



THE ALPHA SHOW OF

Hercules

ALPHASHOWS Pre-Show Activities

This guide contains classroom activities for use BEFORE the Alpha show of 'Hercules'. For ease-of-use and duplication, it might be easier to download these documents from the website <http://www.alphashows.com.au/curriculum>

**[Photocopy / print / email this document
and give to all teachers BEFORE the show day]**

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ABOUT THE PRE SHOW ACTIVITIES

Alpha honours and highly respects the work that all your teachers do with children and we can only hope that our brief visit at your school will help to brighten your day, and help to make learning and the classroom fun. Teachers have a phenomenal capacity and we look forward to meeting you and your children and being at your school. We believe in peak states, happiness, high energy and enthusiasm in general being the most effective ways of learning, we sincerely hope that the show is useful to you in that and many other ways.

THE OUTCOME

ALPHASHOWS' outcome for our performances in schools are:

- ◆ To provide an intense, memorable, high quality and high impact musical, that engages children the entire time. We hope to give them an experience of what 'theatre' is that encourages further participation in arts and theatre in the future.
- ◆ To bring a marvellous tradition, namely 'pantomime', to new Australian audiences and update the format for the 21st century. This means we honour the traditions of pantomime, such as villains, hilarious characters, "behind you" gags and audience participation, but include modern references, songs and ideas, and stories that are traditional yet modern.
- ◆ To give the most talented young performers a chance to perform in a large cast of six to a 'tough' audience – namely children – and have them give a real experience of 'being a performer' to children by answering questions and generally being happy, accessible, fun and cooperative with children and teachers.
- ◆ To provide the most outstanding role models within the stories and ideas of how to be most effective in our world in general. We hope to impart these ideas and to promote discussion by finding ways to reach children in subtle, subconscious ways.
- ◆ To provide a launching pad for creativity, writing, drama, music, and fun in the classroom. To create enthusiasm and encourage children to be in the peak state for learning.
- ◆ To have 'arts for arts' sake that has been shown time and time again to be equally as important as all other Key Learning Areas (Essential Learning Standards), and having a measurable impact on improving results of those other KLAs.
- ◆ More specifically, to provide art that is not sub-standard or 'less' because it is aimed at children, but art that is of the very highest quality possible within the constraints of a touring production. Alpha shows also tour directly into theatres – you have chosen to bring real theatre to your school.
- ◆ To continue to do this in as many schools as possible year after year with a brand new show; to condition and reinforce our other outcomes so it isn't just a one-off but an annual tradition that results in a measurable progression of consciousness and awareness in children and adults; an event that invigorates the entire community!

ALPHASHOWS - PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES for 'Hercules'

ABOUT THE SHOW 'HERCULES'



OVER ARCHING VALUES THEME:

ISOLATION, BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF and THE HERO WITHIN US ALL.

Alpha's 'Hercules', is a show about discovering our true selves. We all have the capacity to be a hero in this world, to lead and to take responsibility for the whole world and its progression into a new level of awakening, as we approach this time. Alpha's version of Hercules uses the old mythical characters in Greek mythology to bring a story that is about the world today. About what we must do as humans to help. Hercules is an example – his story and his growth will be familiar to many in the audiences. To know that there is 'more', that there is more we can all give and be every day, but not always being sure how to do it or what the purpose is. Higher levels of awakening are possible through personal standards and finding the hero within our hearts and Hercules is our story of how this can happen for all.

QUICK SYNOPSIS – Zeus, Hercules' father, has always planned on sending his only son Hercules to earth as a leader for humanity. However, Hades has other plans and steals him away as a baby, and as a result is raised on earth by Amphitryon. Hercules grows up unsure of who he is and what his life is supposed to be about. When his father tells him about how he thinks he may have come from the gods, Hercules goes to see the statue of Zeus, who tells him he must become a hero. Phil trains him, and soon he is famous for his strength. But he has not proven himself a true hero yet, not until he can learn to love, forgive and make the ultimate sacrifice will he do this. All the while Hades is plotting to take over Olympus, the story ends with Hades losing out and Hercules finding the place he was meant to be. Great songs are interspersed throughout the story that help to progress the understanding of the characters and deepen their meaning like no Alpha show before.

