

TEACHER'S RESOURCE



Loose Ends
By Jens Altheimer

2017

REGIONAL
ARTS
VICTORIA
PERFORMING ARTS TOURING

CREATIVE VICTORIA

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INTRODUCTION

This Teacher' Resource provides teachers with information and activities to compliment your class visit to *Loose Ends* by Jens Altheimer.

Loose Ends is an unusual theatrical experience full of surprises! It is rich in visual variety, and audiences will be stunned by the contraptions coming to life before their very eyes in this curious world.

Jens has worked for months on the 'machines' that appear in the show. It will appeal to those who love to 'tinker', invent, play with LEGO, building blocks, or the kid (or adult!) who loves to take things apart to see how they work. *Loose Ends* features contraptions, tricks and quirky characters, but it's also a story about friendship, acceptance and loyalty. Plenty of entertainment with a dose of emotion.

Loose Ends makes science and technology cool – it inspires kids and adults alike to tinker with machines, and make their own contraptions and inventions.

Performer Jens Altheimer won "Best Presentation for Children" at the Adelaide Fringe Festival for his previous show 'Squaring the Wheel'

PERFORMANCE AND COMPANY INFORMATION

Performance Title: Loose Ends

Producer / Company name: Jens Altheimer

Devised and performed by: Jens Altheimer

Directed by: Hayden Spencer and Carita Farrer

Music and soundscape by: Carl Polke

Creative input: Chris Bennett

Running Time: 60 minutes No interval

Warnings: A few scenes might frighten children under five years. Highly recommended for ages 5 -12 and their families.

Key themes: Friendship, inventiveness, social acceptance, moral ambiguity, loyalty

Education links: Interpersonal Development, The Arts, Communication, Design, Creativity and Technology, Thinking Processes

VIDEO LINKS

<https://vimeo.com/124080851>

Learning Areas	Capabilities
<p>The Arts <i>Loose Ends</i> exemplifies the conceptual framework that underpins the Arts learning area, that is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learn as artist and audience/viewer • Students learn through making and responding. <p>Throughout <i>Loose Ends</i>, there are links to each of the strands in the Arts curriculum across Levels F-6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and express • Visual arts practices • Present and perform • Respond and interpret <p>Specific content descriptors are addressed, for example:</p> <p>Media Arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the use of the techniques, materials, processes and technologies 	<p>Personal & Social Capability <i>Loose Ends</i> incorporates learning from each of the strands and provides students with opportunities to recognise, understand and evaluate the expression of emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an awareness of personal qualities and factors that contribute to resilience • Develop empathy for an understanding of others • Recognise the importance of supporting diversity for a cohesive community • Understand how relationships are developed • Use interpersonal skills to establish and maintain respectful relationships • Work effectively in teams and develop strategies to manage challenging situations constructively
<p>English</p> <p><i>Loose Ends</i> draws on each of the language modes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and viewing • Writing • Speaking and listening 	<p>Critical and Creative Thinking <i>Loose Ends</i> incorporates learning from each of the strands and provides students with opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand thinking processes and develop an ability to manage and apply these intentionally • Skills and learning dispositions that support logical, strategic, flexible and adventurous thinking • Confidence in evaluating thinking and thinking processes across a range of familiar and unfamiliar context.

Science

Loose Ends provides many opportunities for learning in Science across the following:

- **Science Understanding:** When a person selects and integrates appropriate science knowledge to explain and predict phenomena, and applies that knowledge to new situations.
- **Science Enquiry Skills:** Through science, humans seek to improve their understanding and explanations of the natural world.

Sub strands: Questioning and Predicting, Planning and Conducting, Analysing and Evaluating, Communicating

Technologies -

Loose Ends provides many opportunities for learning in Design and Technology across each of the strands including:

- **Technologies and Society**
- **Technologies Contexts**
- **Creating Designed Solutions:** Explore needs or opportunities for designing, and the technologies needed to realise designed solutions

LOOSE ENDS

Experience extraordinary visual theatre, set in a wondrous tinkering heaven!

