

## *Send in the Clowns*

One of the origins of modern day clowning is Commedia dell'Arte. Every culture in the world has a variation of jester, trickster, and clown, some of which appeared in *People Like Me 2002:Face to Face!*

Clowns come in all sizes and shapes. Clowning is a highly physical endeavor, and a great variety of skills are used in their performances. Some of these are juggling, acrobatics, unicycle riding, magic, and almost anything you can think of!

Each clown in European clowning invents their own character, even in old Italian Commedia dell'Arte, characters were created by the actors rather than fitting them into a character that was already written.

There are many exercises performers use to find and develop their clowns. It is hard to clown without an audience, so divide your group of children so some are the clowns and the rest are the audience. After a time switch the groups so everyone who wants to clown can try.



Here are some simple clowning exercises:

- 1) Use your face to express different feelings. Don't be afraid to exaggerate -- it's the clown's right!
- 2) Clowns walk funny. Walking around the room, try several different walks. See how each one feels. See what clues each walk conveys to an audience about your clown's character.
- 3) Don't forget you have a voice, even if you are developing a silent character. Clowns can make weird noises or speak in imaginary languages. Carry on a conversation with another clown, all in your own form of gibberish!

Clown ensembles mirror activities that we all do, so we can see the mistakes that we as humans make. We laugh at these problems, and learn not to make the same mistakes that the clown makes.

A few easy situations to give your clown characters to act out are:

- 1) Restaurant scene. Here a clown waiter and clown chef can serve any number of clown characters.
- 2) Clown's parade with a clown orchestra. Use your voices to make the instruments sound as you play unlikely instruments like hats, a shoe, a book, etc.
- 3) Waiting in line. Have several clowns waiting in line for something. You may decide what they are waiting for, without letting the audience know what it is. Each clown can have a different attitude towards the waiting, and towards each other.

*This PDF file was added to the Viewer's Guide in 2002.*