

Curricular Connections

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



Dear Educators and Students,

We are pleased to share with you our Curricular Connections Packet for Company One Theatre's production of COLOSSAL, a New England Premiere by Andrew Hinderaker, running July 17th - August 15th. We've developed these materials for you to explore the world of the production and we encourage you to adapt the packet to suit your needs for the classroom or the stage.

Enclosed you will find:

- A Synopsis and List of Characters
- A List of the Cast and Production Staff
- An Interview with the Playwright, Andrew Hinderaker
- Article and Lesson Plan: Artistry and Athletics

Throughout this packet you will find excerpts from the production, photos from rehearsal, and images that highlight central ideas and themes. The discussion questions and lesson plan will provide creative opportunities for students to engage with these themes and connect with the world of COLOSSAL. More content and updates about the production can be found on Company One Theatre's production and education blogs:

Production Blog: colossalc1.wordpress.com

Education Blog: c1stageone.wordpress.com

If you have any questions about this packet, or are interested in reserving group tickets for COLOSSAL, please contact us at stageone@companyone.org.

See you at the theater!

Education Staff
Company One Theatre

Company One Theatre- Curricular Connections
COLOSSAL- July 2015

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SYNOPSIS

Running for four fifteen-minute quarters like a football game, *Colossal* tells us the story of Mike, a university student who abandoned his career as a dancer in favor of football, fell in love with his fellow team captain Marcus, and was injured during a game in which he attempted to keep Marcus from being hurt by a player from the opposing team. Throughout the play, Mike watches instant replays of the hit that left him partially paralyzed, interacts with a taunting, younger version of himself, and fights through rehabilitation with the help of his physical therapist. *Colossal* looks at the "beauty and brutality" of Mike's relationships with his team, his family and with the past.

CHARACTERS

Mike- 22. Approximately ten months removed from a catastrophic football injury. Uses a wheelchair.

Young Mike- 16-21, at various moments in the play. A dancer, a football player, and an extraordinary physical specimen.

Damon- 40s/50s. Mike's father. Runs a modern dance company, and still an extraordinary mover, though past his prime.

Marcus- 21: Young Mike's closest teammate and co-captain of the University of Texas football team.

Jerry- 30s/40s. Responsible for Mike's rehab. A specialist in physical therapy, occupational therapy, and psychology.

Coach- 40s/50s. Head Coach of UT's football team. Cares deeply about his players and believes deeply in the game of football.

Players- Early 20s. This is our ensemble. At times, they represent Young Mike's teammates at UT; at times his opponents; at times his teammates in high school. There should be at least six players, though ideally the number would be nine.

Damon Shaw Dance Company- A modern dance company.

Drumline- (3-5 players)



Mike (Marlon Shepard) and Young Mike (Alex Molina) gear up for practice

CAST

Mike - Marlon Shepard

Young Mike - Alex Molina

Damon - Tommy Neblett

Jerry - Greg Maraio

Marcus - Anthony Goss

Coach - Damon Singletary

Ensemble - Ben Salus, Aaron Dowdy, Kai Tshikosi, Chris Pittman, Henoch Spinola, Cameron Allen



Coach (Damon Singletary) getting his team fired up

PRODUCTION STAFF

Summer L. Williams - Director

Tommy Neblett - Dance Choreographer

Adrian Hernandez - Football Expert

Ramona Ostrowski - Dramaturg

Mark VanDerzee - Technical Director

Eva Bond - Assistant Director

Karthik Subramanian - Production Manager

Kathryn Lieber - Set & Projections Design

Meggan Camp - Costume Design

Annie Wiegand - Lighting Design

Darby Smotherman - Sound Design

Molly Fitzmaurice - Props Design

Samantha Layco - Stage Manager

Ashley Welp - Asst. Stage Manager

Stephanie Hettrick - Asst. Stage Manager

INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT

Pre-game Press Conference: Company One Theatre Dramaturg Ramona Ostrowski and playwright Andrew Hinderaker discuss the journey and appeal of “this pressure-cooker of a play.”

