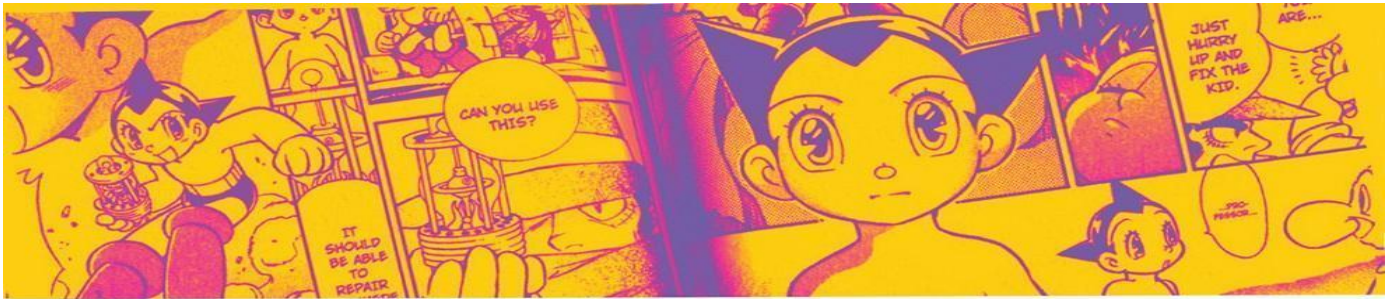


## Curricular Connections

**A guide for teachers and students to Company One Theatre's Production:**



# ASTRO BOY & THE GOD OF COMICS

A New England Premiere conceived and directed by Natsu Onoda Power

Dear Educators and Students,

We are pleased to present to you our Curricular Connections Packet for Company One Theatre's production of *ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMICS*, conceived and directed by Natsu Onoda Power. We've developed these materials to facilitate your understanding and engagement with the production and we encourage you to adapt the materials to suit your needs.

Enclosed you will find:

- A conversation with creator and director Natsu Onoda Power
- Introduction
- Background Information
- Resources
- Lesson Plans

If you have any questions, please contact us at [stageone@companyone.org](mailto:stageone@companyone.org).

See you at the theater!

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## **A Conversation with ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMICS' Creator and Director Natsu Onoda Power**

*Dramaturg Ramona Ostrowski and Natsu Onoda Power took a moment away from the rehearsal room to talk about the origins of the play, Tezuka's vision of the future, and the enduring popularity of Astro Boy.*

RO: I'd love to hear about the genesis of ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMICS. Where did the idea come from, and when did you start working on it?

NOP: When I was in graduate school, I had a chance to create a show, and I decided to do one about the history of science fiction in reverse chronological order. There was a lot about cloning, because everyone was really interested in it at the time. And Astro Boy was in it, but that wasn't the whole focus. I was working with a really talented video artist as well as a cartoonist, and so I just ended up with a lot of projections and on-stage, live drawing in the show. People always ask me why I make this kind of theatre, and I just sort of happened into it.

RO: That's really interesting, because as we've been developing this show over the past year, I've seen you get to know the cast and learn their talents and then incorporate them into the show.

NOP: Yes, I'm always interested in the display of learned, technical skills on stage.

RO: So you worked with a projectionist on the earliest iteration of this show, and now projections are a huge part of it. Can you tell me a bit about how you and Jared, your current projection designer, work together?

NOP: Well, Jared is brilliant, and we work together in a really interesting way because I'm also his cartoonist. He'll say, "We need the head and the desk as two separate drawings" so that he can animate it right, and I'll give him the drawings. He's also a very accomplished and respected writer and director. That's one of my favorite things about collaborating with him—he approaches the projections very directorially. He's also an excellent teacher.

RO: And you're a teacher as well, at Georgetown University in DC. How does that influence your work?

NOP: It's great; I really feel fortunate to be a teacher. Some of my ideas for new plays start out as course syllabi. Also, many of my students are just so talented—I watch them in class and can't wait to work with them. Clark was my student, and now this is his second time in this show. Obehi [RO note: Obehi Janice's play FUF & OREOS was developed by Company One in the XX Playlab this year along with ASTRO BOY] too—from the first class she took with me, it was clear that she had something very special in her.

