



# Developing a Study Guide

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Artists and performers who work with school audiences should all develop study guides to send into schools in advance of a performance.

This document was created as a result of a panel discussion entitled THE ABCS OF STUDY GUIDES held at the ArtStarts Showcase, our annual performing and visual arts showcase.

A group of school administrators responsible for bringing performing artists into schools across British Columbia and an audience of performing artists working in schools discussed the content, organization and distribution of study guides that work well as preparatory materials for teachers and student audiences. The recommendations in this document grew out of the panel discussion.

ArtStarts in Schools thanks the following panelists:

Bill Abley, Principal of John Tod Elem, Kamloops  
Annette Coffin, Fine Arts Coordinator, Coquitlam SD  
Scott Merrick, Principal, L'Ecole Bilingue, Vancouver  
Kerry Querns, Fine Arts Coordinator Langley SD  
Gordon Waters, Music Coordinator, Okanagan/Shuswap SD

Many thanks to the artists who agreed to have their study guides critiqued as part of our discussion: Trent Arterberry, The Canadiana Musical Theatre, and Uzume Taiko.

## What do artists and schools want in a performing artist's study guide?

### What would artists like students to learn about before coming to a performance?

- A biography that briefly outlines the artist's career, so students can see that working in the arts is an achievable professional goal.
- Artists' motivation: Why we do what we do and why it is important to us.
- Anecdotal background info. that helps the students' feel that they know the artist a little.
- Intro. to the artform to provide context
- History of the character or time period when dealing in historical work or themes (e.g.: historical drama)
- Students might see a short video of artists work – a 'sample performance' that they could discuss
- Classroom activities should enable students to participate in some aspect of the art form and inspire interest in the arts area or topic.
- Classroom activities that enable students to participate in the artform. Students will:
  - a) experience the art form as a creator/performer
  - b) become interested in seeing/learning more
  - c) develop an interest in the arts and possibly a desire to perform
  - d) have fun so they want to continue to explore the arts discipline

A good study guide has the potential to shape a student audience that is ENGAGED, CURIOUS, and INFORMED.

### What do educators like to receive from artists in order to prepare students for a performance?

- Teachers want to know:
  - What can we expect?
  - What exactly will we see?
  - What do we need to do to prepare our students to get the most out of the performance?
- Teachers use the study guide to create a context for artists work. Information on the artist's biography and work, and a brief description of the artform are all very helpful.
- Classroom activities that help students learn about the artform they are about to see are important. If teachers don't have an arts background they appreciate new ideas for teaching the arts
- Links to classroom curriculum can be helpful but are not necessary. Teachers know the curriculum and can make their own links.
- Clarity, readability, and ease of reproduction are all very important.
- Timeliness is critical. Study guide material must be received well in advance so there is time to copy and distribute the materials to those who need them.
- Teachers see study guides as good value for the \$\$\$ spent bringing an artist to their school. It means more when an artist takes the time to assist teachers in creating a meaningful context for the performance

A good study guide enables teachers to provide a background for the artist's work that can enhance the performance experience. The study guide can also help teachers to capitalize on students' enthusiasm following a performance.

## Developing a Study Guide

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### CONTENT:

► **Overview:** Begin with a clear description of what you do and a short, summary statement of what you think students need to know/think about your work in order to fully appreciate it.

### Biography

Include a short biographical piece that introduces you and your practice as an artist. In addition to introducing your professional background, the biographical material should share information about how you came to do what you do. This enables students to feel that they know you a little and it also helps them see that a career in the arts is a realistic, achievable goal. Here is an excerpt from Anne Glover's biography for *Story Sting Productions*:

Anne Glover's theatrical training began when she was two and suddenly had to account for the bathroom flood that happened to coincide with a plugged toilet and the disappearance of her brother's favourite toy. She has been telling stories ever since. Her formal education includes linguistics, language and education at L'Universite Laval (Quebec) and the University of Toronto. She has performed to spellbound audiences across Canada and the Northwest US for years, incorporating her lifelong love of languages, dance, folklore and, yes, her brothers...

### Technical requirements for the performance

What is your set up time?

If you are not performing on a stage but on a gymnasium floor what kind of performance space do you require?

Will you require changing rooms? How many?

Outline your technical requirements on a single page and title it clearly. This will be photocopied for the custodian and the facilitator who organizes the actual day of the performance.

### A description of the performance/event

What exactly will the students see?

Is the performance: Loud? Dark? Intimate? Raucous? Scary?

How long is your performance?

A brief overview of the structure of your performance is very helpful. Many teachers who will bring their students to you did not actually have a hand in the decision making around booking your performance

**Notes for an audience:**

What kind of behavior is expected of students?

Should students sing along? Jump up and dance? Sit quietly?

Help teachers to prepare their students as an audience. If you invite audience participation let teachers know in advance.

**Arts Activities**

As well as providing basic information study guides should include a few hands-on arts activities that introduce students to aspects of your art form. These activities also spark class discussion and provide students insight into different things to look for as they watch you perform. Consider including classroom activities (see example below), lyrics to a song, sheet music...

