

THE COMMEDIA ROBIN HOOD

STUDY / GUIDE



Script by Lane Riosley

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A Note for Teachers

Seeing a Columbus Children's Theatre Performance is an engaging, fun, and educational way for students to experience live theatre! This simple, informative study guide is designed to prepare students for the show and expand their learning after the performance.

Whether or not your students have seen a live performance before, we ask that you please share the information on the following page, "**Theatre Etiquette**," prior to the show to help everyone have the best audience experience.

Within this guide you will find worksheets, activities, and thought-provoking discussion questions for before the performance and after the actors have taken their bows. We are excited to share *The Commedia Robin Hood* with you and your students – join our band of merry men for a marvelous time at the show!



Theatre Etiquette

Etiquette: the formal manners and rules that are followed in social settings, for ceremony or for any occasion.

Just as the actors onstage have roles and a job to perform, the audience has a role of its own. It is important to learn and understand how to be a good audience member during a live performance so that everyone has the best possible experience!

One of the key elements of a live performance is that the actors onstage can see and hear the you at the same time that you can see and hear them. It is important to be respectful to the actors and other audience members by having **theatre etiquette**, or following a polite code of Do's and Don'ts.



CHALLENGE YOURSELF:

- Have you ever seen a live performance before? What was it?
- What are some Dos and Don'ts of a good audience member?



- Be seated on time, and stay in your assigned seat.
- Use the restroom before the performance.
- Clap and laugh if you see something that you like!



- Get up during the performance.
- Use electronic devices (phones, music players, games)
- Talk to the person sitting next to you. You might miss something important happening onstage, or distract the actors!

Roles in a Theatre Production

Usually, the only people the audience sees are the actors onstage, but performances are the result of many people working behind-the-scenes.

Let's see how many roles are needed to bring a show to life:



CHALLENGE YOURSELF:

Think about all the different jobs involved in creating a play. Which job would you most enjoy doing? Which would be the hardest?

The Director: The director is the leader of the show. They guide how the play will look and sound, and work with the actors to help them perform their characters. A director is like a painter: the actors and behind-the-scenes crew are the different colors they use to make a painting - a performance.

The Cast: The actors in a show. They memorize a script and listen to the director in order to tell the audience a story, using their imagination to show how their characters move and speak.

The Stage Manager: The director's most trusted partner. They make sure that everything happens on-schedule, and take notes on everything that happens in rehearsals so nothing is forgotten. During performances, they run the tech of the show. Every sound effect, light change, and more take place because the stage manager makes sure that they happen on-time.

Fight Choreographer: Fights onstage are choreographed like dances by a professional fight choreographer. Actors train for many hours to safely use any weapons, even toy ones.

The Designers: The designers follow the guidance of the director and use their creativity to create the world of the show. There are many types of theatrical designers!

Set Designer/Technical Director: The set designer decides what the stage should look like. Then, the technical director takes their design and works with a team to build the set.

Costume Designer: Chooses everything an actor wears onstage, paying attention to when the show takes place and what the actor needs to be able to do in costume. If an actor plays multiple characters and needs to change quickly, a costume designer makes that possible.

Props Master: Creates every handheld object that actors use onstage, and makes sure they are durable enough to be used over and over again across many performances.

Lighting Designer: Decides how the show is lit. Lights can show what time of day or season it is, how the characters are feeling, and most importantly, makes sure the actors can be seen.

Sound Designer: Creates all of the sound effects, and sometimes even music for the show. If the actors are using microphones, the sound designer makes sure that they are working correctly.

About the Show

Who was Robin Hood? Many people have heard of the outlaw who lived in **Sherwood forest** in England, in a time of rich kings in castles and poor, peasant farmers. But the stories of Robin Hood are legend, not history. They may have been based on the adventures of a real outlaw, but no one knows for certain who Robin Hood was or if he really existed.

