



**THEATRE DIRECT**

EXCEPTIONAL THEATRE FOR **YOUNG** PEOPLE

**2011 . 2012**

**THE  
ATOMIC  
WEIGHT  
OF  
HAPPINESS**

**Gr 7 & 8 Teachers' Guide**

**November 21 to 25 2011**

Curriculum Links to: Science, Drama, English, Dance (+ Social Studies & French)

## Artists

**Meagan O'Shea** is loved for her innovative solo work which jumps from dance, storytelling, clown, and comedy, often through improvisation, in her performances.

Meagan also creates group performances, bringing her sense of play and humour to audiences of all ages. Her popular outdoor contemporary dance/public art project, dance like no one is watching, has included more than 200 dancers and engaged over 30,000 audience members since its inception in 2007.

**Andrea Donaldson** is a director, theatre creator and performer. She is a Dora Award nominated director with credits across the country. She also trained with Anne Bogart's SITi Company in NYC.

**Lindsay Anne Black** has designed sets and costumes for theatre and dance of all sizes, both scripted and devised and she was the recipient of the 2007 Pauline McGibbon Award, and she's also been nominated for several Dora Awards.

**Michelle Ramsay** is a lighting designer based in Toronto. She has collaborated with many theatre and dance companies and She has received three Dora Awards and in 2008 the Pauline McGibbon Award for a designer.

**Verne Good** is a Toronto-based sound designer and poet, and has been the Assistant Sound Designer at the Stratford Festival for 2 seasons.

### STAND UP DANCE

Meagan O'Shea is artistic director of Stand Up Dance. Performing in living rooms, theatres and public spaces, Stand Up Dance engages a broad audience. Meagan creates and performs intimate house concerts, dance-theatre solo shows and large scale ensemble work with her company and local and community dancers with dance like no one is watching. Current solo repertoire includes The Atomic Weight of Happiness and based on actual unrelated events, the former of which is being remounted in Toronto is November.

[www.standupdance.com](http://www.standupdance.com)

## The Atomic Weight of Happiness

A production of Stand Up Dance  
Created by Meagan O'Shea &  
Andrea Donaldson  
Performed by Meagan O'Shea  
Directed by Andrea Donaldson  
Set & Costume Design by Lindsay Anne Black  
Lighting Design by Michelle Ramsay  
Sound Design & Original Music by Verne Good  
Assistant Set & Costume Design: Charissa Wilcox  
Assistant Lighting Design: Rebecca Vandeveld

## Jump Right In...

The nature of The Atomic Weight of Happiness is enchanting, engaging, and eclectic. Meagan, the solo artist on stage, speaks in the languages of English, French, and physical movement about environmental issues, genetics, emotions, school days, and gardens.

This guide gives educators a few different points from which to springboard from the performance experience into classroom activity.

There are some quick exercises outlined on the following couple of pages, followed by more in-depth activities explained in detailed teacher prompts for further exploration.

These exercises are a wonderful complement to Theatre Direct's Day Long programming which includes performance viewing and workshops in their beautiful home in the Artscape Wychwood Barns.

Looking for further resources?  
Have feedback on the show?

Contact Kristin Rodgerson,  
Education Coordinator at Theatre Direct  
[Education@TheatreDirect.on.ca](mailto:Education@TheatreDirect.on.ca)  
416-537-4191 x221

## Revisit the Day

### Eco-Drama Workshop

Have the students involved in the Eco-Drama workshop at Theatre Direct share their experience.

Have all students create an Instant Poem (see previous page) inspired by the environmental themes in *The Atomic Weight of Happiness*.

### Dance & Drama Workshop

Have the students who participated in the Dance and Drama Workshops at Theatre Direct share their presentation once again.

They can build on these creations by choosing their own music to accompany the presentations.



## Lists

Throughout *The Atomic Weight of Happiness*, Meagan is searching for different ways to organize and communicate her experience. One of the most immediate ways she chooses to do this is by making lists of emotions, facts etc. This exercise uses list-making as a way to approach a theme in an unexpected way.

### Themes from lists: monologues

Individuals and group (10 - 15 mins)

1. Write out a list of 22 words, under the following categories:

- Eleven things (animal, vegetable, mineral; natural or human-made, no people)
- Six Colours
- Five feelings or emotions.

