

SMIRK



Reid Belstock & Warren Hammond
www.smirkshow.com

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Dear Teachers,

It is with excitement that we are bringing our variety arts show to your school. Our mission is to delight and entertain audiences of all ages with the cleanest comedy around, and look forward to sharing our craft with your students.

While our normal show is 90 minutes in length, we will present a smaller selection in this performance. This includes our famous International Jugglers' Association Silver-Medal winning acts, a flurry of technical-, danger-, and combination juggling stunts, as well as many other feats. These selections will give your students an understanding of Vaudeville performance, an appreciation for object manipulation, and a basic introduction to the physical principles that make it all work.

Many national and state Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) can be met with the material covered in this study guide, which covers Language Arts, Theatre, Mathematics, Physics, and Music. Before attending the production with your students, please do go over the "Brief History of Vaudeville" sheet. We encourage your students to do additional research into the theatrical style before attending the show, as well.

We look forward to seeing you at the event! Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about the materials presented here.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Reid". The letters are stylized and connected, with a large initial "R".

Reid Belstock

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren". The letters are stylized and connected, with a large initial "W".

Warren Hammond

A Brief History of Vaudeville

Vaudeville was a theatrical genre of variety entertainment popular in the United States and Canada from the early 1880s until the early 1930s. Each performance was made up of a series of separate, unrelated acts grouped together on a common bill. (Wikipedia.)

Vaudeville shows often used the talents of many different performers - often with as many as a dozen people in one show! Smaller groups (or “companies”) also performed their own full-length shows which, while more demanding for each performer, were easier to transport from city to city.

Vaudeville performance was different than the circus. Variety performers (or “Vaudevillians”) did their acts in theatres on real stages. Circuses, on the other hand, were done in “in the round”, or with audience members sitting on all sides of a ring. Circus rings usually had a dirt or sawdust floor, and were too noisy to accommodate lots of talking.



Keith's New Theatre, Boston 1894

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma02/easton/vaudeville/vaudevillemain.html>



Preparing for the Circus at Madison Square Garden, New York, 1913

<http://www.shorpy.com/node/3672>

While the circus showcased amazing acrobats, clowns, animals, and other acts, Vaudeville stages had lots of verbal comedy and peculiar stunts performed in a more intimate setting.

Discussion Questions

1. Vaudeville shows usually incorporated a number of different skills and acts. What different skills did you see in their show?
2. Circus shows are usually seen from a distance. Vaudeville shows usually take place in smaller, more intimate theaters. What did Reid and Warren do that would have worked in a circus ring? What wouldn't have worked in that setting?
3. Why do you think a Vaudeville company might want to be small, with just a handful of performers? Why do you think a Vaudeville company might want to have a lot of performers?

Post-Show Questions

1. In the middle of the show, Reid and Warren perform a routine that they call:
 - a. “Tricks we’re really good at”
 - b. “Things we can’t do yet”
 - c. “Impossible tricks”
2. In their introduction, Warren talks about his background. What did he do before he was a juggler?
3. At the end of the show, Warren stands on something and Reid rides on something. What were they doing?
4. How would you describe Reid's personality? What do you think he likes about juggling? How would you describe Warren? What do you think he likes about juggling?

Predictions

1. Reid never tells us where he learned to juggle. What do you suppose his background is? Explain your answer.
2. As Vaudeville performers, Reid and Warren are always on the move. Where do you think they're performing next?
3. Juggling appeals to different people for different reasons. Pick one person out of the audience below. What is he or she thinking?



Skee-Ball Physics

In this trick, Reid throws a ball up into the air. It comes down and hits Warren on the head. It bounces, Warren catches it and then begins juggling a four ball pattern.

Assuming that the ball weighs 100 grams and travels two meters vertically from Reid's hand, how much force does the ball exert on Warren's head? (Reid releases the ball at the same level as Warren's skull.)

Remember: $\text{Force} = \text{Mass}(\text{kg}) * \text{Acceleration}(\text{m/s}^2)$

In Earth's gravity, objects accelerate at 9.8m/s^2



Warren's four ball juggling pattern is one meter high. Is the force of the ball that hits his head less than or greater than the force exerted by the ball when he catches it with his hands?

Spinning Tops, Spinning Lids

Warren and Reid spin two different things in their show.

In the first section Reid spins throw-tops. In their finale, Warren spins a garbage can lid on his head.



