

The Children's Theatre Company has a commitment to create extraordinary theatre experiences that educate, challenge, and inspire young people. Over the past three seasons, and especially with the creation of the new Cargill Stage in 2005, CTC has broadened its focus to include challenging theatrical experiences for teens and young adults. It is our hope that by presenting significant themes that affect the lives of teens in our community we can help to foster dialogue among young people and engage them as active participants in the arenas that affect their lives. It is from this platform that we offer this examination of teen angst, through the lens of one of the greatest rites of passage in the United States - the...

PROM



An experience in theatre can be a gateway into a greater understanding of who we are; it can enhance our understanding of life. You may come to PROM thinking, "Ah, light, frivolous, fun!" and walk away with a feeling of having glimpsed a profound truth about the human condition. It is possible to observe PROM as a living, breathing case study in history, anthropology, and sociology. It's a bit like using an ant farm to study the social interactions of an alien species.

FIRST, imagine

you are plunked down on the sidelines of some sort of major sporting event -- it seems to be a kind of Super Bowl in an undiscovered civilization. Bells, whistles, color, music, surround you! You realize this is something more than a simple contest. It's a kind of rite of passage. Then you begin to recognize the specific earmarks of the spring dance that has become part of our culture. This is PROM, a show that takes you inside the universal, yet excruciatingly personal moments, of the high school phenomenon in a way you have never experienced theater before. PROM happens all around you, using multi-media, promenade* and presentational* theatre styles. Be prepared for an extraordinary experience.



* In presentational theatre the performers work from a stage separated from the audience. In promenade style theatre the audiences may be seated in a non-traditional manner that thematically suits the show, or may stand as in a gallery. Often the performers move among the audience members as the performance unfolds.

CONTENTS

Soon you and your class will see PROM at The Children's Theatre Company, and we want your experience in the theatre to support your curriculum and classroom life. This Study Guide is designed to cover a broad range of needs, so please choose what suits your needs.

NOTE: there are vertical section identifiers along the left edge of each page.

Background:

Before the show this information will prepare you to experience PROM:

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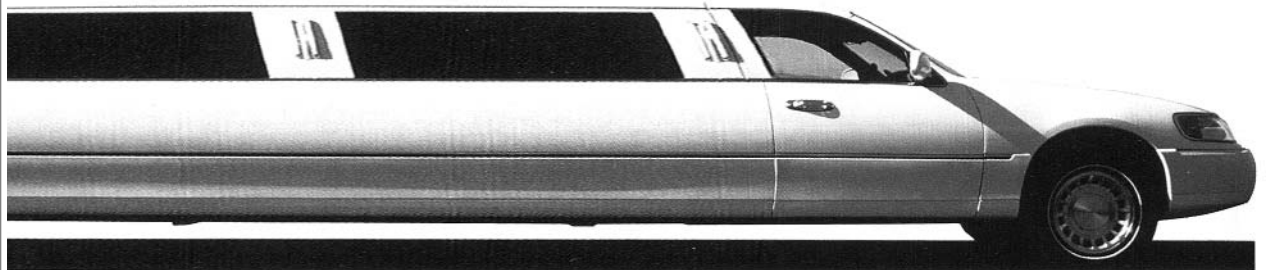
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QUESTIONS ABOUT PROCEDURE OR EXACT RUNNING TIME?
CALL THE CTC BOX OFFICE AT 612-874-0400.



CURRICULUM INTERSECTIONS:

There are many ways in which the themes of PROM can intersect with your curriculum.

English: Explore the themes of the play as Text to Text, Text to Self and Text to World. The situations, characters, and themes in PROM are both personal and archetypal, and will call to mind similar references from other literature. PROM engages the viewer on the basis of his or her own experiences around issues of status, ritual, and passage. And the observance of PROM related behaviors can be observed in real life situations.

Additionally, PROM presents an opportunity to experiment with nonlinear structure and with the relationship between form and content in literature. PROM is also an example of dialogue developed from real life sources - stories and interviews.