700 years ago, **ballads** were sung about Robin Hood. Ballads were songs that told epic stories and were performed by traveling singers. The songs became extremely popular because the character of Robin Hood was so interesting. He was an **outlaw** - a criminal - and a rebel who ignored unfair rules. He didn't steal for fun, but robbed from rich people and gave it all to poor people. People who heard the ballads of Robin Hood were excited to hear a story about a hero who wasn't a prince or a wizard, but an ordinary man who cared for people in need.

As the ballads became popular, more characters were added to the story. The legendary Robin Hood no longer worked alone, but had a team of Merry Men who joined him in his adventures. Some of these characters included a giant man jokingly called "Little John," a jolly man named Friar Tuck, and a brave woman named Maid Marion. Some of these famous characters will appear in this play, with a few *Commedia* twists. On the next page, we will discuss what *Commedia* means, but let's take a moment to think about the Robin Hood legend and how it became so popular...

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

1. Robin Hood is an outlaw - he breaks the law because the laws are bad and unfair. What do you think is a good rule for someone to follow? What would be a bad rule?
2. Ballads are songs that tell stories. Is there a song you like that is a ballad? What kind of story does it tell?
3. Legends like Robin Hood might have been inspired by real events. Then, those events might be **exaggerated**, or made more extreme, in order to be more fun and interesting. For example, Robin Hood might have fired an arrow into a target from 50 feet away, but the legend would say it was 500 feet away. Is there an event in your life you think would make a fun legend? How would you exaggerate your story to make it even more interesting?



About the Show

Lane Riosley, Playwright



Lane is a writer living and working in Houston, Texas. Besides publishing more than 20 plays, she is also a screenwriter whose work has been featured on television. She has written many *Commedia*-style adaptations of classic legends and fairytales, including *Cinderella*, *Pinocchio*, *Puss in Boots* and more.

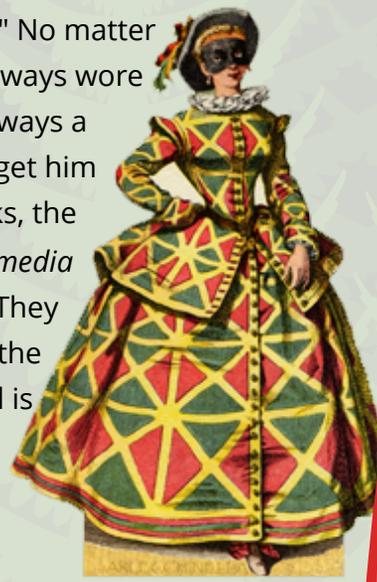
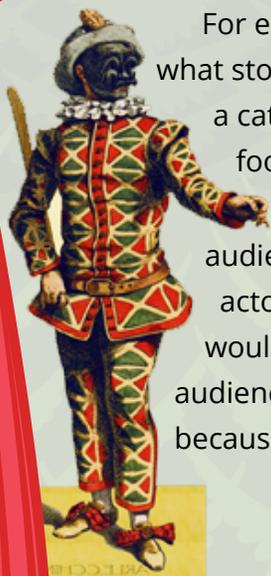
Robin Hood is a classic legend with many different versions of the story. What you will see onstage is just one **adaptation**. An adaptation is when an existing story is transformed into a new idea, like a book becoming a movie or a poem becoming a song. This version takes *Robin Hood* and adapts it into a style of performance called ***Commedia Dell'Arte***.

So...what is *Commedia dell'Arte*?

Commedia dell'arte is Italian for "comedy of professional artists." It is a type of outdoor performance that took over Italian streets in the 1500s. Traveling teams, or **troupes**, of actors would put together a temporary stage and entertain audiences with juggling, acrobatics, and silly plays. There were no expensive sets or props, but the scenery and objects the actors used were often sticks, food, or broken, thrown-out furniture.

Characters in *Commedia* plays are **stock characters**. That means that the same handful of familiar characters will appear in many different stories. They wear specific styles of costumes and masks so that everyone recognizes which stock character they are playing, and the audience expects them to act a certain way.

