

Walk like an Elephant

The Performing Arts
Drama, Dance, Language Arts

Sanctuary Song tells the story of the friendships of elephants but it is performed entirely by humans - there is not a trunk or tusk in sight! We asked our choreographer, Viv Moore, about how she worked to create 'elephantness' on stage.

You can use some of our choreographer's techniques in your classroom!

Elephant Walk

After reading the libretto and listening to the music, one of the first things Viv did in preparation for *Sanctuary Song* rehearsal was to watch elephants walking. From this, she created a list of words and phrases to describe the way elephants move. Some of her words are: weight, sway, swagger, entwining, gentle, playful, stillness and listening. She says that even though elephants are very big and heavy, they walk as though they are floating.

As a class, observe some elephants walking (search ElephantSanctuaryTN on YouTube for videos) **and create your own word list. Viv recommends using action words to describe the elephants' movement.**

In rehearsal, she brought her list of words to the performers. Together, they experimented with elephant movement by walking around the room. Some questions they answered through movement were:

How do we show that elephants take up
a lot of space?

How can we mimic the sway of an elephant with our own bodies?

How do we walk lightly but
appear to be weighty?

How do elephants play? How does an old elephant move differently than a young one?

How would Sydney's bad leg
affect her movement?

What does an elephant 'being still' look like?

Explore elephant walking with your class, using the questions above as prompts. Try using a follow-the-leader approach with different students as leader.

Balance and Support

To show the closeness and supportive relationship between Sydney and Penny, Viv choreographed some contact movement into the performance. In this way, we can see the two animals' familiarity with and like for each other as well as their mentor-mentoree relationship. In order to develop such moves, the cast worked on solo and paired balance techniques.

Try an exploration of balances by instructing students to try to see how many different ways they can balance themselves with only 3 points of contact with the ground (i.e. foot, foot, hand); vary number of contact points. Try a similar exercise with partners or even groups of three.