

# **Directing Disability**

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A s director, your job is to help your cast create authentic and believable characters that help tell the story of *Finding Nemo JR*. As explored in the "Nemo and Disability in the Big Blue World" article, several characters in our story

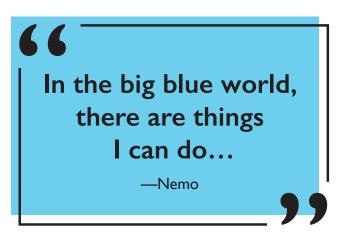
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have disabilities. So, how does one direct disability?

Non-disabled actors have been playing disabled characters on stage for decades, even going so far as to win awards. Unfortunately, these portrayals by nondisabled actors often miss the mark, because to "act" disabled is to put on a lot of societal stereotypes about what it means to be "not able."

This article will share some ideas for directing a cast with both disabled and non-disabled actors and suggest ways to set yourself and your cast up for success in portraying disabled characters.

There are a multitude of disabled characters in *Finding Nemo JR*., all of whom are wellrounded and integral to the journey. It's important that Nemo, Dory, Gill, Bubbles, and even Tad are taken seriously and not played



as the butt of the jokes. The characters may be animals, but they reflect real people in the human world and we must treat them with dignity, as theater is so famously a mirror to society.

For a big-budget Broadway musical or Hollywood blockbuster, production companies can cast a wide net to find actors who can play the roles authentically, casting disabled actors to play disabled roles. But for a school or community theater production, there just aren't as many fish in the sea. Chances are, not every community will have actors with limb differences or short-term memory loss. So, how then can you cast this show responsibly?

Being mindful of the current casting situation in the industry at large is a great first step. Learning about disability in entertainment will help direct you, the director, as you prepare to stage this show in a way that is respectful to disabled people.

At the outset, it's important to remember that there are both visible and invisible disabilities, and not everyone is comfortable disclosing that information publicly.

So, if you have actors who disclose their disabilities, that's great: cast them! There is a wonderful sense of personalization and authenticity that only a disabled actor can bring when playing a character that reflects their own identity. But just because an actor may have a limb difference, that doesn't mean they can only play Nemo — or even that they'd want to! Maybe they have the perfect comedic timing for Dory. Or perhaps they'd prefer not to have a speaking role, and that's totally fine! The important thing is to make both opportunities available to them and to have transparent conversations with all your prospective cast members about what roles they'd be interested in playing.

By having discussions about what it means to interact with disabled people, you will help your actors think more deeply about their roles in the show and their roles in society.

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—Kerry Candeloro

At the same time, you might not have a disabled cast member in your pool, in which case it's okay to cast a nondisabled actor in a disabled role. So long as you can approach the materials and rehearsal process with dignity and respect, you'll be able to fully access who the character is at their core, no matter who is playing them.

Nemo's story doesn't begin and end with a lucky fin — the show is about growing up, exploring beyond one's home, and finding family in many places. Nemo's fin is a part of them and informs who they are and how they experience the world, but it's not all there is to them.

A director guides actors as they delve into the depth of their characters: who are they? What do they want? What are the obstacles in their way? Be careful not to reduce a disabled character to a single descriptor such as "short fin" or "forgetful," which could shortchange the breadth of their storyline and the complexity of their arc. Plus, it's much more fun for your actors to play a three-dimensional character than a twodimensional one!

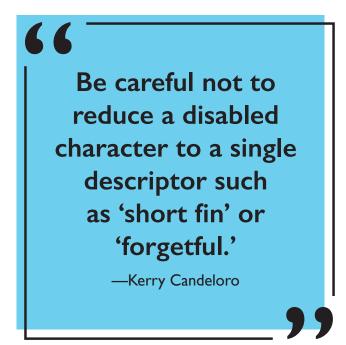
The key here is balance: recognize the significance of Nemo's fin but also don't fixate on it. It's important to highlight that Nemo's obstacle is NOT their lucky fin. If it was, then the story would end three pages in! Be mindful of the problematic trope of disabled people "overcoming" their impairments — this is a damaging stereotype that can position disabled people as objects of pity and inspiration for the benefit of the nondisabled.

Because in the end, Nemo's disability is not about "overcoming" anything. Nemo's fin doesn't change at all throughout the story — what does change is the way in which the other characters interact with Nemo. Instead of diminishing or taunting Nemo, they listen and treat Nemo with dignity and respect.

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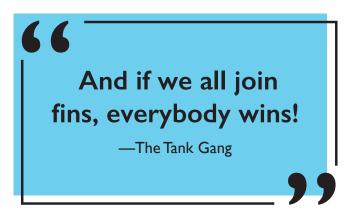
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Additionally, Nemo learns how to advocate for themselves and all that they're capable of. By the end of the show, Nemo is able to articulate to Marlin that they can save the fish in the net, that they are strong enough to step up as a leader and guide the fish to "swim down." It is only after independently exploring the world beyond Marlin's anemone that Nemo can learn that about themselves and help the others.