For example, one of the stock characters was named "Arlecchino." No matter what story was being told or what actor was playing Arlecchino, he always wore a cat-like mask and brightly colored clothes. His character was always a foolish servant whose acrobatics and childlike behavior would get him into hilarious trouble. Because the actors would wear masks, the audience couldn't see their expressions through their faces. *Commedia* actors had to communicate their feelings by using their bodies. They would jump, tumble, dance, and pose in ridiculous ways to show the audience how their characters feel. One reason *Commedia* is special is because of just how athletic and physical it is.



The Characters

In this play, the actors will arrive onstage and introduce themselves as four characters named Columbine, Punchin, Rosetta and Arlequin. These four characters will then tell "the story of Robin Hood, the hero who was a thief," and pretend to be many different people that appear in the Robin Hood legend. They will change their clothes and the way that they speak to help show you they are acting as someone else. You will actually see two stories at once: the story of Robin Hood, and the story of the actors trying to perform it.

The Troupe



Arlequin: A silly and childish actor who will pout and fuss until things go his way. He gets to play Robin Hood in the story. He is based on the *Commedia* character Arlecchino, the trickster acrobat who tumbles around the stage and causes trouble.

Punchin: A boasting, snobby actor with a big nose. He plays the Sheriff of Nottingham and Friar Tuck. He is based on the *Commedia* character Pulchinella, who always had a huge nose on his mask and a large belly.



Columbine: The clever leader of this troupe of four actors. She has her hands full trying to keep everyone focused and out of mischief, and just wants the show to go well. She plays Maid Marion in the story.



Rosetta: The cheerful, air-headed member of the troupe. She is easily distracted and has to be reminded to pay attention and is also afraid of heights. She struggles to play many different characters in the show, including Little John, Lady Ludicrous, Prince John and King Richard.



The Robin Hood Characters

Robin Hood: A legendary thief and expert archer. He is the leader of the Merry Men, a group who robs from the rich and gives to the poor.

The Sheriff of Nottingham: A bully who throws the prince into the dungeon and takes over the country. He just wants to have a lot of money and power, and doesn't care about anyone other than himself.

Prince John: A lazy and foolish prince, played by a sock puppet. He is in charge of the country until his brother, King Richard, returns. The Sheriff of Nottingham throws him in the dungeon.

Little John: A 7-foot-tall giant who at first refuses to let Robin Hood cross the bridge that he guards, but then he becomes his friend and the first to join Robin's Merry Men.

Friar Tuck: A jolly man who travels to spread happiness to everyone he meets. He is also a surprisingly skilled fighter, and joins the Merry Men.

Maid Marion: A brave woman who is Robin's one true love. She disguises herself as a man to find Robin in Sherwood forest and join the Merry Men.

Lady Ludicrous: The bratty daughter of the Sheriff of Nottingham, a rude, selfish girl played by a sock puppet. She wants to be made queen.

King Richard: The true king of England who is being held prisoner somewhere far away. He is a bit odd and adventurous.

Discussion Questions

Like any story, *The Commedia Robin Hood* has themes, or messages for the audience to think about. Let's look at how these themes appear in the show:

1. One of the themes in the show is **try your best and don't give up if things get tough**. The troupe of actors performing the story - Columbine, Punchin, Rosetta and Arlequin - don't have much money to make the show perfect, and built most of their props and set themselves. We also see them making mistakes during the show. What are some moments from the show that represent the theme of not giving up? Why is this theme important?
2. Another theme in the story is **we are stronger as a team**. Robin has his Merry Men, and Columbine, Punchin, Rosetta and Arlequin have each other. What are some moments of teamwork you saw in the show? Why is teamwork an important theme?
3. **Taking risks** and **trying new things** is also a theme in the show. Many people have never heard of *Commedia*, and the actors are excited to show the audience something new. Many of the characters also have to take risks in order to succeed or learn lessons. What are some moments from the show that deal with these themes?