2. Now rewrite the list, mixing the categories up by placing the words in alphabetical order (taking only the first letter of the word as the guide, that is all the A-words, then all the B-words, etc.

3. Write a speech on a particular theme or something that is quite important such as 'war' or 'the environment'. There are two rules: your particular theme cannot be mentioned by name, and the words in the list must all appear absolutely in that order.

4. Once again, the advice is not to plan; just launch in and allow the words to lead you. These key words are the spine, and the other words you use are the bridges between them. Do not worry if it doesn't seem to be making 'logical sense' - indeed, if it seems completely illogical and off-the-wall and if it makes you laugh, then so much the better.

5. Try using the same list of words to explore other themes: education, AIDS, loyalty, fate, trust, etc. Never mention the word in your writing; allow the word to help you find your images and expressions.

6. After using the same list for all the above exercises, reflect on how the imposition of different themes stimulates the creation of fresh new imagery.

Source: *Playwriting a Practical Guide* by Noel Greig, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York, NY, 2005

Example of an initial list:

**Gun, Ant, CN Tower, Moon, Desk, Cat, Grass, Cellphone, Bluebell, Zoo, Mat, Red, Green, Blue Yellow, Pink, Black, Envy, Joy, Love, Hate, Misery.**

In order:

**Ant, Bluebell, Blue, Black, Cat, Cellphone, CN Tower, Desk, Envy, Gun, Grass, Green, Hate, Joy, Love, Mat, Misery, Moon, Pink, Red, Yellow, Zoo.**

One example of beginning of someone's monologue using theme of 'war':

***The ant crawled across the mud towards the body. By the dead man's foot, licking a bluebell, was a black cat. In the man's hand was a cellphone etc.***

## Instant Poem

Individual (2 - 3 mins)

*As well as plumbing the depths of her memory, Meagan also responds imaginatively to the world unfolding around her in the here and now to tell the story of who she is. These exercises (Instant Poem and Responding to the Word) will allow you to explore imagination and intuition in helping to shape a narrative.*

1. Teacher Prompts: "I am a wizard and in a moment I will make all the words that exist in the world disappear except four words.

2. Choose the four words you are going to save and write them down.

3. I am a wizard and I have decided to be generous - you can keep four more words.

4. Choose them and write them down.

5. You now have eight words and they will soon be the only eight words in the world. If you turn those eight words into a poem, then all the other words will be saved. You can repeat words if it helps the poem, but you can only use those eight.

Well done, you've saved all the words in the world. I am no longer a wizard, but you are a poet."

## Read. Imagine. Discuss.

### About the Show

As a dancer born with 12 toes, Meagan O'Shea has always had to acknowledge her inner outcast. In *The Atomic Weight of Happiness*, she involves her audience in an hour-long experiment to arrest global warming; dissect, identify and measure the ingredients of each human emotion. Meagan O'Shea is an engaging dance artist who has created a unique, funny and quirky eco-inspired performance piece that weaves compelling dance and text.

Read "About the Show" to your class and ask:

What does "inner-outcast" mean?

How could theatre "arrest global warming"?

How many "human emotions" can you think of?

What do you expect to see and hear and feel when you attend the show?

### Elements of Dance

Before seeing the play, review the Elements of Dance (from the Ontario Arts Curriculum, Dance Grade 7/8, pgs 136 & 148). Use the following Dance terminology when discussing the play's choreography after the show.

**body** body awareness, use of body parts, body shapes, locomotor and non-locomotor movements, body bases, symmetry versus asymmetry, geometric versus organic shape, angular versus curved shape, isolation of body parts (e.g., moving just the shoulder when the rest of the body is still), weight transfer (e.g., lunge, leap, roll)

**space** levels, pathways, directions, positive versus negative space, proximity of dancers to one another, various group formations, performance space (e.g., confined, large)

**time** pause, freeze, with music, without music, duration, rhythm, tempo, acceleration/ deceleration

**energy** effort, force, quality, inaction versus action, percussion, fluidity (e.g., wring, dab, mould, flow, bind)

**relationship** dancers to objects, opposition, groupings (e.g., large and small groups), meet/part, follow/lead, emotional connections between dancers, groupings

# Energy Brainstorm

A dance club that runs on the footsteps of its dancers. A sidewalk that generates electricity. A bicycle-powered stage show! All these are explored in the play - now it's your turn to invent!

