



The Art of Clowning

4-H Communication and Performing Arts
Members Guide

Y2310



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This material was adapted from the *Art of Clowning* member and leader guides, which were originally developed by Michigan 4-H Youth Development, Michigan State University Extension.

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LEFT: Members of the Harg Hustlers, River Hills, and Woodlandville 4-H Clubs: Bobo, Star, Galaxie, Squiggles, Sweet lil Thang, Sketti, and Stripes.

Preface

“Clowning”, to many people, goes hand in hand with happiness, laughter, and fun. Clowns add much color and enjoyment to parades, community events, and promotional activities. Clowns come in touch with the audience as they wave, perform antics, and visit on a one-to-one basis with young and old alike.

Clowning is a form of entertainment that has appeared in some form in most every culture. The improvisational theaters of 16th century Italy, the vaudeville stages of North America in the early 1900’s, and the societies of African bushmen are just a few of the times and places clowning has appeared around the world. Closer to home, 4-H Clowning is an exciting part of Missouri’s 4-H program and provides unique opportunities. 4-H’ers can expand their communication abilities, develop performing arts skills, build new relationships with others, strengthen self-confidence, and interface with a variety of 4-H projects along the way.

Opportunities to participate and communicate as a clown are numerous. This book has been compiled to assist and encourage volunteer leaders and 4-H members as they plan and carry out the 4-H Clowning program.

Opportunities for 4-H Clowns

There are many opportunities for 4-H clowns to become involved in community activities and events. They may bring a bit of cheer to patients, shut-ins, and residents of convalescent homes. 4-H clowns may lead groups of children in games and activities at birthday celebrations, reunions, parties, and other family events.

Clowns may be acrobats, dancing and tumbling their way through the corridors and rooms of a hospital. Their acts may be interspersed between events at a martial arts tournament or between plays at a 4-H theatre arts festival. They may even appear from within a chorus or band, bringing laughter and fun.

Clowns can be promoters, supporting organizations by providing information and publicity for good causes. 4-H Clowns can be teachers, too, as they develop skits and routines on specific topics they wish to share with the audience. Anyone who has seen a well-practiced 4-H demonstration given by a clown won’t soon forget the experience!

At community events, a clown may invited to set the tone and make people feel welcome. Local service and community organizations often invite clowns to appear on their programs and entertain the audience. Clowns often take part in parades and fairs, but they can also become involved in school functions, banquets, parties, and 4-H events.

Clowning is an excellent means of promoting the 4-H program and can be incorporated into any project area. Whether your clown club decides to be a service club, performing club, promotional club, or a combination of these, there is great potential for all members to participate in a variety of opportunities.



The History of Clowning

The link between comedy and tragedy is well known, so it isn't surprising that the art of clowning arose from rather sad circumstances. A popular early form of clown was the "fool." By the dawn of the 16th century in Europe, individuals who had some physical or mental disability were often given to the local authority as a charge when their families were unable to care for them. They were often the butt of jokes and had virtually no rights. However, because they were viewed as "idiots" they were also among the few in their community who enjoyed free speech! This combination paved the way for many actors, particularly in France, who began to train as *fools* in order to get away with mocking authority, making satirical commentary about their culture or community and violating other social taboos.



The Italian Theatre

Clowning was well underway long before the United States of America was founded, but the circus clown as we know him/her today would not appear for many years. Clowns performed in theatres, on street corners, at fairs, and finally in small traveling companies that moved from town to town throughout Europe.

In 16th century Europe something very important developed which influences clowning even today: a form of Italian improvisational theatre called **Commedia dell'arte**, which is Italian for "play of professional artists." Like 4-H, "the Commedia" has a link to agriculture. It actually began as a way to sell vegetables in market places! The players acted out funny comedies and worked without a written script. The stories were familiar and of a fixed style, and the characters were almost always the same stock personalities from play to play. These characters included:

- **Pierrot** – This character was the hero. Pierrot was trustworthy, honest, devoted, charming and likeable. He wore a loose top and a ruff collar over plain, full pants. Down the front of his shirt and at the top of his pointed hat were pom-poms (such as huge buttons or balls of fluff). The clown suits often worn to Halloween parties today are much like Pierrot's costume, except that he was very often dressed in black and white.
- **Columbine** – As the heroine, Columbine was lovely in a full tutu with a tight-fitting bodice. She had a father, a funny old clown with baggy short pants named **Pantaloon**.
- **Arlecchino** – This character was the funniest clown of them all, at first. He was a boisterous fellow who always played the role of a servant, making the audience laugh by mimicking the upper classes and falling on his face (both literally and figuratively!). Around the 17th century, Arlecchino became more clever and developed into more of a social critic. As his character developed in this way, he eventually became known as **Harlequin**.
- **Harlequin** - This character always wore tight-legged, full-sleeved costumes that were bright in color with diamond-shaped patterns. He also wore black half-masks and white ruffled collars. Harlequin was acrobatic, mischievous, and often involved the audience in the action or gestured to them.
- **Punchinella** – As Arlecchino developed into Harlequin, the theater needed a new buffoon and developed a new clown, Punchinella. He wore white with a black mask and had an extremely long nose which almost resembled a beak. He was short-tempered and crafty and would defend himself by pretending to be too stupid to know what was going on.



The Commedia grew incredibly popular throughout Europe among both the general public and the courts. During the Middle Ages, clowns performed for royalty as court jesters, wearing colorful costumes trimmed with tinkling bells. Almost every royal court had its fool or jester, who made everyone laugh with funny stories and antics.

England: Moving Toward a More Physical Comedy

By the mid 18th century, England's *harlequinades* were very popular. The harlequinade was a series of non-speaking comedy capers performed by characters borrowed from the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*, but with a stronger emphasis on slapstick and physical comedy. In addition to the standard characters in the Italian performances, harlequinades include an English character known as "Clown." In the early 1800's, the emphasis shifted from the Italian characters to Clown, mostly because of the outstanding performance of a clown named Joseph Grimaldi.

Grimaldi's skills at physical comedy are legendary. One of his most delightful tricks was to take ordinary items and use them to construct animated figures. For instance, during a performance in 1810 he created a figure out of a cabbage, turnips, carrots, parsnips and radishes; the "vegetable man" then came to life, engaged Grimaldi in a fight, and beat him off the stage!

America: The Traveling Circus

The Italian theatre would continue to influence the clowns of traveling circuses during the 19th and 20th centuries. One of America's first great clowns was Dan Rice. An accomplished animal trainer, he specialized in pigs and mules, and he even presented an act with a trained rhinoceros. With this in mind, it isn't so surprising that Rice is the only person in circus history ever to present a tightrope-walking elephant! His untraditional costume – red, white, and blue-striped tights, a star-spangled cloak, a top hat, and chin whiskers – bore a striking resemblance to the patriotic character of "Uncle Sam" which would be developed later.

As circuses grew larger, the new three ring formats became too big for singing and talking clowns. Old fashioned animal acts began to be replaced by larger scale acrobatic performances, with large numbers of performers and expensive machinery. Clowning had to adapt as well, to include stage equipment and a more action-oriented focus. For example, the trained dog might be put in a machine, and when a crank was turned a chain of hot dogs came out the other end! The clown policemen brandished rubber clubs and walloped other clowns. When a clown was hit, a big bump (actually a red rubber balloon) would swell on his head. "Carpet" clowns marched around the track, stopping every so often to put on their acts.

Performances had to keep moving, so part of the clown's job became filling in during "set up" time. When riggers put up the apparatus for aerialists or wire-walkers, the clowns ran into the Big Top and went into their acts. The audience was kept busy watching their antics while the other work was going on. The moment the rigging was finished, the clowns all chased each other out of the tent, with cap pistols banging away.

Clowns were also called upon in emergencies as there were bad accidents even in the best of circuses. A beautiful lady on the flying trapeze might take a nasty fall into the net. Or a daring horseback rider might slip under the horse's hooves. At that point the clowns came tumbling out to take the people's minds off the accident. The show went on as if nothing had happened.

"Clown Alley" was a special part of the circus set aside for the clowns, a strip of space close to the back door of the main tent. There, the clowns put on their special costumes and smeared their faces with a grease paint known as "clown white". After that each clown was on his own. No two clown faces could be alike. A clown began to create his own face when he was just a "First of May," as he was called during his first season with the show, and even as a "Johnny Come Lately" in his second season, he made changes. Each clown had his own special

look and no other clown would ever copy it. There were small clowns and animal clowns. There were sad-faced clowns and clowns with high, pointed heads. There were clowns with stomachs so big with padding that other characters had to prop them up.



It was there, too, that young clowns learned the art of clowning from their elders. Many of the older clowns had once been great performers in other areas. When they grew too old for acrobatics or swinging high above the crowds, many turned to clowning, for they could not bear to give up the life of a trooper. Sawdust was in their shoes and the circus was in their blood.



Joseph Grimaldi & Dan Rice

Joseph Grimaldi was the first great clown of the modern age and is widely acknowledged as the founding father of modern-day clowns. For his appearance, he started with the white costume and white-face makeup of the Pierrot character, then painted red half-moons on his cheeks and added English jester patches to his costume.