RO: So getting back to ASTRO BOY: you did a show that had many different elements and themes. What drew you back to the story of Tezuka and Astro Boy?

NOP: By the time I came back to the show, I knew so much more about Tezuka and Astro Boy—I had written a book about him. I wanted to return to the original show, but I realized that I had been trying to do too much in it. I couldn't actually cover the history of science fiction in one play. The Astro Boy section was the best and most developed part.

RO: Where did your interest in Tezuka come from? You wanted to be a cartoonist when you were young, is that correct?

NOP: Yes. I loved Tezuka's comic books ever since I encountered them in second grade. My younger brother loved him too—we collected copies of his books and wrote and drew our own comics. When I was 12, I asked to visit his studio for my elementary school graduation present. I brought a bag full of the comics my brother and I had drawn and a container of sugar cookies I had baked. I didn't think I'd see Tezuka—I knew he had a separate office, and that only his assistants worked here. It turned out that he was there that day, though! At first I was too afraid to talk to him, but I saw other people asking for his autograph. I went up to him and asked him to look at the comics I had brought. He was very kind, and he said something along the lines of "You are really good. Wait three years. In three years, if you have improved greatly, then you should become cartoonists." I was so overwhelmed—I was too shy to even give him the cookies I made, and gave them to one of his assistants later.

I promised myself that day that I would go back in three years, and for awhile I had every intention of keeping that promise. It could not be kept, though—Tezuka died two years and 11 months after I met him. By that point my interests had already started to change, though. And anyway, I wasn't a great cartoonist. My brother was better than me, and I figured if I wasn't even the best cartoonist in my house, what were the odds that I would make it?

This show is how I'm keeping my promise. I think it would have made him happy.

RO: Is there something in particular that you love about Tezuka's work?

NOP: The thing that is so amazing about Tezuka is his comics also draw upon and incorporate so many other types of art. His entire oeuvre is incredibly cinematic. One comic that I was fascinated with was about a person who was a professional understudy—he would come in and play these parts, and he'd be amazing. The first episode was about Hamlet, so I read that and loved it, and then I went and read Hamlet.

RO: When did you decide that you wanted to make a career in theatre?

NOP: Maybe in high school? I don't remember so well. I did choose Northwestern because I wanted to study theatre...I chose it out of a catalogue that said it was good for theatre.

RO: In some ways this show is a marriage of two of your loves: theatre and cartooning.

NOP: Actually, my entire career in theatre is in combining cartooning and live performance, not just this show. This show just happens to be about Tezuka, and was the motivator for doing that kind of theatre.

RO: Tezuka set Astro Boy in the early 2000s, which was decades in the future for him. Do you think Tezuka's version of the future resonates differently with audiences today than it did to his contemporaries?

NOP: It's interesting, because when he was writing about the "future," he was actually writing about his present, which is now the past. So when we see his version of the future, it registers for us as nostalgia. He was writing about issues that he saw in his society at that time. The comic books are actually much more obvious in this way than the cartoon—they're darker and more subversive. It's interesting that in the TV show, things are a lot lighter, or simpler. There are cutesy episodes, or episodes that are just centered around a villain robot. I think this is because they're aimed for a younger audience, so some of the tougher questions don't register. It also has to do with commercialization and sponsorship.

RO: One of the most obvious parallels that I see, and that you reference in the play, is that of the robot civil rights movement, culminating in the Robot Constitution, and African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s.

NOP: The civil rights movement parallels are even more explicit in the comic than the cartoon. A robot's mission is to serve humans. Robots can't go abroad without permission. Robots can't change their genders. Robots can't change their appearances. Robots must call their creators "father." In general, there is a sense of "We are giving you privileges as long as you are *under us!*"

There are several different versions of how robot constitution came about, but in my favorite version (created after the TV series was terminated, for a grown-up publication... probably for the target audience of those who grew up reading Astro Boy and who are now adults), a robot is elected a president of a small country immediately after passing of the Robot constitution. As the elected robot heads to his inauguration events, he is assassinated by robot-haters (mobbed and smothered). It is super duper disturbing.

RO: That is disturbing! These themes also make me think about the movement for LGBT marriage equality today. It's interesting how resonance changes over time.

