

STUDY GUIDE

Dynamo



Théâtre

Mur-Mur (The Wall)



Mur - Mur (The Wall)

PRESENTATION

The intent of this guide is to make the most of the performance. The guide suggests activities to be done "Before" or "After the Performance." Although some indications are given, the teacher can choose any activity in this pool and make adaptations as he or she sees fit.

Some activities are aimed at preparing the audience for a ***Theatre of Acrobatic Movement*** performance. So doing, students will become acquainted with the company's own unique style and with the themes of **Mur-Mur (The Wall)**.

We have also included some follow-up activities. The emotions experienced by the audience can involve some strong reactions. These reactions can focus on the production's themes or the form itself. The idea is to have a second look at these reactions.

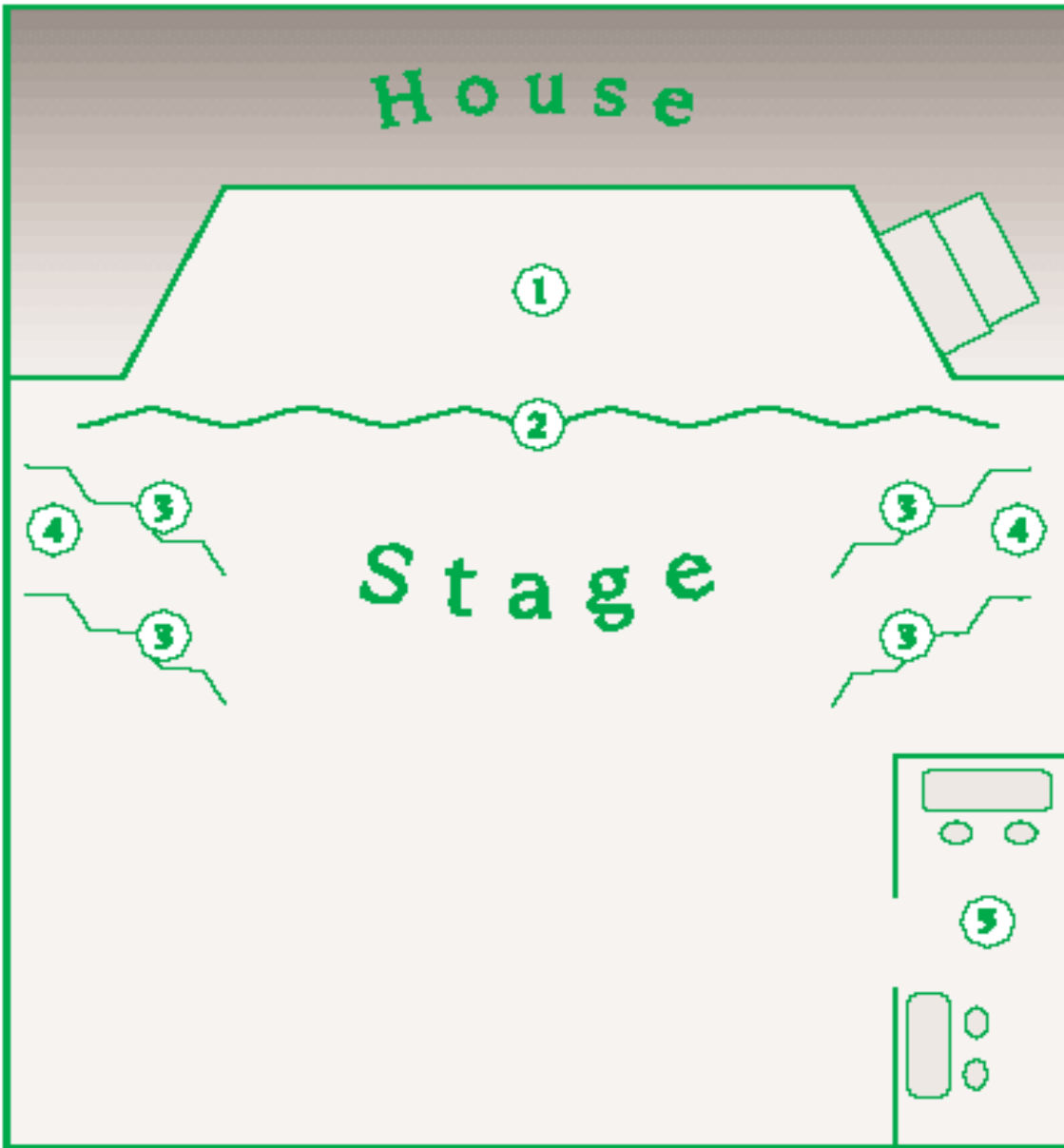


BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Activity 1-

The Theatre is a Specialized Area

It has its own vocabulary. It can be interesting to have a closer look at the space:



