

# THE PEKING ACROBATS STATE STANDARDS



CALIFORNIA STATE STANDARDS

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## Physical Education:

**Standard 1 Elementary and Middle School Students:** Students demonstrate the motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.

**K.1.6** Balance on one, two, three, four and five body parts

**1.1.6** Balance oneself, demonstrating momentary stillness, in symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes using body parts other than both feet as a base of support.

**5.1.1** Perform simple small-group balance stunts by distributing weight and base of support.

**6.1.11** Design and perform smooth, flowing sequences of stunts, tumbling and rhythmic patterns that combine traveling, rolling, balancing and transferring weight.

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## Physical Education:

**Standard 1 High School Students:** Students demonstrate knowledge of and competency in motor skills, movement patterns and strategies needed to perform a variety of physical activities.

**HS1.1.1** Combine and apply movement patterns, simple to complex, in aquatic, rhythms/dance and individual and dual activities

**HS1.1.12** Demonstrate independent learning of movement skills

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## Theater:

**3.0 Historical and Cultural Context:** Students analyze the role of development of theater, film/video and electronic media in the past and present cultures throughout the world. Noting diversity as it relates to theater.

**K.3.1** Retell or dramatize stories, myths, fables and fairy tales for various cultures and times.

**4.3.1** Identify theatrical or storytelling traditions in the cultures of ethnic groups throughout the history of California.

**5.0 Connections, Relationships, and Applications:** Students apply what they learn in theater, film/video and electronic media across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication and time management that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to theater.



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## **Suggested Study Guide\***

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

#### ***BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE***

1. Ask the class to brainstorm all that they know about China and the Chinese people.
2. Based on the attached information, have the students compare their daily lives to the daily life of an acrobat-in-training? How does their routine differ? How is it the same?
3. Review the attached vocabulary list. Or, assign a portion of the list to different groups of students and have them provide definitions. Have the groups share their definitions with the class as they relate to the actual definitions from the list.

#### ***AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE***

1. If Chinese theatre is an illusion of life, which part of the performance illustrated struggle? Which part illustrated joy? How did they specifically show joy and struggle in the show?
2. If you were to create an acrobatic routine to depict one of your struggles, what would that struggle be, and how would you show that? Follow the same creative process to depict one of your joys.
3. What have you learned about China or the Chinese people through the acrobat's performance that you found most interesting?
4. Consider Chinese acrobatics as an art form. What Western (European, American, Latin, etc.) art forms are similar to Chinese acrobatics and why are they similar?
5. Consider the myths discussed in the attached study guide. How does your new knowledge of the truth behind these myths change the way you look at the subject? Does it change at all?

### **SUGGESTED VOCABULARY LIST**

acrobat--one who is skilled in feats of balance and agility in gymnastics.

audition--a trial performance by an actor, dancer or musician to demonstrate suitability or skill.

compensation--that which is given or received as an equivalent for services, debt, want, loss, suffering.

contortion--an unusual form of physical display which involves the dramatic bending and flexing of the human body

dynasty--a lord or ruler; a succession of rulers who belong to the same family; also, the period during which a certain family reigns, as in the Ch'in Dynasty.

myth--a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being, hero, or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation

pantomime--a drama played in actions and gestures to the accompaniment of words sung by chorus or music.

seers--a prophet; one who foretells; a soothsayer.

troupe--a company or group of touring actors, singers, dancers, etc.

*\*Please note that this is only a suggested guide. An original study guide may be derived from the attached background on China, the bibliography provided, or by using other sources of choice.*



## **A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PEKING HISTORY**

Peking (pron. **pee king**), which means “Northern Capital” in Chinese, has been a center of civilization for thousands of years. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Peking was renamed Beijing (pron. **bay jing**) because, as the story goes, foreigners who visited the city kept mispronouncing Peking! The earliest and longest enduring system of government in China was the Dynasty, beginning around 2070 BC. During this period, an emperor ruled until he died or passed the throne on to his first-born. In 1911, the Dynastic system of government finally ended and in 1949, the Communist Party of China, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, became the People’s Republic of China. Chinese communism is a form of society where all businesses, property, foods, goods, and services are controlled by the government. Today, although private enterprise does exist and is flourishing in China, most Chinese citizens are employed by the government and receive wages, housing, health care, and education from the government as compensation for their work.