How the show addresses our outcomes:

- ◆ Hercules is Alpha's 5th show, new in 2007. It is a sophisticated and complex story with deep characters and emotional issues. Some of it will be missed by younger audiences, who instead will enjoy the music and fun jokes and silly characters. Children will get to have an experiential emotional journey along with Hercules, as they too feel what it is like to be a hero.
- ◆ A phenomenal cast of 6, that are all very enthusiastic and keen to be with children.
- ◆ Hercules will provide a wealth of visual and auditory stimulation to inspire creativity.
- ◆ Hercules' costumes and set are all brand new, with some new technologies and inventions, as always. We have made the most impactful and magical staging effects possible whilst still being a 'tour-able' production. We've also updated a few things for 2008 – Hercules' armour is made by hand from a very talented guy who makes armoury like the old days.

The content is delivered through a wide range of engaging and accessible dramatic techniques: including, of course, pantomime-styled sequences, physical comedy, audience interaction in the form of questions, witty dialogue with humour that appeals to children (including the occasional bit of toilet humour!), stylised movement, choreography, modern music interweaved in the story, dramatic lighting and effects, high quality sound and sound effects, magnificent costumes and big realistic sets.

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

➔ Fairy Tales, Folk Tales and other Stories

Learning Area: Literacy

Outcome: To create an understanding of the origins of fairytales and classic stories, and to dispel myths about the common held beliefs about where these stories originated from. To connect children in with the archetypal nature of these stories to ensure they have a strong connection to the show in advance. To explore stories from different cultures

Materials: Discussion in classroom and the internet

Information:

Fairytale, or wonder tale, is a kind of folktale or fable. In these stories we meet witches and queens, giants and elves, princes, dragons, talking animals, ogres, princesses, and sometimes even fairies. Marvellous and magical things happen to characters in fairy tales. A boy may become a bird. A princess may sleep for a hundred years. Objects too can be enchanted — mirrors talk, pumpkins become carriages, and a lamp may be home to a genie.

The oldest fairy tales were told and retold for generations before they were written down. French fairy tales, like Sleeping Beauty were the first to be collected and written down, but now we can read fairy tales from almost any culture. When these stories were studied together, something amazing was discovered. From countries as distant and different as Egypt and Iceland similar fairy tales are told. Both Egypt and Iceland have "Cinderella" stories, as do China, England, Korea, Siberia, France, and Vietnam; and the list doesn't stop there. There may be a thousand versions of the Cinderella story, each with a unique telling which carries cultural information about the time and place the story was told. One thing is for sure; people everywhere like stories in which truth prevails over deception, generosity is ultimately rewarded, hard work overcomes obstacles, and love, mercy and kindness are the greatest powers of all.

Activity: Read old folk stories or fairy tales and then ask children to retell them in a modern setting.

Interesting Web Addresses Relating to Fairy Tales, Folk Tales and other Stories:

Alpha Theatrical Productions Website

<http://www.alphashows.com.au>

Interactive Grimm Brothers Website

<http://www.grimmfairytales.com/en/main>

Aesop's Fables

<http://www.umass.edu/aesop>

Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime Stories

<http://www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm>

Native American stories

<http://www.ihawaii.net/~stony/loreindx.html>

➔ Discuss the myth of 'Hercules'

Learning Area: Literacy

Outcome: To provide an expanding awareness of mythology

Materials: Discussion in classroom and writing

Information:

Greek myths are sometimes violent, sexual and as a result, inappropriate for a show primarily aimed at children. However, we've taken the characters and events of the myths and been very very particular in attempting to remain true to the stories as closely as possible. When something from the myths isn't appropriate to include in our show, we leave it 'open' to the imagination and try not to have connections or plots that would contradict the myths, although in some ways this isn't possible. In the myths, for instance, Hera was portrayed as quite 'evil' in some ways, plotting to kill Hercules. We thought that having the mother figure do this was too much for our show, although we did toy with the idea for over a year. Hades is also not traditionally a 'bad guy' so much, just the Lord of the Underworld. We had to have some way to create conflict and Hades was the obvious form. In reality, Zeus was just as 'naughty' as Hades in a way, going and having sex with mortals etc. So all this is left up to the imagination, we try not to get into it. You can use the website below to find out more information about the actual myths and compare them to our show. We have got lots of little tidbits of info about myths in the show, mentioned here and there.

