COLLAR & CUFFS CO PRESENTS

Back To The Theatre

A sensory love letter to audiences with complex needs and theatres affected by Covid-19

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"Honest to God, this is the absolute best kind of moment. The auditorium lights are off except for ones over the stage, and we're all bright-eyed and giggle-drunk. I fall a little bit in love with everyone."

Becky Albertalli, Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda

About...

Hope this finds you safe and well?

I'm Julia, and I run <u>Collar & Cuffs Co</u>. We are one of a growing gaggle of sensory theatre companies in the UK developing work inclusive of or exclusively for people with complex needs, including PMLD. Our focus is on developing work that follows a musical theatre or cabaret-style, and we primarily explore topics relating to emotional development, mental health, and wellbeing.

As the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic rumbles on, we can see that our amazing audiences need a bit more time to feel safe and ready to return to live performances. Some of this is due to the clinical vulnerability of our audience and some of this is due to vaccine roll-outs for different age groups. For some of our audience, the impact of Lockdown has affected their confidence, sensory and regulation needs significantly: people who once loved theatre no longer feel safe there, and feeling unsafe leads to dysregulation, and dysregulation means that participation and engagement cannot happen. Opportunities to rebuild relationships with theatre spaces, working on feeling regulated in public places again, and remembering the pleasures of going to live performances are therefore needed.

On top of this, some of the amazing venues we have worked with have suffered severely during the pandemic. Some have been tragically lost forever, some are working on sustainability plans and hope to reopen in the future, while others are throwing open their doors and are programming in work that will generate much-needed income. Not every venue at the moment is practically or financially able to programme inclusive work for our audiences, but we really, really know that they want to and will do so as soon as they possibly can. We invite you to remember your local theatre and to support them however you are able to - a coffee in their cafes helps everyone: pounds in the till and life in the building for the theatre, and a gentle way to reacquaint yourself and the people you love, teach and care for with theatre without the pressures of attending a performance.

While we wait for the world to fully open up again, we send our partner venues and audience all our love. To put love into action, we have created this little sensory pack as a reminder of the magical experiences that can be had when we buy a ticket and go back to the theatre. The activities would work really well alongside social stories or visual guides for performances already in your diaries, but can also be used as a standalone resource. Talk to your local theatre to find some of the resources you will need, and let them know that you're working towards coming to visit them again soon.



Back to the Theatre An original poem by Collar & Cuffs Co

One day, we will go back to the theatre There will be a cheery greeting from the staff at the Box Office And printed tickets to collect: our passport to delights and adventures

> The foyer will be buzzing with chatter And the warm, comforting smell of coffee and popcorn Will greet us like an old friend

The usher will tear our ticket, just as always And show us to a seat, a space, a wondrous place Holding worlds full of possibilities

We wait.

The lights fade down A performance begins!

And even if the actors on the stage are playing Characters with sad or mad faces, We know inside they are smiling Because we're back at the theatre.

We have called this building, these people These stories, this magic Back to life once more. It is the story of all of us Returning to normality, even in the midst of fantasy

At the interval: ice cream If there's no interval: have ice cream anyway!

And then, when the show ends, we will clap The loudest applause we have ever helped make. A rhythmic heartbeat of our appreciation, Our celebration, our reoccupation Of the theatres we loved and lost. Of the theatres who welcomed us back As soon as it was safe to do so

> One day we will go back to the theatre And it will feel as if we never left



At **Collar & Cuffs Co**, we like to write sensory stories that have a bit of an element of performance and character within them. We like our narrators to venture into role-playing so that stories become performative and immersive, and for a sensory story about a theatre visit, a few bits of performance are absolutely necessary!

For some people, the idea of role-play or performance is very scary - please, don't panic or worry. Your participant(s) love you exactly as you are and you will always be among their favourite sensory experiences just because you are you: your voice, your smell, your energy, your movements, your essential 'youness'. Magic.

To set the scene for the story...

'Back to the Theatre' aims to recreate in an ad hoc low-budget way, a visit to the theatre. You can do this as simply or as elaborately as you wish, but the basics we suggest are:

- Plan to physically move through your story so your participant(s) go on a journey as if moving through a theatre building, encountering different sensory experiences in each location. Choose three locations you can travel between: a Box Office, a foyer area, and the theatre auditorium. These could be as simple as three rooms in your home; you could have your Box Office in the hall or at the front door, a foyer in the kitchen, and an auditorium in your living room, for example. If in a school, you could use your Reception hatch as a Box Office and rope in your wonderful office team to staff it and hand out the tickets; the foyer could be a corridor or a classroom space; the auditorium could be your school hall or even a sensory room. Think 'immersive drama' as much as you do 'sensory story'.
- Think about lighting for your auditorium. Ways of creating the experience of house lights going up and down are described in the resources section, however, for the section when the show is running and we're looking at the actors, think about having some lighting focused towards a performance area at home, this could be a lamp or some sensory lights positioned on or focused towards a table or towards a tablecloth or sheet on the floor; you could even use your window and curtains, especially floor-length curtains, to be your focal point and draw the curtains back when the 'performance' begins. At school, this could be an actual stage if you are lucky enough to have one, or perhaps you can rig up some fabrics to create curtains or use a doorway with a glittery fringed or beaded curtain across it. Depending on your resources, you could also go small and use a puppet or toy theatre and light it using led candles, torches, or a lamp. The key ingredients are having a performance area *and* being able to turn out the lights in the room so the stage alone is illuminated.
- Use costumes to suggest characters if you can you will already have items in your wardrobe that will work brilliantly, so nothing fancy is required. Think about a uniform for the Box Office staff and the usher a black t-shirt, or shirt and tie, a waistcoat, a suit jacket, etc and then some outfits for the actors. For the actors, imagine what kind of a show you're visiting and choose accordingly e.g. swimming costumes, pyjamas, party dresses, animal onesies, etc.