As the cultural and political center of China, Beijing houses political institutions, prestigious universities, art museums, and theatres. Beijing has a long and rich theatrical history, dating back to the Shang dynasty (1523-1028 BC). During this time, “seers” performed ceremonial songs and dances honoring the gods, invoking them to drive out pests, produce abundant crops, or create other “miracles.” By the Han dynasty, (around 202 BC) court entertainers were very popular. Clowns, wrestlers, acrobats, contortionists, and musicians entertained emperors by acting out famous fables. These entertainments were the precursors of Peking Opera, which is a multi-faceted art form. Peking Opera combines singing, dancing, acrobatics, martial arts, pantomime, and more to create fantastic stage productions. The fundamental belief of Chinese theatregoers is that theatre, at best, should be an illusion of life. THE PEKING ACROBATS take part in this philosophy of and bring it to the world.

### ***DAILY LIFE OF A PEKING ACROBAT***

Acrobatics as an art form displays grace, beauty, strength, and agility. This requires a lot of dedication, including years of study and practice. In China, being selected to become an acrobat is an honor, and brings prestige, but it also requires commitment. Once selected to attend an acrobatic school, students take their general education classes alongside practicing gymnastics, juggling, and martial arts. They do this six days a week! Acrobats begin training at around age 6, but most are not selected to become part of a professional performing troupe until they are around age 16. THE PEKING ACROBATS are truly representatives of their country and art, and they take great pride in performing for audiences like you!



### **THE LION DANCE: THE LEGEND**

One of the acts included in the program is The Lion Dance. It is one of the most popular acts in Chinese celebrations and folklore. It combines theatre, music, history, and Kung Fu to create a spectacle that dates back thousands of years. Although lions are not native to China, their stories date back to the Han Dynasty (205 – 220 B.C.), when they were first sent across Asia as gifts from Silk Road merchants. Usually the lion is enacted by two dancers. One handles the head, made of light materials like papier-mâché and bamboo, while the other plays the body and the tail under a cloth attached to the head. The “animal” is sometimes accompanied by three musicians, playing a large drum, cymbals, and a gong. The head dancer can move the lion's eyes, mouth, and ears for expression of moods. The Lion Dance is a part of many festivities, like the Chinese New Year, harvest festivals, business openings, and weddings. The Lion Dance is believed to chase away evil spirits and to bring good luck and prosperity. The Lion itself symbolizes strength and courage. Many different stories have been told about the origins of the Lion Dance, and following are two of these great myths:

#### ***THE GREAT CREATURE NIEN***

A long time ago, a strange creature appeared in China that terrorized the public. The fast and fierce creature was called 'Nien' (or Nian), which sounds similar to the Chinese word for 'year'. Neither the fox nor the tiger could fight the 'Nien' effectively, and in despair, the people asked the lion for help. So, the lion shook his mane, rushed towards the creature, and wounded it. The Nien hurried away with its tail between its legs, but it announced it would return to take revenge. One year later, the Nien returned. This time the lion couldn't help the people because he was too busy guarding the Emperor's Gate. So, the villagers decided to do the job themselves. Out of bamboo and cloth, they created an image of the lion, two men crawled inside it, and approached the Nien. The “lion” pranced and roared and the monster fled away for good.

#### ***THE EMPEROR'S DREAM***

Another popular belief is that the Lion Dance finds its roots in the Tang Dynasty (618-906 B.C.). Legend has it that the Emperor had a strange dream where an odd creature he had never seen before saved his life. The next day, wondering what this creature was and what the dream meant, the Emperor described it to his ministers. One of the ministers explained that the strange creature resembled an animal called a "Lion," which did not exist in China at the time. The Emperor had his ministers create a model of the dream creature so he could see it while awake. Because in the dream the lion saved him, the lion came to symbolize good luck, happiness, and prosperity.



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