Activity:

Discuss the elements of the myths, the characters etc, to familiarise your children with the various elements. When you come to the show, have them prepared to listen and look for references to the myths.

Website:

Hercules Lesson Plans with links to lots of info:

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/classmyth.html>

➔ **Question Time**

Learning Area:

Literacy / Theatre / Music / Performing Arts / Science & Technology / Art / Values Education

Outcome: To prepare the students for asking quality questions after the show and in life.

Materials: Discussion in classroom and writing

Information:

At the end of each show, when time permits, Alpha's performers come back on stage to give the children an opportunity to ask questions.

If you have specific children who did not get their questions answered, you are more than welcome to bring them to us whilst we are packing up, to talk to us. We welcome and encourage the performers to have the maximum possible contact time with students. We are also very happy to provide autographs and personal messages to each child.

You may have had actors in your school before who answer questions after their performance.

Here is how we do it differently:

- ◆ It is almost 'part of the show'.
- ◆ We have a voiceover introduction and 'pump-up' music before the actors come back out on stage. It is always important that children are in a 'peak state' to ask and answer questions
- ◆ The actors will come out in costume, but as 'themselves' (not in character). They will remain energised and enthusiastic, rather than showing fatigue (even if the Actors themselves are fatigued at all)

Activity:

Get the students to brainstorm various question 'areas'. There are multiple types of questions to ask, that coincide with the possible Learning Areas above. Then brainstorm 1 or 2 great questions in each area.

You may want to also run the 'sensory acuity' activity below.

It's important to reinforce the purpose of the question time. Ask them what they think their focus should be during the time. If they ask a question that is silly, the purpose of that would be to make people laugh. If they ask a question where the whole audience finds out some really great valuable information, the purpose is to provide a worthwhile and beneficial experience for the whole audience. We reward 'clever questions' so the more preparation, the more reward!

You can then follow up with a discussion about how a great truth in life is the importance of questions and how they effect our lives.

The quality of life is in direct proportion to the quality of the questions we ask, especially those we ask on a consistent basis

So mastering this area of our life is imperative. If we're always asking a question like 'why do I always get it wrong', our brain comes up with an answer ('cause you're an idiot!'). If we ask quality questions like, 'How can I do my best and have fun at the same time?' you'll always come up with a better answer!

ALPHASHOWS - PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES for 'Hercules'

QUESTION TIME (continued):



EXAMPLES of QUESTION AREAS POSSIBLE TO ASK US ABOUT:

- ◆ So **Literacy questions** are about the story, how we told it, the script, the humour, our version of the story and our choices we made.
- ◆ **Theatre questions** are about the show, bringing theatre into a school etc.
- ◆ **Music questions** are about our song selections, the live singing, how we learnt to sing etc.
- ◆ **Performing Arts** questions are about acting, role playing, creating a character, character choices, how we got cast, auditions, the experience of being an actor.
- ◆ **Science & technology questions** are about the set, how we built them, the construction methods we used, how long it took, how we planned to do it, what skills were needed etc.
- ◆ **Art questions** are about the costumes and the set painting.
- ◆ **Values Education questions** are about the embedded messages in the show, the role models of the performers and what we hoped the children learnt during the show about how to live life with passion, enthusiasm and success.

Below are some examples of good questions and also some examples of questions we've received in the past (some not so good!). Great questions (ones where we'll answer something really useful to the experience) are marked with an *

Rehearsals and Preparation

- *How long does it take to rehearse?
- Where do you rehearse the show?
- *Who makes up the dances?
- *Who writes the shows?
- Was it hard to learn your lines?

The Set-up

- *How long does it take to set the set up?
- *Who made/painted the sets?
- What's behind the set?
- Where did you get the costumes?
- How do you get changed so quickly?
- *Where does the smoke come from?
- *How do the lights/music/sound work?
- Were the swords real?