NOP: Yes. I think that's one of the things that makes Astro Boy so special—it's not only a superhero cartoon, it is a social issue cartoon.

RO: Something that doesn't seem to have changed with time is a cultural fascination with robots in Japan, the US, and many other countries as well. Why do you think this is?

NOP: I think robots are interesting to people because creating a robot is a combination of having a child and making a work of art. A robot is something you create, like a child or a piece of art, but eventually it can go off and do its own thing too. It brings up all these ethical

questions—if you’ve created something and given it free will and the ability to think and act, what do you owe it? How much control over it do you have? What rights does it have?

RO: What do you think Tezuka thought about these questions? Where did he stand on the matter of robot rights?

NOP: I think he was torn. I think he was really conflicted. A lot of his work deals with this. One of my favorite episodes of Astro Boy is called Robot Land. It’s about two carnival robots who were created as entertainment for humans. They end up falling in love and wanting to leave the carnival so they can have a life together, but they’re not allowed to because their job—what they were explicitly created to do—is to work at a carnival and to entertain humans. I think in the end Astro Boy ends up saving them somehow and Robot Land ends up being governed by the robots.

Also, another part of the fascination with robots is the fascination with immortality. A robot will not die unless it is destroyed. You could keep fixing it or remaking it and it would “live” forever.

RO: These big concepts are probably part of why Astro Boy has been so resonant through the decades. There was a remake of the animated series in Japan in the 80s as well as in the 2000s, and a movie version in 2009 made in the US. What else do you attribute the long-term popularity to?

NOP: Astro Boy is so cute! We love things that are cute. And he is sweet and innocent—he doesn’t really understand evil. You want to be his friend. Kids don’t really want to be Astro Boy, but they want to hang out with him.

RO: He’s accessible and relatable.

NOP: Yeah, he’s not like a Marvel superhero. You can imagine hanging out with him, especially when you’re a kid. His psychological suffering registers as “life-size” to children, and “adorable and innocent” to grown-ups.

RO: So Natsu, what’s next for you?

NOP: First, vacation! And then I’m working on a show at school next semester. It’s a devised work based on *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. “Evolutionary theory for dummies” meets Victorian nautical melodrama. I’m very excited!

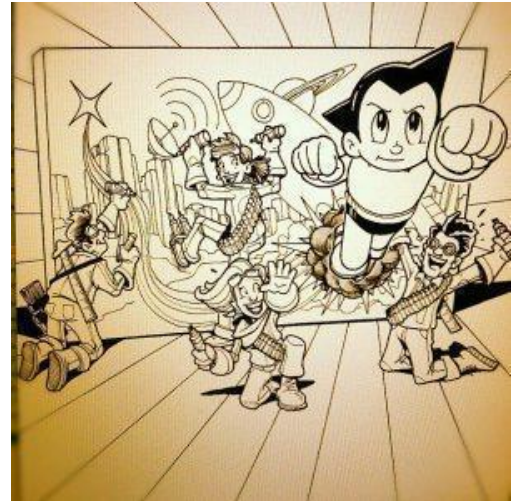
# Introduction

## What is ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMICS?

“This sensational, multimedia, experimental theatre piece, devised with an ensemble cast, combines live hand drawing, interactive video, and large-format animation by actors on stage. A major step in the imaginative use of technology in theatre; ASTRO BOY is a truly ground breaking work.”

-Ramona Ostrowski, Dramaturg

ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMICS focuses on Osamu Tezuka, the God of Manga, and his best known creation, the character of the robot Astro Boy. Natsu Onoda Power, an avid admirer of Osamu and his work, brought Astro Boy to the American stage in 2012 at the Studio Theatre in Washington D.C. Conceived, written, and directed by Natsu, this piece is a 70-minute peek into the life and work of Osamu Tezuka, using multi-media projections, cartooning, illustration, and puppetry.



## What is Manga?



The word Manga in Japanese simply means “whimsical drawings” or “cartoons” and has been used since the seventeenth century. Today the word means comics, cartoons, and caricature of any kind or origin. In the global context, manga seems to refer more narrowly to certain genres of Japanese comics that the U.S publishers have chosen to translate and publish. In this packet, I am using the term *manga* primarily to refer to “Japanese comics of the Post World War II period”.