DIFFERENT ELEMENTS IN A THEATRE

1. Proscenium
2. Curtain
3. Legs
4. Off-stage right and left
5. Dressing room

The Theatre Dictionary

Term	Definition	French equivalent
Prop	Object used on stage (except for set and costumes) by the performers.	Accessoire
Costume	Clothes worn by the performers on stage. The clothes often give information on the character.	Costume
Set	The physical setting of the events happening on-stage. The set elements can be painted, three-dimensional, symbolic or realistic.	Décor
Stage left	The left side of the stage from the performer's point of view.	Côté cour
Stage right	The right side of the stage from the performer's point of view.	Côté jardin
Carpenter	The person, who, during the performance, changes the sets or places the props.	Machiniste
Break a leg!	Wishing each other a good performance.	Merde!
Directing	The integration into one work of art of all the efforts, ideas and contributions by the different artists.	Mise en scène
Black-out	A moment during which the lights go down. This allows for a pause in the action or a set change.	Noir
Spotlight	A special instrument designed to direct light on a specific point on the stage.	Projecteur
Rehearsal	Period of time during which the performers experiment and develop their characters, learn their lines and the staging.	Répétition
Curtain call	The moment at the end of a performance when the performers come back on stage to thank the audience for their applause.	Salut
Script	The outline of productions, which have no spoken lines, are usually created through improvising and consist of movement.	Scénario

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Activity 2-

Theatre is live art

Type of assignment: Writing

The artists give a live performance on the stage.
Once a performance has begun, it cannot be stopped.

- What are the consequences of such a requirement?
- Are there similar situations? (Exams are similar!)
- Two performances are never identical. Why?

Clues:

Humans are not machines.

Performers try to recreate their moments as if it was the first time.

A performance happens under specific conditions (the performance space, the time of day, the audience, the temperature) and each participant influences the quality of the performance.

- List all the people responsible for a performance and their responsibility

The people involved with Mur-Mur (The Wall) and their responsibilities

A- **DynamO Theatre**: Creating an exciting production

B-The performers

Giving a lively and exciting performance.

Requirements:

1- Readiness: training and warm-up

2- Concentration: getting ready for the performance, reviewing the movements.

C- The theatre space

Quality seating, good acoustics and lighting

D- The audience!

Indeed, the audience has an important role in a performance. Its participation and its attention influence the rhythm of a performance. Even its silence can be felt by the performers. One student may have performed in a play. He/she could tell the others what happens backstage before and during a performance. He/she could tell what stagefright feels like, how the audience influences a performance.

BEFORE OR AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Activity 3-

MUR-MUR (THE WALL), a non-verbal performance

Type of assignment: Conference/ Research / Discussion /
Non-verbal creativity

Mur-Mur (The Wall) is a production that has (practically)
no words.

Everything is expressed through body movement.

Conference

Have some students seen non-verbal productions? (such
as dance or mime)

Or television shows such as "Mister Bean" on British TV?

A visit to a museum or an art gallery can also be a similar
experience.

The students that have seen this kind of a production
could share their experience with the others.

- a) They should first write an outline of their conference.
- b) In this outline, their topics would put into some order.
- c) Then, working from their notes, they can share their
impressions and have their notes as a reminder.

Non-verbal creativity:

1-Tell a story without using words.

This work can be a simple card, a drawing, a series of
dance steps or a story board.

You could also ask the students to portray a
character and convey different emotions through
movement or attitudes.

Analysis

Choose an ad that has an interesting picture. Try and
figure out the message behind this picture. What is the
story? What are the people producing this ad trying to
convey?

You could divide the students into different teams and
compare the different interpretations from the same picture.

BEFORE OR AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Activity 4-

Walls through and through

Type of assignment: Research / Essay writing

The motivation for the movement and the set is a wall.
Many activities can be developed around walls.

When you think of a wall, what comes to mind?

- the different functions of a wall
- the symbolism of walls
- the words and expressions using the word wall
- what a wall represents for you

Name some famous walls. Explain their purpose.