Makers, creators, and story lovers; dive into a theatrical adventure that feels like the magic box of a bygone trickster!

Journey to an eccentric place where gadgets are poetic, puppets naughty, machines untamed and circus tricks pop up when you're least expecting it! This is a world where music appears from lemons, carrots and bunny's bums, monsters go crazy and birthday parties are ferociously celebrated.

Loose Ends is the story of a man who thinks he can organise all his life in boxes, and has a knack for getting into mischief. Can this tinkerer learn enough about real friendship to keep him out of trouble?

Built from hard rubbish and op-shop treasures, the set is a celebration of the capricious: household items are transformed and given new uses and contexts, offering a humorous and surprising look at things.

This breathtaking show is highly visual, emotional and unpredictable. It makes inventions and machines fun and adds a few quirky edges to puppetry.

JENS ALTHEIMER

Jens Altheimer, who relocated from Europe to Melbourne in 2009, is a performer, director and teacher in theatre and circus, trained at the Lecoq International School of Theatre in Paris. Zealous frontman of his one-man shows, quirkologist, established collector, inventor and transformer of thingamabobs and other wondrous oddities of day to day life.

Jens Altheimer tour his prior production *Squaring the Wheel* nationally and internationally in 2014-2015. By the end of 2015, the show will have had about 260 performances. It was the 2013 winner of "Best Presentation for Children" at the Adelaide Fringe Festival. <http://squaringthewheel.blogspot.com.au> He also has been running workshops and community arts projects with different organisations (Arts Victoria, Artplay, Theatre Kimberley) and as an extra component on his tours.

“A comical visual feast which simply has to be seen to be believed.” **ArtsHub**

“Pure junkyard genius.” **Sydney Morning Herald**

A BRIEF Q&A WITH JENS ALTHEIMER

What do you love most about what you do?

That I can do exactly what I like to do: inventing stuff, creating shows, tinkering, all in my own time and, even better, without a boss! Then, there’s the traveling bit that takes me to all kinds of different places, meeting all kinds of people. I still enjoy seeing a beautiful sunset while driving from one show to another, thinking it makes part of the job! And I’ve never stopped loving to hear all the rewarding feedback from people after the show.

Have you ever gotten tangled up in all those contraptions during your show?

They try to attack me constantly, but so far (except a bit of blood now and then or a sprained thumb or ankle or shoulder), I manage to escape in one piece.

How many people do you think you've performed for in your career?

Probably around two million. The biggest part of that came from the Portuguese World Expo in 1998, when I performed in a huge stadium three times the day in a XXL show over a period of a few months. *Squaring the Wheel*, my previous show has been seen by more than 20,000 people so far, all over Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Pretty good for a one man show! *Loose Ends* is still in its beginning, trying to catch up.

What is your background? Science or Theatre?

I started off as a circus performer, but after a few years of performing complicated juggling tricks, I got a bit bored by just throwing lots of objects in the air and trying to catch them again. So I decided to go through a two years training in a theatre school in Paris, starting to mingle circus and theatre. At one point, I became interested in our relationship with all the machines and objects around us and how quite often they complicate straightforward things. That was the start of my tinkering career, building silly machines and dragging them onto stage with me; definitely complicating life, but also making it more fun and generating new ideas.

What is the ideal age group for *Loose Ends*?

I call *Loose Ends* an ‘adult friendly family show’. It is designed to provide fun for very different age groups, working on different layers of understanding. Little kids love it because of all the action and silliness, the older ones also appreciate the quirkiness and inventiveness of the contraptions. For adults, there are lots of moments of recognition of situations that humorously apply to their life. So, it is really catering to all ages. A few darker scenes might be a bit scary for the under 5s though.



CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGIES & ART

Loose Ends makes important connections between Science, Technologies and The Arts including:

- inspired by **curiosity**
- stimulated by **observation & perception**
- **Making** and **responding**
- investigated using **observation & research**
- **Experiment** and **Discovery**
- driven by mastery of **techniques**
- design, create, manage and evaluate sustainable and innovative digital solutions to meet and redefine current and future needs
- interactions between individuals, societies, economies and environments

Creativity & **imagination** are intrinsic to scientific and technology process and **logic & reasoning** are essential to artistic process.



