

WITH **JULIE TAYMOR**  
SETTING AND SCENE

Photograph by Carol Rosegg

**About the Program**

*Behind the Scenes with Julie Taymor* explores the art of theater by observing the work of one of the theater's most inventive directors. Children view selected scenes from a production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that demonstrate some of Taymor's signature traits—the use of shadow puppetry, bunraku puppets, and extraordinary masks combined with human actors to create a uniquely theatrical experience. Through interviews with Julie Taymor, the actors, and other members of the production team, children learn about the process of creation that shaped the production.

**About the Artist**

A recipient of two Obies and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, Julie Taymor has written, designed, and directed both traditional and nontraditional theater forms. She created the sets, costumes, masks, and puppets for Andrai Serban's *King Stag* at the American Repertory Theatre. With Elliot Goldenthal, she directed, designed, and wrote *Juan Darien: A Carnival Mask*. Taymor recently adapted and directed a film of Edgar Allen Poe's "Hopfrog" (retitled *Fool's Fire*) for American Playhouse and directed Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* in Japan.

**Jumping Off Activity****Seeing with the Imagination**  
(40 minutes)

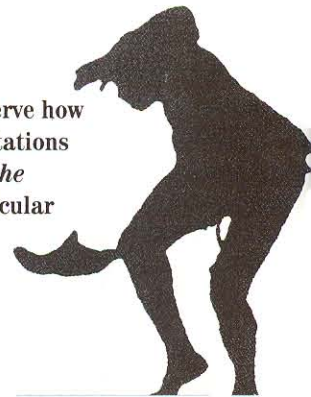
This activity encourages students to use their imaginations to transform everyday objects.

In his speech in Act V of *The Tempest*, Prospero, the deposed duke of Milan, proclaims that he will "abjure" his "rough magic"—the power he has used over the years to survive in exile and which he uses during the play to transform the island's atmosphere for his purposes. As he notes elsewhere in the play, his "art" can call forth spirits to enact "present fancies." Like Prospero, the director, designers, and actors in a theater production use their art—the magic of their imaginations—to enact their fancies. This exercise should give students an experience with the habit of mind that gives birth to inventive theater.

Ask the students to bring to class an object they use every day. Have them study the object from all angles, placing it on the ground or on their desks or holding it in the air. Now tell them to imagine that the object is a real animal that they might find at the park or the zoo, along the beach, in the ocean, or in the sky, and have them move the object. They might want to write a list of verbs or adverbs that describe how the animal moves. As they move the animal, they should think of sounds the animal might make. Have the students take turns showing their animals moving and making sounds. Encourage them to combine two or more objects to form one animal.

**Viewing**

Before continuing the activities, observe how directors can create unique interpretations of theater pieces by viewing *Behind the Scenes with Julie Taymor*. Pay particular attention to the differences in the characters—their costumes, their voices, and their movements.



## Follow-up Activities

### 1. The Undiscovered Island (two 40-minute class periods)

This activity gives students the opportunity to create their own imaginary inhabitants of a strange island.

Remind your students of the two creatures they met on Prospero's island—the spirit Ariel and the monster Caliban. Shakespeare created the characters of these two creatures, but it was Julie Taymor who used her imagination to give them physical form on the stage. Discuss the differences between Ariel and Caliban, perhaps starting with the first appearance of the creatures. Ask students to think about the way the creatures moved and spoke. Then divide the class into groups of three or four. Each group will draw a map of an imaginary island inhabited by strange creatures never before seen by anyone. Ask students to draw in the topographical features of the islands (mountains, fields, forests, jungles, caves, swamps) and to indicate where their creatures live. Knowing what kind of place the creatures call home might help younger students describe their creatures.

In the next class, have students create the creature that inhabits their island, using only their bodies and faces, either alone or together with one or two other students. Once they have discovered what the creature looks like and how it moves, each group should show the creature moving from its home to eat lunch. The creature should make sounds or speak its own language as it moves and eats.

### 2. Masks in Motion (two 40-minute class periods)

This activity allows students to explore the physical creation of a character.

A unique feature of Julie Taymor's production of *The Tempest* is the use of masks. Ask the students to describe the differences in the masks worn by Ariel, Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano. How did the actors wearing the masks stand and move? Students should then try to duplicate the movement of the characters and transform their faces to match the masks worn by the actors.

In the next class, divide the students into groups of three or four. Tell students that each of them must turn his or her face into a mask that expresses an emotion or feeling. The other members of the group will take turns helping the “masked” student turn his or her body into a statue whose frozen action matches the expression, or “character,” of the mask. Once all the students have made a frozen statue, ask them to move or do some everyday activity (eating, washing, drinking, going to sleep) in the character of their masks. Then ask them to speak in a voice that their characters might use—a voice that matches the way they move and the shape of their faces. Have the actors in each group share their characters with the rest of the class.

### 3. Hand or Foot Plays (three 40-minute class periods)

This activity is designed for older students. It gives them an opportunity to stage a production, making artistic choices and solving problems.

Another dimension of Julie Taymor's production of *The Tempest* is the use of puppetry. In viewing puppets of any type, the audience is asked to shift its normal perspective, to accept a different theatrical reality. Have your students write and stage plays in which the actors are hands or feet. Divide the class into groups of three or four; larger groups can be used if necessary. Tell the students that they will be staging plays

in which their hands or feet are the actors. They can use make-up, costumes, props, and sets, but they cannot use any actual puppets on their hands or feet. They can consider sound effects and music—anything that enriches the production values of the play. Students can write original scripts based on simple themes (for example, “You can't teach an old dog new tricks,” or “It doesn't pay to pretend to be what you are not”), or they can dramatize fables, myths, or biblical parables. They could even act out a scene from *The Tempest* or some other Shakespeare play. Allow two class periods for preparation and rehearsals and one class period for presentations. *Note:* An old door set on the floor or on chairs can be used to mask the “puppeteers.”

## Related Curriculum Activities

### Art

**Making Masks**—Students in art classes can create expressive masks using a variety of materials. These masks can be distributed in class as the basis for the “Masks in Motion” exercise.

### Language Arts

**Writing Plays**—All three follow-up activities provide excellent opportunities for story and play writing. For example, once they have invented their mask characters (“Masks in Motion”), the students can select the two most opposite characters and write a story or short play in which these characters have to cooperate.

### Music

**Explaining Character through Sound**—The sounds made by different musical instruments or short songs can be used to create the language of any of the creatures or to underscore the movement of the creatures or the mask characters.