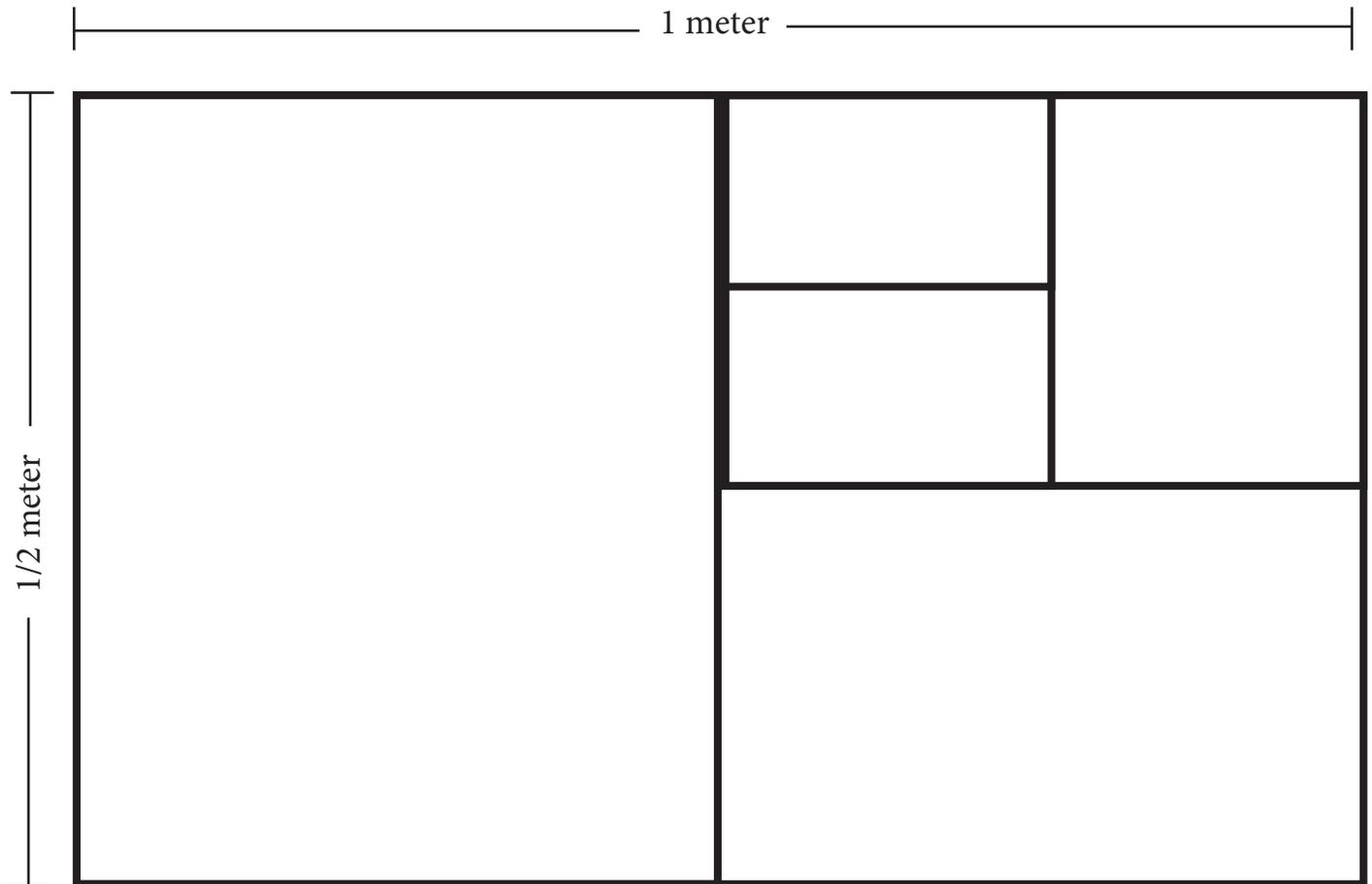
The garbage can lid spins at 240 rotations per minute. If this trick takes exactly 90 seconds to complete, how many revolutions does the lid make while it's spinning on Warren's head?

Reid throws three spinning tops in succession. Each spinning top spins at 1,500 revolutions per minute (that's pretty fast!) Assuming that Reid takes 30 seconds to wind and throw each top, the trick takes 1.5 minutes to complete. How many rotations does the first top he throws make? How many rotations does the third top he throws make? How many rotations do all of the tops make, combined?

Whip-Cracking Geometry

During the show, Warren uses a whip to tear a sheet of paper into pieces.

The paper is 1 meter wide and $\frac{1}{2}$ meter tall. If he tears the paper four times, what are the dimensions of the smallest piece he makes?