When he retired in 1823, the character of Clown was always named Joey in honor of him. Since then, clowns have also been known as "Joeys." To this day, on the first Sunday in February a memorial service is held for Grimaldi at All Saints' Church at Haggerston in the London Borough of Hackney. Hundreds of clowns flock from all over the world in full 'garb' for this service, which is followed by a show for the children.

One of **Dan Rice's** famous acts was called "Pete Jenkins from Mud Corners." The ringmaster would announce sadly that the great bareback-riding star was sick and could not perform. Rice would then stumble clumsily down from the stands in his baggy clothes and brag that he would take the place of the star, while the audience laughed. He would chase the loping horse, snatching at its tail. Once he caught it, he would slide around the horse's back and fall off clumsily while the audience laughed louder than ever. But then Dan began to shed his baggy clothes and soon, dressed only in spangled tights, he would ride like an expert.

Getting Started

Things to consider

Developing Your Character

Clowning is a performance art, so there is more to it than painting on a funny face and doing a few summersaults. You must understand the character of the clown you are developing. The character of the clown is an exaggeration of life, or some aspect of life as the clown sees it. Why does he act the way he does? What makes her happy or sad? What are some ways you might communicate that to the audience?

A good place to start is with yourself. What kind of person are you? Would you like to be a sad clown or a happy clown? Would you be in character as a boisterous and rowdy clown like Allecchino, or more as a quietly funny little man or woman? Would you like to work with an animal? Would you like to be a clown on horseback, like Dan Rice?? The best person to answer these questions is you.



Finding Your Look

Once you have a feel for your character, think about how you want to look. Are you going to be a white-face clown and wear a baggy costume in many different colors, with a full ruffled collar? Are you going to be an acrobatic or an equestrian clown in spangles and tights, with a ruffled waist and white skull cap with a pointed hat on top? Are you going to dress as an old tramp with big feet and a coat that drags the floor? The possibilities are endless!

There are several types of modern-day clowns. The three main types are the White Face, Auguste Face, and the Hobo (tramp) clown.

- **White Face** – This is the more conservative looking member of the group. The White Face clown wears a white background upon which the other facial features are drawn. A red color is usually selected along with blue, green, or other bright colors. Features are less exaggerated and the costume a little less gaudy than the Auguste.
- **Auguste** – This is the gaudiest of all clowns. The Auguste clown wears flesh-colored makeup as a background for the large exaggerated features of the mouth, nose, and eyes. The costume is usually oversized, with bright flashy colors, and comes complete with huge, floppy shoes.





- **The Hobo** – The Hobo, or Tramp, is the one clown who can be untidy. The clothes are ragged and patched, gloves usually have the finger tips missing, and the shoes are often oversized with worn-out soles. Makeup is flesh colored to the beard line, then blackened to simulate a beard. Red is sometimes used on the cheeks to give a ruddy look to the complexion which very often includes a red nose. Often the mouth and eyes are accented with white.

Character Study



One great Missouri clown is Emmett Kelly, whose character “Willie” is famous all over the world. Emmett spent a lifetime developing his character. He was born on a farm in Cabool and developed a love for cartooning.

He sent away for a cartooning course and dreamed of finding a job as a cartoonist. He wasn’t successful, though, and the closest job he could find was work as a sign painter, so while living in Kansas City he joined a circus as a chalk talk artist, drawing pictures to help illustrate the stories that he told his audiences (IMDB).

Eventually, Emmett became part of a trapeze act and decided to try clowning. He tried to be a White Face clown but that didn’t seem suit his personality. Then he remembered a cartoon character he used to draw – a sad-faced tramp – and thus the character “Willie” was born! Though he hadn’t succeeded as a cartoonist, the experience he gained by striving for that success was exactly what helped him find fame and acclaim later on.

Each clown face and costume must be original. No two clowns are exactly alike, and no good clown copies the face or costume design of another. For inspiration, study pictures of clown faces in books, magazines, and any other resources. Use these for ideas, and then be creative!

Putting on Your Face

Application of Clown Makeup

White Face Clown

The White Face clown wears a white background upon which the other features are usually drawn. While grease paint is traditional, many modern 4-H clowns prefer to use washable clown makeup, which is much easier to remove and available at most costume shops.



A red color is usually selected along with blue, green or other bright colors. The most conservative looking of the group, there should be nothing but white makeup on the upper lip! White Face clown features are less exaggerated and the costume a little less gaudy than the Auguste.

When you're deciding on a face design, make faces in a mirror. Move your eyebrows up and down. Try different smiles to see the smile lines, etc. Drawing out a design on paper is definitely a good idea, and it will probably take several tries before you are completely satisfied. Try not to choose more than two facial areas to emphasize, or your clown face will be too busy.

Now that you're ready to design your face, use makeup worksheets to draw several sketches of your clown face on paper. Take into consideration the natural lines of your face, especially the laugh lines. Use your favorite sketch as a guide to help you remember your design.

Equipment and Supplies Needed for White Face Makeup

(Check for sensitivity to supplies)

Hair covering to keep hair out of face and eyes*

Bobby pins and hair ties to tie back your hair before putting on the hair covering.

Smock or cover-up (optional)

Self-standing 8" x 10" mirror (magnified on one side)

Baby or mineral oil or cold cream for makeup removal

Tissue

White face powder (MUST be white. Do not use corn starch, as it will yellow the makeup)

Two shaving or soft brushes (one for white and one for color)

Large powder puffs or powder socks** (at least one for powdering white and at least one for powdering colors)

Clown grease white or white washable makeup

Color grease paint or washable makeup in sticks or jars

Swab sticks or makeup brushes for applying paint/makeup

Black eyebrow pencil

Eyelashes, glitter, bulb nose, etc. (optional)

Latex glue or spirit gum for application of eyelashes, glitter nose, etc. (optional)

Include glasses if you plan to wear them as a clown. You can attach eyelashes to the rim of your glasses for a special effect that adds to your costume

* This can be made from the top of pantyhose. Cut and remove legs from pantyhose. Use the top portion for a head covering. Gather the excess at the crown and tie or sew together.

** A powder sock can be used instead of a powder puff to apply powder. The powder sock is made by using a white cotton sock and filling it about 1/4 full with white powder. Tie the open end into a knot.

It is slapped or patted lightly on the face. This is especially handy to carry for quick touch-up jobs when performing. Keep the sock in a closed jar with powder so that the powder is on the outside as well as the inside of sock.

Assemble supplies before you apply your makeup. It's a good idea to keep all your face paint and makeup in a container, especially one with trays. Then you can take it with you to the event, in case you need to touch up something. This kit could contain makeup, makeup brushes, a small mirror, powder, a makeup pencil sharpener for makeup pencils, a comb or brush, bobby pins, safety pins, an extra pair of hose, toothpicks to scratch with (so you don't mess up your makeup if you have an itch!), wipes and Q-tips. Small items can be put in old film canisters or plastic bottles to keep them together.



Applying the White Face Makeup

Before applying your makeup, cover your hair or tie it back away from your face. When performing, it is a good idea to put your costume on first and cover it with a towel or blanket. Putting on your costume without damaging your clown face is very difficult, particularly if your costume goes on over your head.

First, make sure your face and hands are clean and dry; men should be smooth shaven. If you have dry skin, oil should be applied first and wiped off. Apply clown white with fingers or a foam makeup sponge, starting with your forehead and applying to just below the neckline of your costume. No natural skin color should show after your wig and costume are on.

Next, powder your face and neck with a powder sock or powder puff that has been generously dusted with white powder. Don't be stingy with the powder. The powder sets the clown white so it won't fade or run, especially in warm temperatures. Powder the entire white area. Let the powder set for a minute or two before removing excess powder with a brush. If your face still gets cakey, some clowns prefer to powder last after all the makeup is completely on.

Refer to your sketch, and using an eyebrow pencil lightly draw facial features – mouth, eyes, etc. – on your face.

Now you're ready to fill in your features with the desired color. The color may be applied over the clown white with color grease paint or the clown white can be removed in the area to be colored. If you choose to remove the clown white, use oil to remove the white and apply color directly onto the skin in the area to be colored. To apply color, use a colored stick, or for better control, use a swab stick or makeup brush. Powder the colored areas generously to set the grease paint. Wait a moment, then brush off excess powder.

Outline colored features with a black eyebrow pencil.

If you want to add a nose you can use an artificial bulb nose, small pom-pom, button, etc., and apply it with latex glue, spirit gum or with clear fishing line. Make sure the nose doesn't have any sharp edges which can cut your face. You can also draw a small circle or design on the end of your own nose.

Next apply your eyelashes, glitter, etc., with latex glue or spirit gum.

Keep practicing the application of your clown makeup until your face is exactly the way you want it. Thoroughly remove your makeup each time. Apply either oil or cold cream, remove with tissue, and then wash as usual. Put on a moisturizer if needed.

Once your face is on, don't touch it!

Auguste Face Clown

The Auguste is the gaudiest of all clowns. He/she wears flesh-colored makeup as a background for the large exaggerated features of the mouth, nose, and eyes. Some Auguste clowns forego the flesh-colored makeup all together. The costume is usually oversized, with bright flashy colors and huge, floppy shoes.

