

The Fourth Wall

Fruit Flies Like a Banana

Educational Guide, Grades K-8



About the Performance

Working at break-neck speed, the multi-talented performers of The Fourth Wall combine music, theater, and dance in this sprint-triathlon variety show. The audience chooses the show order by picking cards from a deck and even determines parameters for some pieces created on the spot. Every performance is unique! As the onstage timer ticks down, The Fourth Wall will blow your mind with tricks, bust your gut with laughter, and maybe even bring a tear to your eye with beautiful music. They strive to turn conventional classical music performances on their ear and leave audiences with a good feeling in their belly.



About the Artists

Few musical ensembles earn top marks for their "deft choreography," but this is no ordinary ensemble. Part chamber music group, part devised theatre company, part modern dance troupe, part circus act, The Fourth Wall blends music, theatre, dance, and acrobatics into a new hybrid art form. The Fourth Wall is comprised of flutist **Hilary Abigana**, bass trombonist **C. Neil Parsons**, and percussionist **Greg Jukes**.

Program Learning Goals

1. To develop curiosity and excitement in hearing new pieces and styles of music while helping determine the order of the performance.
2. To gain or deepen an appreciation for chamber music through sight, sound, and movement.
3. To explore the diversity of classical music by featuring living composers as well as composers whose identities are underrepresented in the Western canon.
4. To experience creativity and divergent thinking in action as performers bounce between pieces of music and different ways to move while playing instruments.

Essential Questions

1. How can you make something unique and different?
2. Where will your imagination take you in the future?
3. How do you enjoy music?

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Vocabulary

- **Beat:** the steady pulse of a song or piece of music
- **Rhythm:** a strong pattern of notes or beats in music
- **Tempo:** the speed of a song or piece of music
- **Melody:** a series of notes that creates the main part of a song or piece of music
- **Harmony:** individual notes or groupings of notes that accompany and support the melody
- **Dynamics:** how loud or soft a note sounds, musical volume

Key Facts and Context for Students

What is Hybrid Arts?

Many cultures all over the world combine music, dance, acting, and acrobatics, but Fourth Wall's particular style of performance is something they are constantly reinventing. They call it hybrid arts, but you can see versions of the idea in variety shows from early 20th century America called Vaudeville where lots of different performers would appear throughout a show, each doing something unique from music to dance, clowning to comedy. Their main instruments are flute (Hilary), bass trombone (Neil), and vibraphone (Greg), but you'll see several others in their shows.

Think About It!

As you watch the performance, notice the way Hilary, Neil, and Greg connect the music they are playing to the movements they are making as dancers. How do their movements change with the rhythm (pattern of sound), tempo (speed), or dynamics (volume) of each piece of music? How do they interact with each other?



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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What is your favorite way to listen to music?
- Where do you experience music?
- When was the last time you heard someone playing music or singing in-person? Was it interesting to watch? What did you notice or pay attention to during the performance?

Pre-Performance Activity: Make a Collaborative Mix Tape

Learning Goals:

- To identify the different musical characteristics that make up a song
- To compare and contrast songs through their musical characteristics

Materials:

Recordings of popular songs (from mp3s, Spotify, YouTube, etc.)

Directions:

1. Discuss mix tapes as a curated collection of songs. Why is it called a mix tape? What does it mean to contrast songs? The Fourth Wall plans their shows based around contrasting pieces so they can give each audience lots of different experiences. As you create your mix tape, think about the experience you are offering your audience.
2. In a group of 3-5 people, make a list of songs you know really well. For each song you pick, think about why you like it and what makes it special. Note the different musical characteristics of each song, such as:
 - **Tempo:** the speed of music. Is it fast or slow?
 - **Dynamics:** musical volume. Is it loud or soft?
 - **Lyrics:** the words of a song. Are there words or is it instrumental only?
 - **Theme:** the “story” of the song or a repeated musical pattern. If there are lyrics, do they tell a story? If it is an instrumental, is there a repeated section that you recognize? Do you feel like the song takes you on a journey?
 - **Emotional connection:** how the music makes you feel. Is it happy or sad? Busy or calm? Do the emotions change throughout the song?
3. Figure out the most interesting order of songs. Try to make each song as different as possible from the songs before and after to create contrast. Change tempo from song to song. Put a big, loud, busy song right after something soft and thoughtful. Try a happy song after a sad one.
4. Share the mix tapes with the class. How did different groups contrast songs in their playlists? Were there any surprises? How did the playlist order make you feel?