Warren and Reid's Colorful Language

One of the hallmarks of Vaudeville theatre is the clean comedy. No one is allowed to say any bad words or vulgar language to express themselves. As a result, many Vaudeville performers invented new words, phrases, and plays on words to make their audiences laugh - and to poke fun at the rules!

In the show, you may have noticed Warren and Reid using some interesting turns of phrase. There are three main kinds of verbal humor that they use: metaphor, simile, and nonsense!

Metaphors

A metaphor is when one thing is called another. These statements are often untrue, but paint an interesting mental picture. For example, Warren often refers to his childhood as “When I was knee-high to a grasshopper.” Was he ever actually that small? No! Is it a clever way to say “when I was small”? Absolutely.

Similes

A simile is when two things are compared to create a mental picture. These can often be very silly. When Warren gets playfully annoyed with Reid’s behavior, he sometimes exclaims something like “Hey! You’re as annoying as a mosquito!” or “What are you, a kindergartener?” Reid isn’t actually a mosquito or a kindergartener, but he’s acting like one. (If Warren said “Get out of here, you mosquito!”, though - that’d be a metaphor. When there’s a comparison using the words “like” or “as”, it’s a simile. When there isn’t, it’s a metaphor!)

Nonsense

Sometimes, when Reid gets very upset, he starts to make up words. Sometimes these new words are very silly sounding and get a laugh!

...Now find them yourself!

Warren and Reid use colorful language throughout the show. Can you remember any examples?

Metaphor

Simile

Nonsense



Why is nonsense funny?

...No one can say for sure! Some scientists refer to this kind of humor as “linguistic ambiguity”, meaning that your brain isn’t sure what’s happening with the words, so fills in the meaning with something that makes you laugh automatically!

Combination Tricks

Warren and Reid's big finale trick involved a variety of different skills. In the circus world, any juggling trick that involves more than one skill is called a "Combination Trick." Oftentimes, jugglers like to make these tricks dangerous in order to thrill their audiences. In their act, Warren and Reid combined juggling, unicycling, balancing on a rola-bola, and spinning objects - all at the same time!

Imagine you were Smirk's artistic director. How would you change their final combination trick to make it more dangerous? How would you change their final trick to make it even more exciting?

Explain your answer, then draw a picture of it below!

In your day-to-day life, you do many routine things - you brush your teeth, do your homework, and lots of other tasks that you're really good at. What might it look like if you did them all at the same time? What would make this "combination trick" particularly exciting or difficult?

It's Music!

- Warren juggles to a piece of music in the middle of the show. What was the music like? How did he move to the music? Did it fit?

- Warren was hired to perform at a few different events this year, and he needs your help! The songs he usually performs to wouldn't be quite right. What songs might be appropriate for the following places or events?

Wedding -

Funeral -

Birthday -

Old Folks' Home -

Roller Skating Rink -

Circus -

80's Power-Ballad Night -

Cinco de Mayo -

Wedding Anniversary -

Your Choice! -



Now, with a friend or small group, pick your favorite song and sing it for the class. How might the movement be different? What kind of trick does the new music inspire you to do?

Why did you pick the song you did? What makes it most appropriate for the event?

Fancy Introductions

One of the staples of circus, sideshow, and vaudeville traditions is the elaborate introduction. In their show, Warren and Reid introduce one another several times throughout the show. In one instance, Reid calls Warren an “innovative juggling ace.”

Why do you think it's important to introduce an act before it goes on stage?

You have been asked to introduce Smirk before their next show. How are you going to introduce them? What would you say about them in order to get the audience excited?

Imagine you have been asked to introduce your teacher before they give a speech at the next parent-teacher conference. What would you say about them, in order to get your parents excited to hear what they have to say?

Imagine you are going to be introduced before your next report for class. What would you like to have said about you? How might you get your classroom excited to hear what you have to say?

Online Resources

Thanks to the Internet, everyone can be a research historian! Take a look at these videos of legendary Vaudevill Hall performers.

Shaw & Lee - "Vaudeville Legends" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hgck7pVakU8>

Burns & Allen - "Lambchops" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPhmNhO7dRw>

The Marx Brothers - "Mirror Scene" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5lU52aWTJo>

Abbott & Costello - "Who's on First?" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTcRRaXV-fg>

Do you see any running themes or styles in these acts?

What parallels between these old routines can you and your classroom find with Smirk's performance?

Book Resources

Below are some books that you can use as resources as well!

The Abbott & Costello Story: Sixty Years of Who's on First? - Stephen Cox

No Applause--Just Throw Money: The Book That Made Vaudeville Famous - Trav S.D.

Circus techniques - Hovey Burgess