Now that you're ready to design your face, use the makeup worksheet to draw several sketches of your clown face on paper. Take into consideration the natural lines of your face, especially the laugh lines. Include glasses if you plan to wear them as a clown. Use your favorite sketch as a guide to help you remember your design.

Equipment and Supplies Needed for Auguste Face Makeup

(Check for sensitivity to supplies)

Hair covering to keep hair out of face and eyes*

Smock or cover-up (optional)

Self-standing 8" x 10" mirror (magnified on one side)

Baby or mineral oil or cold cream for makeup removal

Tissue

White powder (MUST be white)

Two shaving or soft brushes (one for white and one for color)

Large powder puffs or powder socks** (at least one for powdering white and at least one for powdering colors)

Flesh-colored grease paint for base

Color grease paint in sticks or jars

Swab sticks or makeup brushes for applying color grease paint

Black eyebrow pencil

Eyelashes, glitter, bulb nose, etc. (optional)

Latex glue or spirit gum for application of eyelashes, glitter nose, etc. (optional)

* This can be made from the top of pantyhose. Cut and remove legs from pantyhose. Use the top portion for a head covering. Gather the excess at the crown and tie or sew together.

** A powder sock can be used instead of a powder puff to apply powder. The powder sock is made by using a white cotton sock and filling it about $\frac{1}{4}$ full with white powder. Tie the open end into a knot. It is slapped or patted lightly on the face. This is especially handy to carry for quick touch-up jobs when performing. Keep the sock in a closed jar with powder so that the powder is on the outside as well as the inside of sock.

Assemble supplies before you apply your makeup.





Applying the Auguste Face Makeup

Before applying your makeup, cover your hair or tie it back away from your face. Make sure your face and hands are clean and dry; men should be smooth shaven. If you have dry skin, oil should be applied first and wiped off.

Apply flesh-colored grease paint with fingers, starting with your forehead and applying to just below the neckline of your costume. To get a smooth look, “pat and slap” your face and neck using your fingers. No natural skin color should show after your wig and costume are on.

Next, powder your face and neck with a powder sock or powder puff that has been generously dusted with white powder. Don't be stingy with the powder. The powder sets the flesh-colored grease paint so it won't fade or run, especially in warm temperatures. Powder the entire grease paint-covered area. Let the powder set for a minute or two before removing excess powder with a brush.

Refer to your sketch, and using an eyebrow pencil lightly draw facial features – mouth, eyes, etc. – on your face.

Now you're ready to fill in your features with the desired color. The color may be applied over the flesh-colored grease paint, or the grease paint can be removed in the area to be colored. If you choose to remove the grease paint, use oil to remove it and apply color directly onto the skin in the area to be colored. To apply color, use a colored stick, or for better control, use a swab stick or makeup brush. Powder the colored areas generously to set the grease paint. Wait a moment, then brush off excess powder.

Outline colored features with a black eyebrow pencil.

If you want to add a nose you can use an artificial bulb nose, small pom-pom, button, etc., and apply it with latex glue, spirit gum or with clear fishing line. Make sure the nose doesn't have any sharp edges which can cut your face. You can also draw a small circle or design on the end of your own nose.

Next apply your eyelashes, glitter, etc., with latex glue or spirit gum. You may wish to do this after you have put on your costume.

Thoroughly remove your makeup each time. Apply either oil or cold cream, remove with tissue, and then wash as usual. Put on a moisturizer if needed.

Keep practicing the application of your clown makeup until your face is exactly the way you want it.

Once your face is on, don't touch it!

Hobo Clown

The Hobo or tramp clown is the one clown who can be untidy. The Hobo's clothes are ragged and patched, gloves usually have the fingertips missing and oversized shoes are often worn. His makeup is flesh-colored to the beard line, then blackened to simulate the beard. Sometimes red is used on the cheeks to give a ruddy look to the complexion and very often a red nose is added. Oftentimes the hobo's mouth and eyes are accented with white.

Now that you're ready to design your face, use the makeup worksheet to draw several sketches of your clown face on paper. Take into consideration the natural lines of your face, especially the laugh lines. Include glasses if you plan to wear them as a clown. Use your favorite sketch as a guide to help you remember your design.

Equipment and Supplies Needed for Hobo Face Makeup

(Check for sensitivity to supplies)

- Hair covering to keep hair out of face and eyes*
- Smock or cover-up (optional)
- Self-standing 8" x 10" mirror (magnified on one side)
- Baby or mineral oil or cold cream for makeup removal
- Tissue
- White powder (MUST be white)
- 2 shaving or soft brushes (one for white and one for color)
- Large powder puffs or powder socks** (at least one for powdering white and at least one for powdering colors)
- Red, black, white and flesh-colored grease paint
- Swab sticks or makeup brushes for applying color
- grease paint
- Black eyebrow pencil
- Eyelashes, glitter, bulb nose, etc. (optional)
- Latex glue or spirit gum for application of eyelashes, glitter nose, etc. (optional)

* This can be made from the top of pantyhose. Cut and remove legs from pantyhose. Use the top portion for a head covering. Gather the excess at the crown and tie or sew together.

** A powder sock can be used instead of a powder puff to apply powder. The powder sock is made by using a white cotton sock and filling it about $\frac{1}{4}$ full with white powder. Tie the open end into a knot. It is slapped or patted lightly on the face. This is especially handy to carry for quick touch-up jobs when performing. Keep the sock in a closed jar with powder so that the powder is on the outside as well as the inside of sock.

Assemble supplies before you apply your makeup.





Applying Hobo Face Makeup

Before applying your makeup, cover your hair or tie it back away from your face. Make sure your face and hands are clean and dry. Men should be smooth shaven unless their beard is to be used as part of their hobo face. If you have dry skin, oil should be applied first and wiped off.

Refer to your sketch, and using an eyebrow pencil lightly draw facial features – mouth, eyes, etc. – on your face.

Apply white grease paint around your mouth with your fingers. To get a smooth look, “pat and slap” your face and neck using your fingers. You may also want to put white around your eyes.

Next, powder your white area with a powder puff or sock that has been generously dusted with white powder. Don’t be stingy with the powder. The powder sets the grease paint so it will not fade or run, especially in warm weather. Let the powder set a minute or two before removing the excess powder with a brush. Apply flesh-colored makeup on down to the beard line.

Next fill in your eyebrows and beard area with a black color stick. A swab stick or makeup brush may be used for better control while coloring. When you have filled your color in smoothly, you are ready to powder. Do not pat! Powder generously to set your makeup. Remove excess powder with a second brush. For better results, repeat powdering process. Brush well.

If you want to add a nose, use an artificial bulb nose, small pom-pom, button, etc., and apply it with latex glue, spirit gum or with clear fishing line. Make sure the nose doesn’t have any sharp edges which can cut your face. You can also draw a small circle or design on the end of your own nose.

Next apply your eyelashes, glitter, etc., with latex glue or spirit gum. You may wish to do this after you have put on your costume.

Thoroughly remove your makeup each time. Use either oil, cold cream or petroleum jelly, remove with tissue, and then wash as usual. Put on a moisturizer if needed.

Keep practicing the application of your clown makeup until your face is exactly the way you want it.

Once your face is on, don’t touch it!

Dressing the Part

Designing a Clown Costume



Designing your clown costume is very important. You are your clown persona once you have the makeup and costume on. Even if you go out to eat after your performance, experienced clowns will stay “in character” if they are still wearing their makeup and clown costume.

Your costume should fit the clown character you are creating and there are several things to consider as you design it. It should be appealing to look at, roomy (large enough to wear over a sweater or coat), comfortable and practical. A two-piece costume can be more convenient, but if you choose a one-piece outfit, consider putting the zipper in front. This makes the costume easier to get into and out of. Your costume can also have a high or ruffle collar with elastic or a drawstring. Whichever style you choose, make sure your costume covers you completely.

Clown costumes are as individual and unique as clown faces and should complement each other. Costumes have different styles, materials and color combinations. The costume you select will depend on whether you’re going to be a Hobo, White Face, or Auguste Clown. If you’re a Hobo, you may want to obtain old clothing, sew on patches and have a burn hole or some paint “spilled” here and there.

Finding Materials

Between the Internet and local stores, it’s fairly easy to find traditional patterns for clown costumes, but buying one really isn’t necessary. A nightgown, pajamas, smock or dress pattern can be used for the top, and the bottoms can be made to match or coordinate. They do not have to come all the way down to the ankles, and can be worn short like knickers with either brightly colored socks or unmatched socks or tights. Remember, no skin can be showing!

Rummage sales, thrift stores or clothes salvaged from friends, neighbors or relatives are often good sources for clown outfits. Other sources for materials are yard sales, sheets, curtains, dresses, pajamas, etc. Choose materials that are durable but not too heavy and not transparent, and remember that your costume must always be clean.

Design Notes

You will need lots of pockets for your props and personal items. Pockets should be large enough for easy access and should coordinate with your costume. If you plan to do balloon artistry, try to have a separate pocket for each type of balloon you’ll be using. A hidden pocket with a zipper, snap, or hook and loop closing is especially nice for carrying personal items such as money or car keys.

