

The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy



Teachers' Notes

About Slingsby

Slingsby creates theatrical experiences that acknowledge the pain that is often a feature of the human experience but that ultimately remind 'the adult in all of us' of the potential joy, infinite possibility and wonder of the universe.

Slingsby is proudly based in Adelaide, South Australia and is led by Andy Packer (Artistic Director) and Jodi Glass (Executive Producer). The company's productions are conceived by Andy and developed in collaboration with Artistic Associates Quincy Grant (composer) and Geoff Cobham (designer) alongside teams of artists from a range of artistic disciplines.

Slingsby's award winning inaugural production, *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy*, premiered in the Adelaide Festival Centre in January 2008. It has since been performed 220 times in 40 venues in 25 cities on 5 continents. Seasons include Sydney Festival, Children First Festival in Singapore, Festival Teatralia in Madrid, Imagnate Festival in Edinburgh, The Egg at Theatre Royal Bath, Sydney Opera House, ASSITEJ 2008 World Congress and Performing Arts Festival in Adelaide, and a five-week tour of regional and metropolitan South Australia. In 2011 the production undertook a seven week tour of North America including two weeks 'sold-out' at The Duke Theater on 42nd Street, New York. Slingsby's debut international tour, the 2009 world tour of *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy*, won a Ruby Award for "Leadership in Arts Enterprise".

Wolf, the company's second production was largely developed and subsequently premiered in Mount Gambier in regional South Australia. *Wolf* premiered in May 2009 in Mount Gambier's Sir Robert Helpmann Theatre after which the production toured for three weeks to 10 regional South Australian towns and performed a week-long season in the 2009 Come Out Festival for young audiences. In 2011 *Wolf* toured to the Sydney Opera House.

Man Covets Bird, Slingsby's third production took its inspiration from a sketch by American artist and musician John Lurie and the art of Australian industrial photographer Wolfgang Sievers. The production incorporates animation, live music and beautiful prose to tell a tale that blends equal measures of melancholia and sunshine. *Man Covets Bird* premiered in March 2010 for the 2010 Adelaide Festival and Adelaide Festival Centre's InSpace program, receiving unanimous critical and audience acclaim and winning a variety of awards. In August 2012 *Man Covets Bird* toured to The Arts Centre, Melbourne, Sydney Opera House and Centenary Hall, Goolwa in regional South Australia.

For more information on Slingsby visit: <http://www.slingsby.net.au/>

To hear the artists discussing the ideas behind the companies work visit: <https://vimeo.com/45431548#at=0>

Learning activities

SACSA Key Ideas from the Primary and Middle Years

Arts – Drama – Arts analysis and response 3.4, 4.4, Arts in context 3.5, 4.5, 3.6, 4.6, Arts practice 3.1, 4.1, 3.2, 4.2, 3.3, 4.3

Prior to attending *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy* by Slingsby

The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy begins in true classic Greek Tragic theatre style with the death of the main character's parents. The production is also inspired by the travelling medicine and magic lantern shows of the 18th and 19th centuries.

1. Research the characteristics of classical Greek Tragic theatre. Focus on elements of one or more Shakespearean plays to gain an appreciation of the style. Compare contemporary interpretations of the same play by studying different film interpretations.
2. Examine the context in which the original Shakespearean plays were performed. For example research the original Globe Theatre, built in 1599, and the New Globe Theatre, built in 1997. Imagine being a part of the audience in the early 1600s. Discuss what this experience might have been like in comparison to being in the audience at a performance at the Adelaide Festival Theatre.
3. Find out more about the magic lantern and travelling medicine shows of the 18th and 19th centuries. Did you know that the magic lantern shows involved oxygen or hydrogen being burned on a limestone surface to produce 'limelight', which was projected through hand painted scenes on glass slides?
4. Visit the website that shows a digital re-enactment of Uncle Tom's Cabin as a magic lantern show in the early 1850s. (See Resources) Compare this with the use of multimedia projections in contemporary theatre shows.
5. Find out more about travelling medicine shows. You're probably familiar with the work of the 'pitch doctors' who were part of travelling medicine shows and whose cries of 'Step right up folks...' were designed to attract people to buy pills, elixirs and salves that were supposed to have 'miraculous healing powers'. Other pitch doctors would perform some kind of magic trick or have on show 'wonders from the four corners of the earth' to get people from rural villages interested. Early American movies often featured these shows.
6. Workshop your own travelling medicine show in groups of four or five people. Practice your magic skills and get your sales pitch ready before you perform to your class.
7. Attend the ASSITEJ 2008 performance, *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy* by Slingsby.

