



Spring 2007

**CREIGHTON ELEMENTARY  
&  
PHILADELPHIA THEATRE COMPANY**

**Teaching artists**

Ed Shockley, Playwright  
Bobbi Renzi, Actor

**Participating teachers**

Connie Wilson, 4<sup>th</sup> grade  
Deborah Swank, 4<sup>th</sup> grade  
Robyn Beckert, 4<sup>th</sup> grade  
Larisa Vedensky, Music Specialist  
Diane Lavalais, Art Specialist  
Eugene Golson, Vice Principal

**I. Project**

**Project Purpose**

Fourth grade students and teachers from the Creighton Elementary School Arts Bridges Team will collaborate with playwright Ed Shockley and theater teaching artist Barbara Renzi to create a series of performance pieces utilizing the concept of working as an ensemble. Students will incorporate vocabulary, figurative language and grammar from the Philadelphia School District's 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy Curriculum into each performance piece, giving a real world context for these curriculum topics. A Project DVD containing video of both the creative process and resulting performance pieces will be created, and each student will receive their own copy.

**Project Goals**

Goals of "Working as an Ensemble" are:

- 1) Improve students' attitudes towards self and school, fostering pro-social behavior.
- 2) Develop students' teamwork and leadership skills.
- 3) Increase student perception of inclusion and competence in group activities.
- 4) Increase and enrich students' comprehension of vocabulary and understanding of figurative language and grammar.
- 5) Deepen students' understanding of the relationships between various types of writing and speaking.
- 6) Create an environment for more self-motivation and peer learning.

**Project Theme**

The theme of working as an ensemble permeates theater. The art form itself incorporates many other artistic disciplines – music, dance, creative writing, painting, and sculpture, for example. The ability to work together as a class or in small groups is a skill that the Creighton teachers have identified as sorely lacking in their students. This project will develop those skills through the process of creating performance pieces based on 4<sup>th</sup> grade language arts curriculum content.

**Experiential Events and Activities**

Working as an Ensemble will engage students in multiple experiences of communicating through the art form of theater. Teaching Artists Ed Shockley and

Bobbie Renzi will lead students through a creative process that embodies the concept of ensemble in all literary, acting and performance activities. Fourth grade teachers will reinforce the group work skills developed in the teaching artists' sessions by replaying activities, rehearsing performance pieces and generally incorporating ensemble techniques into their teaching. Breaking the project down into a series of performance pieces of smaller scope rather than one grand final performance allows for reflection on the collaboration necessary to create and perform each piece, the opportunity to learn from each experience, and the all important chance to make new and better choices for yourself in creating and performing the next piece. The specific content of each performance piece will be determined for each class individually but all will be based in components of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts curriculum. While Mr. Shockley's primary focus will be creating written work such as dialogue, scenes and scripts, and Ms. Renzi will focus on developing acting skills that allow students to communicate ideas and perform their written work, there will undoubtedly be areas of overlap in their workshop sessions.

Sharing the performance pieces will occur in a tiered process. The first performance piece will be performed, video taped and played back in individual classrooms. The second performance piece will be performed and video taped on the school's stage without any outside audience, and classes will view the video of all pieces in individual classrooms. The third piece moves closer to the experience of live theater by having each class' performance piece video taped as they perform them in on the stage with the other participating classes as audience. A final celebration and viewing of a DVD containing all performance pieces created for the project will be viewed by all classes together in the school auditorium. Additionally, each student will take home their own copy of this project DVD to share with their family and friends. This will also give students who continue in the program in subsequent years a record of their past achievement. Teachers and teaching artists will use the DVD as a reflective tool for themselves and a tool to connect future classes to the work that has been done.

### **Connections to Literacy**

Each of the performance pieces will be based on student generated writing. Character lines and scripts for scenes begun in sessions with Mr. Shockley will be continued by classroom teachers who will reinforce the integration of vocabulary, grammar and figurative language. In sessions with Ms. Renzi, students will expand their written work by applying verbal and nonverbal communication skills they develop.

### **Other Curricular Connections**

The first performance piece will be based on Pennsylvania history, an element of the fourth grade social studies curriculum. Decisions to use other curricular areas for performance content will be determined on a class by class basis. Music and visual art content will be incorporated into each performance piece.

### **Standards Addressed**

#### **Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening**

- 1) Learning to Read Independently
  - Purposes for Reading
  - Word Recognition
  - Skills Vocabulary Development
  - Comprehension and Interpretation
  - Fluency
- 2) Reading Critically in All Content Areas
  - Detail
  - Inferences

- Comparison
- Analysis and Evaluation
- 1) Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature
  - Literary Elements
  - Literary Devices
  - Poetry
  - Drama
- 2) Types of Writing
  - Narrative
  - Informational
- 3) Quality of Writing
  - Focus
  - Content
  - Organization
  - Style
  - Conventions
- 1) Speaking and Listening
  - Listening Skills
  - Speaking Skills
  - Discussion
  - Presentation
- 1) Characteristics and Function of the English Language
  - Variations
  - Application
- 1) Research
  - Selection
  - Location of Information
  - Organization