Geography/History: The rites of passage of any society are rooted in the geography and history from which they come. For example: the vision quest passage experience found within many Native American tribes depends on a relationship with the land and has altered over the course of history as the way in which that relationship is expressed has necessarily changed. PROM is an opportunity to look at how our rituals reflect our relationship with our geographic and historical contexts.

Social Studies: PROM looks at a recognizable phenomenon, a spring dance, much as Margaret Mead might look at the rites of passage in a remote civilization. There are many anthropological issues around status, the use of ceremony and symbol, ritual rehearsal for adulthood, social identity and self identification that can be contrasted and compared to other societies, both contemporary and historical. This could be an excellent opportunity for sharing the cultural rituals common in the diverse ancestries of your classroom through the use of interviews as well as personal experience.

Math: The subject matter of PROM could produce rich experiences in data collection, charts, graphs, maps and/or statistical formulas. Some foci might be: How has the pervasiveness of the prom experience in America grown in the last fifty years? What is the cost of a typical prom in Minneapolis as compared to outstate Minnesota? To New York City? In 2006 as compared to 1973? With variables of both time and place? Can you predict or project future development? What is the prevalence of "Coming of Age" rituals in societies through time? Where are the highest concentrations of prom activities located?

Art/Theatre: Choose a topic or theme that students find compelling. Use the model of how PROM was created - discussion inside the group, interviews both inside the group and outside (such as home), and research - to create your own theatre piece. Let the style in which it is performed evolve from the subject matter.

GOOGLE:

A Google search for "prom" brings up 11,500,000 hits. "Debutante Ball" gets a mere(!) 476,000. What kinds of conclusions could be drawn from even a brief comparison of these results? **Write an essay** in response to twenty minutes spent "surfing" the web based on these Google searches.

OR:

Compare and contrast a prom with a vision quest as a coming of age phenomenon. Use your own knowledge, PROM, and this the basis for your comparison:

<http://www.crystalinks.com/visionquest.html>



THE GALLERY:

A prom is something you can observe from the outside or be inside of. When you stand outside you can fill the event with imaginings or with reminiscences, depending on your point of view. When you are inside it, a prom is consuming.

Imagine that you are in an art gallery and you come upon a velvet rope strung across the entrance to a room. You stand behind the rope - at a distance - and you see a prom in progress. You notice on a small brass plaque placed near the entrance that this work is titled, PROM; it is more than a dance, it is art. It has been imbued with meaning by its creators. What you are seeing is a representation of an individual prom as something too large and possibly archetypal to be contained in anything other than a work of art.

Create your own PROM work of art by collecting photos from magazines as well as other memorabilia and combining them in a collage. You may choose to create your collage on the inside and outside of a shoebox so that you can present both an exterior (public) and an interior (private or personal) view.

“Here we stand on the precipice of life. Behind us the past. In front of us and beyond - the future. But tonight, there is only the present.”

- Mr. Mielke, PROM



THE METAPHOR:

The primary metaphor in PROM juxtaposes a high school dance with a football game. The metaphor works on several levels: structurally, spatially, categorically, and in relationship to time. There are two teams: teens and adults. At one end of the playing field is the past, at the other, the future, and the teams seek to progress toward their goals - the teens are compelled toward the future and the adults toward the past. High school and football identify as compatible. And finally, the timed segments of both the prom experience and a football game are elastic - although a quarter lasts fifteen timed minutes, the clock stops and starts so that it is only when a goal is accomplished, or denied, that progress through the game is made; allowing a fifteen minute quarter to stretch over a much longer time (both real and perceived).

Explore the metaphor. Write about the differences and similarities you see between a football game and a prom. **Create** a parallel metaphor for something else: what sporting event would be useful metaphorically in describing marriage, severe illness, the birth of a younger sibling into your household, as a few examples.

A metaphor places two disparate concepts side by side. The soul leaps into the gap between them in an act of individual imagination. In such an act we get a glimpse of who we are.

A CONTRAST: Speaking of contrasts, do you think the experience of a prom is typically different for males than it is for females? For example, is there more pressure, a different kind of pressure, more or less stigma connected with the accoutrements (clothes, cars, etc.) for one gender than the other? Is prom more or less important for one gender than it is for the other? Discuss this in pairs, preferably, of mixed gender. Then share with the class.

