

WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

STUDY GUIDE

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I have been touring and performing in the schools since 1977 as a mime, clown, magician, and storyteller. In 1988 I wrote and began performing a clown theater play for adults, **THE STOOGES**, that made use of sound effects performed live by an offstage performer. In researching how to make the sounds and build the props, I realized that this was a wonderful area to develop as a school assembly program. Sound effects, the props used to make them, and the process of adding sound to telling a story (or performing a play, cartoon, etc.) was a subject that I knew would be fascinating to students for a number of reasons. Here was something that they came in contact with on a daily basis, unaware of how it happens, or even that it happened at all! This is a hands-on subject where the students are encouraged (and eager!) to participate. It also has practical vocational appeal for any student interested in technical theater, television, film, and sound production.

WHAT'S THAT NOISE? is a program for grades K through 12 (different material is available for varying grade levels) exploring the methods of creating sound effects as they were performed in the early days of theater, radio, and television. You will see an episode of the live radio serial "The Adventures of Superman" and learn the secrets of creating sound effects while participating in the show! This 45 to 55 minute (depending on the grade level and time available for programming in your school) assembly includes demonstration of several old-fashioned sound effect props, including a wind machine, thunder sheet, boing box, and car crash. Students will learn how to create their own vocal sound effects and make several simple sound effect props from everyday objects found around the house. Volunteers from the audience will also participate in creating the sound effects for a radio play.

Another appealing aspect of the subject as a school program was the large number of educational tie-ins. On the following page of the study guide you will find several projects that can be assigned, using sound effects as the basis to elicit student enthusiasm. I am also including a sample radio play script, and useful information about how to create sound effects and related props.

Related subjects and tie-in projects:

Listening:

Listening skills can be focused on and improved by assigning students the task of visiting a specific site or event (mall, park, zoo, lake, playground, sporting event, play, concert, etc.) and making a list of all sounds that they hear.

Have students try to recreate the sounds they heard.

Create “sound pictures” by performing sound effects from a specific site or event, then have the rest of the class try to identify the location and sounds that they heard.

English:

Write a radio play and perform it for the school over the P.A. system.

Tell a story, complete with sound effects.

Read a play or script and discuss what sound effects would be needed to perform it.

Write a “Newscast” complete with live reports from the scene and the sounds in the background.

History:

Research the development of sound effects from their earliest uses in the theater through the early days of radio, film, and television.

Recreate a radio program from the thirties or forties using the enclosed sample script or finding a script from an old radio program. (Superman, The Lone Ranger, Buck Rogers, Dragnet, etc.).

Have one group of students act out a story or cartoon while another group creates the sound (voices and effects).

Science:

The study of sound and sound waves, how sound is created and how it travels, can be emphasized and demonstrated by building simple sound effect props (i.e. a boing box).

Math:

Have students graph sound waves.

Biology:

Study the human ear. How do we hear sound? What sounds can we hear? What sounds can't we hear?

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