What Do I Need To Find?

All the items you need to gather you will probably already have or can be quickly and simply made, adapted, or sourced from junk, or for a small cost from major suppliers...

But, we invite you and encourage you to contact your local theatre to ask for blank tickets and brochures, to join their mailing lists, and to ask them what inclusive productions and Relaxed Performances they have coming up. If they don't have anything programmed, tell them about companies and shows you would like them to host. Your local theatre needs you.

Theatre tickets - blanks from a reel or used ones, ideally tickets that are of the printed and perforated type with the stub still intact. If you can't get any from your local theatre then make your own using the photos provided in this pack; these have been photographed and sent with love by the amazing members of the Musical Theatre Appreciation Society. The feel and smell of printed tickets are quite specific, so go for authenticity if you can by speaking or emailing the Box Office at your nearest theatre. Schools or other organised groups may have links to theatre education departments, so this may be another route via which to get hold of some tickets to use for sensory exploration. You could also ask any theatre fans you know who may have kept hold of tickets as souvenirs - they may have some spares they would be willing to part with.

Busy theatre foyer - search on YouTube for 'theatre foyer sound effects' and you will find a few free examples you can play via a computer or smartphone, or to record onto a sound button: <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yRueEJDZoo</u>

Coffee - use strong cooled black coffee, coffee essence, or coffee essential oil and offer the smell on cotton wool, or in a cup or mug. If safe and appropriate for your participant(s), you may wish to make or buy a hot coffee; coffee with hot milk is different in scent from plain coffee, and foam is always fun so consider using a cappuccino and dotting it on noses or lips. Other alternatives may include coffee-scented candles or even coffee-scented hand creams or lip balms; search on Amazon or eBay.

Popcorn - the emphasis is on smell not taste as popcorn can be a choking hazard even for people who can swallow safely. Place pieces of popcorn in a pot or jar or, for extra safety, seal popcorn in a squeezy bottle and squirt the scent instead. Plain rice cakes also have a good popcorny smell and may be more suitable for those with allergies or food sensitivities. As above, popcorn-scented candles and toiletries can also be sourced from Amazon or eBay.

What Do I Need To Find?

Fading lights - if you are lucky enough to have a dimmer switch then use this to go from full light to low light in your auditorium space. Alternatives could include using a torch or anglepoise lamp; use this to illuminate the space and orient the light beam upwards to begin with, tilting it down to the floor to create the effect of lights being turned down. Even simpler, provide a countdown from five to one and then switch the lights off in one go; a countdown will support your participant(s) in anticipating the lighting change, which may help to reduce anxiety at the sudden change of lighting levels.

Bubbles, confetti or another effect that ties in with your costume items - this is to create a little bit of show business so the 'actors' can interact with your participant(s). At a sensory performance, actors interact closely with the audience sharing resources that help to unpack a moment of meaning in the narrative, so this moment mimics what may happen at a real show. When you set your story, you were invited to think about what sort of show you and your participant(s) were going to see and you will have chosen costume items to support that, so think about what would go well with that setting or theme e.g. bubbles and swimming costumes; dried autumn leaves and a teddybear onesie; snow and a Christmas hat; a spray bottle of water and a raincoat, etc.

Ice cream - you can use real ice cream in small tubs like the ones you get at the theatre or decant some ice cream into a small bowl. Alternatives could include crushed ice with syrup over it (think Slush Puppies), or toy plastic ice creams; if using plastic ice creams, keep them in a bowl of ice until needed so the surfaces are really cold. Vanilla scented toiletries, essential oils, or food essences may also be more appropriate for some participants or, if you can get it, freeze-dried astronaut ice cream! Choose combinations of taste, feel and scent depending on what is safest or will give the strongest effect for your participant(s).

Crowd clapping and cheering - search on YouTube for 'theatre audience applause' and you will find a few free examples you can play via a computer or smartphone, or to record onto a sound button: <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhP661F-bsk&list=RDUhP661F-bsk</u>



The words in **bold** are the ones you read, the ones in *italics describe how to use or create* accompanying sensory experiences using the resources listed above and your acting skills!