DISCUSSION/SMALL GROUP/WRITING:

The following can be used to generate conversation or composition:

- If a prom is a ritual, a rite of passage, what are the elements that make it so?
- What happens to those who don't take part in prom? Are there other "proms" in our lives outside of the one we do in high school?
- Does prom break down or reinforce male/female stereotypes? How? Why? Does it need to?
- Is prom healthy? Why or why not?
- Do you agree or disagree: "Embarrassment occurs when the inner life is exposed to external view, resulting in feared loss of status and power." How do you withstand embarrassment?
- If prom is a defining moment in life, what makes a successful prom? A disastrous prom?
- What's the reason for, or symbolism of, dressing up for prom? Could you have the same rite of passage in jeans and a comfortable shirt? Why or why not?
- Think of an example of a piece of art, music, or theatre that is not narrative, or story telling, in nature; something that is a collage or collection of images. For example: The Beatles' *White Album*, or *Radiohead*, or *Twin Peaks*. Once you think of your own example answer these questions: Do you like it? Do you understand it? How?
- Explore the role of media in establishing a sense of "need" for all the accoutrements of the prom experience, i.e., the gowns, tuxedos, limos, after parties, etc. What tools does the media use to manipulate the market for these things?



RESPOND to the following quotations:

Choose one of the quotations below. What does it mean? Does it provide insight for you? Do you agree or disagree? Where there is a source for the quote does it affect the point of view it expresses? Use examples to clarify your opinions.

- At the prom everyone is filled with unfulfilled desires. You are on a treasure hunt and you may not believe that the treasure exists. - from PROM
- Life may not be the party we hoped for, but while we're here we should dance. - Unknown
- The truest expression of a people is in its dances and its music... Bodies never lie. - Agnes De Mille
- At the prom you experience the last party of your childhood. - from PROM
- Partying is such sweet sorrow. - Robert Byrne
- A prom is a practice wedding. Unfortunately, it lacks the attendant practice for marriage. - Anonymous

EXPERIMENTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY:

Below are two activities that offer experiences in the creation and expression of specific cultural anthropology:

Make A Speech:

Read the monologue (right) taken from PROM, delivered by Milo Mielke, the principal of the high school. It may at first glance seem rather random, but in truth, it expresses some very deep questions. **Decide** what you think are one or more of the core issues. Then **write** your own monologue to address a group of students at a prom. **Consider** these factors: Who are you? Why are you speaking to the students? What point is it that you feel is most important to make? How will you get your point across? **Perform** your monologue for the class or direct another student in the performance of your piece.

MIELKE: Welcome, welcome, welcome. I, your principal Mr. Milo M. Mielke, on behalf of the entire staff of Franklin High welcome you. Welcome. Welcome. Illumination through books. "Prom" is a four-letter word. And like "tape" or "zoom" or "face" or "pain" or "love," what ultimately matters is what we do with it. Tradition is to humans what instinct is to animals. Imagine the chaos if animals lost their instincts. So would it be if human beings were to lose all their traditions. This year's theme, "Lost in Enchantment," reminds me of my desire to travel. It began with that great American poet, Mr. Autry, who said, and I quote "Home, home on the range where the deer and the antelope play. Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day." Remember: Be prepared. Ready? Okay.

Make A Culture:

This is a game to play in order to experience what it is to create a culture and how we learn to assimilate and/or identify cultures - our own and others.

Divide the class into groups of approximately 8 people each.

Separate the group sufficiently so that they may work privately. The task of each group is to create and agree upon the following things:

- What is the factor which everyone in your "culture" has in common?
- How do you say "hello" when you greet one another?
- What is your attitude toward newcomers?
- What is a *faux pas*, or major "no-no" in your culture?
- What are the consequences for the perpetration of the above *faux pas*?
- What is the ritual your group is enacting today? Be prepared to enact it very specifically.