### **Pennsylvania Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities**

- 1) Production, Performance and Exhibition of Dance, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts
  - Vocabulary Within each Art Form
  - Themes in Art Forms
  - Function and Analysis of Rehearsals and Practice Sessions
  - Function and Analysis of Rehearsals and Practice Sessions
- 1) Historical and Cultural Contexts
  - Styles and Genre in the Arts
  - Historical and Cultural Perspectives
  - Historical and Cultural Impact on Works in the Arts
  - Philosophical context of works in the arts
  - Common themes in works in the Arts
- 1) Critical Response
  - Critical Processes
  - Criteria
  - Vocabulary for Criticism
  - Comparisons

#### **9.4 Aesthetic Response**

- Aesthetic Interpretation
- Artistic Choices

## **Learning Objectives**

- 1) Solving problems using the arts as a tool to investigate issues, and as a forum to find solutions;
- 2) Communicating and interpreting information and ideas -- both as creators and as receivers -- observing, analyzing, evaluating, critiquing and interacting;
- 3) Using artistic techniques and technology to access information, process ideas, and communicate results;
- 4) Working on teams and learning to contribute both as an individual and as a member of a group;
- 5) Recognizing and applying connections -- between disciplines, among individuals, and within communities;
- 6) Reviewing ones own and ones peers' progress in work activities and evaluating final products;
- 7) Discovering and designing connections between the school and the larger community.

## **Student Work Created**

Students in each class will generate three separate performance pieces. All of the text, props, costumes and staging for each piece will be created by students under the guidance of the teaching artists, classroom teachers and the school's art and music teachers. All students will keep a project journal containing their daily responses to teaching artist sessions, additional entries guided by classroom teachers and their reflections on viewing video of the performance pieces. A project DVD documenting their work will be given to each student.

## **II. Description and Roles of All Partners**

### **Robyn Beckert, Deb Swank and Connie Wilson**

As the fourth grade teachers on the Creighton Arts Bridges Team, Ms. Swank, Ms. Wilson and Ms. Beckert will design and implement reading, writing and content specific activities to support the creation of student performance pieces. They will collaborate with the teaching artists to develop techniques and classroom structure that develop the project concept of Working as an Ensemble.

### **Ed Shockley**

As the Literary Teaching Artist, Mr. Shockley will guide students in writing scenes and other text for performance pieces. He will collaborate with classroom teachers, students and theater teaching artist, Bobbie Renzi to create a series of student performance pieces in each class, as well as facilitate the video taping, playback and reflection of all performances.

### **Bobbie Renzi**

Teaching Artists, will guide students in developing skills for communicating with your body and voice (the actor's instrument). She will collaborate with classroom teachers, students and literary teaching artist, Ed Shockley to create a series of student performance pieces in each class, as well as facilitate the video taping, playback and reflection of all performances.

### **Larisa Vendensky**

As the Creighton music teacher, Ms. Vendensky will design and implement music activities relating to the project. She will collaborate directly with Ms. Renzi, Mr. Shockley, and students in the design and creation of music and soundscapes to be used in the performance pieces. She will support the theme of "Working as an Ensemble" by reinforcing group work techniques established by the TA's and classroom teachers.

## **Diane Lavalais**

As the Creighton Elementary Art Teacher, Ms. will design and implement visual art activities relating to the project. She will support the theme of “Working as an Ensemble” by reinforcing group work techniques established by the TA’s and classroom teachers. When possible, students will create props, set and/or costume pieces for use in their performance pieces during her art class.

## **Philadelphia Theatre Company**

As the arts mentor for the Creighton Elementary Arts Bridges Team, PTC will coordinate all project activities, and provide all project materials, including video taping, video editing and DVD replication. PTC will acquire any additional support materials, services or personal that the team requests. PTC will also be responsible for collecting all documentation and assessment materials generated by this project.

## **III. Project Timeline**

February 2007	Planning meetings involving teaching artists, classroom teachers, and Philadelphia Theatre Company.
March 12 – April 13, 2007 Performance	Teaching artist workshop sessions creating Piece #1
April 16 – May 1, 2007 Performance	Teaching artist workshop sessions creating Piece #2 Reflection on video of Performance Piece #1
May 2 - 10, 2007	Creation of Performance Piece #3 Reflection on video of Performance Piece #2
June 2007	Participate in Arts Bridges conference and showcase of student work

## **IV. Project Assessment and Evaluation**

### **Outputs:**

- 1) Student-created performance pieces – goal of 3 per class
- 2) Live performance of final piece for an audience
- 3) Video of performance pieces as reflective tools
- 4) Individual student journal/portfolios
- 5) Enhanced student motivation for learning
- 6) Enhanced student peer collaboration

### **Measurable Outcomes:**

- 1) 75% improvement in literacy specific to morphing written work into multi-disciplined performances.  
*Indicator:* qualitative analysis of use of vocabulary, grammar, and figurative language in text for performance pieces, guided journal responses and other related writing assignments
- 2) 75% improvement in listening skills and the ability to follow directions  
*Indicator:* classroom observation within and without the bounds of the project
- 3) 75% improvement in student motivation for learning  
*Indicators:* attendance, classroom participation, completion of assignments
- 4) 90% improvement in peer collaboration and teamwork skills  
*Indicators:* attitude survey pre- and post-project, observation in project setting (e.g., of use of affirmative language, conflict resolution), and observation in scenario tests (e.g., team-building theater games relating to the project)