RO: Let’s have you kick us off, so to speak, by telling me a little bit about where the inspiration for COLOSSAL came from.

AH: It came primarily from two different places. There’s somebody in my family who’s a former athlete and has a spinal condition, and watching this person negotiate a new normal, physically, was something that was very much a part of my life. I tried to write about it in a different theatre piece in grad school, and that piece was not terribly successful in executing that story, but it did get me thinking about what it meant to tell a story physically. So that was one piece of the puzzle. Another piece was that one of my closest colleagues who runs the theater company that I’m a part of in Chicago called The Gift is an actor who uses a wheelchair. Our previous collaboration had nothing to do with disability, but working with him really opened my mind more to the intersections of theater and disability.

Also, I was down in grad school at the University of Texas at Austin, and that’s a theatre department that literally sits in the shadow of the football stadium. You know, a 100,000 person stadium that is really the biggest, most popular form of theatre at UT.

RO: You’re not from Texas originally—did writing this play while you were there influence you?

AH: Being there definitely amplified all of the things that were already sort of present for me. The interesting thing about Texas, I think more than perhaps any other state, is that football is so in the bloodstream at every level—Pop Warner to high school to college to the pros. I grew up in Madison, Wisconsin, which is a huge college football town, but the popularity begins in college. Certainly there’s high school football, but it’s not like Texas high school football.

RO: Did you play football growing up?

AH: I didn’t, other than pick-up tackle games as a child. I don’t have the skill sets and abilities to play. I am pretty flow-less and grace-less. But a lot of people in my life are dancers. That’s really where Texas played a big role in this show, because UT Austin is a department of theatre and dance, and I became pretty close friends with a number of the grad student dancers. Movement really became a central point of exploration while I was down there.



Playwright Andrew Hinderaker

RO: You specify in the script that the role of Mike has to be played by an actor who uses a wheelchair. What made you make that decision, and have you gotten any pushback on it?



Jerry (Greg Maraio) helping Mike (Marlon Shepard) with his recovery

AH: I was writing the role with my friend, Mike Thornton, in mind, and never anticipated the play would get a production, much less many! The challenge from my mentor was to write an unproduceable play; to do something so big and ambitious that people would be like, “No, we can’t do this.” So initially there wasn’t anything about ability in the script because I thought, “Well, Mike Thornton’s gonna do it.” But once it became clear that we were going to get

some more productions after Olney, I realized it was probably something that I should make explicit because Mike couldn’t actually do all these shows. After talking to a lot of folks in the arts and disability community, I realized that a lot of the narratives out there are about overcoming the disability, and then the role is often played by someone who doesn’t have a disability. I didn’t want to be a part of that; I made it explicit in the script because it just felt like a natural thing to do.

No one has said, “Well, oh jeez, then we’re not interested.” I think one thing that speaks to Company One and speaks to all the folks who’ve been great enough to produce this play is, if you’re going to take on a play with a cast this size, with choreography and football players and full contact hits and a drumline, you’re generally not going to be scared off by needing to hire an actor who uses a wheelchair. I think that the piece attracts companies that are drawn to both ambition and to difficult theater.

RO: Company One Theatre is the fourth stop of this National New Play Network rolling world premiere, after Olney Theatre Center outside of DC, Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, and Dallas Theatre Center. You were directly involved with the previous three productions, right?

AH: Yeah, I was. Very much so with the Olney—pretty much the entire production there—most of the production with Mixed Blood, and at least half of it with Dallas. It’s been great. I’m so fortunate because the evolution of the piece has been so incredibly well-supported, and has really given me a strong sense of what the play wants; what the play is and what it isn’t. It’s been great because I have had the opportunity to work with different directors and different casts in theatres of different sizes. You come away from that experience with revelations for sure.

RO: What are some specific things you've learned about the play through the process?