When that work is done. **Choose** one group at a time to be the INDIGENOUS culture in the room. All other players thus become VISITORS. As the VISITORS enter the territory of the INDIGENOUS, they must learn appropriate behavior by trial and error. No overt explanations may be used. Also, VISITORS will begin to sense the purpose of the ritual in which the INDIGENOUS group is engaged. The ultimate goal is for the VISITORS to find a way to either assimilate or peacefully abstain from joining in the ritual.

Rotate who is VISITOR and INDIGENOUS until all the groups have had each experience.

Once play is complete, **debrief** by discussing the perceptions of all the players involved.

CRITIQUING PROM

One of the first responses we have to seeing a play is, "I liked it" or "I thought it was terrible!" In fact, it is difficult NOT to judge a play (or any other work of art) entirely on your own opinion. However, if you apply a method to evaluating the experience - much like you use a scientific method in the laboratory - you can go far beyond being a passive observer of a theatrical event. You can become involved and aware of what you yourself bring to the performance.

As a viewer you bring many things to the play, just as those who create the play and the performance bring what and who they are. The more aware you can become of the individuality of the play and the choices made to create it, and of your own specific point of view (or context), the deeper and more developed your response will be.

Here are four steps to follow that will give you a guideline for critiquing a play:

- **DESCRIPTION:** Describe the play. Tell what you saw and heard. Include the title, the subject, and what you know about the creators of the piece (see Credits below). Be objective. Try not to express opinions. Think of yourself as a detective – “Just the facts!”

Examples: The play was about a prom. There were both adult and teenage actors in it.

- **ANALYSIS.** Express your thoughts about the messages the play is trying to convey. How does it convey them? The more you understand about the elements of theatre the more thorough you can be. (See the sidebar: Elements).

Examples: The costumes and set are a visual metaphor combining a prom with a sporting event. Monologues are used to convey personal points of view.

- **INTERPRETATION:** State what you think the artist/s mean to say with the production and how it affected you. Use specific examples of when and how you were affected. Remember, interpretation is very personal. Your interpretation may differ greatly from someone else's. There is no right or wrong answer.

Examples: It made me nervous that the prom was competitive like a football game; I think I respond that way because I'm going to a prom myself next year.

- **JUDGMENT:** Express your personal opinion. What do you think about this piece of work? Give some reasons why you like or do not like the work. Does the play have artistic merit? The answers you have already given will help you identify why you responded the way you did.

Example: I loved this play. It was different than anything I'd ever seen. I felt like I was actually part of the action because it wasn't done on a stage separated from the audience.

Some elements of a play:

- Character
- Plot
- Conflict
- Dialogue/
Monologues
- Staging
- Costumes
- Set
- Lighting
- Sound and/or music
- Style,
(realistic or not)
- Themes

Credits: This is information such as the name of the play, the author, the actors, the production team, and when and where it was performed. You can learn a great deal simply by knowing these facts.

Example: PROM is a new play written especially for teens by a movement based theatre company from Philadelphia. Teenagers helped write it through interviews and discussions.



This critiquing process is based on the Art Critiquing Process designed for interpreting visual art found at: <http://www.brigantine.atlnet.org/GigapaletteGALLERY/websites/ARTiculationFinal/MainPages/ArtCritiquingMain.htm>



