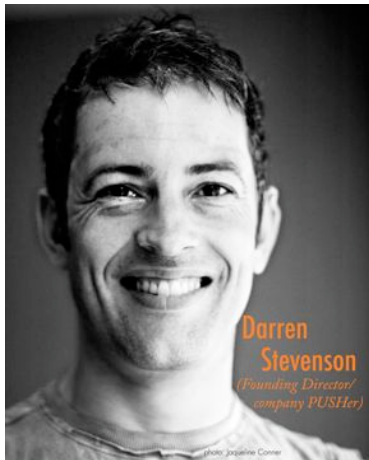




# PUSH Physical Theatre Study Guide

Darren Stevenson and/or Heather Stevenson with company  
- [www.pushtheatre.org](http://www.pushtheatre.org) -

## Biographical information



Award-winning PUSH Physical Theatre has been called “a cross between fine art sculpture and the hit movie *The Matrix*.” but its co-founders currently (and with tongue firmly in cheek) characterize it as: “like regular theatre...but more painful.” Its physical feats can be awe-inspiring, but the cherry on top of this acrobatic sundae is PUSH’s ability to grab hold of audiences’ emotions through exceptional visual storytelling. Following their sold-out run at Geva Theatre Gevas’ Artistic Director, Mark Cuddy, said, “By far, their performances... were the highlight of the entire (*Theatrefest*) season. They are a treasure.”



In addition to a busy school-performance and residency schedule, as well as event and concert appearances, the company has toured the U.S., England and Mexico, and has been profiled on PBS and NPR. They also received the Anton Germano Dance Award in February from the "Community of Color" Black History Month World Culture Celebration and accepted the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester's Performing Artist of the Year Award.

Students will never forget their experience with PUSH. The narratives of our lives played out with hope, strength and optimism. They’ll remember how each part of that experience is tied to a learning objective in the classroom. PUSH Physical

Theatre **DISCOVERS** the potential of young imaginations, **GUIDES** children in creative, expressive movement, **EXPERIENCES** the joy of living and the wonder of the world around us, and **BUILDS** confidence and healthy esteem by maturing self-identities in a safe and nurturing environment. Watch a virtual performance at [www.pushtheatre.org](http://www.pushtheatre.org)

# Program Information

(PUSH provides a Sign interpreter for most performances and workshops. Please notify PUSH in advance.)

## Performances

### *PUSH 21*

21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills presented by PUSH's team of talented 'human sculptures' using acrobatic strength, stunning physicality and emotional depth. Core subjects such as physical science, literacy and the arts are explored within the context of health, creativity, innovation, communication and collaboration. Relationships are examined between classroom learning and career & life skills such as social awareness, responsibility, adaptability and flexibility. Performers carefully guide audiences throughout the program. Individual pieces are given context that is grade level appropriate to help students interpret the work on a level that is relevant to them. Program can include Q&A. **(Grades K-12) (21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills/Health/Nutrition/Physical Activity)**

### *THE NATURAL WORLD*

What does it look like to literally, 'give someone a hand?' Physical illusions and gravity-defying, acrobatic high jinks by PUSH's group of talented performers show us how. Audiences are guided through each step of the action as the ramifications of kindness, respect, bullying, conflict resolution, friendship, and more are discovered by a community of fantastical creatures created from the performer's bodies. Meet 'The Two Headed Bug', 'The Scorpion' and the playful 'Squat Frogs'. The performance is given context that is grade level appropriate to help students interpret the work on a level that is relevant to them. Program can include Q&A. **(Grades K-12) (Cultural Awareness/Diversity/Character Development/Social & Emotional Well-being)**

## Workshops

Workshop material can be tailored to support students' curriculum, inspiring them to express their current studies using other methods of communication.