(Berlin wall, Great Wall of China, Wailing Wall, The Wall by Pink Floyd, etc.)

-Some words are scribbled on the show's wall: these are graffiti. Usually, graffiti defaces the environment. What do you think about graffiti? Is all graffiti the same?

-Some artists express themselves through street art, by creating frescos on walls. Street art can be found in many cities. Do you know how many there are in your city? What is the difference between a fresco and graffiti?

-The first part of the show's name is Mur-Mur. This is close to a word in the English language. Which is it? * What does it mean?

- In French, half of the title Mur-Mur is the French word Mur. What does Mur mean in English? *
- Now that you know the meanings of both these words, what do both these words have to do with the show?

* Look for answers at the bottom of the page.

1st question: Mur-Mur is close to murrmur
2nd question: In English, mur means wall

BEFORE OR AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Activity 5-

In the following pages, we have included a biography of the company and a text on its unique style of theatre.

THE COMPANY

Type of assignment: Review / Text analysis

DYNAMO THEATRE - A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE COMPANY

La Troupe Circus (later renamed DynamO Theatre) was founded in 1981 in Montreal as part of both a movement which set out to rediscover the circus arts and of a coming together of artists from various performance backgrounds (gymnastics, theatre and mime). The company members sought to blend circus arts (such as acrobatics, mask, clowning and juggling) with theatre.

This style so thrilled audiences that, within three years, the number of performances jumped from 10 to 150 per year. The company quickly gained an international reputation for the quality and the originality of its work. The productions, *Dynamogénique*, *Le Tambour Rit*, *Création 85* toured right across Canada and into the United States. All in all, some 800 performances were logged in these early years.

Just as the company was beginning to work on productions which focused on one story or theme, the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde offered to sponsor a new work. So, Clément Cazalais wrote *La Lune, rien que la lune*, the company's first fully scripted production. As a result, a unique theatrical style was born: the Theatre of Acrobatic Movement.

The following year, a piece of New York street art inspired a new production. The creative team scripted the work collectively under the guidance of Théâtre Repère's Jacques Lessard. Directed by Robert Dion, *Mur-Mur (The Wall)* is now approaching its one thousandth performance. This landmark production also prompted the company to adopt a new company name which would fit with this new direction: DynamO Theatre.

The company's next step was to push the staging and scripting of acrobatic movement even further. The turmoil of adolescence was the main theme of the new project and playwright Gilbert Dupuis joined the creative team to script the next two productions. In *The Challenge*, Claude Goyette's set design was literally the jumping-off point for Alain Fournier's directing. To date, over 350 performances have already been given. In *Echoes of the River*, Robert Dion explored the world of legends, trying to convey the essence of a hero.

These achievements encouraged the company to keep exploring the possibilities of acrobatic movement. Indeed, a new work is in the making. This time, DynamO Theatre is teaming up with a new playwright, Lise Vaillancourt, to script the story. The new show will be called *Lili* and is slated to open in 2000.

The students can use this text to write a review based on the aims and objectives DynamO Theatre has set for itself in producing this show. You could also do some text analysis exercises with this text.

Theatre of Acrobatic Movement

From the start, DynamO Theatre's approach sought to blend theatre with acrobatic movement and circus arts, such as clowning and juggling.

The most obvious feature of acrobatics is its spectacular quality. However, the company is searching beyond the physical performance and looking to convey characters' inner conflicts and their sometimes complex set of emotions through movement. DynamO Theatre is convinced that acrobatic movement can spark an audience's imagination.

The scripting of a story for acrobatic movement goes through different stages. The performers begin by improvising and exploring the first draft of a script. The director spots evocative movements and matches them to a character's emotional state. This exploration brings the playwright to revise his script. The process is repeated as many times as needed. Thus, the director can uncover and enhance the themes of the production. The show continues to be polished even when touring has begun.

With every production, Theatre of Acrobatic Movement, the company's own unique style, is continually redefined and, as each new show explores a theme, new questions arise. For instance, the goal of *Mur-Mur (The Wall)* was to script a show with one story line. In turn, with *The Challenge*, the company wanted to go beyond a formal approach to acrobatic movement and explore a more profound subject matter through a specific event. The starting point was the turmoil of adolescence but, as the performers risked more and more during the rehearsals, the playwright added a layer: the characters' mortality. Again, all through the creative process, another question arose: some movements somehow crystallized the sheer essence of a character's aspirations. The question was to find a way to develop this new aspect of acrobatic movement.