In these questions, we're going to think about the legend of Robin Hood and how it was told in the show:

1. Did you know anything about Robin Hood before the show? The legend has been told in many different ways. If you got to tell the legend of Robin Hood, what part do you think would be most important?
2. Putting on a play is a lot of hard work. The troupe of actors have to work together to make everything happen onstage. Who do you think has the hardest job, Columbine, Punchin, Rosetta or Arlequin? Why?
3. The Sheriff of Nottingham is determined to catch Robin Hood and put him in the dungeon. Why does he hate Robin so much?
4. Maid Marion gets kidnapped by the Sheriff to teach Robin Hood a lesson. Even though she is a captive, Marion shows her bravery in the show. When do we see Marion acting with bravery?
5. What do Little John and Friar Tuck bring to Robin Hood's team of Merry Men? They each add something unique and special to the team. What do they add? How are they different?
6. Is Robin Hood a good leader? Why or why not? What kind of qualities do you think make a good leader?

Lastly, let's think about the performance and the technical parts of the play:

1. You got to see the actors transform into many different characters. Besides changing their costumes, how did the actors change to become multiple characters? Which transformation was your favorite?
2. Acting can be incredibly physical. What are some of the ways you saw the actors use their bodies? How do you think an actor might practice for a very physical show?
3. A lot of the props in the show were meant to represent other things. For example, the "swords" look more like sticks. How was using your imagination important to understanding the show?
4. The donkey is a big prop in the show. How does it get used in the show? Why is the donkey important?

Further Learning Activity:

The Golden Arrow Vocab Challenge

The sentences below describe vocabulary words, characters and places from The Commedia Robin Hood. Use the word bank below to match the words with their definitions. Hints can be found inside of this study guide!

1. ___ Songs performed by travelling singers that tell epic stories.
2. ___ A team of actors who travel and perform many different shows together as a team.
3. ___ This member of the troupe of four actors gets easily distracted and struggles to pay attention. She plays many characters and is afraid of heights.
4. ___ When an existing story is turned into a new idea, like a book becoming a movie or a poem becoming a song, we call it this.
5. ___ Characters in *Commedia* theatre who can be recognized by their masks and always act in familiar and expected ways.
6. ___ To describe something as being larger, better, or worse than it actually is. Making a true story sound more extreme and interesting.
7. ___ The name of the brave, loyal woman that loves Robin Hood.
8. ___ The name of the type of Italian theatre that means "comedy of professional artists."
9. ___ The leader of the troupe of four actors. She tries to solve any problems that happen in the show and keep her team very focused.
10. ___ A word that means "a rebel that breaks the law."
11. ___ Since the king is away and the prince is in the dungeon, this man is the one left to run the country in the Robin Hood story. He is selfish and takes everyone's gold.
12. ___ One of the members of the troupe of four actors performing the show, this man is silly and childish and pouts until he gets his way.
13. ___ The team of people that joined Robin Hood in his adventures to steal from the rich and give to the poor.
14. ___ The boasting, snobby member in the troupe of four actors. He has a large nose that he is very proud of.
15. ___ This fat, jolly man travels all over the land spreading peace and happiness, and also proved to be an excellent fighter.
16. ___ The setting of Robin Hood's story, a forest in England.

