

**BACKGROUND**

There have always been "clowns" - the trickster sharmans of Indian tribes, the irreverant peasant characters in Mediaeval Miracle Plays, the fool characters in Shakespeare, the masked caricatures of Italian Commedia Dell'Arte, the august or "clumsy one" in circus, the vaudeville eccentrics, the great silent film comics, the physical and verbal comedy of "media" clowns from Lucille Ball to "Con the Fruiterer".

As jester, fool, trickster, the clown traditionally "holds the mirror to the foibles of the human race" in an eternally mischeivous, light and anarchic manner.

Christof!! has based his contemporary style on this worthy history while rejecting the cliché of the grotesquely made-up, red-wigged, unfunny, hamburger clown.

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

Some of these activities are more suited to some age levels than others. Teachers should feel free to select, change, adapt, extend these suggestions.

Christof!!'s show is **live**, not a TV or cinema show. You can't watch it at home.

If you were putting on a show like this, how would you let people know it was on and get them to come along?

Can you make a poster, tickets, TV or newspaper advertisement?

Talk about the difference between live and recorded shows e.g spontaneity, control, risk, excitement, audience response.

What is your idea of a clown? e.g appearance, behaviour etc

Why do some clowns wear make-up? Does it work?

What makes Christof!!'s clown characters funny?

How can you change your face or your appearance?

How can you alter your behaviour, walk, talk, etc?

What sort of people want or need to change their appearance?

Why do they do it, how do they do it?

Try having a theme day or time when everyone becomes somebody else.

Notice how other people move, sit, talk, etc

Try to imitate them as closely as possible.

Do it seriously or comically

Watch other people outside (in playground, on weekends etc)

How do adults move differently from children, babies, old people?

Do you have a trick you can do?

Can you make a story around it (eg a human pyramid to change a light bulb)

Can you teach your trick to other people?

Why do people laugh?

What makes you laugh?

Sitting in a circle, take turns at trying this game

- Choose a simple object.... eg a hat, a ball, a chair, a table, a stick. Imagine you

have never seen it before. How many things can you do with this object without using it for what it was intended.

(2)

Try making yourself look different with noses, moustaches, glasses, masks, (these can be made simply and quickly from junk - disposable cups, egg cartons, sixpack rings, elastic bands, string, cardboard etc. - work quickly and spontaneously as possible).  
Change one part of your face and see if you look like someone else - try to be like that person - show how they might walk, say hello, enter a room etc

Choose a simple, well known story tell the story and as you go get other people in the room to play the parts of all the characters. Let them do a lot of the talking and acting, help them along if they get stuck. Let them use a box of props, hats etc. Keep the best bits and practice them and try to do it again making it look as if you are doing it for the first time.

## **MUSIC**

Do you play a musical instrument? Create a simple short routine about how a character sets about playing a tune. Remember the more things that go wrong the funnier it will be. Even if you are not a virtuoso musician this could be very funny with simple home-made instruments eg spoons, tissue paper and comb, bottles . There is a lot of humour in the status relationship (who is the boss etc) between several characters all trying to achieve a common goal.

Have you ever noticed how in a rock band, the bass player always seems a bit slow, the lead singer seems to have a huge ego, the lead guitarist always wants the limelight. Create a modern clown routine using this, or some other modern theme using characters based on real people.  
My work is based a lot on rhythms, a long walk, a sharp look, a slow grin, a quick wink....play a lot with rhythms.

## **CLOWNING, CHARACTERIZATION AND IMPROVIZATION**

The key element in becoming a character is to **believe** it..... forget who you are and believe you are someone else with someone elses outlook, habits etc. If you start with this everything else that happens, what you were, how you enter a room etc follows from this belief - so you don't need to invent

Clown is a series of problems solved in idiosyncratic ways. I think that **"a clown's logic is the longest distance between 2 points"**.

Set yourself a problem (how to steal a wallet, how to tie a shoelace, how to ride a bicycle) and solve it using clown logic. This process, cleaned up, becomes a performable piece.  
Do this in groups of 2 or 3. Keep it short.

Leave the room - re-enter in such a way as people will honestly want to watch you. See how long you can hold your audience without **doing** anything. This is tough. Be hard on yourselves - if it is not working - stop, try again or let someone else have a go.

Create a simple character. Enter the room in such a way so the audience immediately knows who the character is, what their attitudes, emotions, outlook, age, nationality etc is. Each subsequent action should reveal more about this character. Don't prepare this piece, just try it. The stronger the character the easier the exercise.....

- be obvious
- be brave
- be bold
- be silly
- be simple

**As a rule don't discuss things - get up and try them.**

Clown characters are obsessive - there are 4 levels of obsession for the purposes of this game.

Choose a simple activity - eg painting, peeling spuds.....

Do it with - disinterest  
                  apathy  
                  fascination  
                  obsession

Watch each other - note the differences in

                  efficiency  
                  speed  
                  detail  
                  movement etc

What's the role of the comic/clown in our society?

Are there any famous or traditional 'clown' figures in the social/ethnic group you come from?

What is a clown? - try to define this to include all things which are clown but exclude things which are not - if you get a good definition - let me know.

Look at Fellini's movies "**Clowns**" and "**La Strada**" where clowns play a symbolic role.

Look at some Keaton and Chaplin movies where the comedy is purely physical.

Choose a simple two person interaction - eg greeting an old friend, buying an apple - use interactions which demand emotional content eg a death, discovering a burglary etc.

Portray this using words and movement. Now try without words. Let us see every aspect of this interaction, how you feel, what you want, what happens, what happens next, how it finishes, how you feel after the interaction.

                  Play this straight, then play it for laughs.

**Stillness** is as important as movement - a posture that 'says' something is called, in theatrical terms, "**an attitude**".

As a class, or individually, strike an attitude which communicates to an audience how your character feels, try a range of emotions/ sensations/ attributes....eg shock, love, fear, greed, joy, disgust, nausea, stupidity, arrogance, wisdom.

Put these together to create a still "picture of an interaction eg have a look at DaVincis "Last Supper".

**SUGGESTED READING**

**History** :The best most readable book on the subject is\*Clowns: John Townsen, Hawthorn Books

**Technique** : A useful resource, but always better to do his classes, \*Impro, Keith Johnstone, Faber

**Two quite interesting traditional books**\*Be a Clown: Turk Pipkin, Workman

\*Clown for Circus and Stage: Mark Stotzenberg, Sterling

Set of 4 handbooks on Theatre Design by Anita Sinclair, available only from : ASTDEC,  
phone (03) 9417 1038

\*Puppetry

\*Mask

\*Costume

\*Using Foam Rubber To Create Monsters