Hercules Specific

- Why is it different to the Disney movie?
- Why were there extra characters?
- **Why was Hades so mean?
- How did the magic work?
- **How/Why did Hercules become a god?
- Why did Megara fall in love with Hercules?
- ***What sort of Values were in the show?
- ***Why are you saying being a hero isn't about killing all the bad guys or saving the whole world?

The Company

- **What other shows does Alpha do?
- How many shows have you done?
- *Which show are you doing next year?
- ***Why do you do shows like this in schools?

Whose idea was it to perform in schools?

- *Do you perform anywhere in the school holidays?

The Performers

- *How did you all get to be in the show?
- *What acting training have you done?
- *Where/How did you learn to dance/sing?
- How old are you?
- *How does it feel to be an actor?
- *Do you get scared/nervous?
- Have you ever been on TV?
- *What other shows have you been in?
- *What is your favourite thing about performing?
- What is your favourite colour?
- What is your hair like?

Please note: "Question Time" sessions are an extra value in addition to the show your school has purchased from Alpha, provided free of charge – as a result, we cannot guarantee that we will have time – especially if we have another school to go to afterwards, or if it is already too close to the end of your school day. If this is the case, please feel free to allow children to speak to the performers as they pack up.

➔ Alpha-Writing

Learning Area: Literacy

Outcome: To engage children in passionate creative writing in response to the Alpha Show.

Materials: Writing materials

Information: Alpha shows can inspire much enthusiasm and creativity. Harness this energy to create amazing creative writing!

Activity:

For K-2:

Storytelling. Seat them in a circle and using one of our story starters below, begin the story. One by one in the circle, the children can contribute a line to the story, each taking the story in their own crazy direction.

- ie.
- 1) Once there was a rabbit who loved to dance.
 - 2) He would dance all around his little house.
 - 3) Then he fell and broke his leg!
 - 4) So he couldn't dance any more.
 - 5) He was so sad that his friend, the frog, wanted to cheer him up.
 - 6) He said, "Why don't we try doing something different? What about knitting?"
and so on and so on.)

For Gr 3-4:

Choose a character and write an entry in their diary

ALPHASHOWS - PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES for 'Hercules'

Alpha-Writing (continued...)



For Gr 5-6

1. Write a newspaper article about the events of the story, 'Extra Extra! Report of new hero doing amazing feats!' "Editorial on our gods: Are they perfect? Do they have humanities best interest at heart?"
2. Write your own Fairytale, play or pantomime, brainstorm the elements of these stories ie
Characters: an evil magical person, a good magical person, a mother, a wolf, a prince, a princess, a cow, a king, a narrator, a grandmother, a boy/girl, a fairy, a goblin, a bossy person
Place: a castle, a dark wood, a cottage, a cloud in the sky, up a tree, in the city,
Events: falling asleep, getting married, running away, meeting a magical creature, finding treasure
Then put it all together! Remember the happy ending!
3. Choose from one of our 'Story Starters' to create their own fairy tale.

Story Starters:

- ◆ *Once upon a time, in a deep dark wood, in a teeny tiny cottage with a straw roof, lived a big rat. His name was Claude.*
- ◆ *Deep, deep down in the ocean as I was minding my own business...*
- ◆ *Way back in the back hills where even the ants didn't go, I remember...*
- ◆ *In old grandmother's trunk there was a ...*
- ◆ *There once was a rabbit who loved to dance*
- ◆ *My grandmother used to tell me home is where the heart is. I did not understand what she meant by that until one stormy night when ...*
- ◆ *Long ago, in a faraway place, there was a land filled with wonder. In this fantastic place there was a little girl. She was very special, for she had magic...*
- ◆ *It started out just like any other school day. I finished the last soggy pieces of cereal from my bowl full of milk. (I always pour too much!) But as I grabbed my coat and ran out the door, I couldn't believe my eyes!*

➔ **The Tradition of Pantomime**

Learning Area: Literacy / Performing Arts / Theatre

Outcome: To develop an understanding of traditional pantomime, it's conventions and how to be a pantomime audience to enrich the experience of an Alpha Show

Information: Alpha Shows allow the students to be free and to yell out and talk to the characters.