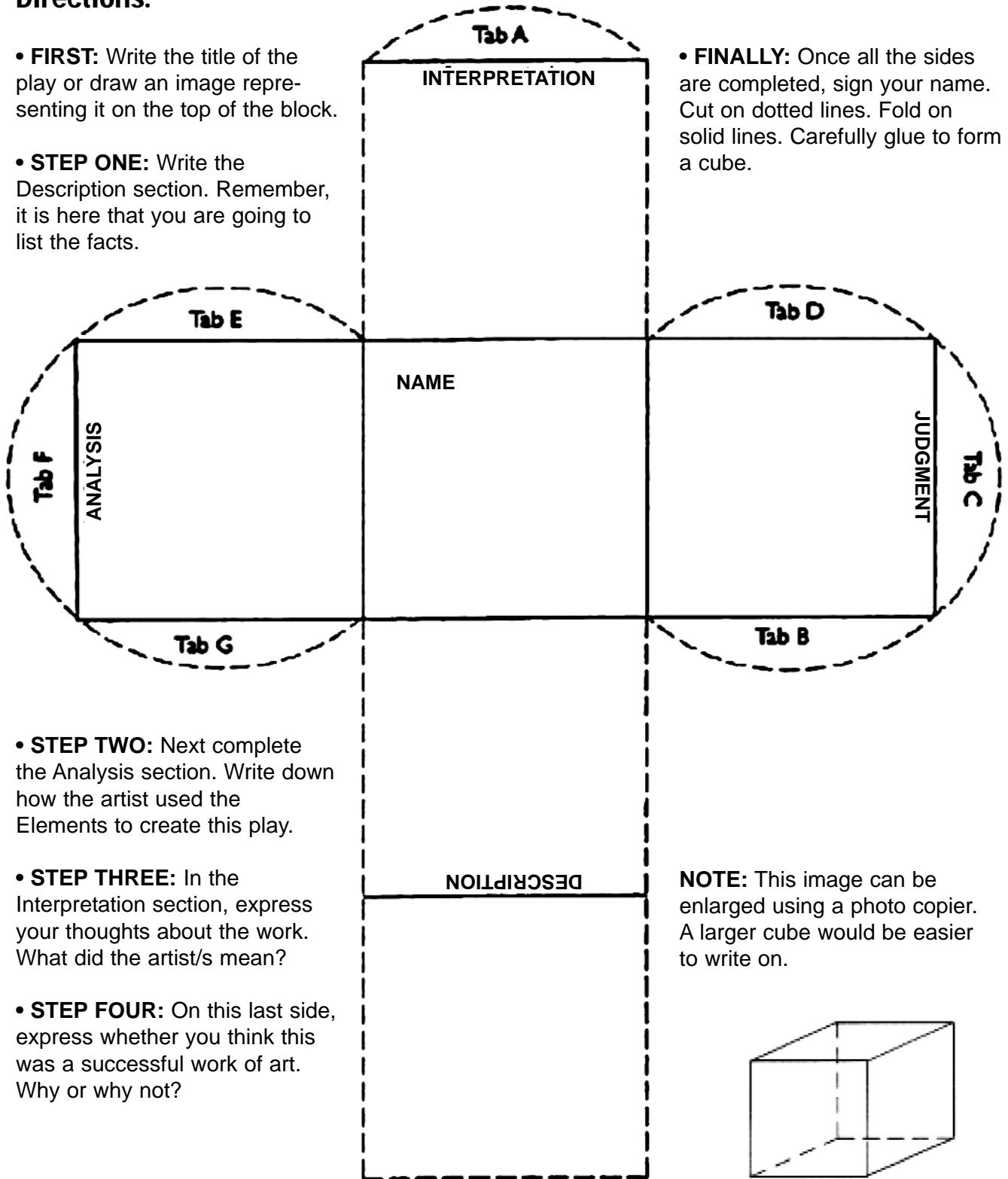
BUILD A CRITIQUING CUBE

Complete the sides using the four steps on page 8. Then construct your cube.

Directions:

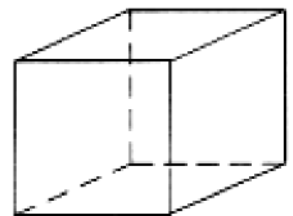
- **FIRST:** Write the title of the play or draw an image representing it on the top of the block.
- **STEP ONE:** Write the Description section. Remember, it is here that you are going to list the facts.

- **FINALLY:** Once all the sides are completed, sign your name. Cut on dotted lines. Fold on solid lines. Carefully glue to form a cube.



- **STEP TWO:** Next complete the Analysis section. Write down how the artist used the Elements to create this play.
- **STEP THREE:** In the Interpretation section, express your thoughts about the work. What did the artist/s mean?
- **STEP FOUR:** On this last side, express whether you think this was a successful work of art. Why or why not?

NOTE: This image can be enlarged using a photo copier. A larger cube would be easier to write on.



Adapted from the Art Critiquing Process: <http://www.brigan-tine.atlnet.org/GigapaletteGALLERY/websites/ARTiculationFinal/MainPages/ArtCritiquingMain.htm>