Discuss the difference between energy conservation and green energy generation.

Brainstorm possible solutions for energy conservation or low impact energy generation

What's happening already at your school? In your community?

Brainstorm, pitch, and vote on your class' top 5 renewable energy innovations. You could do a "money's no object" version and then use the same process to choose ideas to implement in your own class/school!

## Curriculum Connections:

*Grade 7 Science: Life Systems - Interactions in the Environment:*  
1.1, 1.2, 2.5;

*Grade 8 Science: Structures and Mechanisms - Systems in Action:*  
1.1, 1.2, 3.2, 3.9;

### EcoSchools Toolkit

Check out the Big Ecological Ideas that are organized in the TDSB's EcoSchools Toolkit 2010-11 (page 141).

### from the show

"Generating power from footsteps: Piezoelectric power technology--using pressure generated by people walking to produce electricity--has been used in small applications before. Rotterdam has a human-powered dance club, English supermarket Sainsbury's features people-powered checkout lines, and a Tokyo subway station runs turnstiles and displays with piezoelectric power. But Toulouse, France, recently became the first city to stick the pressure-sensitive modules on the sidewalk so that residents can generate power just by walking down the street."

## Memory. Thinking about your life

During *The Atomic Weight of Happiness*, Meagan reflects on various images and incidents from her past and weaves them into her overall narrative.

Divide students into pairs or small groups and ask each student to share a story from his/her childhood. In choosing a story, think of one that is often told by you or members of your family.

How is the way *you* tell the story different from the way your family, friends, or siblings tell it?

Extension: Have each group choose one story to dramatize or represent as a tableau or a dance.

## Quant j'etals petite...

In French, Meagan tells a story about her school days.

1. Ask students to recall the French language used in the play. Ask:
  - Did you recognize any French words?
  - Did you understand each word?
  - Did you understand what was happening in the story? How?
2. Discuss how gesture, tone, and facial expression help convey verbal meaning.

Extension 1: Create a Physical Alphabet like the one in the show and explore some French vocabulary from the play. Perhaps play a big version of the classic hangman word game.

Extension 2: Did you notice the English words sprinkled in the French-language sections of the text? Why do you think these were not translated into French? What purpose did the English words serve?

*Curriculum Connections:*

*Complements the Franco-Canadian culture exploration through the Grade 7 & 8 Social Studies curriculum as well as the core French program.*



## This plus That

In the show, some emotional elements (Joy, Sorrow, Fear, Anger) are mathematically combined to create more complex emotions (3Joy=Elated, 1Fear+2Sorrow-1Joy=Despair, etc).

Use the This Plus That<sup>1</sup> model (eg. "smile+wave=hello; smile+ocean wave=beach") create your own equations in class. Try:

- having a t-shirt slogan contest with an eco-schools theme (us+green=..)
- identifying 5 elements (classroom objects, players in Canadian history, geographical terms, etc). Have pairs of students brainstorm different equations

<sup>1</sup> *This Plus That: Life's Little Equations* is a wonderful children's book by Amy Krouse Rosenthal, published by HarperCollins.

# Our Mandate

- To create and present sophisticated and uncompromising theatre for, with and by young people that provokes, challenges and inspires.
- To present theatre that is socially conscious and reflects and interprets the diversity of the Canadian experience.
- To nurture our audience's appreciation of the arts and each other through community and education based programs.

Our work is driven by a belief that young people deserve truth not diversion, that they have a cultural right to meaningful content and compelling relevant theatre. We view our audience as thinking, feeling, complex individuals, not a market, not just future audiences but one that needs and demands theatre that engages all their faculties and feelings.

Our audience inspires us to tackle big questions in the same way children and youth ask them, honestly, directly, courageously and passionately.

**Lynda Hill, Artistic Director**

# Our History

Theatre Direct is one of the country's leading professional theatres dedicated to young audiences. Now in its 35th year, the award-winning company's productions tour locally, nationally and internationally. In 2009, Theatre Direct opened the doors to two new creation/education and performance venues in the Wychwood Barns where it engages a diverse community of families and over 30 local schools.

Some of the company's most acclaimed productions include *Head à Tête*, *Beneath the Banyan Tree*, *The Demonstration*, *Walking the Tight Rope*, *Binti's Journey*, *And, By the Way Miss...*

Theatre Direct is a registered not-for-profit charity  
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