POST SHOW ACTIVITIES

Science and Technology - Themes

Chain reaction

Chain reaction, self-sustaining reaction that, once started, continues without further outside influence. Or we could also say: a series of events so related to each other that each one initiates the next, triggered by the same initial event.

A line of dominoes falling after the first one has been pushed is an example of a mechanical chain reaction.

One way to describe chain-reaction machine is through cause and effect: everything that happens is CAUSED BY another action.

Group Activity 1 (Grade 4 - 6) : Chain Reaction

Divide the class into small groups (ideally into pairs, also possible around 3-4) and assign a table to each group. The tables should be placed in the room to create a long linear sequence, obviously 90 degree angles between tables are possible. The connective interface between each table could be a simple domino like element on each table side. Prepare a stack of materials, giving preference to materials, that have are cheap and easy to use and transform (see list below). Also ask students to bring in used house hold items and recycled items. Appropriate tools to work with the proposed materials should be provided. Organise the room in a way that everybody has easy access to the materials and create a workshop area, where simple cutting or preparing of material can happen safely. Each table could have one suggestive centre element, chosen by the group, as a possible starting point.

Each group separately build their part of the whole sequence, connecting with an individual approach the domino from one side of the table to the domino on the other side of the table. Encourage students to build all elements as slow moving as possible and find surprising way of moving the chain reaction forward.

A good time frame would be two two hour sessions, possibly on two different days.

Day 1:

- Introduction to the concept of chain reaction and the idea of cause and effect. Depending on the age group (and time provided), some introduction to gravity, conservation of energy and smile machine can be given.
- Division of the class into groups.
- Individual exploration and tryout, collection of ideas and possible design
- Start to build elements of the chain reaction

Day 2:

- Continuation of the building
- Try out runs and adjustments of elements, learning to reset precisely
- Connection between the tables
- Individual verbal explanation of the built elements to the rest of the group
- Test run of the whole chain reaction, adjustments.
- Possible public (school) demonstration

Points to reinforce:

- the idea of a common project, where everyone works towards a common goal.
- each unsuccessful experience isn't a failure but just another step towards succeeding
- sharing ideas
- keep ideas simple
- even though reliability is the objective, human intervention (using the magic finger to move on stalled elements) will happen in a few cases and isn't a big problem

Proposed tools/materials to be provided: thick and thin cardboard, string, wire, hinges, gaffer tape, brown tape, clamps, contact glue, various lengths and thickness of timber, tubes, ruler, battery fan, remote controlled cars, funnel, plastic and other containers, balls, marbles, anything that can make a ball track. Books and boxes can provide very useful higher levels.

TIP: This could be a good activity to enlist parental help with!

Some very useful information can be found at this Exploratorium link

<http://tinkering.exploratorium.edu/chain-reaction>

Here are a few examples of great chain reactions to watch:

From the music band OKGO a real epic one that is very popular with students:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qybUFnY7Y8w>

The world slowest chain reaction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-c7tBlNFsw>

And a few great examples here:

<http://mashable.com/2013/08/21/rube-goldberg-machines/#ZEggQ13H.Sq3>

Exploratory Play—tinkering, experimenting, getting to know tools and materials

Touching, patting, banging, pouring, tasting, looking, listening, pulling apart, putting together —these are some of the many ways that children explore and experiment by playing. Through these activities — done with increased skill over the years children learn the physical properties of various materials, begin to count and measure, recognize shapes and patterns, develop language and motor skills, and begin to make sense of the world around them. Many inventors seem to retain the curiosity that children have. Their mastery of their craft may be

based on a field of study, but more often than not it also comes from constantly exploring and experimenting with their tools and materials. Inventors are always asking “What if I tried this?” “What if we did it that way?”