Costumes are much more colorful when trimmed with coordinating patches, rickrack, ribbons, lace, ball fringe, ruffles, fancy stitching, pom-poms, buttons, etc. Insert a long shoelace or elastic in ruffled collars.

Clothing Tips

When selecting your costume it is important to find one that looks neat and clean. Appearance is always the audience’s first impression by which to judge a clown, and there are a number of standards.

First, most clowns wear something on their heads to cover their hair. You may choose either a colorful crocheted wig, hair wig or skull cap. If you prefer, you can also change or restyle your own hair. To complete your costume, wear a hat of some kind or decorative head covering.

Consider using hat pins to secure the wig or hat to your head. You have to be careful, but this can keep your wig from flying off in the middle of an act or during a parade.

Wear gloves at all times. White gloves are most attractive, but they may be dyed to match your costume. They should also be clean, so it's wise to carry an extra pair. If you are a Hobo or work with balloons, you will have to cut the fingertips out of your gloves in order to work.

Shoes should be comfortable. Clowns walk a lot! Remember that shoes that are too large or too small can cause discomfort. Shoes can be old ones, but again, make sure they are comfortable. Shoes can be dyed or painted, or patches may be glued on them. Oftentimes, clowns wear their regular shoes inside a much larger pair, although this can be very painful. Please don't forget your socks.

Your name tag is part of your costume. It identifies you. Your name should be short and easy for kids to read and say. If you wear glasses, decorate them and/or design your face to be worn with your glasses. Finally, if you must wear a ring, watch or other personal item, don't let it show. The absolute best policy is to leave valuable items at home.



How to Make a Crocheted Loop Wig

Materials

1. 4 oz. skein (Knitting Worsted is recommended or use 1 1/2-3 oz. skein rug yarn.) Sayelle yarn has a tendency to stretch. More than one color can be used for a more attractive wig by using two skeins and alternating colors.
2. Size F crochet hook
3. Cardboard of desired width for loops (recommended double crochet as wig will be cooler and more comfortable)

Directions

- Chain 5. Join with a slip stitch to form a ring.
- Chain 3. (Yarn over hook, insert hook in ring. Yarn around cardboard (of desired width) clockwise. Pick up with hook, work off 2 stitches, work off 2 more stitches (Double Loop Crochet made)
- Repeat 11 times. Join and chain 3-12 loops made.
- Row 1. Work 2 DLC in each st around. Join.
- Row 2. Ch. 3. Work 1 DLC in 2 sts, 2 DLC in next st. Continue around. Join and chain 3.
- Row 3. Work 1 DLC in 2 sts, 2 DLC in next st. Repeat around, join and ch. 3.
- Row 4. Work 1 DLC in 3 sts, 2 DLC in next st. Repeat around, join and ch. 3.
- Row 5. Work 1 DLC in 4 sts, 2 DLC in next st. Repeat around, join and ch. 3.
- You should have 72 sts. Now you put 1 DLC in each st around, join and ch. 3. Repeat this until the wig covers your ears. You will have from 13-15 rows, depending on the yarn you use.



Communicating as a Clown

Communicating as a clown can be a very rewarding experience, but there are special considerations a clown must consider. In this section, think about how “clowning” can mean “presenting a message while dressed as a clown.” Clowns can perform skits, give demonstrations, supervise exhibits, appear on TV and video, and use just about any other communication method they choose. There are some special challenges clowns face, though, and they will be discussed here.

The Audience

A clown’s performance will be most effective when aimed at a particular audience, so try to find out some things about your audience before you begin planning your act. In addition to basic information such as audience size, age, group, or educational background, a clown must consider these other questions as well:

How does the audience feel about clowns? Young children who have never seen clowns may be frightened by their exaggerated features. Many adults are uneasy around clowns, perhaps because of scary childhood experiences or because the clown’s “humanity” is hidden behind makeup.

How far away from the audience will you be? As a rule of thumb, the farther away the audience, the more exaggerated features and gestures you should use. Wildly swinging arms and whoops of noise may be very funny ways to express mock fear from a distance, but up close they may be more distressing than funny.

Does your audience have any special characteristics? Clowns often perform for special audiences – children in hospitals, elderly nursing home patients, etc. Ask yourself how your clowning act can be tailored to fit the audience’s special needs. Sick children might appreciate a quieter humor than other kids of the same age at a birthday party. People with sensory disabilities such as blindness or deafness will get more from your performance if you bear their special needs in mind.

Is clowning a good way of delivering my message? It’s true that clowning can be a great way to present lots of messages, but don’t get carried away in your enthusiasm. Clowning is not always an appropriate communication tool. Whether or not you should use clowning will depend a lot on the basic purpose of your message. Here are some basic do’s and don’ts:

DO use clowning if:

- **Your message is humorous.** A funny skit or puppet show that is meant to entertain can nearly always use a clown.
- **Your message is serious but can be illustrated in a humorous or exaggerated way.** Hunter safety, for instance, is a very serious topic, but your message may sink in just as well by showing a clown experiencing a series of accidents because of carelessness.
- **You are tired of doing the same old thing.** Do you think clowning would add some life to your message? If you think clowning will fit in, try it.

DO NOT use clowning if:

- **You don't intend to rework your message to make it a clowning message.** For instance, it's not enough to deliver the same old demonstration you've already done before, dressed up as a clown.
- **You want to make a serious impression.** Think of how you want the audience to view you. It's hard to convince a group that you are a serious sophisticated problem-solver if you approach them as a clown.
- **You want to establish a person-to-person contact.** Remember, when you are dressed as a clown, you are no longer you – you are a clown. Your features are hidden or distorted by makeup, people expect you to act like a clown, and you will attract a lot of attention. If you want your audience to get a feel for you as a person and not your clown character, don't meet them as a clown.
- **Your intentions could be mistaken.** Because people expect clowns to be funny, they often take everything clowns say in a funny way, even when they're trying to be serious. Make sure your message is appropriate for being delivered as a clown and that it won't be misinterpreted.



One way to gauge your effectiveness and decide whether your act is ready is to use a video camera. Video can help you perfect your act by helping you see whether a joke works; it's also a way to decide if you need to be more animated, to determine whether your voice is loud enough, and to check your costume. You could also consider making recordings of your performance and giving them to shut-ins or others who wouldn't be able to see your performance live.

The Message

Once you've decided that working as a clown will please your audience and suit your purpose, the next step is to make your message a "clown's message." You may use clowning with a variety of communication methods, including demonstrations, skits, and exhibits, but here are some rules to follow for any message you choose.

Exaggerate. It's not enough to give the same old speech or demonstration while dressed as a clown. Make your words and gestures fit your character. If you're showing how to make a salad, for instance, use oversized utensils, search the area for rabbits, or use other gags to make the demonstration part of a clown act.



Decrease the words, increase the action. Try to illustrate ideas by your clowning actions instead of relying on words. Act out ideas instead of talking about them.

Keep it simple! Most people enjoy watching clowns. If your message is too detailed or complicated, they may miss a lot of what you say because they may be concentrating on your funny shoes instead of your words. Keep your message simple.

Performance Considerations

Much of the “language of clowning” comes from the circus, where there are many types of clown acts. Clowns may be aerialists, bare-back riders, wire artists or any other part of the circus family, except that they are funny. Clown acts are classified in one of two ways:

- A **routine** is two or three clowns doing one stunt, dealing with one subject.
- A **production** is a larger group of clowns doing a 5-10 minute performance on a major subject, with a number of small gags by members of the group building up to a surprise ending.

“Charivari,” meaning uproar, is usually the first act of the circus. It is the entrance of “a thousand clowns” with noise, tumbling, and general clowning, props, and music.

“Fill-ins” are another general entrance of the clowns. Between acts, they enter all three rings and create commotion and diversion during changes of scenes. Apprentice clowns and stage hands – in fact, all hands – take part in a fill-in.

“Walk-a-rounds” are individual clown acts going on at the same time as the clowns circle the ring. A clown may do his act, walk a little way, and do it again for the audience in another part of the big top.

“Entrees” are generally the rough and tumble acts of the Auguste clowns. Machines explode, balloons burst, and color and noise run riot in these familiar but structured clown acts that are among the most important kinds of clowning.

The “carpet clown” is a specialist and a loner. He has many funny acts or bits he takes out into the audience. You have to be pretty sure of your act and also be used to working close up to the audience in a very special way to be a carpet clown. Emmett Kelly often worked with small sections of the audience or individuals in an up-close and personal way.

Working with Balloons

Balloons are one of the most common tools a clown uses to entertain, but while they are fun balloons can also be hazardous to children. If you are clowning at a nursing home, hospital, etc. check to make sure it's okay to bring and give out balloons. Don't let younger children put balloons near their mouths, as the plastic can be inhaled or ingested if the balloon pops.

If you plan to be making a lot of balloons, blow them up before the event and bring them with you in an upright stand or container. This will help you avoid being tied up with inflating and knotting balloons while a lot of children wait impatiently. Foldable hampers are readily available and can make great balloon holders.

Clown Etiquette

Being a clown is more than makeup and costume. Professional clowns have a strict code of ethics, which relate well to the Six Pillars of Character. The following are suggestions that will make you a better clown and help you maintain a professional image:

Trustworthiness

Always be on time to any activity for which you're clowning.

Follow through with all commitments you have made.