After the performance

1. Discuss the impact of the performance. Did it convey the excitement and the colour of the original travelling medicine and magic lantern shows? Could you identify aspects of Classic Greek Tragedy theatre? How would you describe the pace and atmosphere of the performance? What was the central theme and how was it conveyed?

2. Explore the technologies used within the show – the use of LED lighting, images projected through a data show, the 1920 strip film slide projector and the physical manipulation of small model set elements.

- Try to replicate some of these techniques. For example, work the projection of images through a data show into a major class performance. Think about the images you will need and the editing software and digital filters that can be used to create the effects you want.
- Locate an old slide projector and/or an OHP projector and experiment with making your own slides. For example, you may be able to scan 'found objects': lace textured materials or natural fibres, old photos, onions skins and so on into Adobe PhotoShop using different tools to create something that suits your performance. Print these onto OHT transparencies.
- Invite someone with lighting and sound experience to your school to talk about how they work and about the pathways they took to get to this kind of job(s).

Arts – Visual Arts and/or Media Arts analysis and response 3.4, 4.4, Arts in context 3.5, 4.5, 3.6, 4.6, Arts practice 3.1, 4.1, 3.2, 4.2, 3.3, 4.3

1. Attend the performance, The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy by Slingsby.

After the performance

- Discuss the imagined world created through the performance.
 - Discuss other imagined worlds as shown through films, music, for example the original music for War of the Worlds, theatre productions and visual artworks. Point out any similarities and differences and develop a concept map to illustrate what you have discussed.
2. Read the picture book, The Lost Thing by Shaun Tan. Look carefully at the pictures in the book. Do they remind you of artworks you may have already seen?
 - Investigate the work of artists Jeffrey Smart, Edward Hopper, Hieronymus Bosch and Surrealists, Salvador Dali, Joan Miro and Rene Magritte. Can you find examples of artworks by Shaun Tan that appear to be influenced by these artists?
 - Present your findings and opinions through a series of Venn diagrams or Concept maps.
 3. Create your own storyboard sequence to tell a very short story of someone or something that is lost. Remember to use a narrative genre.
 - Visit Shaun Tan’s website and check out the short film The Lost Thing <http://www.shauntan.net/film1.html>
 - Create a short animation from your storyboard; or take each cell in your storyboard and scan it into Adobe PhotoShop to create a series of coloured images that can be printed on plastic transparencies and projected onto a wall using an OHT projector. Alternately, the images can be cut and pasted into Microsoft PowerPoint for projection on a wall.
 - Experiment with projecting onto different surfaces – textured, coloured or curtained.
 - Negotiate with a Music, Drama or Dance teacher at your school to use your projected images as part of a performance presentation to a school or community audience. This could also be worked out as part of a collaborative project with other teachers so that the performance and visual elements are designed to complement each other.

English – Texts and contexts 3.1, 4.1, 3.3, 4.3, 3.4, 4.4

1. Attend the performance, *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy* by Slingsby.

After the performance

2. Identify themes within *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy* performance and explain how these relate to the Essential Learnings – Futures, Identity, Interdependence, Thinking and Communication. (Work in groups for this. Each group focuses on one Essential Learning only).
3. Choose one of the themes you or another class member has identified and develop a news report about this theme as it relates to the performance. For example, your report may be about there being no moon in the sky and the impact on people, or it could be about Cheeseboy's resilience and bravery in overcoming problems and 'saving the world'; about the ecosystems, or on valuing diversity.

Unpacking words and phrases used in the show to create a new imagined world

4. Explain what you think the following words or phrases mean:
 - 'The light was embarrassed'. Is this phrase a simile or metaphor?
 - Everything 'looked too beautiful as only destruction can be'.
 - 'Days that never end'.
5. Discuss: What is an 'imagined world'? Think of children's story books and movies about worlds created through imagination. Books include Enid Blyton's *The Faraway Tree* series, *Shrek*, *The Wizard of Oz*, the *Harry Potter* stories; while movies include the *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* series, *Finding Neverland*, *The Lion King*, *Robots* and *Ice Age 1 and 2*. How are the worlds in these stories different to the world in which you live? Are there similarities?
6. Write a narrative about an imagined world by beginning with 'Waves, lapping on waves ...' See if you can include one of the phrases (listed in part 1) in your story.
7. Prepare a short talk to your class using the topic 'a day that never ends' or 'days that never end'. Your talk may be on a very positive experience or a day that just seemed to go on forever because of the challenges you faced.
8. Read the picture book *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan. This book is about a day that seems to go on forever, where nothing seems to be going well, but it ends on a very hopeful and optimistic note.
9. Create Cinquain poetry using one of the themes – hope, optimism, resilience, imagination. Desktop publish this with an appropriate illustration.
10. Read and analyse the picture book, *The Lost Thing* by Shaun Tan.