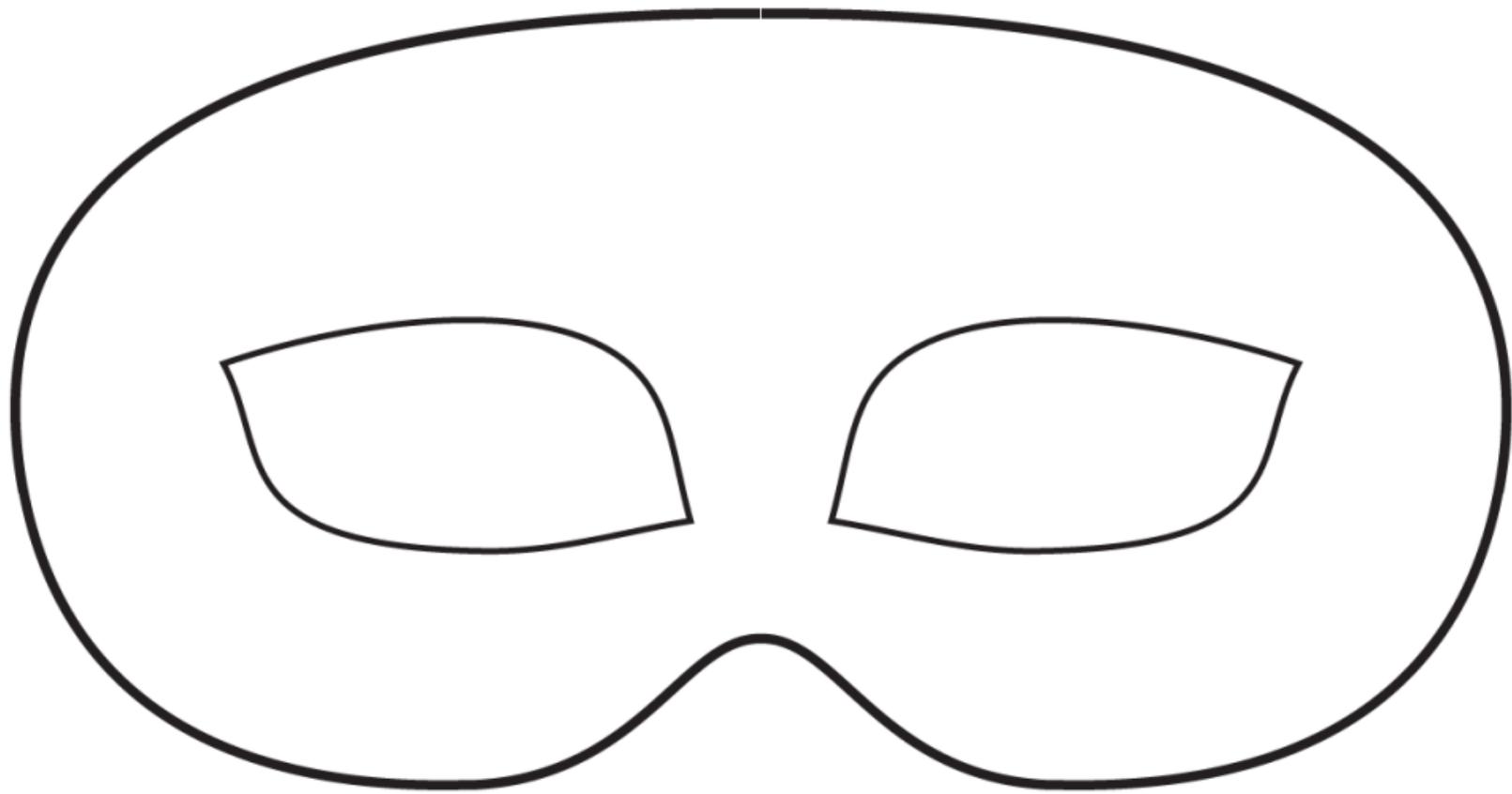
Word Bank

A. Sherwood Forest **B.** Outlaw **C.** Stock characters **D.** Troupe **E.** Exaggerate **F.** Ballad
G. Maid Marion **H.** Friar Tuck **I.** Punchin **J.** Merry Men **K.** Adaptation **L.** Arlequin
M. Commedia dell'arte **N.** Sheriff of Nottingham **O.** Columbine **P.** Rosetta

Further Learning Activity:

Create a Commedia Mask

Stock characters in *Commedia* wear masks so that the audience can recognize their characters. A funny character would wear a silly, brightly colored mask. An evil character might have huge, hairy eyebrows. Design your own acting mask, and your own brand new *Commedia* stock character!



Pick an adjective, a descriptive word, for your character. Are you silly, bossy, serious, brave, grouchy, sleepy, or something else? If you get stuck, try looking at a dictionary.

My character's adjective is: _____

Now, make up a name for your character. It can be whatever you want!

My character's name is: _____