Only promise what you can deliver. Do not make commitments you cannot keep.

Respect

Be neat, clean and well-groomed.

Don't use humor in a way that makes other people feel bad about themselves.

Honor the art of clowning by following the code of ethics, being prepared, and having fun.

Responsibility

Before going on, allow ample time to apply your makeup and to start thinking about your clown character. Mentally become the character you represent as a clown.

Practice – perfect your skits, routines, pantomime, and use of props.

Make sure your costume is neat, clean, and appealing to the eye.

Wear white gloves and carry an extra clean pair to change when necessary.

Caring

Make others feel good!

Demonstrate good sportsmanship.

Be understanding and “back off” when someone doesn't wish to be approached by a clown.

Be at children's eye level when talking to them.

Take care of yourself—be in good physical and mental condition.

To avoid getting overheated in a parade, slow down and sit on the curb if necessary, and have someone meet you at the end of the parade with transportation and a refreshing drink.

Citizenship

Be sure to stay in clown character while clowning in public.

Clowns never use bad language or advertise products like cigarettes and alcohol.

For safety reasons, never throw candy or other items into a crowd. Pass candy or other items directly to people on a one-on-one basis.

Remember that when you perform as a clown, you're a representative of all clowns throughout history.

Fairness

Always be considerate of others and in full control of yourself.

Give others the benefit of the doubt if they don't respond as you would wish them to.

Help other clowns be their best, and offer help if it's needed.



Clowning and the Media

Your State 4-H Office can provide you with a list of stations and newspapers in your area, along with the appropriate contacts and other helpful tips. In addition to these basic rules above, be sure to follow the tips below for working as a clown through the various types of media.

Newspapers: Contact the local paper if you will be performing in public. They may be interested in a story and pictures. Most papers have an Internet website that makes it easy to alert them to your event. You can also call them, using the number from the web site or from your local phone book.

TV: If your clown act will be performed in public, contact your local station's News Assignment Editor. Again, all television stations have a website with contact information that will let you easily alert them to your event.

Radio: Much of a clown's effectiveness is visual, but radio can be a good way to put the word out about your event. Talk to your local radio station program manager about possibilities for interview shows, public service announcements, etc.

Newsletters: Use newsletters to keep in touch with other clowning groups and to share ideas and experiences. Let other 4-H groups know how your clown group can help with their activities by contacting them through newsletters.

Live Performances: Demonstrations, skits, exhibits, public speaking, and puppet shows are live performances that can usually substitute clowns wherever actors and speakers are used. Just be sure you alter your message to accommodate clowning.



Creating your Act

4-H clowns have many kinds of opportunities for live performances. From promoting 4-H at community programs to entertaining between acts at “Share the Fun Night,” skits can be a valuable communication tool for a clown group’s live performances. There aren’t many rules to producing a skit, and any that exist are often broken with no harm done. The following will help you decide when to use a skit and will teach you the basic skills needed to produce a good skit.

Entertainment – This is probably the place you’ll use skits most. They’re fun for the clowns and audience and can liven up an otherwise dull meeting or gathering.

Education – Skits can be used to convey important messages in a humorous way. Usually a skit emphasizes the main points of an educational message – the details might be supplied in a handout that can be given to the audience after the show.

Announcements – Sometimes skits are used to act out “previews of coming attractions” to help the audience remember the event and when it will be held.

What You’ll Need

If you want to use a skit, there are only a few requirements to be met.

Stationary audience – A skit usually tells a story from beginning to end, so your audience will need to see the whole thing to get the message. For this reason, skits don’t work very well in shopping malls, fairs, or other places where people wander about. If you are performing in locations like these, one way to get around the problem is to post a schedule of your performance times.

A place to perform – A stage isn’t necessary, but you will need room to move around. Avoid crowded rooms or places where commotion in the surroundings will distract from your performance.

Choosing Material

Before you can get down to the nitty-gritty of choosing a skit, you will need to consider the following questions:

Why a skit? Is it just for fun? Will you try to get a specific message across to a certain audience? Your purpose will influence your choice of material.

How much time is there? How much time will your or the group have to rehearse? How long should the finished production be?

What about the audience? How old are they? How many people should you expect? What are they interested in? Are there any topics you really need to avoid?

Once these questions are answered, you’ll be ready to find something to perform. There are three basic ways to come up with material for a skit:

Choose a skit from a book. Most libraries have several books of skits for all ages and occasions. You can keep the things you like and make changes you think would make the skit better fit your needs and talents. This may be a lot easier than writing a skit from scratch.

Write an original skit. This can be a team effort or an individual one. It may take much more time than you realized, but the result will be original and uniquely your own. Don’t be afraid to look to the work of other performers whom you admire for inspiration. (See the next page for more information about writing a skit.)



What Makes a Good Skit?

It's hard to pinpoint just what makes a good skit, but as you're considering material, put yourself in the place of the audience and ask:

- *Does this skit hold people's attention?* Is the story well-told with a definite beginning and ending? Is it funny?
- *Is the skit appropriate for the clowns and the audience?* If the cast is inexperienced, it's best to stick to a short, simple story. If you're performing for young children, make sure they'll be able to understand what's going on. Be sure to use words and language that everybody can understand.
- Think outside the box! For example, you may wish to make your own recording of the dialogue or narration, complete with music or sound effects, and act along to it. This isn't easy, but it can be fun for the cast and audience.



These hints may help you come up with some material, but don't take them too seriously. Skits are a very flexible form of communication, and just about anything goes. Try your ideas, and if they challenge the actors and interest the audience, you've got it made.

Casting

Once you've got the skit that fits your clown group, purpose, and audience, start the production. If your skit involves other people, the next step is to decide who plays what character. What are the interests of your group members? What roles does the skit need? Does anyone have a special talent or skill that would be great in a certain role? Again, this is a flexible situation. You may leave it up to the group to decide who would be best in what role.

Production

When you've chosen the cast, it's time to rehearse. How much rehearsal time you put in will depend on the skit and the cast, but even a simple informal production should be rehearsed until the actors are quite familiar with their roles and able to perform them well. A general schedule of rehearsal might go something like this:

Read through the skit. Let the actors get the feel of the characters and their lines. If some lines or sequences seem unnatural or awkward to your group, this is the time to change them.

Walk through the skit, figuring out where to position the characters for the best effect. Make notes on the scripts to remind actors where they should be, what gestures they should use, etc. This will save time later because the actors can study the script to help them learn their motions. Make sure nothing comes between a speaking character and the audience.

Rehearsal. Discard the script and act the skit out as you have walked it through. Sometimes when the whole script is rehearsed, lines or actions that were all right during the walk-through will seem artificial or out of place. If this happens, rework the faulty area.

Dress Rehearsal. Run through the whole skit, using props and costumes (if there are any). This rehearsal gives the actors a feel for the whole skit and shouldn't be interrupted. If an actor flubs a line, the rest of the cast should carry on as they would during a performance.

You may go through each of these steps several times, or discard the steps you don't need. However you rehearse, make sure that each session is used to **build** the skit. Work at it, adding corrections and changes and polishing performances. Rehearsals that are merely repetition of lines or scenes soon become boring to the actors, and the life of the skit is lost.

Writing a Skit

Where do you start when you're looking for script ideas? You can write a **situation-based** script, where you take a normal situation and build it into a skit. Or you might write a **gag-based** script: think of a gag first and then figure out a situation to lead into the gag. Check out old silent movie shorts featuring such greats as Charlie Chaplin. You should be able to find this kind of footage with an Internet search or by checking out movies from the local library.

As you put together your script, begin the scene with the least important ideas. As you get further into the skit, ideas get more important. Finally, there's the gag or punch line! While you are reviewing examples of situation-based and gag-based skits, watch how every action and line moves you along to the punch. Think of how you could use your own ideas. Keep your own list of skit ideas to work from, and whenever you get an idea for a funny situation, write it down. Then you'll always have a pocketful of ideas for skits!

To Start With a Situation

Let's take a situation – a taxi ride – and build it into a skit. What could be funny about three or four clowns taking a taxi? Brainstorm. Write down everything that comes to mind. Later you can take out what you don't like and what you think doesn't work.

Flagging Down a Taxi

The first thing a person might do is to flag down the taxi. The driver stops, gets out and opens the door. The riders enter. Then the driver wants to know where to? They point the way. But wait a minute...the riders are all pointing in opposite directions. They try again, pointing in opposite directions again.

The driver shrugs his shoulders and pantomimes starting up and taking off. He goes around sharp curves; everyone leans. Another sharp curve dumps out a clown, who spills the contents of his suitcase. But the driver doesn't notice. The other clowns stop him and make him back up the taxi. They help the unfortunate clown pick up the contents (which can be gag items) and put them back into the suitcase.

Back into the taxi. This time, the driver speeds around a corner and hits a very bumpy road. The clowns bounce up and down and all over.

Now they want out. The driver goes through the motions of stopping a car. The passengers get out and pay the driver. "Hey, where's my tip?" yells the driver. "Eh," comes the reply, "My tip to you is take some more driving lessons!" They exit, still bouncing up and down as they walk. Another ending might be with the driver chasing the passengers off the stage.