Alpha's versions of stories are usually significantly different than anything they have seen before – as is the tradition of pantomime. Explore the value of doing this with your children, and how using theatre and the pantomime genre helps bring new life to classic stories.

Energy and Pace

You may like to look at how the energy and pace of the show varied considerably, to parts with only dialogue, to lots of songs, to slow bits, to parts where a LOT was happening all at once... this is all part of the theatre experience and also necessary for children to have parts where they can tune out for a moment and chat to each other, and to let it integrate into their subconscious, and take a break! The structure of the shows is all done on purpose. Generally Alpha shows are high energy and pace, to ensure children don't get bored. They are far more impatient than an adult audience, as they pick up on the crux of a scene immediately and don't always need all the details.

Therefore, we always speak fast, move each scene along quickly etc (which can sometimes be too fast for adults!).

HOWEVER, you could prep your children in advance to ensure they are listening at the right times, and not taking advantage of the style of the show which allows them essentially to do what they like. You can use the following activity for this purpose or your own way of teaching awareness of when to listen and when to actively participate. **This is up to you – as the actors will not 'punish' children for being loud and having fun during the show.** If you think they should listen, prepare them to do so in advance.

Activity: Screaming & Listening

To get an idea of what an Alpha show is like

Ask a simple question, like, 'do you think Hercules is cool'. Prepare them in advance, to yell yes at the tops of their voices, scream, do 'wohoo's' or whatever else. And then visibly and physically 'cut' them, and see how fast they can stop and listen again. As soon as you 'cut' them, tell them some hard to remember information, and test to see who remembered it. This is a great game for preparing them for what an Alpha show is like and how they'll be yelling out at some points, and listening at others.

Activity: Sensory Acuity Game

You should also promote the skill of 'sensory acuity' so they know when it is NOT time to 'yell out'! Sensory acuity is a useful skill in all areas of life!

You could play a game where children pair up and one tells a story and the other, without speaking, gives the storyteller cues about what they're feeling, whether they like the story or hate it, or other things. You, as the teacher/facilitator, can come round holding up cards behind the storyteller like "You need to go to the toilet" to tell the non-talker what to 'act out'. After it's over you can see how much the storyteller picked up about the other person, by using their skills of 'Sensory Acuity'.

➔ **Cliché's of pantomime and Alpha's pantomime elements**

Learning Area: Literacy / Performing Arts / Theatre

Outcome: To become very familiar with the specific chances to participate in the show

Information:

Alpha Shows borrow from the pantomime genre many traditions which increase the level of audience participation eg. "He's behind you" and "Ohhh no you're not" etc. as well as 'booing the villain'. The cliché's and most traditions of pantomime are always honoured by Alpha shows – and we also add in our own idea of what modern pantomime should be about.

Discuss how we use this as a tool to create fun in stories in ways not possible with other formats, especially non-live formats (you wouldn't bother booing a villain in a TV show, as they can't hear you! How boring is that!). Vocal participation by children is important in our shows, and whilst our stories will structure it and educate how it works during the show in the best way possible, initially children may not realise they can yell out – especially if your group is very well behaved, it may be a new experience for them!

You can encourage and let them know it is part of the experience to join in with the singing, dancing, the booing and being a part of the story by answering questions - we'll remind them during the show as well.

On the other hand, some children will take the opportunity too far, and whilst our shows are structured in the best way possible to control over-the-top participation, you may like to also discuss how your children should recognise when to yell-out and when not to. As mentioned, it's a great skill to learn for life in general!

