

Study Guide for David Gaines's *(7 X 1) Samurai: An Epic Tale...Told by an Idiot*

By Sarah Rose Graber

Every spring, the Chicago Humanities Festival offers **Stages, Sights, and Sounds**, a mix of the best theater, music, dance, puppetry, and visual art the world has to offer. 2010 features three international companies making their Chicago debuts: Scotland's Visible Fictions, Israel's The Galilee Multicultural Theatre, and France's Vélo Théâtre. Two Chicagoans, Frank Maugeri of Redmoon Theater and beatboxer/vocal percussionist Yuri Lane, treat us to brand-new work. At the audience's request, we also welcome back Leah Mann and Ela Lamblin, the dynamic duo behind Lelavision, whose stunning physicality and musical sculptures made it the runaway hit of the 2008 festival.

We have prepared study guides for each of the 2010 performances. These materials will help teachers ready their classes for the 2010 **Stages, Sights, and Sounds** and provide activities and ideas to explore with students long after the Festival is over.

ABOUT THE CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

The Chicago Humanities Festival (CHF) creates year-round opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and economic circumstances to explore, enjoy, and support the arts and humanities. We accomplish this by presenting programs throughout the year, culminating in two annual Festivals of the Humanities, one in the spring specifically for children and families and one in the fall for the general public. The CHF's mission of providing broad access to the humanities – at a low ticket price – depends in part on the generosity of its most committed and enthusiastic supporters.

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Lesson Plan:

(7 x 1) *Samurai: An Epic Tale . . . Told by an Idiot* David Gaines

How can one man embody so many characters, seemingly simultaneously? Find out as solo performer David Gaines whizzes through his take on Akira Kurosawa's 1954 masterpiece *The Seven Samurai*. From action-flick style fight sequences to a constant stream of self-produced sound effects, and from swashbuckling samurai to glowering villain, Gaines breathes madcap life into this classic tale.

BIOGRAPHY

David Gaines is an actor and director who specializes in movement, mask, improvisation, commedia, and clown. He studied for two years at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris, France, after which he formed The Moving Picture Mime Show - a very successful theatre company based in London that toured Europe and the world for 10 years. He then accepted M. Lecoq's invitation to join him on the faculty of the Ecole Lecoq as a professor of mask and movement.

Since leaving Paris to return to the U.S., he has taught workshops at many U.S. universities and colleges, as well as acted in plays from *Waiting for Godot* to *The Brothers Karamazov*. He taught for three years at the graduate school of the University of Missouri at Kansas City Professional Actor Training Program before moving to the DC area.

He is currently a member of the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit in Washington and Baltimore. Based in Arlington, VA, he has co-written and directed two shows for YBY Theatre in Salzburg, Austria, and recently wrote and performed two new solo pieces for himself. One, entitled *A Little Business Under the Big Top*, was performed at the New York Clown Theatre Festival this summer, and the other is his highly acclaimed show *7 (x 1) Samurai* which was voted "Best Solo Performance" at the 2008 Capital Fringe Festival.

STAGES SIGHTS & SOUNDS

CONTENTS

In this guide you'll find:

- Three activities recommended for 3rd and 4th grades.
- Each activity will take 10 – 15 minutes
- These activities will prepare students to attend the 2010 production of David Gaines's *7 X 1 Samurai* or can be used in response to the what they see during **Stages, Sights, and Sounds**

ACTIVITY: SATIRE

Purpose: David Gaines uses satire as a means of retelling the story of *Seven Samurai*. This is shown in the way he exaggerates the characters he portrays and the retelling of the events. Using the idea of satire, students will have the opportunity to explore how changing the delivery of a line can influence our perception of the story.

Time Frame: 15 minutes

Lesson Plan:

- o Have two students stand up in front of the class.
- o The students will take turns introducing themselves to each other. (i.e.: “Hi, My name is Joe and I’m from Chicago” “Hello, my name is Jill and I’m 8 years old. Nice to meet you”)
- o Ask the class to pick an emotion that can be assigned to each of the two students (i.e.: Joe=happy, Jill=sad)
- o Then have the students repeat their introduction but with exaggerating the emotion they were assigned. (i.e.: Joe would have more bouncy energy and smiling and Jill might look downward and be frowning while saying their introductions)
- o Encourage the students to fully embrace these emotions. It should be silly to watch and fun to do.
- o Bring up another set of students to try it again with different emotions.

Variations: Once they are able to play with different emotions, ask them to take on different characters (i.e.: repeat the introduction as an old person, as a drill sergeant, as a valley girl, as the coolest person in school, etc)

ACTIVITY: MOVING THROUGH SPACE

Purpose: This exercise will allow students to understand how our bodies can be used to convey emotion, social status, age, etc.

Time Frame: 15 minutes

Lesson Plan:

- o Ask the students to begin walking around in an open space the way they would normally walk.
- o Remind them to be aware of others around them and to mix up their patterns so that they are not just walking in a big circle, but rather making a small circle, changing direction, cutting through the middle of the space, etc.
- o Explain that on a 1-10 scale, their speed and energy at this normal/neutral walk is a 5.
- o Ask them to adjust their level to go slower with less energy to a 4, 3, 2, 1.
- o Then remind them to be careful and bring their level higher to a 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
- o With a 1-10 range, mix up the numbers so that they are shifting from a 3 to a 6 to a 1 to a 5, etc.
- o Bring the students into a circle and discuss what kind of characters would use which kinds of levels. (i.e.: an old person at a 1, a sleepy person at a 3, someone running late at a 8, etc)

Variations

- o Ask the students to move through the space and pick a body part to lead with (i.e.: a nose, a hip, their chest). Have them explore what it feels like to move with that body part leading them through the space at different levels 1-10. What kind of characters might move like this?
- o Ask the students to move through the space as a specific character (i.e.: a soldier, a sumo wrestler, an old person, the coolest person at school) Discuss what changes they had to make physically in order to embody those characters.

ACTIVITY: STATUES

Purpose: David Gaines is the only performer on stage in *7 (x 1) Samurai* and yet he embodies a wide array of different characters. By creating different statues, students will be able to see the physical transformation that needs to happen in order to convey different emotional qualities.

Time Frame: 10 minutes

Lesson Plan:

- o Have everyone find his or her own space. We are going to create a statue image based on certain words. (i.e.: Exhausted, Excited, Confused, Frustrated) Say the word out loud and then count to 5 while the students make a frozen statue embodying that word.
- o While they are frozen, tap a few kids on the shoulder who have statues that look great!
- o The ones that were tapped will stay frozen while the other students will be asked to comment on what we see in those nice statues.
- o Are they making a fantastic facial expression? Is their whole body engaged? What do you think could be happening to them in this moment?
- o Repeat the exercise with different words.

DIGGING DEEPER

Writing Exercise: In *Seven Samurai* the farming villagers need to protect their crops from being taken by the bandits. They decide to convince seven samurai to protect their village by offering them food and shelter. Have students imagine they are a farmer in the village and write a letter to a samurai convincing them to help them protect their crops.

WORKS CITED

David Gaines's website:
<http://www.davidgainesperformance.com/>

Bio on David Gaines:
<http://www.davidgainesperformance.com/about.php>

Performance excerpts:
<http://www.davidgainesperformance.com/videos.php>

Additional Background information on the Japanese film, *Seven Samurai*:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Samurai