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Post-Performance Discussion Questions

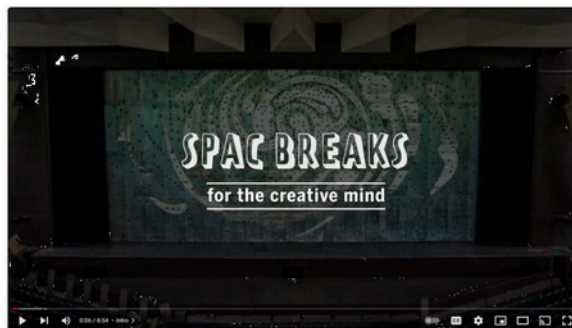
- What pieces of music did you recognize in the performance?
- What surprised you? What did you see and hear?
- What was your favorite part of the performance and why?
- What about this experience was different from other experiences you've had?

Post-Performance Activity: Making Machines

Learning Goals:

- To communicate through movement and sound as part of an ensemble
- To create a cohesive machine where both musical and movement ideas relate and react to one another
- To explore leadership, listening, and following skills

Materials:



"[SPAC Break Let's Make a Music Machine](#)" YouTube Video, a large open space clear of desks/tables/chairs, optional: musical instruments

Notes for the teacher:

- Music machines combine short, repeating musical and choreographic phrases to encourage performers to think about how their gestures, shapes, and sounds interact in an ensemble. By layering ideas together, students will get a taste of The Fourth Wall's creative process in their hybrid arts work.
- Music Machines can be created with vocal and body percussion sounds and/or almost any instrument. Handheld musical instruments allow for more choreographic flexibility, but larger instruments can make some really interesting shapes too!

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Post-Performance Activity, continued

Directions:

1. Discuss machines as contraptions that have many parts which work together to make something happen. Examples include pedals, gears, and wheels on a bike or the battery, circuit board, wires, fans, and screen of a computer. Introduce music machines as a connection of many people performing short, musical and choreographic phrases at the same time to make an ensemble.
2. Watch the "SPAC Break Let's Make a Music Machine" video. Talk about student reactions and answer questions.
3. To start building a machine, ask one person to come to the center of the open space and begin a short, repeating musical pattern. Examples can include a repeated clapping pattern (such as clap - clap - clap clap clap) or the first few notes of a song (such as mi-re-do rest mi-re-do rest). While performing that musical pattern, add a motion to accompany the sound. Keep in mind that the motion will need to be done for a while.
4. The next person to add on to the machine should move around the first performer and look and listen for spaces where they can fit in. Rests in music and negative space around body shapes are great for building connected machines.
5. Continue adding performers to the musical machine! About 4-6 performers is a good final size. If the newly formed machine is doing well, ask one of the members to gradually change the tempo of the machine.



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Post-Performance Activity, continued

Directions, continued:

6. Build a second machine as a big group. Start from just one performer again and give them time to establish a solid pattern both sonically and physically. Once that is going, more students can be added in simultaneously. Encourage them to walk around the growing machine and look for places to fit their motions and gestures that might inspire reactions. Some ideas:
 - **Explore levels:** if the first performer is standing, others might join in with low level shapes crouching, sitting, or laying on the floor.
 - **Play with different kinds of sounds:** a rich musical experience can be made of clapping, patting, snapping, singing, humming, whistling, stomping, etc. Musical instruments can also be added.
7. Break students into smaller groups of 4-6 students. Give them 5-10 minutes to make a machine they will share with the whole class. If groups build their machine quickly, explore changing tempo and dynamics.
8. Have groups perform their machines for the class. Ask each group to define the stage and audience spaces so performers consider how they orient their machines. What angle gives the audience the best view of the action? Does their machine look interesting only from the front, or could it be equally or more effective from all sides?
9. After each performance, invite students to reflect on what they liked about their machine. Did they work well together? Were there any surprises in the creation process? What could have gone better? Are there particular movements or sounds that could better unify the machine? Encourage the audience to share what they saw or found interesting. Through all the reflection, remind students to think of the machine as a whole unit rather than singling out individual performances.



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Further Resources

- [The Fourth Wall Artist Website](#)
- [Bash The Trash: How to Build Musical Instruments](#)
- [“Vaudeville” article by Britannica Kids](#)
- Marsalis, Wynton: *Squeak, Rumble, Whomp! Whomp! Whomp!:* A Sonic Adventure, Candlewick Press (2021)
- Morland, Charlie: *Music and How it Works: The Complete Guide for Kids*, DK Children (2020)

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Dance, Music, and Theatre

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (D.Cr.01, M.Cr.01, T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (D.Cr.02, M.Cr.02, T.Cr.02)

Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (D.P.06, M.P.06, T.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (D.R.07, M.R.07, T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (D.R.08, M.R.08, T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (D.R.09, M.R.09, T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (D.Co.10, M.Co.10, T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (D.Co.11, M.Co.11, T.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