AH: I think one thing that has been proven true from production to production, and is so vitally important, is that the play has a certain precision and relentlessness and violence that isn't adaptable. There is a certain level of violence in this pressure-cooker of a play where it can't be allowed to become a little bit sloppy with the movement or the rhythm of the language. If you suck in your breath and tighten absolutely every muscle of your body until everything is unbearable and uncomfortable and tight, that's the way that the play needs to feel up until that final moment—which is partially why it's such a short play.

Also, though, the play became about different things in different cities. At the Olney, with an older audience, it became clear that this particular production was about care-taking. In *Mixed Blood's* production, there was a little more focus on disability, because that's something the company is really focused on. And in Texas, the football piece, of course, but also the relationship between two men became what the play was about. There were a number of people who walked out of the play when the two men touched each other. And it was because this particular kind of men, these hyper-masculine football men, were touching each other in a very vulnerable way.

RO: That's one thing we've been talking about in our process—it's not necessarily the sexuality of the characters that's dangerous or even interesting about this story, but the intimacy between these two big guys who are so hyper-masculine in a culture where masculinity means closing off emotions and vulnerability.



The Cast of C1's COLOSSAL in action

AH: Exactly. One of the things we've always talked about is that it's absolutely not a coming out story. If Mike had told his father he was in love with his teammate, he would have been fine with it. The interesting thing is that he can't tell his father because they've broken off all ties.

Part of the reason that the play has landed with folks is because we are really drawn to this violent performance of masculinity. We find it attractive, and obviously the play is out to disrupt that, but there is something that's truly compelling about the play for the same reasons. As a person, and part of a larger society, I'm drawn to this particular brand of masculinity that I find hypnotizing. It's an incredibly violent game, where these men are asked to really push themselves beyond physical boundaries and to put themselves in positions of extraordinary physical risk. Without question the play is written from the point-of-view of someone who both loves football and finds it grotesque.

RO: Broadening our scope for this last question: what's exciting to you about the theatre right now? Why do you make plays?

AH: Right now I'm interested in a lot of collaborations that may cut across disciplines—into dance, into sports, into magic, into these forms where people are participating in performance before an audience.

I think that one of the greatest gifts that the theatre can give is the sense of being present. Maybe it's just me, but I'm so rarely present in my life. In theatre, generally speaking, you're like, "Sit down, shut up, and don't go anywhere for the next hour and a half." If we actually embrace how demanding we're being, then we might embrace how much we owe our audience. The contract that we're making is that every moment is going to matter because we're not allowing you to do something else. We're not allowing you to look away. So this all has to matter.

That experience that people who love football have when they go to a game that is electric, where they stand on the bleachers and scream? I'm interested in that emotional electricity inside of you. Why can't the theatre do that? Why can't it charge us into this animalistic place? At a magic show, people lose their minds. These feats of virtuosic magic are so powerful because they're actually making us be present; that moment that you weren't present, you missed it.

I'm not interested in smugness or commentary; I am really drawn to theatre pieces that unabashedly wear their heart on their sleeve—that are unafraid of being emotional. Our contract with the audience is to make every moment matter. That's the value that I aspire to.



C1 COLOSSAL Rehearsal

ARTISTRY AND ATHLETICS

"I'm interested in sports, as I imagine most people are, for the display of the human form divine."

- NFL's Films Encore: When Football Meets Ballet

The history of sports extends as far back as the beginning of time, where we see ancient cave paintings depicting wrestling, sprinting, and swimming. Today, competition and rivalry are as timely a tradition as ever. According to the World Sports Encyclopedia there are 8,000 indigenous sports and sporting games in the world. The FIFA World Cup, the world's most widely viewed sporting event, had an estimated 715.1 million people watch the final match of the 2006 FIFA World Cup held in Germany. The National Football League, however, is still the most popular sports league in the United States, drawing the highest TV ratings by far. Its revenues climbed above \$9 billion last year and the 2015 super bowl had an estimated 114.4 million viewers.

What is it about the game that we love so much? Is it the traditions tied to the game? Hot dogs, Cracker Jacks, and national anthems at Gillette Stadium? Or is it the thrill of contact and the suspense of not knowing what's going to happen next? Is it the skill and artistry of the athletes? Or is it cheering against our rivals?