One day, we will go back to the theatre There will be a cheery greeting from the staff at the Box Office And printed tickets to collect: our passport to delights and adventures

Visit your Box Office place. If you are telling the poem solo, then you will need to become a member of Box Office staff and role-play a character. Put on or reveal your costume, greet your participant(s), and hand them their tickets with a theatrical flourish. If you are using colleagues or family members as Box Office staff, then approach them as you would in real life, receive a greeting and wait for them to find and give you the tickets. Allow time to explore the tickets together with your participant, looking and feeling for shiny surfaces, crisp edges, and gently fan the air with them to convey the prospect of 'delights and adventures' to come allowing the air movement to be felt by the participant(s)' faces. Use energy in your voice to make the words sound and feel exciting. If working solo, use the time spent exploring the tickets as an opportunity to remove or cover your Box Office costume and to return back to your own self again.

The foyer will be buzzing with chatter

Move to your foyer place. Use the sound effect, inviting your participant(s) to deploy it themselves by pressing the button if possible. Allow the sound effect to run throughout the introduction of the smell resources used in the next stanza.

And the warm, comforting smell of coffee and popcorn Will greet us like an old friend

Use your voice carefully as an extra sensory prompt to draw out the words 'warm' and 'comforting' to make them sound as cosy and inviting as possible. Offer the smells one at a time to your participant(s) and model smelling them yourself; exaggerate your intake of air as you take in the scent, sigh in a pleased and satisfied way and show a happy, relaxed expression on your face as if you have just eased into a deep, hot and bubbly bath after a long day.

Back to the Theatre | Sensory Story

The usher will tear our ticket, just as always

Change into or reveal your usher costume, or move to your colleague or family member playing this role. Hand over your tickets to be checked, then using either hand-over-hand or independent movement, invite your participant(s) to tear off their ticket stubs. This can be quite a popular moment, so be prepared to repeat! Listen for the rrrrrip, emphasising it by saying 'rrrrrip' as you tear if need be; use wide eyes and inhale as you prepare for the rip in order to build the anticipation.

And show us to a seat, a space, a wondrous place Holding worlds full of possibilities

As the usher, or in the company of your usher, move to your auditorium place. Remove or conceal your costume if telling the poem solo.

We wait.

Sign 'waiting' in your preferred signing system. Alternatively, hold your participant(s) hand and breathe in and out slowly three times; your calm breathing will cue your participant(s) nervous system to settle.

The lights fade down A performance begins!

Use your torch, lamp, dimmer switch, etc, to take the lighting levels of the room down to darkness, and then bring up the lights you're using to illuminate your staging area.

And even if the actors on the stage are playing Characters with sad or mad faces,

Transform into your acting character with costume, or have your colleagues or family members appear on the stage in character. Bring your participant(s) to the edge of the staging area and move close to them so faces can be seen and felt. Start from a neutral face, gradually transform your face to an exaggerated sad face; support your participant(s) to feel how your facial muscles move into a sad face, help them trace the down curve of your mouth, sign 'sad' in your preferred signing system. Return to neutral and repeat with a mad face, helping your participant(s) to trace your furrowed brow and signing 'angry'. Cover your face with your hands in preparation for the next lines.

Back to the Theatre | Sensory Story

We know inside they are smiling Because we're back at the theatre.

Draw back your hands to reveal an exaggerated smile with wide eyes and raised eyebrows and sign 'happy'. Use your participant(s)' hands to cover your face and allow them to feel how your muscles move from neutral to a big smile again. Use your hands and theirs to reveal your happy face a few times as if playing 'Peekaboo'.

We have called this building, these people These stories, this magic Back to life once more. It is the story of all of us

Returning to normality, even in the midst of fantasy

Use your chosen effect - bubbles, confetti, etc - as the background to these lines and to punctuate the words 'building', 'people', 'stories', and 'magic' with puffs or sprinkles, etc.

At the interval: ice cream If there's no interval: have ice cream anyway!

Bring up your house lights and leave the staging area lights on. Remove or conceal your character costume if telling the poem solo. Taste, feel, and smell the ice cream as appropriate for your participant(s). Use your body language and expressions to scaffold this indulgent moment as if it's a shared exciting and cheeky secret between you.

And then, when the show ends, we will clap The loudest applause we have ever helped make. A rhythmic heartbeat of our appreciation, Our celebration, our reoccupation Of the theatres we loved and lost. Of the theatres who welcomed us back As soon as it was safe to do so

Play the sound effect of theatre applause, inviting your participant(s) to press the button where possible. Clap and cheer with your participant(s) to join with the sound. If you have colleagues or family members as actors then they may like to take a bow.

Back to the Theatre Sensory Story

One day we will go back to the theatre And it will feel as if we never left

Turn the lights off on the staging area. Return to your Box Office place and either in character yourself with your Box Office costume, or as portrayed by colleagues or family members, say and sign 'goodbye' and 'see you again'.



"To enter a theatre for a performance is to be inducted into a magical space, to be ushered into the sacred arena of the imagination." Simon Callow.



www.collarandcuffs.org

Ticket