Provide Hands-on Experiences

Encourage students to use all of their senses and their entire bodies. Our culture places great emphasis on visual and auditory experiences, but it is also important for students to develop their sense of taste and touch, as well as small and gross motor skills. For younger children, play involving water, sand, clay, Play-Doh, blocks, and other materials continues to be essential.

Group Activity 2 (Grade 3 - 6)

Toy take apart

Relating to the scene of the show, where some familiar fur toy animals suddenly transform into a bunch of crazy white plastic monsters, students transform some old plastic toy by tinkering.

Starting from the question: “Do you ever wonder what’s inside your toys?” children will make some exciting and surprising discoveries about toys’ inner parts when they don some safety goggles and get started dissecting their old stuffed animal, remote controlled car, or singing Santa. Use screwdrivers, seam rippers, scissors, and saws to remove their toy’s insides and check out the mechanisms, circuit boards, computer chips, lights, and wires they find inside. Once they’ve fully dissected their toy, they can use the toy’s parts, their tools, and their imagination to create a new original plaything. They can cause some mechanical mischief as they strip wires and solder them to new places to make a car’s headlights moo and a cow light up. They can design an unique stuffed animal by sewing your teddy bear back together inside out, or attaching part of another animal to it.



What are the qualities we value in this activity?

Using Tools

This activity requires the use of many tools, so there are plenty of opportunities to practice! To deconstruct their toys, children will want clamps, screwdrivers, wire cutters, scissors, and saws. If they would like to make a new toy, they will find it especially helpful to use wire strippers and solder to create new electrical connections, and sewing needles and thread if they need to stitch anything back up.

New Uses for Everyday Objects

Toys are everywhere, and almost all of them are premade. Taking apart a toy will show them that the parts inside of it can be just as exciting as the toy itself. They will soon discover that there are objects lying around everywhere that can lead to hours of exploration.

Science and Art Connections

This activity really forces children to think scientifically while creating a unique piece of art. They will figure out how circuits work, explore the physics of mechanisms, and experiment with many different technologies inside of your toy. They will be engrossed in creating and expressing themselves through art as they stumble upon these scientific discoveries.

Playful and Inventive

What could be more playful than playing with toys in a new way? Children will be able to figure out how their toys work, and gain the knowledge and skills necessary to make their old toy into their own unique invention.

Here is a great detailed activity guide, provided by the fantastic Exploratorium, the museum of science, art and human perception.

http://tinkering.exploratorium.edu/sites/default/files/Instructions/toy_take_apart_0.pdf

Group Activity 3 (Grade 3 - 6)

Make Junk Bags

Fill brown lunch bags with common items found around the school or home, making sure that each bag has identical objects like paper plates, paper clips, elastics, tape, felt pieces, etc. Ask groups of three or four children to “invent” something using the items from the bags. Have a brain storming before the start of the making process to develop ideas what the inventions could be good for. (i.e. invention to measure). Also, they must give their inventions a name and offer a plan for marketing the finished products. Perhaps the most surprising result of this activity will be that each group, using the same materials, comes up with something entirely different.

Personal & Social Capability – Themes

Some of the important themes in *Loose Ends* are friendship, acceptance and loyalty. The main character appears lonely but he doesn't give up and uses his imagination to overcome this precarious situation, transforming the world around him and learning about the true meaning of friendship.

Questions for the Class.

- What do you think the main character had learned by the end of the play?
- Have you ever invented characters and situations by yourself? What sort of things did you pretend to be doing or seeing?
- What do you think the expression ‘thinking outside the box’ means? How does the main character do this?
- The main character re-invents a number of everyday objects. Name 3 examples of how he does this.

Critical and Creative Thinking & English – Themes

Students can write a short story about an amazing invention and what it does. Students develop skills and learning dispositions that support logical, strategic, flexible and adventurous thinking, as they describe their amazing invention and how it works.

The Arts – Themes

Puppetry is a major component of *Loose Ends*

Your class could make their own puppets out of unusual items eg. Socks, paper bags, balloons, cardboard box, newspaper.