Whatever the reason, we know this to be true: we love the game.



Cast of C1's COLOSSAL in rehearsal

But what about other games? Theatre and dance are a tradition as timely and cherished as that of championship. Dating back to the Festival of Dionysus, theatre is a game of spectacle and conflict, intention and execution, much like sports. So what separates sports from theatre? Or better yet, what doesn't separate the two?

Similar to professional American football, theatre and dance are forms of entertainment intended to reach wide and varied audiences. Theatre asks its audience to spend a few hours watching people solve problems and create some magic along the way. Most sports do the same, but the expectation of the audience is much different. Football audiences roar as their favorite players battle through plays and find their way to the end zone, while theatre audiences root for characters and sometimes ideas as they navigate the stage. Both theatre and football patrons get a thrill from waiting for the next play, or scene, not knowing how it'll unfold. Rivalry and conflict are key elements for both disciplines.



"I once interviewed a puppeteer who believed that all humans can do is imitate what they see in the world around them. Both plays and sports are man-made imitations of conflict, drama and competition performed in sacred spaces throughout the world."



C1 COLOSSAL Ensemble Member Cameron Allen

Professionals in both fields have pointed to their similarities – their capacity for beauty and grace, and the way they push the human body to its breaking point. Performers train to act and react with vulnerability and presence. Athletes train to move and think quickly. Timing, rhythm, and control are vital and both performers and athletes spend countless hours dedicated to mastering their craft.

The NFL released a video, *Films Encore: When Football Meets Ballet*, in which both football and dance critics examine the intersection of the two.

"Dancers and athletes have a lot in common. They both have to move through space in a dramatic way very often as swiftly as possible. In dance you have to look a certain way and in athletics you have to achieve a certain thing.

-Roni Mahler, Cleveland Ballet

Link to video:

www.nfl.com/videos/nfl-videos/09000d5d8294a56e/Films-Encore-When-football-meets-ballet

In the following excerpt from COLOSSAL, Jerry, a physical therapist specializing in sports injuries and rehabilitation, describes just how breath-taking the game of football can be:

JERRY So now there's just two men to beat--the safety and the corner--that's it. The safety's first and our tailback does this spin move and it's not football it's dance. But that is nothing compared to what happens next.... The very thing that a hundred thousand people have paid a hundred dollars each to watch. 'Cuz this tailback, he turns on a--no, he doesn't turn on a dime--he turns on a pinpoint. He is going twenty miles per hour in one direction and then suddenly... impossibly... And then it happens. He is airborne. And a hundred thousand people go quiet....



C1 Cast of COLOSSAL

With movement and dance, you are propelled to move by truly expressing yourself with the intention to conquer the music. In sports you're propelled to move to overcome the opponent with the goal of winning. To overcome the obstacles, both disciplines require a level of artistic expression, and together it is simply the art of expressing the human body.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you're a sports or a theatre fan, what is it about either form that excites you? If not, what is it about either form that turns you off?
2. Imagine you're a football coach. What are qualities or characteristics you would want to see in your players? Now imagine you're a theatre director. What are qualities or characteristics that make a good actor? How do those characteristics differ? How are they similar?
3. Think about your favorite actor and athlete. What about them makes you root for them? How are they similar? How are they different?
4. What are some other disciplines which use the human body as a form of expression?

RESOURCES

Read:

<http://howlround.com/the-problem-with-loving-sports-and-theater>

<http://www.tcqcircle.org/2012/05/when-sports-and-theatre-mix/>

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/jun/17/thereslittledifferencebetwe>

Watch:

www.nfl.com/videos/nfl-videos/09000d5d8294a56e/Films-Encore-When-football-meets-ballet

LESSON PLAN: ARTISTRY AND ATHLETICS

DESCRIPTION

Students will watch and analyze different forms of human expression, specifically through the lens of sports and performance, discuss their similarities and differences, and then create a short scene using specific qualities found in each discipline.

