

HADESTRAIN: A RHYTHM RIDE

Objectives

- Students will be introduced to the vocal and physical use of "trains" in *Hadestown*.
- Students will devise their own "train" using elements from the show.
- Students will obtain a greater understanding of how storytelling in *Hadestown* moves beyond text alone, forming a more dimensional picture of the world of the play.

Materials needed

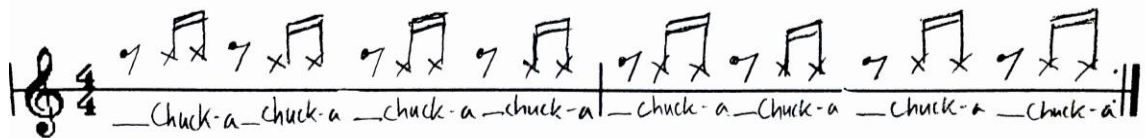
- HADESTRRAIN audio folder and speakers
- Percussion Instruments: shakers, drumsticks, etc. (optional)
- Train Props (optional)

Activity

- Warm-Up: With hands resting on the diaphragmatic muscle (beneath the lungs), have students stand and inhale deeply, feeling air fill up the bottom part of their lungs (rather than the shallow part of the lungs found in the chest area). Cued by leader/instructor, students should exhale slowly on an "s" sound, letting out as little air as possible in order to strengthen breath control. Once all students have completed the long exhale, repeat exercise with a simple objective: try to make the second exhale last a little longer, letting out even less air over time than on the first try. When repeated over time, this breathing warm up will help strengthen the diaphragmatic muscle and allow for greater breath control.
- The text of *Hadestown* describes a railroad track along "The Road To Hell." Characters in the production are transported in and out of the Underworld on this "train", making this concept central to the plot. Using vocal passages from the show, students will first depict the "train" vocally. There are two vocal parts needed for this, so students should be split into two groups (Part One and Part Two). Note that these vocalizations are specific to the sounds of a steam train, not a modern-day electric or diesel train. To help paint this picture, the HADESTRRAIN audio folder includes a file called "Train Sounds". To begin, play this track for students. Have them close their eyes and imagine the sights and sounds of an old-fashioned steam train.
- The two vocal parts are written out in rhythm below, but rhythm reading is not a prerequisite of this activity. In addition to the "piano only" HADESTRRAIN track provided, there are also isolated parts for "part 1," "part 2," as well as "parts 1 and 2" together. Before attempting any of the vocal parts, students should be shown the "parts 1 and 2" track that includes both. This will help to provide a greater understanding of what the "train" should sound like, especially after hearing the track titled "Train Sounds."

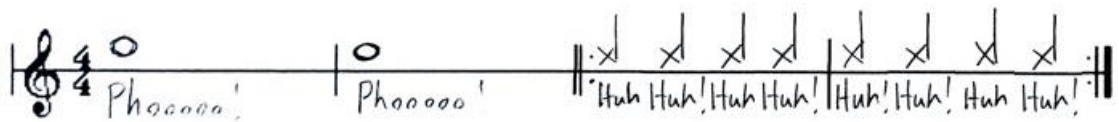
- Teach Parts One and Two! Leader/instructor can either share these written rhythms with students or teach using provided audio. Part One happens off the beat; hearing the 4 count off at the top of the "HADESTRAIN piano only" track, the beat can be subdivided as "1 and 2 and 3 and 4". The "chuck-a" text happens on the "and". Teaching the "and" in between the 4 counts should make it easier for the students performing Part One to hear that rhythm. Part One never changes and repeats as written throughout until the end of the "HADESTRAIN piano only" track.

Part One:



- Immediately after the "1, 2, 3, 4" count off at the top of the "HADESTRAIN piano only" track, Part Two begins. Part Two has two additional counts of 4 after the count off to create a "train whistle". Pitch does not matter for this; since train whistles are polyphonic (consisting of multiple pitches), the more different tones, the better! After the whistle, Part Two continues with "huh" syllables on each beat and repeats until the end of the "HADESTRAIN piano only" track.

Part Two:



- Once students have the basic grasp of these rhythms, the next step is to shape these mouth sounds to make them sound more "train-like". For example, the "chuck-a" sound can be overemphasized for a more percussive impact and pushing more air out on the "huh" sound can make it sound breathier and more like steam.
- Have students practice their vocal parts along with the "HADESTRAIN parts 1 and 2" track first. Once they are comfortable, try with "HADESTRAIN piano only" and see if they can create the train sounds without the guidance of the recorded vocal.

Reflection/Discussion

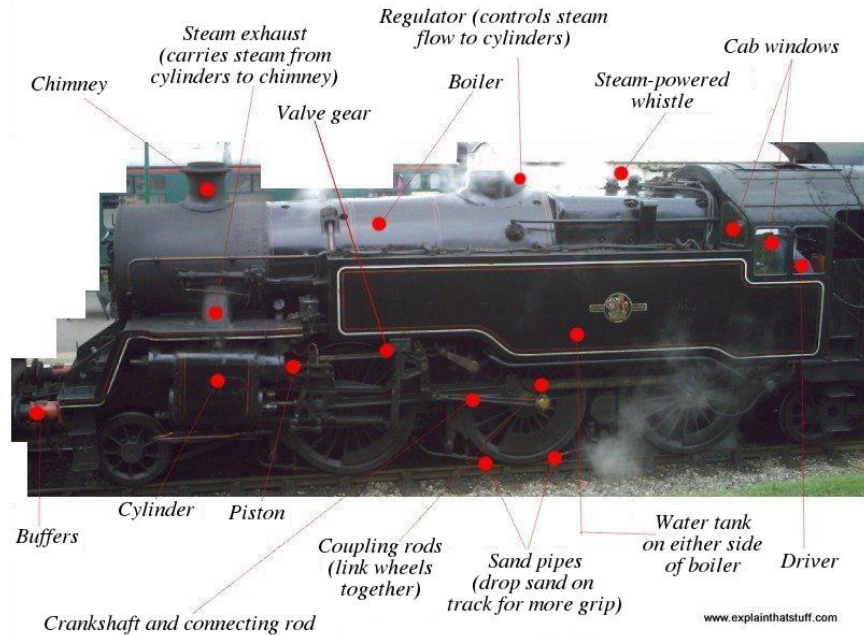
In this activity, students participated in "devised theatre," where a concept is developed collaboratively. Devised theatre is also referred to as "collective creation." What are the values of devised work and creative collaboration? Working as a group, was the idea of a train brought more vividly to life by the joining of voices and bodies?

Activity Expansion

1. KITCHEN BAND: the idea of a "kitchen band" comes from using whatever is on hand as a musical instrument. Actual percussion instruments (shakers, drumsticks, etc.) may also be incorporated if available. When applied to a classroom setting, students may use found

objects (pencils, water bottles, crumpled paper, etc.) to expand upon the "steam train" idea and add further dimension. Give students a short amount of time to find items to use for this; there is no right or wrong here. Students may then compliment their Part One and Part Two vocal rhythms by playing the same rhythm on whatever "kitchen band instruments" they can find, further augmenting the "HADESTRAIN piano only" track.

2. PHYSICALITY: with or without percussion, work with students to physically "build" a train. Looking at images of steam trains may prove helpful. What can students devise for the chimney? For the wheels? For the whistle? Encourage creativity and teamwork and, when ready, have students create their train in a stationary position while performing their vocal Parts One and Two along with the "HADESTRAIN piano only" track. Props maybe incorporated! Think outside the box!



3. SECOND LINE: The device of a "second line" is used during the song "Way Down Hadestown." The "second line" tradition comes from New Orleans, and consists of a parade through the streets, often in context of a wedding or funeral. The "first line" is composed of musicians as well as individuals being honored (i.e. bride and groom), and the "second line" consists of those joining the parade to show support and acknowledgement. In *Hadestown*, Hermes leads the "second line" with a fringed umbrella, a tradition seen daily in the streets of New Orleans. Try "traveling" with your devised train referencing the "second line" tradition.

While watching *Hadestown*, listen carefully to the usage of mouth sounds and vocal percussion to create the world of the show, specifically in terms of the workers in the underworld of Hades ("Chant"). How are the vocalizations supported by physicality? Separately, throughout the performance, how is the idea of the train supported without any evidence of an actual train onstage?