## Post-World War II and Why it's Important

After Japan surrendered in 1945, ending World War II, Allied forces led by the United States occupied the nation, bringing drastic changes. An explosion of artistic creativity occurred in the post-war period, bringing Japanese comics and cartoons to a whole new level. Due largely in part to Osamu Tezuka's innovative and revolutionary work in the field, manga and anime became increasingly popular not only in Japan, but across the globe.



Astro Boy, better known at home in Japan as Tetsuwan Atom, or Mighty Atom, is one of Tezuka's more popular characters. Known all over the world, "Astro Boy is the sum of Tezuka's background, influences, experience, and belief" says Helen McCarthy, author of *The Art of Osamu Tezuka, God of Manga*. The doe-eyed, adorable robot first appeared in Japan in 1951 when Tezuka was 22 and conquered America in 1963. His comic ran from 1952-1963 and is frequently reprinted. After his animated series swept Japanese and American audiences, Astro Boy appeared in animated features, including a major feature film, Imagi's *Astro Boy*, in 2009.



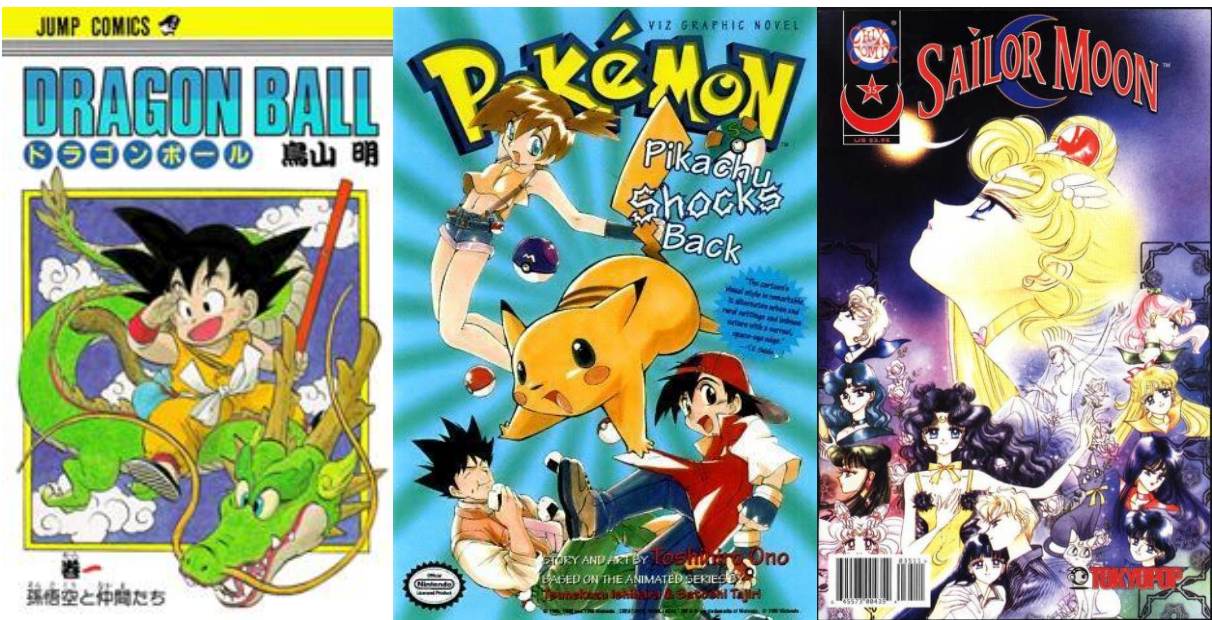
The following Curriculum packet contains background information that discusses Osamu Tezuka and his work, Astro Boy, Manga, and Japanese animation, resources, and lesson plans in order to expand and broaden your engagement with the **ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMICS**.