It's a good idea to give a brief explanation of the goals of each activity and the ways the activity can enlarge a discussion of your artform.

The activities below come from Trent Arterberry's study guide for *Meaning Through Motion*, a mime performance.

## *Trent Arterberry: Meaning Through Motion*

### *Creating/Performing in the Classroom*

#### **Frozen Picture Warm-up**

1. Students work in groups of three.
2. The teacher calls out a cue word: e.g. beach, family, football, zoo, test, on the moon, or underwater.
3. The first group runs across the room and forms a tableau (frozen group picture) that represents the word.
4. The teacher can comment on what makes the tableau effective, and what can make it more so.

#### **The Adverb Game**

1. Students sit in a semicircle with a chair in front of them.
2. Each student thinks of an adverb. S/he must then pick up the chair, move it and sit down on it, moving in the style of the adverb. For example, a student might be asked to move the chair *quickly, romantically, angrily, fearfully, clumsily, joyfully, lowly, proudly, rigidly, gently, anxiously*, etc.
3. When the actor is finished, the rest of the class guesses the word.
4. The purpose of this game is to teach how quality of movement can convey emotion, attitude and tone.

#### **Do You See What I See?**

1. Students sit in semi-circle on the floor, and perform on at a time.
2. One student walks into the playing area, looks around, sees something imaginary, and communicates what s/he sees by his/her expression.
4. When s/he returns to his/her seat, the other students guess what it is.
5. As an extension to this exercise, students can handle the object. Remind students to take a minute to see the object in their mind's eye and to use slow, precise movements to show size, shape and weight.
5. Other evaluation criteria include: using the whole body, keeping the presentation uncluttered, short and simple.
6. The teacher can help guide the students to notice what kinds of gestures, facial expressions, etc. help to communicate clearly and what gets in the way of audience recognition. If students are really shy, then no talking is allowed until everyone has presented. This helps to create a safe and focussed environment.

#### **Character/Conflict/Narrative**

This is a long narrative process and can easily take two 40 minute classes. It does, however, help with understanding story and structure in other disciplines and can be linked to the curriculum in a number of ways.

1. Students work in pairs.
2. Together they choose characters that might be in a scene together. One character can be an animal, but not a television character.
3. The next question is "What are we doing?" The students answer this by finding a conflict between the two characters. This can be physical (a farmer trying to move a spirited horse) or emotional (a child wanting an ice cream cone from a parent).
4. If students are stuck for ideas, have them focus on some object in their scene. Remind them that a conflict is not always a "fight," but can be a problem that needs to be solved. Usually, conflict comes out of opposing objectives.
5. To help the students create a clear narrative, try making a "comic strip" first:
  - a. Students form a frozen picture that begins the story: Who are the characters? Where are they?
  - b. Students create a middle frame or two, to show the conflict.
  - c. Students show the outcome or ending in a final frozen frame.
  - d. These physical tableaux will capture the essence of a scene and help students to use strong, uncluttered gestures and expressions.
6. Have students perfect these tableaux until they can move quickly from one to the next and hold them in stillness for the count of five.
7. Students can then fill in the transitions between the tableaux, creating a smoothly flowing narrative.



Marcel Marceau, the great French mime, as his alter-ego, Bip.  
(Courtesy of Ronald Wilford Associates)

### Additional Information

If students would benefit from learning particular information before experiencing a performance, you may wish to provide maps, cultural information, background research on a historical figure or specialized vocabulary in your guide. It is a good idea to make this material visual whenever possible, or to tie its introduction to an activity. For example: introduce key terms as a crossword, accompany a description with an image.

Here is how Uzume Taiko introduces some of the different drums they use:

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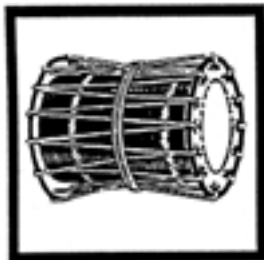
**O-DAIKO** (*Oh-Dye-Koe*) *Taiko*, or *daiko*, means "big drum" in Japanese. Placing an "O" in front of a word gives the word greater importance than it would have on its own. So, *O-daiko* means "very great drum" and it is the largest of the taiko drums. Some *O-daikos* in Japan are as big as eight feet in diameter. Japanese barrel-type drums, like the *O-daiko*, are carved from the trunk of a solid tree which makes them very expensive. Therefore, North American taiko groups have learned how to make taiko drums from oak barrels like the ones that are used to make wine.



**JOSUKE** (*Joe-Skay*) This is the most common taiko drum. It is often used when people are playing in unison and is also used for soloing. It is constructed the same as the *O-daiko*, but is smaller. Like the *O-daiko*, it is covered with cowhide that is stretched very tightly over the body (*doh*) and attached with heavy iron tacks. The *josome* is sometimes played in an upright position and at other times it is placed at an angle which allows the drummer great freedom of movement around the drum.