### *ANIMALS OF THE ANTARCTIC*

Students observe, discuss, and demonstrate characteristics of Antarctic animals and their habitat. As they analyze the movement of polar bears, penguins, and seals, children discover how each creature is designed for its own environment...recreation, hunting habits, and quick escape. **(Grades PreK-1) (Science/Physical Activity)**

### *WEATHER*

Classical music guides eager imaginations during participatory exercises relating to the changing of seasons and the effects they have on our everyday lives (i.e. growing spring flowers, grumbling summer thunderstorms, falling autumn leaves, drifting winter snowflakes). Students become aware of their personal responsibility for maintaining their health throughout the year as they act out dressing up for an afternoon at the beach or an anticipated snow day! It is a scientific fact that no two snowflakes are alike! Each is beautiful in its own unique way. Likewise, each one of us is unique and has something special to share with those around us. **Grades (PreK-2) (Science/Physical Activity)**

### *HEALTHY HERO'S*

3-2-1-0 Be a Healthy Hero! This workshop has continuous physical activities that support the *Be A Healthy Hero* campaign for our community's kids! Kids run for the healthiest snack choices in our relay race, get tips on learning to love exercise through physical theatre and end the class with a bit of something just as important...rest. (This workshop includes a coloring book for each child to take home.) **Grades (K-4) (Health/Nutrition/Physical Activity)**

## Workshops or Residencies

### *SIMPLE MACHINES*

This workshop facilitates a deeper internal understanding of the Physical Sciences as students both analyze and synthesize topics such as simple machines, transfer of weight, magnetism, and energy through physical movement and discussion. Science exercises focusing on the concept of teamwork, balance, and trust are used to encourage the development of friendship skills and guide students to thought-provoking 'ah-ha!' moments. **(Grades K-6) (Science/21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning)**

### *METAMORPHOSIS*

From egg to adult, the 4 stages of the life cycle of a butterfly are physically created by students in individual and group exercises. Students get to *become* the process of metamorphosis through movement. Students physically demonstrate their growing understanding of each stage and make connections to their own physical and social lives. **Grades (2-4) (Science/21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills)**

### *LIGHT*

A study of the Properties of Light, Systems, Optical Illusions, Reflection, Refraction or any other vocabulary the classroom teacher would like to explore from the Light Unit! Concepts of light are transferred into partner and group creative movement exercises. Classroom discussion is generated throughout the residency as curriculum connections are made through the improvisation of the students. Many discoveries and ah-ha moments! **Grades (4-6) (Science)**

## HUMAN POP-UP BOOKS

Students have the opportunity to view an art form that uses no words and leaves them with the challenge of transposing movement language into written or spoken language. By creating their own "Human Pop-Up Book" they will be faced with the challenge of analyzing a literary work and identifying key vocabulary vital to the storyline and then translating and synthesizing those words into a series of movements that reflect the story as it was in its original written/illustrated form. Students work in teams and collaboratively put their thoughts and ideas together. (Grades K-12) (Language Arts/21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills)

## ART & THE BRAIN

Students are asked to evaluate the hypothesis of noted neurologist V.S. Ramachandran in his research into the "science of art". Dr. Ramachandran's "10 laws of art" are, as yet, unproven which allows children the excitement of investigating, questioning and responding to cutting edge science in process. Students combine visual and movement art as they answer key questions such as "Can we observe the laws in well known paintings?" "Do the laws transfer to movement?" "Can art be created by purposely breaking the laws?" Far from being a purely academic discussion, students will create physical theatre experiments to test the limits of the laws of science used by artists. Grades (4-12) (Science/21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills/Cultural Awareness)

## PARTNERING

Non verbal communication, personal boundaries, appropriate touch, confidence and intuition are just some of the topics addressed as students grapple (sometimes literally) with the creative skill-set that PUSH performers use everyday as they "share weight" to build impossible looking physical sculptures. This grade appropriate workshop/residency allows students to question and deal with high-pressure situations in a humorous environment that is safe and non-threatening. Grades (7-12) (Character Development/Social & Emotional Well-being/21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills/Physical Activity)

## EMOTIONSCAPES

Students read and explore the problems and solutions different characters face in well-known books, stories, or even newspaper articles and photographs (source material can be provided by PUSH or selected by the classroom teacher) and uncover the idea that, despite many external differences, all characters experience basic human emotions. Working collaboratively, students create "Emotionscapes" – choreographed movement sequences that represent the emotional journey of the character(s) in the story. A celebration of their new understanding of the shared humanity of emotions culminates in a group performance. (Grades 3-12) (Character Development/Social-Emotional Well-Being/21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills)

## Residencies

### BULLYING

Through the themes of Strength and Power; Cooperation vs. competition; leadership and responsibility; partnership and trust; self discipline vs. external control, students will acquire positive character traits. Students engage in theatre and movement skills to learn how to overcome fear of failure and channel aggression into success rather than bullying. They will identify the benefits of self-control and the difference between leading and intimidating to build confidence and make positive choices regarding their actions towards themselves and others. This residency includes a planning meeting with the classroom teacher is conducted with the school psychologist or social-worker. (Grades 3-12) (Character Development/Social & Emotional Well-Being)

Note: students are divided by gender



## Goals

Specific goals can be emphasized to support the classroom curriculum. See attached sheet.