In *Echoes of the River*, the creative team used group movements to embody heroic behaviour. In *Lili*, the latest work, the directors are trying to combine the lightness and simplicity of *Mur-Mur (The Wall)* with the richness and drama found in the two following productions. In so doing, DynamO Theatre continues to broaden its vocabulary by exploring every aspect of movement and discovering new meanings.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Activity 6-

THE TRIAL

Type of assignment: Public speaking/ Analysis/ Evaluation

Expecting young people to come out of the performance with a structured critique is risky. It takes all the fun out of going to see a show. And fun is an essential part of a performance. To urge them to review the performance, we suggest a more roundabout manner. It may be as productive.

A-Brain-storming

The idea is to ask students to share their impressions without necessarily asking that they articulate them. At this stage, they can just jot these feelings down as they come. No need to insist on form. The idea is to get an emotional reaction in the rough.

Here is an example:

Like a circus. . . gymnasts speaking their own physical language. Boards coming out of the wall. The youngest, real funny. Climbing all over the place. The brick people, ??? Actually what happened is real simple.

B-Structuring their reaction

The trial

The idea is to organize a trial in which the merits of the performance would be debated. There are two sides, the pros and the cons, who try to convince a jury.

You act as judge and set down the criteria which will enable the jury (the other students) to come up with a verdict. This exercise can be a public speaking exercise and the listeners have to sharpen their analytical abilities. Thus those that are strong speakers can develop their own talents and those who are more shy or those have not made up their minds can have their point of view expressed collectively. You could ask that each member of the jury to explain how he came to his opinion, which arguments convinced him/her.

To help the students organize their ideas, we have included

- a) an evaluation guide
- b) a scene by scene breakdown

This list of scenes constitutes the backbone of the production. It would be a good reference tool for both sides. It could help them identify the scenes they are debating.

Mur-Mur (The Wall) evaluation Guide

Personal comments	What struck you? Name 3 elements and explain.
Theme	What is it? Are there more than one? Explain the development.
Characters :	Describe the basic temperament of each character. Are the characters believable?
Acrobatic Movement	Give your definition of acrobatic movement: Does the movement express the intentions or the emotions of the character?
Costumes	What kind of impression do they convey? Do they give information on the character?
Lighting	Does it create an atmosphere? What kind?
Music	Define the style of music? Does it enhance certain emotions? Does it fit? If not, what kind of music would you choose?
Set	Does this structure enhance the theme? How? Would other set designs achieve the same effect?
Script	Is the sequence of events interesting? surprising? Why?
Directing	Do the images and the movement strike the imagination? Do similar situations come to mind?
Audience reaction	Rate it. What interested the audience the most? What didn't interest them?

Mur-Mur (The Wall), scene by scene

Opening	Presentation of the wall and of the characters.
Teasing	The teenagers mock Bob's crush on Lucy.
Acrobatic duel	Mike and Bob try to flirt with Lucy and Cathy, but their rivalry turns into a fight.
Pas de deux	Cathy tries to get closer to Mike.
Ralphie's Prank	Ralphie accidentally falls off the roof.
The Break	Mike and Lucy get closer, which shocks Cathy and Bob.
The Letter	Cathy hands Mike a letter in which she tells him she wants to break up.
The Brick People come in through the window	The wall comes to life.
Saturday afternoon	The couples get back together. Ralphie bothers them.
Handbag lady	Ralphie and his brother Bob face the Handbag lady.
Pas de deux	Mike and Lucy are a happy couple until Ralphie sticks his nose in their
Ralphie's dream	In his room, Ralphie dreams that he has become the indisputable gangleader.
Hullabaloo	Ralphie is now a gang member. Everybody can play the game.
Finale	The characters return to their original positions. The story comes full circle.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Activity 7-

THE VISUAL ASPECT

Type of assignment: technical drawing

The structure of the set may intrigue some students.

Here are some activities on the technical aspect of theatre.

Can the students draw up a floor plan, a section or an elevation of the set?



Technical information on the set:

- Height: 3m (10')
- Depth: 1m (3')
- Width: 6m (20')

One last word...

This guide aims to suggest different ways of taking advantage of this event. You may have other ideas. We would appreciate knowing if this guide was useful to you. It would help create better study guides in the future.

We take great pleasure in reading about ways you develop the material. Here is our address:



Dynamo
Théâtre

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