**SHIME** (*Shee-May*) is a Japanese word that means "to tighten". These drums have heavy, curved bodies that are carved from pieces of solid wood. Cowhide is stretched over metal hoops and sewn on. These heads are then attached to the body, using either ropes or bolts. When the ropes or bolts are tightened, the heads are pulled together, making the skins taut. A *shime* that has been tightened well has a very high-pitched sound that can be heard over the sounds of the lower-pitched drums.



**OKEDO** (*Oh-KehDoe*) These drums are similar to *shimes* - their sound can be changed by tightening or loosening the ropes that hold the heads together. They are usually larger and the body is made from thin strips of wood glued together to form a cylinder. The interesting thing about *shimes* and *okedos* is that they can be tuned to different pitches. This makes it possible to create interesting effects with the drums.

### **Post performance activities for teachers and students**

Post-performance activities should give students a chance to deconstruct the performance and try out some of the things they have seen.

\*If any activities require specific answers from students (i.e. a crossword puzzle) provide an answer key

### **Make Activities User Friendly**

Be sensitive to the time constraints that teachers work under, both in their own ability to prepare and in their use of classroom time. Activities should be relatively simple and not require a lot of materials (financial constraints are a reality too!).

Provide clear instructions (test them out on a friend).

If activities are intended to encourage discussion, be sure to provide a sample of ideas that might jump-start the conversation and articulate clearly what kinds of things you hope students will come up with.

### **Resources for Students:**

If you decide to include a bibliography focus on books that are appropriate for students rather than teachers. While it is unlikely that teachers will have time to pursue independent research, students who become interested in your art form certainly will. Try to keep this information as current as possible – books from the 60's and 70's will be hard to find.

### **Solicit Feedback**

Seek advice: rather than trying to 'be a teacher' design the study guide based on your strength as an artist and then get feedback from a teacher or arts coordinator where you live. Think about the age range of students in your audience. You may wish to ask teachers working at different grade levels to critique your work.

Ask for feedback on the study guide from those who use it. Include an email address where teachers can send their comments and questions. Make the occasional phone call to see how things went with the study guide.

### **Copy write**

You may or may not wish to copyright some material in your study guide. For information on copyright go to [www.cancopy.ca](http://www.cancopy.ca)

### **Parlez-vous francais?**

Study guides available in French are MUCH APPRECIATED.

## **DESIGN, ORGANIZATION AND DISTRIBUTION:**

The key issues to organizing a study guide are **clarity, readability** and **ease of reproduction**. Title sections clearly and lay out information logically. Some teachers will not work through the whole study guide, but will pick the parts appropriate to their work with students. Clear organization helps them find what they need. If your performances are for students of all ages you may wish to divide the study guide into primary, intermediate and senior sections.

### **Notes on Design:**

- Font sizes and readability: a 12 point font is a minimum visibility for comfortably reading hand held documents more than 500 words in length.
- Serif fonts are supposed to be easier to read in hand held documents than sans serif fonts. (print a full page of each and see if you notice a difference)
- Pick relatively clean fonts to increase readability. Wacky fonts can give a page visual energy but should be confined to less important material.
- Be consistent: pick 1 or 2 fonts and sizes, and stick with them.
- Justified text is harder to read than text with a ragged right margin.

### **Notes on Reproduction (not that kind):**

Your study guide, or parts of it, will almost certainly be photocopied for distribution:

- Beware of paper overload in schools! Be as concise as possible and think about how to limit the amount of paper required. For example a double sided, 11"X17" sheet is preferable to four 8 1/2" X 11" pages.
- Avoid printing your guide on coloured paper - it cannot be photocopied!
- Camera-ready images with rich gray scales are best for reproduction on a photocopier. If you are undecided about including an image, test it to see if it will copy easily.

### **Timelines**

Keep the school year calendar in mind (be aware of holidays, exams, etc.). Study guides need to be received well in advance to leave time for photocopying, distribution and use. Every school district distributes information in different ways. Find out what works best for the district where you are performing by phoning the arts coordinator for the district or the individual who books performances. Remember arts administration in BC schools is always changing. Check annually to be sure contacts are correct.

For information on the coordinators in all of the school districts in BC, go to Touring BC Schools [www.artstarts.com](http://www.artstarts.com)

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### **WWW**

Have your study guide available as a PDF for posting on your ArtStarts website profile page or to easily email to schools.



### **STUDY GUIDE CHECKLIST:**

- A short biography and a description of the artistic discipline
- A description of the performance/event and notes for the audience
- Technical requirements for the performance
- Preparatory activities for students (may include classroom activities, lyrics, sheet music)
- Post-performance activities for teachers and students
- Vocabulary and Terms (this may include images of types of musical instruments, music and dance terms, maps etc)
- An answer key if activities require specific answers from students (i.e. a crossword puzzle)
- An annotated bibliography for students who may wish to learn more about the art form.
- Email and surface mail addresses for teacher feedback.

### **Resources for Artists**

For ideas and great music resources, Share the Music and Music Canada . Information on the BC curriculum is available at [www.bced.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca). Clearest explanations are in the overviews of learning outcomes for each subject. To look at study guides other artists have developed, check out the online Artists Directory at [www.artstarts.com](http://www.artstarts.com)

