Name: _____ Date: _____

Commedia: Masks and Make-Believe in the Square

Circle group

Long ago in Italy, traveling actors set up a plain wooden stage in a town square. Then they began to perform. Their style is called commedia dell'arte. It means comedy of the profession. It grew popular in the 1500s. Its ideas spread across Europe.

The actors did not learn every word. They had a rough outline of the plot. They made up the lines as they went. So the group had to be quick. Actors had to listen to each other. If one made a joke, the others had to catch it and toss something back.

The characters were types that people already knew. Pantalone was an old, stingy merchant. Harlequin was a clever servant in a patched, colorful costume. He was always trying to get out of trouble. Many actors wore half masks of leather. The crowd could tell who they were from far away. A mask hides the face, so the actors used their bodies. They made big gestures, leaps, and tumbles.

Later writers and comedians borrowed these ideas. The lovable fool, the sly helper, and the grumpy rich man are still in plays, cartoons, and comedies.

Questions

1. Where did commedia dell'arte begin?

_____

_____

2. Did the actors learn every word?

_____

_____

3. What kind of character was Harlequin?

_____

_____

4. What did many actors wear on their faces?

_____

_____

5. Why did actors have to listen to each other?

_____

_____

6. Why did actors use big gestures and tumbles?

_____

_____

Words to know

stingy: unwilling to spend or share money
merchant: a person who buys and sells goods
gestures: movements of the hands or body that show meaning

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Commedia: Masks and Make-Believe in the Square

Triangle group

Hundreds of years ago in Italy, traveling actors set up a simple wooden stage in a town square and began to perform. Their style is called commedia dell'arte, which means comedy of the profession. It became popular in the 1500s, and its ideas spread across Europe.

The actors did not memorize every word. Instead, they were given a rough outline of the plot, and they made up the lines as they went. That meant the troupe had to be quick, and the performers had to listen closely to one another. If one actor invented a joke, the others had to catch it and toss something back.

The characters were stock types that audiences already knew. Pantalone was an old and stingy merchant. Harlequin was a clever servant in a patched, colorful costume, always scrambling to get out of trouble. Many of the characters wore half masks made of leather, so the crowd could tell who they were from far away. Since a mask hides the face, the actors told the story with their bodies, using big gestures, leaps, and tumbles.

Later playwrights and comedians borrowed these ideas. The lovable fool, the sly helper, and the grumpy rich man are still common figures in plays, cartoons, and comedies today.

Questions

1. Where did commedia dell'arte begin?

_____

_____

2. Did the actors memorize every word?

_____

_____

3. What kind of character was Harlequin?

_____

_____

4. What did many characters wear on their faces?

_____

_____

5. Why did the actors have to listen closely to one another?

_____

_____

6. Why did the actors use big gestures and tumbles?

_____

_____

Words to know

troupe: a group of actors who perform together
stingy: unwilling to spend or share money
merchant: a person who buys and sells goods
gestures: movements of the hands or body that show meaning
playwrights: people who write plays

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Commedia: Masks and Make-Believe in the Square

Square group

Several centuries ago in Italy, troupes of traveling actors assembled a simple wooden stage in a town square and began to perform. Their style is known as commedia dell'arte, which means comedy of the profession. It rose to popularity in the 1500s, and its ideas eventually spread across the continent of Europe.

The performers did not memorize every word of a script. Instead, they were handed a rough outline of the plot, and they invented their lines as they went along. This meant that the troupe had to think quickly, and each performer had to listen very closely to the others. If one actor invented a joke, the rest had to catch it and toss something back.

The characters were stock types with whom audiences were already familiar. Pantalone was an old and stingy merchant, while Harlequin was a clever servant in a patched, colorful costume who was forever scrambling out of trouble. Many of the characters wore half masks made of leather, which allowed the crowd to recognize them from a long distance. Since a mask conceals the face, the actors told the story with their bodies, using sweeping gestures, leaps, and tumbles.

Later playwrights and comedians borrowed freely from these ideas. The lovable fool, the sly helper, and the grumpy rich man remain familiar figures in plays, cartoons, and comedies even today.

Questions

1. In which country did commedia dell'arte begin?

_____

_____

2. Did the performers memorize every word of a script?

_____

_____

3. What sort of character was Harlequin?

_____

_____

4. What did many characters wear over their faces?

_____

_____

5. Why did each performer have to listen very closely to the others?

_____

_____

6. Why did the actors rely on sweeping gestures and tumbles?

_____

_____

Words to know

troupe: a group of actors who perform together
stingy: unwilling to spend or share money
merchant: a person who buys and sells goods
gestures: movements of the hands or body that show meaning
playwrights: people who write plays

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Commedia: Masks and Make-Believe in the Square

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Commedia: Masks and Make-Believe in the Square

Easier · 189 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.2

1. In Italy.
2. No, they had a rough plot outline and made up the lines.
3. A clever servant in a patched, colorful costume who was always trying to get out of trouble.
4. Half masks made of leather.
5. The lines were made up, so each actor had to react to what the others did.
6. A mask hides the face, so the body had to tell the story.

Triangle: Commedia: Masks and Make-Believe in the Square

This passage · 208 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.4

1. In Italy.
2. No, they used a rough plot outline and made up the lines.
3. A clever servant in a patched, colorful costume who was always trying to get out of trouble.
4. Half masks made of leather.
5. Since the lines were made up, each actor had to react to what the others invented.
6. A mask hides the face, so the body had to tell the story.

Square: Commedia: Masks and Make-Believe in the Square

Harder · 224 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.5

1. Italy.
2. No, they were given a rough plot outline and invented their lines.
3. A clever servant in a patched, colorful costume who was forever scrambling out of trouble.
4. Half masks made of leather.
5. Because the lines were invented, each actor had to react to what the others created.
6. A mask conceals the face, so the body had to tell the story.