OBJECTIVE

Students will work in small groups to create a short scene in which they examine ways the human body is used as a form of physical and emotional expression.

MATERIALS

Computer, laptop, tablet, or other device to watch YouTube Videos
Chart Paper
Writing paper and utensils
Various props and costumes (optional)
Lesson Plan Worksheet

LENGTH

Three - Four 45 minute classes

LESSON PLAN

PART ONE: Analyzing Media

Students will get into groups of 3-4 depending on class size. Students will then watch the following clips:

Reggie Bush USC Highlights
https://youtu.be/2_ZhbsJbz_o

Barry Sanders Highlights
<https://youtu.be/vKifoQVssBo>

Ballet Dancer Alexia Giordano and the Guinness World Record Holder of Football Freestyle WASS
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYL8NDFODME>

Les 7 Doigts de la Main- TRACES
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh0OVMLaYtA&feature=youtu.be>

America's Best Dance Crew- JabbaWockeez
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K16ltN3nWaU>

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Using the Lesson Plan Worksheet, have groups write down a list of 3 qualities they observed in each video. For example, after watching the Reggie Bush USC Highlights, students might observe speed, force, and teamwork. Repeat for each video.

As a class, then discuss each group's' findings. Using chart paper, create a list of characteristics for each video. Discuss their similarities and differences. Did most groups have similar ideas about each video? What are some of the qualities that were apparent in each video? Each group will then pick one characteristic per video (a total of 5 characteristics) to be revisited.

PART TWO:

Groups will then discuss ways to incorporate each quality into every day action. For example, where do we see people using speed? Perhaps it's someone who is eccentric and talks very fast, or maybe it's someone who is running late and walks in a hurry. Create a list of at least three examples of how you might use each quality in real life. The examples must be something that the students can actually do/depict in real time. Something traveling at the speed of light to represent speed, for example, would not work.

Students should now have 5 qualities and a list of three real life examples for each.

PART THREE: Creating a Scene

Based on the previous exercise, each group will write a short scene. Each scene must have some sort of conflict and a clear beginning, middle, and end. Each scene must also use each student, whether they have a speaking role or not. Each scene must depict at least three qualities or characteristics discussed in Part Two. For instance, one scene might show examples of grace, stamina, and teamwork. Use the real life examples from Part Two as a jumping off point, however, students should also feel free to explore new ideas or examples in their scene.

PART FOUR: Performance

Groups will have about 15 minutes to rehearse their scene before they share their pieces with the class.

Each scene should be no longer than 3 minutes.

PART FIVE: Discussion

Discuss the following as a class:

1. What were some challenges each group faced?
2. What was something that surprised you throughout the exercise?
3. Were the similarities and differences in the videos what you thought they would be? Did you discover something new about either sports or performance?
4. In what ways do you use your body every day to express yourself?

ASSESSMENT

1. Completion of Lesson Plan Worksheet
2. Performance of Short Scene
3. Effective collaboration with other students towards creating a scene
4. Participation in class discussions and providing feedback to peers about their work



LESSON PLAN WORKSHEET

Your Name:

Date:

Partner's Name:

PART ONE

Video One:

Quality 1.

Quality 2.

Quality 3.

Video Two:

Quality 1.

Quality 2.

Quality 3.

Video Three:

Quality 1.

Quality 2.

Quality 3.

Video Four:

Quality 1.

Quality 2.

Quality 3.

Video Five:

Quality 1.

Quality 2.

Quality 3.

Choose one quality per video:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

PART TWO

Real life examples for each quality

Quality One:

Example 1.

Example 2.

Example 3.

Quality Two:

Example 1.

Example 2.

Example 3.

Quality Three:

Example 1.

Example 2.

Example 3.

Quality Four:

Example 1.

Example 2.

Example 3.

Quality Five:

Example 1.

Example 2.

Example 3.

PART THREE

Short Scene Title:

Characters:

Setting:

Script:

Script Continued: