapping, etc.—are an important part of the performance. Have your students break into small groups. Have each group choose a different type of percussive dance to research on and report back to the rest of the class. You can use some of these examples, or have students identify a style on their own.

- Stepping (African American)
- Gumboot dance (South Africa)
- Schuhplattler (Germany)
- Cherokee stomp dance (USA)
- Morris dance (England)
- Step dance (Ireland)
- Tap dance (USA)
- Flamenco (Spain)
- Clogging (USA)
- Kathak dance (India)

EXPLORING THE DANCE-MUSIC CONNECTION

As a class, watch this video of the STOMP troupe performing their piece, Basketball, on a city street.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYXUm8GgPjE

While you’re watching, think about these questions:

- Notice the different types of sounds the performers create. Describe some of the sounds. How did the performers make these different sounds?
- What kinds of skills do you see the performers using?

After you’ve watched the video (you may want to view it more than once), describe what you saw and heard, and discuss the questions.

Next, watch this video of tap dancer Savion Glover and his group Bare Soundz performing on Dancing With the Stars.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ40aKtPlXc

- Describe what you see and hear in this performance.
- What are some of the ways this performance is similar to the basketball piece? How is it different?
- Do the performers interact in the same way in both pieces?
At different points in the show, the dancers try out objects to see what kinds of sounds they can make. In one scene, dancers make a variety of sounds with paper and plastic bags by shaking them, blowing them up and slapping them, or pushing them together.

After the show, brainstorm with students to create a list of the objects that STOMP performers used to make sound. (The list might include brooms, lids, bins, poles, sand, drumsticks, water, oil drums, and ballpoint pens.)

Break students into groups of 4-6. Have each group work together to create their own lists of ordinary objects that make sounds. Their homework assignment will then be to explore their home environment and come up with more objects to add to their lists.

The next day, have students look at their group’s list and come up with a variety of objects that each student has access to that, together, would make interesting combinations of instruments for a performance. (Actual musical instruments should be excluded from the lists, and you might want to set some parameters limiting students to objects—such as pens that click or plastic containers of sand—that would make quieter sounds.)

Once each group has gathered together their objects, give them time to experiment to see how many different sounds they can achieve. They will work as a team to create a 2-minute performance to share with their peers. (If possible, find a space where students have more room to move and experiment.) Take two class sessions for this part of the activity so that students have enough time to rehearse their piece once they have finished creating it. They should find a way to write down or otherwise commit the performance to memory so they can perform it the same way each time.

When the groups present their final performances, make a video recording. Afterward, spend a class period reviewing the video, talking about what students noticed and what elements they found most interesting. Each group should share how they went about creating their performance, how they committed it to memory, and how the performances of STOMP inspired them.

If you want to take the activity even further, put together all of the groups’ pieces to create a mini-STOMP performance for the rest of the school!

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- How many different ways can you ‘play’ the object you’ve brought in? What kinds of different sounds can you make with it?
- Besides the sounds you make with your objects, what other sounds could you add to the performance (foot stomping, handclaps, finger snaps, etc.)?
- What kinds of dance moves can you do while playing your instrument?
- What are some of the different ways your group can combine your sounds and movements? Do you want everyone in your group to be playing and moving the whole time, or do you want to change the number and combinations of instruments throughout the piece?
- After you have seen the other groups perform their pieces, which ideas would you be interested in adding to your own group’s performance?
AT THE SHOW

BE A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER.

Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so that everyone can enjoy the show. Make sure to follow these rules:

- If you have a phone, make sure to turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.
- During the show, give the performers all your attention. Stay in your seat and don’t talk.
- Taking pictures or recording the show is not allowed.
- Don’t eat or drink in the theater. And no chewing gum, please!

BE A GOOD OBSERVER.

During the performance, pay attention to everything that’s going on onstage—not only the words, but the lighting, the way the performers move around on stage, how they’re dressed, and how they interact with the audience. Notice how all of these elements come together to create a unique experience.

Also try to observe how the performers interact with each other. What are some of the ways you see them working together as a team?
ON THE WEB

This video is a behind-the-scenes look at STOMP in its early days.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0afeh59xiLE

While with the band Pookiesnackenburger, Luke Cresswell created a number called "Bins" that was used in a 1986 commercial for Heineken beer, and later went on to become one of the most popular numbers in STOMP. You can watch the video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jyds9qT6jE

Pulse: A STOMP Odyssey features the cast of STOMP and 10 diverse music groups from around the world.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=mN5f35Jc7Xg

The STOMP official study guide offers lesson plans for younger and older students, with lots of science connections.

http://www.stomponline.com/stomp/percussion.php

The John F. Kennedy Center's ArtsEdge arts integration website has some useful ideas and activities:

Percussion Instruments and Pitch:
http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-3-4/Percussion_Instruments_And_Pitch.aspx

Social Dances for Upper Elementary
http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/how-to/tipsheets/upper-elementary-social-dances.aspx#Overview

VIDEO

Landfill Harmonic. The Film Collaborative, 2015. This film tells the inspiring story of music teacher Favio Chavez and his Recycled Orchestra of Cateura, a children’s orchestra in Paraguay that performs on instruments made with materials recycled from a trash landfill.

STOMP Live. Well Go USA, 2008.

STOMP Out Loud. HBO Studios, 2005.


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