In practicing the correct pantomime moves for this, get into a parked car (with a parent supervising) and go through each of the moves needed for the skit. Learn where the shift, keys, steering wheel, doors and so on are located. What positions are your hands in when you steer? Don't break the circle of the steering wheel when you transfer this move to the skit. How do you get the vehicle? You have to bend down or you would hit your head.

When you speak, speak toward the audience or you won't be heard. Usually, you need to turn toward the audience. The only time your back should be to the audience is when it's effective as part of the skit.



At one practice session, a clowning group took four chairs and set them up to represent taxi seats. They found they had to set the chairs up on a diagonal so that all the clowns could be seen clearly by the audience. When you plan a skit, remember where your audience will be!

Great job! Now try other situations like crossing a busy street, eating in a restaurant, or walking a dog. **List ten of your own situation ideas:**



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

To Start With a Gag

A gag is any funny stunt worked by one or two clowns with a minimum of props. Here is an example of starting with a gag and then setting up a situation.

Sucker on the Line

Two clowns come out. The first clown phones the other and asks, "Have you been doing any fishing?"



The second clown says: "Have I been doing what?"

First clown: "Have you been doing any fishing?"

Second clown: "I can't understand you."

First clown: "We must have a bad connection. I'll check my line." (He goes into audience and brings a person back and has him or her hold arms out like a telephone pole.)

First clown calls again: "Have you been doing any fishing?"

Second clown: "I still can't understand you. Let me check my line." (Goes out into the audience and brings back a person and has him or her hold his/her arms out like a telephone pole. Can be repeated as often as desired. Usually about 4 or 5 people standing like telephone poles.)

Then the first clown calls the second clown and asks: "How is the connection now?"

Second clown: "Fine, I can hear you very well."

First clown: "Have you been doing any fishing?"

Second clown: "Don't need to do any fishing. We already have plenty of suckers on the line."

(Suggested props—use two tin cans as receivers with a long string in-between.)

Great! Now that you've read about one idea that leads to a "Sucker on the Line," **list five of your own ideas for a gag:**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Developing a Routine



Remember, a routine is two or three clowns doing one stunt dealing with one subject. To develop a routine, start by putting your skit into a pyramid form. Take your audience from the first idea (flagging down a taxi, entering a restaurant) through the situation to the punch line (here's a tip...) or the gag (a sucker on the line). Lead them straight to the gag with funny developments (like falling out of the taxi, or missing the chair the waiter pulls out). Keep the skit short and simple. And always keep 'em laughing.

“Slop Joke”

Sooner or later, the subject of “slop jokes” comes up, and the decision has to be made whether or not to use them. These are jokes that involve the use of water, pies, etc. Give this

subject careful consideration. Is it really appropriate? What kind of a mess are you creating for the janitor? Remember, you may want to use the building again. If you're outdoors, will your partner catch cold? Though they appear spontaneous, all such jokes are carefully pre-planned. The “victims” are other clowns or “plants” in the audience who know ahead of time that they're going to receive a pie, for example. Slop jokes come at the very end of the show, because the performer then gets cleaned up. Pies are **not** real. They are made from **shaving cream** (not menthol, it hurts) so that no one's costume or clothing will be ruined. If the person is wearing clown makeup it will be messed up, so that's why slop jokes are done last.

Falling

Many comedic performers have seriously injured their backs while falling during a slapstick routine. One famous example is Jerry Lewis, who suffered forty years of chronic back pain from injuries he incurred in his many comic falls. If you insist on using much falling in your act, learn to do it well and safely. One great way is to take a beginner's course in judo or some other martial art. Check with your local Parks & Recreation service for what may be available in your area.

For a simple back fall, start in a standing position. Then bend your knees and squat on your heels, tuck your chin on your chest, gently roll back onto your seat, then onto your back. As you roll onto your back, slap with both arms, using the whole arm, resisting the temptation to “catch” yourself with your wrists or elbows. Your head should not touch the floor. Let your feet rise and gently lower to the floor, relaxed, with one knee up and the other on its side flush to the floor. Practice on a mat or thick carpeting, slowly at first.

There are side falls and forward falls that can be learned also. Above all, be safe!

Famous Clown Acts

Here are some of the funniest and most famous clown acts that have appeared in the three rings of the circus:

Delivery Boy

During intervals between acts of a show, the clown goes through the audience calling for a Mrs. Throckmorton to deliver a small plant. He continues this throughout the performance, carrying a larger plant at each interval. Finally at the end of the show, the poor clown greets the departing audience with the largest plant. He staggers under its weight, still paging Mrs. Throckmorton.

For this act, the clown needs the following props: four flower pots, graduated from small to large and all the same shape; four crepe paper plants made from cut leaves and wired to the bottom of the pots. The small plant should not exceed six inches. The largest should be as big as the clown can handle.

Dinner for Two

A tramp clown with a small dog pulls from his oversized coat a candle, a frying pan, a can of dog food, a tablecloth, two bowls, a fork and a can opener. He opens the can, pours the contents into the frying pan and heats it over the candle. He sets the table, including a decoration from his hat or buttonhole for a centerpiece. He neatly serves himself and his canine friend, and then they sit and solemnly eat their supper.

Fire Department

One clown wearing a fireman's hat runs into the ring screaming that his house is on fire. As he calls for help, the whole company of clowns comes running out, each one carrying a glass of water.

Thousand Clowns

A clown drives a very small Volkswagen-type car to a place in the ring, where under the sawdust is concealed a trap door. He parks the car, opens both doors and the trunk, and then out jump, tumble or fall a "thousand clowns."

You might make a cardboard silhouette of a small car and position it in front of a slit in the curtain. Make sure the curtain is pinned together below the top of the car. Then from backstage, you can bring out your own "thousand clowns!"



Props



Props are a very important part of a clowning. They can accent, be part of, or add a certain flavor to your costume, as well as playing an important role in skits. Just about anything can be used as a prop – let your imagination be your guide!

When choosing a prop, consider the kind of activity you will be using it in. For skits and indoor activities, the props can be larger, but a prop can become very heavy in a long parade. For parades and outdoor activities that require a lot of walking or moving about, the props should be smaller and lightweight.

There are all kinds of things you can use for props. Small props may be carried in your pockets. Larger ones can be put in a bag or basket. If you are making props, be sure that they are safe and attractive. Also, keep in mind that props must be transported and must fit into a car or other transportation, so don't make large props that can't be transported easily.

The following are some simple examples of what might be used for props:

- Sponge rubber cake with shaving cream frosting
- Noise makers
- Big bat and little ball or little bat and big ball (plastic)
- Large toothbrush or comb
- Camera squirt gun
- Fly swatter (made with stick and plastic can holder)
- Walking or pull toys
- Siren or gong
- Swat stick (lightweight wood—two sticks, 30 in. long, 3 in. wide, 1/4 in. thick, screwed together at one end to form a handle. Approximately midpoint, fasten a 1/4 in. wedge to one slat to spread ends. The ends clap together when an object is struck.
- Big old shoes (stuff them to fit around your own shoes)

Let your imagination go in making props to fit your needs. Garage sales and second-hand stores are great places to find props to use in skits and other clowning activities.



Pantomime



Clowns may talk when they work in a small arena or on a stage, but in the large three ring circus where dialogue would be very difficult to hear they must become masters of the art of *pantomime*, or “silent acting,” performing a skit without using props or words. Pantomime is an important and useful skill that takes a great deal of practice. Some clowns rely on the pantomime skit entirely, while others may use that type of act only in situations where it would be very difficult to hear them speak.

Pantomime is an art and a craft. It’s a way of expressing oneself with the use of only the body. The whole body is used to create an illusion and to make a statement for the audience to interpret. If you hold an imaginary glass in your hand, it must become visible to the audience and to you. The imaginary is made visible and tangible. You must make your mind aware of the glass to the point that you can actually “feel” it in your hand with your mind.

Claude Kipnis, in his book on pantomime, says that pantomime is “the art of creating the illusion of reality”. The good pantomime must make an outer world seem to exist, and at the same time express an inner world of imagination. Kipnis says that the art of pantomime begins where and when these two worlds meet.

The author explains for instance: “I imagine an apple. For me, it is real, but at the moment, only for me. I look at this apple, a look that establishes my desire and creates the image of something out there beyond me. You who watch cannot see yet, but it begins to exist. There is now a fixed point in space, a vanishing point that should lead somewhere from something. In time, I will grab the apple, then bite into it. Now you will see the apple, my apple, completely”. Now pantomime is present. The two worlds of inner and outer space have met.

A common error is made when the motions are too fast for the audience to really see that you’re doing something you want them to take notice of. The audience also needs time to translate your movement into meaning, not just to see what’s going on. If the movements are too rapid, the observer’s mind simply doesn’t have time to absorb what’s happening and make sense out of it. Practicing in front of a mirror is one way to tell if the movements really look like they feel.

Marcel Marceau was among the most popular pantomime artists in the world, and widely acknowledged to be without peer. In 1947, Marceau created “Bip” the clown, who in his striped pullover and battered, beflowered silk opera hat — signifying the fragility of life — became his alter ego. Bip’s misadventures with everything from butterflies to lions, on ships and trains, in dance-halls or restaurants, were limitless. His silent exercises and satires on everything from sculptors to matadors were described as works of genius. One critic remarked, “He accomplishes in less than two minutes what most novelists cannot do in volumes.”