## Background Information

### **Manga/Japanese cartoons:**

Manga became very popular in the 20th century when laws prohibiting the publication of these items were lifted. It has since become a huge part of Japanese culture. Manga is read by most people in the country, regardless of age. There are several different genres, including but not limited to action-adventure, romance, sports and games, drama, comedy, science fiction, mystery and horror. Manga made their way into U.S markets, first in association with anime and then independently, around the 1970's and early 1980's. Japanese anime like *Dragon Ball* and *Pokémon* became increasingly popular in America around the 1980's to mid 90's and by 1995 the *Sailor Moon* manga had been exported to over 23 countries, including China, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, North America, and most of Europe.



### **Anime:**

In Japan, anime, an abbreviation of the word animation, refers to all animation. Outside of Japan, it's become the term for animation from Japan. Because anime is a much newer term than manga, older generations still use manga to refer to animation as well. Known for exaggerated features (such as big eyes, oddly colored hair, etc.), anime frequently portrays fantastic stories (usually about some supernatural power) that is not just beautiful to watch but also entertaining. An article in the *Wall Street Journal* defines anime as "the highly stylized cartoons featuring idealized, doe-eyed characters." For decades, anime was produced by and for Japan -- a local product, with distinct artwork, storytelling, themes, and concepts. Over the last forty years, though, it's become an international phenomenon, attracting millions of fans worldwide.

Some of the most influential Japanese anime series in the U.S are:

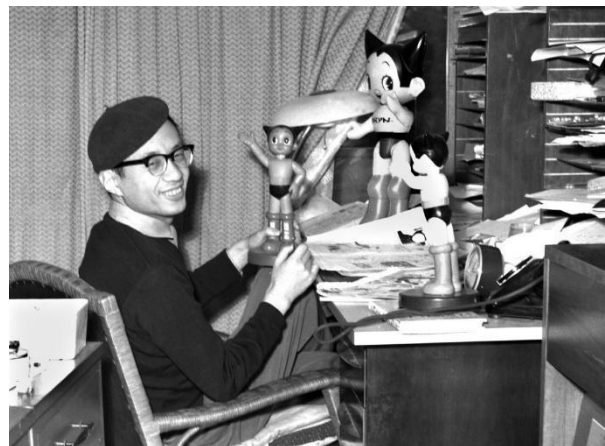
- Dragon Ball Z
- Full Metal Alchemist
- Neon Genesis Evangelion
- Naruto
- Dragon Quest
- Code Geass



### **Osamu Tezuka:**

Osamu Tezuka's revolutionary work transformed the way comics, animation, and Japanese culture were viewed by Western and global audiences. Tezuka is one of Japan's most celebrated cartoonists and published more than 150,000 pages of comics, produced TV animation series, feature films, and experimental shorts, won several awards at international animation festivals and received a Ph.D in medicine.

Born on November 3, 1928 to Yutaka and Fumiko Tezuka, he was the eldest of three children. They were fortunate enough to have progressive, well-educated parents who exposed them to art at very young ages. Tezuka's father, Yutaka Tezuka, was a keen photographer, wrote haiku and drew comics for his own amusement. Both parents loved movies and were the first family in Takarazuka to own a foreign film projector. Osamu began watching Disney films and remained a fan his whole life. In 1946, Tezuka drew a book length comic that would soon become *New Treasure Island*, his breakthrough title. There were more than 400,000 copies sold. By the age of twenty-two, Tezuka introduced one of his greatest





creations, Tetsuwan Atom, or as we know him today, Astro Boy. In 1963, the Astro Boy animated series conquered Japan and soon after NBC began broadcasting the English version in North America.



“For Tezuka, who had idolized Walt Disney since a young age, this was a pivotal moment: his Astro Boy now occupied a place in the minds of American children, just like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.”

-Natsu Onoda Power, *God of Comics, Osamu Tezuka and the Creation of Post-World War II Manga* (Page 5)

### **Astro Boy:**

Astro Boy, a science fiction series set in a futuristic world where robots co-exist with humans, was the first weekly animation series on Japanese television. Its focus is on the adventures of Astro Boy: a powerful robot created by the head of the Ministry of Science, Dr. Boynton (Dr. Tenma in the original Japanese comic). Astro was created to replace Dr. Boynton’s son Astor (Tobio in the original Japanese comic) who died in a car accident. At first, Dr. Boynton is pleased with his robotic replacement, but he becomes incredibly angry when he realizes Astro isn’t growing like a real boy. He sells Astro to a circus, where Astro is forced to fight other robots. After some time, Dr. Elefun (Professor Ochanomizu in the original) rescues Astro from the Circus and takes him in as his own. He soon realizes that Astro has superior powers and skills, as well as the ability to experience human emotions.

“Astro’s powers give him enormous potential for good or evil. They vary in his various incarnations in comics and animation. He understands sixty languages, has super hearing and vision, can use his eyes as searchlights, and flies by jet propulsion. He can fire rockets from his limbs, lasers from his fingers, and machine guns from his backside, but he can think for himself and has powerful emotions.”

- Helen McCarthy, *The Art of Osamu Tezuka, God of Manga* (Page 38)



## Resources

### Books:

- *God of Comics, Osamu Tezuka and the Creation of Post-World War II Manga*  
By Natsu Onoda Power
- *The Art of Osamu Tezuka, God of Manga*  
By Helen McCarthy Forward by Katsuhiro Otomo
- *Metropolis*  
By Osamu Tezuka
- *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution*  
By Frederik L. Schodt

### Videos:

- "The Birth of Astro Boy"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZg2Vhluuol>
- "Tezuka's Astro Boy (1963) Episode 1"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYSfncB4peU>
- "Astro Boy Movie (2009) Official Teaser"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nYBfYIU0mA>
- "Osamu Tezuka Documentary"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yULt\\_h3E\\_Ag](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yULt_h3E_Ag)

### Online Articles:

- *Off-Kilter and Out of Bounds? Thank You. COMPANY ONE LAUNCHES ITS AUDIENCE INTO A NEW THEATRICAL STRATOSPHERE WITH ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMIC*  
By Jared Bowen  
[http://companyone.org/Season15/Astro\\_Boy/docs/AstroBosComMag.pdf](http://companyone.org/Season15/Astro_Boy/docs/AstroBosComMag.pdf)
- *Company One Theatre Rehearsal and Development Blog*  
<http://astroboyc1.wordpress.com/why-were-here/>
- *Washington Post Editorial Review*  
By Peter Marks  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/gog/performing-arts/astro-boy-and-the-god-of-comics,1213141.html>
- *DC Theatre Scene Review*  
By Scott Meslow  
<http://dctheatrescene.com/2012/02/23/astro-boy-and-the-god-of-comics/>

# Lesson Plan 1: Create Your Own Super-hero

## Objectives:

- Demonstrate an ability to think creatively and abstractly
- Engage students with their imaginations
- Demonstrate an ability to think quickly and spontaneously
- Exercise innovative, team-work skills
- Create a safe environment through individual and ensemble work

## Materials:

- Pencils
- Crayons
- Markers
- Magazines
- Construction paper
- Large rolls of blank white paper

## Length:

- One 45 minute session (can also be broken down into two 20 minute sessions)

## Activity:

- Have students sit in a circle, so that everyone is visible.
- Go around the circle, asking students the following questions:
  1. Who is your favorite super-hero, and why?
  2. If you could have any super-power, what would it be and why?
  3. Create your own, original super-hero. What is your name? What is your super-power?
  4. Have each student, one at a time, go into the center of the circle and strike one pose that encompasses their super-hero and super-power. (This can be the end of the first session if you choose to do two 20 minute sessions)
- Give each student a large piece of white paper (large enough to trace their body).
- Have each student lay down on the piece of paper and strike their super-hero pose. Have another student trace the outline of their body onto the white paper. Do this until each student has a piece of paper with a trace of their super-hero.
- Students will then use markers, crayons, colored pencils, construction paper, images from magazines, etc. to decorate their super-hero costume.
- Encourage students to be creative and think outside the box.
- At the end of the session, have each student present their super-heroes in front of the group.

## Lesson Plan 2: Robot Battles

### Objectives:

- Demonstrate an ability to think creatively and abstractly
- Engage students with their imaginations
- Create a safe environment through individual and ensemble work
- Demonstrate an ability to think quickly and spontaneously
- Exercise innovative, team-work skills

### Materials:

- Pencils
- Crayons
- Markers
- Scissors
- Tape
- Large rolls of blank white paper
- Stop watch

### Length:

- One 90 minute session or two 45 minute sessions

### Activity:

#### **Set-up:**

- Tape tall pieces of blank white paper to the wall. The pieces of paper should extend to most of the wall (top to bottom and most of the width of the wall). Depending on class size, you might have to reapply new pieces of paper after each battle.

#### **Part One:**

- Split students into teams of no more than about 5-6 students per team (This number is subject to change depending on group size. Be sure to have an even number of teams). Have each team come up with a team/robot name. Each Robot Battle will consist of two opposing teams at a time. For example, team A will battle team B, then C and D, then E and F, etc. until each team has battled.
- During a battle, assign each team to one half of the white paper that is now mounted on the wall. Each team has thirty seconds per round to draw. Only one team draws at a time. (The teacher or instructor can keep time, or they may assign a student to keep time). During their time, teams will draw a robot that is in battle against the other team's robot. Students may draw weapons, attacks, and defenses. This may include, but is not limited to armor, shields, swords, squirt guns, flame throwers, grenade launchers, butterfly nets, lasers, claws, and flying minion robot pterodactyls. Teams may also draw defenses. For instance, if while Team A is drawing, Team B watches. Team A is drawing a flame thrower that is heading towards team B's robot. Team B can



strategize while team A draws and may draw a flame retardant shield during their next turn to block the flame thrower. Encourage students to think creatively and abstractly about the robots they draw. The sky is the limit.

- After about eight rounds, the robot war will come to an end. Each team will take down their half of the paper from the wall and hold on to it for the next part of the activity. Re-apply paper to the wall and continue until each group has completed a robot war.

### **Part Two:**

- Give each team a pair of scissors and a roll of tape. Each team is going to use their drawn on pieces of paper, scissors and tape to build a robot costume on a teammate of their choice. Costume pieces may also include armor, shields, masks, weapons, etc. This should take no longer than 7 minutes. The finished product could look something like this:



- Each team will present their robot in front of the group.

**(NOTE-** If you have a competitive group, you may add the following to the activity: Have each robot strike a menacing pose and let the class vote on an overall winner based on creativity and imagination. The winner isn't as important as the creative process. )

### **Part Three:**

Discuss the following:

- What was the most challenging part of the exercise? Why?
- What was the most exciting part of the exercise? Why?

## Lesson Plan 3: Story-telling Through Movement

### Objectives:

- Analyze plot structures
- Create original characters and storylines
- Demonstrate an ability to think creatively and abstractly about the way we tell stories
- Exercise physical acting and storytelling techniques
- Demonstrate an ability to think quickly and spontaneously
- Demonstrate an ability to work as a team
- Take and give direction effectively

### Materials:

- 7-line story templates

### Length:

- One 45 minute session

### Activity:

- Make sure that you are in a large enough space that students have room to move and play. If you are in a classroom, try and move the desks out of the way, so as to create a playing space.
- Split the students into pairs. Give each pair about two-three minutes to create a story. The story should be simple and not take too much time to think up. The following 7 line story is a template to help students create an original story. By filling in the rest of the sentence for each line, students will create structured, original stories.

**Once upon a time...**

**And every day...**

**Until one day...**

**And because of that...**

**And because of that...**

**Until finally...**

**And ever since then...**

It's important that students not share their stories with other groups.

- Then give students about four to five minutes to create tableaux (a depiction of a scene usually presented on a stage by silent and motionless still images using the body) to present their story. The story must be presented in four tableaux. There should be no sound or speaking during each of the images. Students may move in between each tableau to prepare for the next, but should not move during the tableau. This should take no longer than five minutes. Students should think quickly, creatively, and spontaneously.
- Each group will then present their four tableaux in front of the class. The class will then try to figure out what is going on in the story. Ask students:

- o What is happening in the beginning of the story?
- o What is happening in the middle?
- o How did the story resolve itself?
- o How did you know what was going on?
- Groups will then share their original stories aloud. Discuss the following:
  - o Was the story clear?
  - o Why or why not?
  - o How did not using sound or words affect the story telling? Was this difficult? Why or why not?
  - o How did the movement and still images affect the storytelling?
- Repeat with each group.