- To develop students' understanding of the way in which the human body communicates.
- To support learning standards and school specific curriculum, culture and behavior goals.
- To engage the imagination in a format that allows a deeper interpretation of the work.
- To tap into students' natural curiosity and feed their creativity for future projects.
- To draw attention, not only to a story, but also to the way in which the character responds to the created environment.
- To give a sense of historical perspective in understanding movement arts.
- To provide tools that help students be creative problem solvers.
- To encourage the development of students' self-awareness and confidence.

## Grade Level

The treatment of the work presented is age specific. Performance pieces and workshops are given context appropriate to each grade.

# Curriculum Correlation

## The Arts

PUSH uses a broad range of movement styles to communicate, demonstrating both diversity and similarity of different forms. This encourages students to understand that art comes from within, regardless of specific style used to communicate it.

## English

The opportunity to view an art form that uses no words leaves students with the challenge of transposing movement language into written or spoken language. In addition, this inspires them to express the literature of their current studies using other, non-verbal, forms.

## Health, Phys. Ed.

The techniques of Physical Theatre demonstrate the potential of a fit, healthy body. Students are encouraged to imitate what they see and learn more about their bodies and the mechanics of movement.

## Social Studies

The content of the choreography typically deals with social issues that affect us all. The use of movement helps student to interpret the work on a level that is relevant to them.

## Science

The movement of our human bodies operates under specific scientific principles. The use of movement as a tool for learning helps students to “feel the principles in action” and develop a deeper internal awareness of these principles and the physical world around them.



### Getting Ready for the Performance/Workshop

- Discuss the importance of body language in communication.
- Use every day actions as opportunities to raise awareness of the way in which movement affects us emotionally (i.e. observing animals, the effects of the wind, the gesturing of students and those around them).
- Study the human body in sculpture and art, esp. Michelangelo, Da Vinci, The Greeks.
- Try role-playing, in which the students attempt to communicate an idea or thought without props or words.

### After the Performance/Workshop

- Discuss the content of the work. Students (esp. younger students) may have different interpretations of the meaning. Encourage a lively discussion that highlights why these differences occur, making sure to validate each individual interpretation as being right for them.
- Have the students repeat the pre-performance/workshop role-playing exercise using the communication tools that they learned.
- For older students, have them evaluate the attached “A Case for Physical Theatre”.
- Have students give written examples of concepts and emotions and have them draw a comparison between those better communicated with words and those better communicated with movements. Discuss the inevitable difficulty in describing something that can only be fully communicated with movement by using words.



## Further Study

### Web sites:

<http://www.pushtheatre.org/>  
<http://www.artslynx.org/theatre/physical.htm>  
<http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/CirqueDuSoleil/default.htm>  
<http://www.blue-man.com/>  
<http://www.pilobolus.com/>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical\\_theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_theatre)

### Books:

#### Older Readers, Teacher assisted:

*Modern and Post modern Mime* Thomas Leabhart  
*Words on Mime* Etienne Decroux  
*Creating a Character* Moni Yakim  
*The Male Dancer* Ramsay Burt  
*The Moving Body* Jacques Lecoq

#### Younger Readers:

*Earth Dance* by Joanne Ryder  
*Snow Dance* by Lezlie Evans  
*Alvin Ailey* by Andrea Davis Pinkney  
*Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae  
*Dumpy La'Rue* by Elizabeth Winthrop

### Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/pushtheatre> Also check PUSH's favorite videos in the search bar to the right.  
[http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=physical+theatre&search=Search](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=physical+theatre&search=Search)

### Internet Word Search Ideas:

Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Marcel Marceau, Pilobolus Dance Theatre, Etienne Decroux, Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq, mime, mimodrame, physical theatre, modern dance, parkour