There are many other talents that are useful in the art of clowning. Clowns and mimes both study gymnastics in order to keep their bodies limber so they’re capable of performing many different moves and antics. Modern day clowns have started making use of many of the skills taught in schools for pantomimists. Many such schools now offer special classes and seminars for clowns. They include classes in makeup, skits, ballet, gymnastics, and even martial arts!



Practicing for Pantomime

Talking isn't allowed in true pantomime. For example, to pantomime playing golf, you could pretend you are taking a golf club out of the bag, putting a tee into the ground, placing a ball on the tee, swinging the golf club, and watching the ball fly through the air. All of this would be done without ever really touching a golf club, tee, or ball!

To make these actions believable for the audience, the pantomimist must use facial expressions. Without animated facial expressions, the movements become boring and ineffective. The following are five basic facial expressions and instructions for practicing them. These exercises will help to increase your flexibility and control of your facial muscles. Each expression uses a particular group or combination of facial muscles, and all involve exaggerations or approximations of the true expressions. For the best results, practice in front of a mirror.

Happy: Every muscle of your face should be uplifted in an expression of joy. Raise the eyebrows and cheek muscles. Your eyes will squint and your mouth should form a large, open smile.

Sad: Pull the muscles of the face downward. Form your mouth into a frown. Pull up the inner corners of your eyebrows.

Surprised: Draw up the muscles of your face and raise your eyebrows. Form your mouth into an exaggerated "ooh".

Angry: Draw or bunch up your facial muscles toward your nose. Wrinkle your nose, squint your eyes, and furrow your eyebrows. Your mouth should form somewhat of a frown, almost a pucker. This one is the most difficult of the facial expressions.

Fearful: For this one, combine the upper half of the "sad" face with the lower half of the "happy" face. Open your eyes as wide as possible.

Practice each of the expressions slowly. Begin with happy and overlap into the next one. Then repeat in reverse order starting with fearful. When this becomes easy, go through each expression rapidly, returning to the normal facial expression between each.



Try practicing these clown pantomimes, to enrich and sharpen your act:

- **Running:** Run in place, bringing your knees up to your chest and moving your arms like pistons. Pause to show you are out of breath.
- **Odors:** Screw up your face and hold your nose.
- **Food:** Rub your stomach.
- **Pleasure:** Click your heels together while jumping in the air. Clap your hands.
- **Pride:** Puff out your chest. Put your thumbs in your imaginary suspenders, palms out and spreading your hands.
- **Fear:** Shake and tremble. Hide behind another person or object. Cover your head with your arm.



Try pantomiming these actions!

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Play hop scotch | Pet a dog | Direct traffic |
| Fly a kite | Drive a car | Catch a butterfly |
| Play jacks or marbles | Sew on a button | Paint a sign |
| Hear a strange sound | Hammer a nail | Jog a mile |
| Hang a picture | Mop the floor | Conduct a band |
| Tie your shoe | Comb your hair | Take a picture |
| Blow up a balloon | Walk a tightrope | Walk upstairs |
| Pick an apple | Open an umbrella | Play golf |
| Brush your teeth | Open a present | Place a phone call |
| Do your exercises | Read a newspaper | Buy a bag of popcorn |
| Walk like an old person | Eat an ice cream cone | |

An excellent example of the coming together of clowning and pantomime can be seen by doing an Internet video search for "Shields and Yarnell." Robert Shields was discovered by Marcel Marceau at age 18, while working as a street mime. He began studying under Marceau at his school of mime, and later left to perfect his own style at Union Square in San Francisco, where he became one of the city's top tourist attractions. There he met Lorene Yarnell, an actress and tap dancer, who became his partner and later his wife (they married in full mime regalia, in front of thousands of fans in Union Square!). Their dance and mime performances were seen by millions in *The Shields and Yarnell Show*, a television show on CBS that ran from 1977-1978, and they appeared in around 400 other national television shows in the U.S. Shields is credited with inventing "the robot," influencing an entire generation of hip hop artists, break dancers, and other performers.



Puppetry

Puppetry is another tool that can be used by clowns and is actually one of the oldest forms of entertainment in recorded history. The most commonly used puppets are hand puppets, which can be large or small. Some clowns use a ventriloquist figure instead (ventriloquists do not use the term “dummy”). Below is a summary of puppetry as it relates to clowning. For more information on puppetry techniques, check out the 4-H Theatre Arts puppetry curriculum, titled “Become a Puppeteer!”

When to Use Puppets

A clown may use puppets to convey serious messages or to entertain. If you’re thinking about using puppets to convey a message, ask yourself the questions below.

- **Am I trying to reach a small audience?** Unless it’s shown on television, puppetry is not usually a good way to reach large, diverse audiences. Puppet shows are usually most effective with an audience of 30 or fewer people.
- **Can my message be presented in the form of a conversation between characters?**
- **Are my audience members fairly alike** in age, interests, abilities, etc.?
- **Do I have some dramatic ability** to recite lines with expression, for instance? Do the people I’ll be working with have this talent?

If your answer to any of these questions for your performance is “No,” it’s probably better to save this idea for a future performance, and consider using another communication method instead.

Advantages to Using a Puppet

A puppet show is flexible. If done well, it can be an excellent way to present educational materials to a class or promotional material to mall shoppers (just set up some chairs around your stage). In addition to the appeal of a theatrical production, puppets offer these advantages:

- **Your cast is unlimited.** A puppet show can be put on by one person or 20. Regardless of the gender, age, or appearance of the puppeteers, the puppets can represent anything or anyone you want them to.
- **Puppets are inexpensive.** Hand puppets can be made from almost any scrap material, and puppets are much easier to outfit than human actors. Make your puppet look very different from you, to further the illusion that there are two people on the stage.

Hand puppets are available at most toy stores, but it’s usually more fun to make your own. Use socks, foam balls, papier-mâché and draperies or other materials to make the characters for your play.



How to Write Puppet Scripts

Impromptu acting can be fun, and it is good practice for puppeteers. To help guarantee a professional show, however, write a script. Depending how complicated your message is and how capable your puppeteers are, you can ei-

ther write lines to be memorized or read, or just provide general instructions to be followed. Here are some tips on scripts:

- **Keep it short.** Ten minutes is usually long enough.
- **Keep your audience in mind.** If you're performing for very young children, keep the lines short and simple and include lots of action. Older youth and adults like puppets, too, but may prefer more sophisticated humor with more witty lines and less slapstick comedy.
- **Combine dialogue and narration.** Use narration to set the scenes and present background material.



How to Use Hand Puppets

Make sure the puppet fits firmly on your hand, and practice working the puppet until you have good control. Then follow these techniques to polish your puppet's acting ability. Because puppets usually can't change their facial expressions, the puppeteer must use the puppet's movements to show feelings.

- **Sadness:** Use slow movements. If the puppet's face has a happy expression, cover its face with its hands or turn its back to the audience and make its shoulders drop.
- **Happiness:** Use quick, bouncy movements. Clap hands, dance, wiggle.
- **Anger:** Shake fist, clap hands to head in exasperation, pace back and forth shaking the head firmly.
- **Sleep or death:** Turn puppet's face away from audience.

When opening your puppet's mouth to speak, keep your fingers still and lower your thumb. Work your puppet in the mirror, talking aloud at the same time, and you'll see why: when you speak, you lower your chin instead of lifting your head. Using your thumb to work your puppet's mouth keeps your puppet's head still.

Keep your eyes on the puppet and exaggerate its actions. Exaggerated movements are often used in puppetry to show emotions.

Voicing

With lots of practice, anyone can learn to "throw their voice". There are many good books on making your own puppets in the local library. Pay special attention to the rules of voicing:

- **Speak slowly and clearly.** To enjoy the show, your audience must be able to hear and understand you.
- **Give each character a voice of its own.** It's often funny to give puppets surprise voices—a deep tough voice for a tiny mouse, for instance.
- **Only the character who is speaking should move.** Otherwise, it's hard for the audience to keep the characters straight. When puppets aren't "speaking", their attention should usually be directed to the character who is.

Ventriloquism

Ventriloquism is the art of talking without moving the lips and manipulating your voice so that it appears to be coming from elsewhere. If magic is an illusion to the eye, ventriloquism is an illusion to the ear, and both rely on misdirection. As with puppetry, good material and a connection with your audience are more important than your skill as a ventriloquist. However, as a clown it's an excellent tool to make your hand puppet a more effective part of your act.

How it Works

The words we speak are made up of sounds. Some sounds require you to move your lips, while others don't. Ventriloquism involves substituting those sounds that don't require lip movement for those that do. If you do it well, by rolling over them quickly while misdirecting the audience's attention to your puppet, you can give the appearance that the puppet is talking and not you. Ventriloquism requires a lot of practice, but you can practice almost anywhere because the most important pieces of equipment needed are your voice and your face!

Technique

Mouth Position

First try the mouth position in front of the mirror. Starting with your mouth closed, bring your teeth together but just barely touch them. Part your lips slightly and relax your jaw. Your tongue should be able to move around freely.

