

Curriculum

Stage One

Introduction of cultural and conceptual background, broken up progressively into three sections.

Section A

Ritual and Theatre!

Notes to the teacher A

Theatre for Discovery and Transformation

The Balinese are primarily concerned 1) with the integrity of the characters' intention and 2) that the simultaneously joyous and intense relationship between the performers and the audience remains unbroken; the minute details that are the data of a story/plot are less important. These are essential qualities, perhaps because Bali is a world where 'you are me and I am you' means that on a thousand levels we give and receive impact, like a tangled ball of 'ripple effects', if such an idea is imaginable. The Balinese are also always aware of being a part of the swirling river of spirit that carries along the entire village. The "entire village" includes people who are not at the performance, whatever gods or demons are watching, the spirits of the ancestors, those channeling the spirits of the characters (the actors), those buoying up the spirits with their chanting and singing, the priests and medicine men that consecrate any Balinese performance, and those whose joy, shrieks, terror, and ecstatic participation feed the performance (the audience).

The masks are conduits and conductors of this overarching phenomenon.

The Theatrical Mask: provides (nominally) secular entertainment. Yet we find residues of the archaic magical, evocative and spirit-summoning powers still present in theater. Greek tragedy or the Japanese Noh drama, as high art forms, educate the audience in deep mysteries of the spirit while providing secular 'entertainment.' Where catharsis takes place, a full circle back to the origins of theater in shamanistic healing rite has been accomplished. The deeper portions of the self are engaged with the dramatic ritual (Larsen and Larsen, 1981).

Group Discussion A

Set the stage by using a reflective process from the start. You may wish to write down ideas and responses on large paper.

Now introduce some ideas and imagery about Bali; I recommend beginning with something similar to the following and adding in that which intrigues you the most from 'Notes to the Teacher' and whatever portions of 'Read On' or outside resources you have decided to use:

Bali is an island far away from here, but pretty close to Australia. It is near to the equator and is about 80 degrees Fahrenheit year round. The tallest mountain is Genung Agung, which is also a volcano! 'Genung' means 'mountain'. The top is often shielded with clouds, and the Balinese say that when this happens, "she (Agung) is hiding her face." Pasar Agung, the temple on Genung Agung, means "The Marketplace of Spirit". What are the different things that might mean?

{The students will probably think of money, buying and selling. Continue to reflect on this question throughout the curriculum (although I will not repeat it) and keep track of their shifts in perspective.}

How do we think about performers and performing in this country? In this community? In this classroom? Why do we do shows or performances of any kind at all?

As a performer in the United States, I think sometimes performers feel that we do something glorious for someone else, as though we (performers) are better than other people. Personally, however, I disagree with that idea!

{This would be an excellent opportunity to look at the distribution of wealth in our country, generally or specifically with regard to the arts. In the arts, there is a very distinct ratio between the social value of a performance project and the amount of money people receive: drama therapists and people who use drama to engage disempowered communities, Youth at Risk, et cetera are paid very little, a fraction of what they would get for doing a series of personal product commercials, for example. Why?}

In Bali, the performances are for the performers and the audience equally, as members of a community. What keeps things balanced in daily life? How can people notice what they do, how they think, how they view and treat other people, whether they are being disrespectful to themselves, their community, their ancestors and gods, the act of living itself? This is the job of the performers. Performers do their part to maintain balance and make daily life possible just like everybody else (offering makers, basket makers, moms, farmers et cetera). Art is not separated from life, from the NECESSARY process, the ONGOING process of healing and giving and growing; it is not a superior thing, but a necessary thing. We and our communities need constant tending, like a garden!

{A nice way to end might be to share the traditional greeting and departing gesture: one puts the hands together in front of the face, fingers upright and palms flat as though in prayer, and bows slightly, saying "ohm swasti astu", which means "I honor your spirit".}

Reading and Reflection A

What is a ritual?

Rituals can be social, personal, religious, any kind of thing. Rituals are a way that we remind ourselves of certain ideas at particular times, like lighting a candle when something sad has happened or hanging out a flag on Memorial Day. Rituals also mark a time or an event as special, like a wedding, a graduation ceremony, or a birthday party. But don't think all rituals are about big important things!! Many rituals are about little important things, and they help us live our daily lives. Maybe your family makes it a point to have dinner together each Friday, or you and your parent-type set aside time to work in the garden together and then watch a video. Or maybe you and your friends all get to the soccer or stick ball game early, put on any special shoes or shirts or whatever together, go over strategies, pat each other on the back or grab each other's caps then go out and play the game, after which you cheer for the other team, shake hands and dash for the ice cream truck. Whew! That's a large and really fun ritual. Rituals re-affirm who we are and who we want to be, both as our "inside selves" and the selves we are at home, at work, at school, with our friends and all those other versions of our selves.

What is a ritual you participate in? What are the different parts or steps?

Food For Thought: "You are good when you are one with yourself. Yet when you are not one with yourself you are not evil. For a divided house is not a den of thieves; it is only a divided house" (Kahlil Gibran).