Visit the following website for more info:

<http://www.its-behind-you.com/history.html>

ACTIVITY: The traditional pantomime audience participation elements

You can practice all the different pantomime traditions in class. It makes the show extra fun if children have a few clichés that they can look for and really get excited about doing. The main difference between Australian and English audiences is that Australians don't have the education with the old panto's as much so they miss out on that one element. It doesn't actually make much difference overall to how much they enjoy it but it is a fun thing to get them educated about! Try these out:

- 1. "Oh no you're not"**. At some stage during the show, the villain will ask a question like "I am the most gorgeous beauty in the entire world, aren't I boys and girls?". The audience's response should be "Oh no you're not!". The villain then responds with "Oh yes I am", audience with "Oh no you're not", etc. It repeats 3 times at which point the story moves on.
- 2. "He's Behind You!"**. Obviously a classic gag, we love doing what we call "Behind You Gags". Usually in the script it literally just says "Behind you Gag" rather than scripting out all the lines! This is where a character is looking for another character and can't find them, but the audience CAN see the other character. At one point, the other character will be behind them, and will ask "Where is he boys and girls?" At this point, the audience should respond with "He's behind you!" If the audience didn't do a good enough job, the character will probably say again, "WHERE?!" until a big enough "He's behind you" is heard and then he looks behind him and catches the other character.
- 3. "BOOING THE VILLAIN"**. Whilst we agree that 'booing' isn't something that should be encouraged in normal day to day life, it is a time honoured tradition and we believe we should keep it. It is also a brilliant way for the audience to band together in opposition to what the villain represents – ie. nastiness, selfishness and being mean! If the whole audience isn't booing, sometimes the villain may even say "Is that the best boo you can do?" until everyone is involved. Remember to remind the children to be aware of when to stop 'booing' so that the story can continue.
- 4. Answering Questions.** In addition, the audience will help the characters along the way with anything from simple 'yes's' to sometimes more involved answers or repeating things. It will usually seem like the audience is actually affecting the action (sometimes they really are!). It's great when an audience altogether really believes this so try to explain how they are part of the story and can involve themselves. Again, a reminder is needed to be aware of when the actor has decided to ignore the comment (eg. A villain won't really respond to someone yelling out "You're a loser!") and it's probably best to explain they should wait for the next chance to respond as a group rather than interrupting the story.

Apart from that, strange as it seems, we love the random call outs from the audience outside of these. It keeps us on our toes and helps us grow as performers as well! If it's actually understandable and feasible, the actors will attempt to address what was said and go with it, much to everyone's amusement! So again, an important point – as long as a child isn't being obscene, if they yell out random stuff, **PLEASE don't tell them to shoosh as it spoils it for them** and we don't get a chance to play with them in a unique way for you! Although remember to watch for children taking the opportunity too far and spoiling the plot and non-participative moments.

➔ 'Reach for the Stars' finalé song

Learning Area: Music

Outcome: To increase skills in performance, singing and music. To enhance the show by teaching and learning Alpha's finalé song so that everyone can join in at the end with every Alpha Show.

Information:

The final song in the show is just great to join in with, so it's up to you how much you decide to take advantage of this special event visiting your school. If you have seen one of our shows before you will remember the song – it's a great song to always end on, it has a **great message**, the audience always knows it and enjoys the chance to really join in, so take advantage of it! We're sorry we can't supply a cd of songs – copyright issues are involved with doing that.

Activity:

Learn or listen to the song "Reach" by S Club 7 – it's Alpha's finale for all our shows. You could even choreograph a dance to the song and join in at the end.

REACH by S CLUB 7

When the world, leaves you feeling blue
You can count on me, I will be there for you
When it seems, all your hopes and dreams
Are a million miles away, I will re-assure you
We've got to all stick together
Good friends, there for each other
Never ever forget that
I've got you and you've got me, so

Chorus:

Reach for the stars
Climb every mountain higher
Reach for the stars
Follow your hearts desire
Reach for the stars
And when that rainbow's shining over you
That's when your dreams will all come true

There's a place waiting just for you
Is a special place where your dreams all come true
Fly away, swim the ocean blue
Drive that open road, leave the past behind you
Don't stop gotta keep moving
Your hopes have gotta keep building
Never ever forget that
I've got you and you've got me, so

Chorus

Don't believe in all that you've been told
The sky's the limit you can reach your goal
No-one knows just what the future holds
There ain't nothing you can't be
There's a whole world at your feet, I said reach

Climb every mountain (reach) Reach for the moon (reach)
Follow that rainbow, and your dreams will all come true