Now, without moving your lips, say the vowels "A, E, I, O, U." Congratulations, you just talked without moving your lips! Next, practice saying the alphabet. Keep practicing in front of a mirror until you can say most of the letters without moving your lips. Then you will be ready to go on to the next part.

Learning the More Difficult Sounds

Now you will need to master the more difficult sounds one at a time. These are the sounds of B, F, M, P, Q, V, and W. In words with these letters, you will be learning to substitute a different sound for the sound you would normally use.

- For the "B" sound, you'll need to use a "D" instead. Here is a practice sentence: The boy bought a basketball. As a ventriloquist, you will be saying "The doy dough a dasketdall". When you're practicing this, you need to concentrate on the sound of the letter B while actually saying D. Try putting your tongue in different places in your mouth as you search for what works for you. Then practice until the sound comes out right without moving your lips. Be sure to watch yourself in the mirror.
- For the "F" sound, use "Thh" instead. Practice saying this sentence: If good fortune follows a fellow he's fine. As a ventriloquist you'll be saying, "Ith good thortune thollows a thellow he's thine".
- For an "M" sound, substitute an "N" sound. Don't forget to concentrate on M while saying N. Practice sentence: Many men make money, or as you will say it, "Nany nen nake noney".
- For "P" sounds, use "T." Please play the piccolo is said as, "Tlease tlay the ticcolo".
- For "Q" words that have a "W" sound to them, like 'quality,' use a "Koo" sound instead. Thus Quality becomes "Koo-all-ity."

One of most successful modern-day ventriloquists is Terry Fator, who combines the art of ventriloquism with amazing celebrity impressions. After a concert in 2008, Terry was asked what advice he had for young ventriloquists. “Practice, practice, practice!” he replied. “When I was a kid I would watch Sesame Street and then spend hours in front of the mirror, trying to recreate what I had just seen.”

Terry started developing his talent when he was 10, after finding a book on how to throw your voice. His regular practice and hard work paid off in 2007 when he won NBC television’s “America’s Got Talent” competition. He went on to sign a 100 million dollar multi-year deal, performing his act in Las Vegas, and likes to joke that it took him 32 years to become an “overnight sensation.” He takes pride in inspiring young ventriloquists, and clearly knows the value of his own advice.



- For “V” sounds, use “Thee.” To say “Values in veal and venison” as a ventriloquist, you’ll say, “Theealues in theeal and theenison.”
- Finally, for “W” sounds, use o and i together, saying them as fast as you can. Practice sentence: When we work we will win. You say, “Oihen oie oiork oie oill oin”.

Think about what your tongue is doing when you practice these exercises. You must learn to use your tongue against your teeth in such a manner that it replaces the need to put your lips together for the sound of difficult letters. You must also force the air and sound up from your diaphragm. Singing exercises may help here.

Developing Your Voice

Now you need to start practicing the above exercises in your ventriloquial (“then-trill-oh-koo-ee-al”) voice. You have two voices, falsetto which is high, and the “pinched voice.” For the first one, all you have to do is practice speaking about as high as you can get. With the second voice, you must talk “through your nose.” Tighten your throat and vocal cords and try not to let breath through your nose as you talk.

Practice going back and forth between your normal voice and your puppet’s voice, for you will need to be able to do this seamlessly. It may help to develop a routine to practice, so that you’re practicing the same things each time. It will take lots of practice in both voices to become really good, but anyone willing to work hard can do it. Turn this work into fun by practicing with the lyrics to your favorite songs!

Developing Your Puppet’s Character

Just as your clown character must be developed, so too must that of your puppet. As you find which sounds and voices you are best at, work them into the character of your puppet. If a particular sound is all that’s standing between you and your success, consider giving your puppet an accent!

As you practice with your puppet in front of the mirror, you will need to find what movements seem the most natural for it. Practice changing expressions as you “react” to something the puppet says, and to what the puppet should be doing as you talk. Study the ventriloquists you see on television or the Internet, watching their techniques and learning everything you can.

Balloon Artistry

Many audiences, young and old, are fascinated by watching a balloon artist at work. A 4-H clown can draw a large crowd by adding this easily-learned skill to his/her performance. This section contains some suggestions to help you create intriguing balloon animals.



Balloon Animals

The balloon animals included in this section are based on the basic animal. Before trying any of the other balloon animals, follow the step-by-step instructions for making the basic animal. Once you have learned the basic balloon-artistry skills, let your imagination go wild and design your own balloon creations.

Basic Animal Instructions

1. Stretch a No. 245 balloon. Inflate the balloon, leaving 4-5 inches at the end not inflated. Tie the end.
2. Pinch the balloon between your thumb and first finger, approximately 3 inches from the tied end. Twist the main portion of the balloon away from you. This makes the nose or head of the animal.
3. Holding the first twist in your left hand, make a second twist, approximately 5-6 inches behind the first twist. This will form an ear. The second ear is formed by making a third twist approximately 5-6 inches behind the second twist.
4. Put the two ears (bubbles 2 and 3) next to each other and twist. This locks the first part of your balloon animal.
5. To form the neck, pinch the balloon between your thumb and forefinger approximately 3-4 inches behind the ears.
6. Twist the long part of the balloon away from the body. Holding this twist, measure 5-6 inches and make another twist, forming a front leg. Measure another 5-6 inches and make another twist, forming the second front leg. Put the two front legs next to each other and twist again.
7. Make the body by twisting the balloon 3-4 inches behind the front legs. Form a rear leg by measuring 5-6 inches and making another twist. Form the second rear leg by measuring another 5-6 inches and twisting again. Place the two back legs next to each other and twist again to lock. Adjust the tail for the completed animal.

Use these same procedures to make other animals.

The Dachshund

(Use a No. 245 balloon)

The public expects every balloon artist to make the "sausage dog" or dachshund, with a long body and short legs. To make the dachshund use the same twists as in the basic animal but make the rubber bubbles of different lengths.

The Giraffe

(Use a No. 245 balloon)

The giraffe is a bit like the dachshund tipped up on end. Make the front legs longer than the hind legs to create the effect of a sloping back. The neck can be shaped by squeezing and bending the balloon with the hands.

The Mouse

(Use a No. 245 balloon)

1. To make the mouse, use the moves of the basic animal and keep your balloon bubbles small. Stretch the balloon only from the neck to the halfway point.
2. To form the mouse, blow the balloon up about half way and then let a little of the air out before starting to twist.
3. Form the same as the basic animal but keep the bubbles small and equal in size for head and ears. Squeeze a little air into the end of the balloon each time you make a twist. This keeps the balloon bubbles small. The unfilled part of the balloon gives your mouse a long tail.



By giving different names to the same basic things, you can create more animals. For example, putting a poodle type of head on the mouse lets us call the animal the Chihuahua. Just add long ears and long back legs and make larger spaces between twists.

The Elephant

(Use a No. 245 balloon)

Shaping the trunk of the elephant will take a little practice. By holding the balloon stretched out while you blow it up, it will make a thin tube of air.

Shape the elephant's trunk as follows:

1. Stretch the top inch of the balloon (the mouth end) a few times.
2. While stretching this top inch out to 3 to 4 inches, you must fill it with air by gripping the top rim of the balloon in your teeth and pulling against the grip. Since the air cannot go beyond where you are holding it, blow into the balloon and form a little sausage of air.
3. To prevent it from getting any larger, curl your left hand around the little sausage as you blow up the rest of the balloon.
4. Leave a 4 to 5 inch tail in the bottom.
5. Before uncurling your left hand, tie off the neck and make your first twist about two inches beyond your left hand. This is the head. The trunk is in your left hand.
6. Measure off the length of your thumb, fold the balloon back on itself (without twisting) and twist this loop at the head of one ear.
7. Do the same with the other ear. Each ear will be about the length of your thumb.
8. Squeeze the trunk to form a ball shape at the end.
9. Make the neck, front legs, body, back legs and tail according to the directions for the basic animal.

Performing With Your Balloon Animals

Beginning balloon workers are often disturbed when their balloon pops, but any professional balloon worker knows that balloons break sometimes. When one breaks during a performance, make a joke out of it. Stare at the balloon and say, "Hey, what kind of dog was that? You don't know? That was an airdale!"

Turn any mishap into your immediate advantage.

When it breaks, take a firm grip at the twist, where the air is still held in it, and tear off the twisted part. Turn to a member of the audience and say, "Here, hold this". When the person reaches for the balloon, let go and with nothing to keep it inflated, it will fly through the air, making a shrill sound. You might say, "Well, you just lost your job as my assistant!"

In working with balloon animals, give the impression of great speed, but actually keep your movements deliberate.



Summary

The 4-H clowning program offers many opportunities for developing communications skills, growing as a performing artist, and engaging in community service. Clowning can be as flexible as you want to make it. You can incorporate communications, magic, dance, music, ventriloquism, personal appearance, and many other project areas into your career as a 4-H clown.

However you proceed with your 4-H clowning project, remember to relax and enjoy yourself. That's what clowning is all about.

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Members of the Harg Hustlers, River Hills, and Woodlandville 4-H Clubs: Squiggles, Sketti, Stripes, Spangles, Spots, Bobo, Daisy, Star, and Galaxie.