The same goes for characters like Dory and Bubbles. No one in the show makes fun of Dory for her short-term memory loss or Bubbles for their singular word language we can laugh with them, but they are not there to be laughed at or made fun of. It's okay to find humor in the dialogue (after all, the show is very funny!), but please be sure that the laughs are contextual and not a joke at the character's expense.

So, when casting non-disabled actors in disabled roles, be aware of what that means. Have open conversations about the role of disability in *Finding Nemo JR*. Refer to the suggested exercises and discussions in the Rehearsal section of your Director's Guide as a place to begin. Yes, your actors are all playing sea creatures, but this play is a story about real experiences that can and will relate to their lives. The conversations that you have in rehearsal will impact your actors' relationships in the great blue world around them, too. By having discussions about what it means to interact with disabled people, you will help your actors think more deeply about their roles in the show and their roles in society. And, if you look hard enough, you'll see that there are even more disabledcoded characters in this story, just like in the human world on land.



If you can treat Nemo (and Dory and Bubbles and everyone else) as fully formed, complex characters with obstacles and struggles beyond their impairments, you'll be able to really dig deep into this material in a way that celebrates the diversity of *Finding Nemo JR*. And, in turn, you'll be able to "make a splash" and help reflect that celebration, dignity, and respect of disabled people outside of your rehearsal room as well. Have a 'fin'-tastic time with this show!

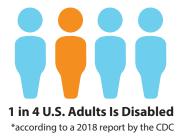
## Nemo and Disability in the Big Blue World



've been disabled from the minute I entered the world. Clinically speaking, I was born with Type 4 Ulnar Club Hand, but in layman's terms, I'm missing an arm bone, which means I only have 3 fingers on my left hand, including a

Kerry Candeloro

non-opposable thumb. Those were the cards I was dealt at birth, so I can't even fathom what it would be like to walk around with 10 fingers. And at age 20, I was diagnosed with a chronic, invisible illness, which forced me to relearn how to live in my new body. Another disability, another set of cards added to my hand.



Over 1 billion people in the world live with a disability—that's one person out of every seven (WHO). As of 2018, the CDC recorded that 1 in 4 Americans is disabled. According to the UN, disabled people are the world's largest minority group, increasing in numbers due to population growth, medical advances, and longer life spans. Moreover, Long COVID and other lasting illnesses stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have expanded that number by 1.2 million more people in 2021 alone, creating a mass disabling event across the globe (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Disability, then, is not so foreign to us—in fact, it's all around.

## So what exactly is a disability?

According to the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), a disability is "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity," and a person with a disability is defined as "someone who has a history or record of such an impairment; or who is perceived by others as having such an impairment."

According to the UN, disabled people are the world's largest minority group

Signed in 1990, the ADA was a landmark law for people with disabilities in the United States — that was only 4 years before I was born. For the first time in American history, there was a law in place prohibiting the discrimination of disabled people in virtually every public entity; disability became a protected civil right. No longer could people with disabilities be denied access to schools, transit, and commercial facilities. It was now illegal to deny a person a job based on disability status, and the law specifically required that "reasonable accommodations" be made in terms of accessibility for both private businesses and public spaces.

But this victory didn't happen overnight. It was the result of years of activism by leaders like Judy Heumann, Ed Roberts, and countless others who strived for change. Events like the 504 Sit-ins and the Capitol Crawl became historic events that forced disability into the forefront of American society. With the passing of the ADA, so many of these activists' goals, hopes, and dreams could finally come true, and disabled children like me could grow up with equal opportunities alongside non-disabled children. As part of the first generation post-ADA, I never knew a world without that legal protection, and I am forever grateful for the vital work of the Disability Rights Movement.

The fight for equal rights for disabled people didn't end there. Today, artists, activists, and other public figures are now able to use the internet to organize and share information. Activists like Andrew Gurza, Imani Barbarin, and Charis Hill have created viral hashtags that plaster the reality of being disabled over social media for all the world to see. Films like Crip Camp and the 2022 Best Picture Oscar<sup>®</sup> winner CODA both had widespread releases over the streaming services Netflix and AppleTV+, respectively. Notable actors like Mickey Rowe, Ali Stroker, Lauren Ridloff, Marlee Matlin, Troy Katsur, and Selma Blair all use their platforms to share their personal stories and bring awareness to so many others through their work. With the advent of modern technology, disability is arguably more visible now than ever, and activism has become even more accessible for the disabled community and their allies. But even with all these successes, media representation still lags behind, and disabled folks are searching to find themselves in stories onscreen.

### **Disability Representation in Finding Nemo**

Growing up, no one else around me had a limb difference, so I wasn't able to see myself reflected in the world around me. In fact, when I was little, I remember going to the store, seeing some figurines with broken arms, and asking my mom to buy them because they "looked like me." In school, some other kids called me Captain Hook because of the curvature of my arm. As a 90s kid, that was the only onscreen character that they could equate to having a limb difference: a villain. Despite that negative connotation, I did feel a strange sense of kinship with Captain Hook, since that was the sole mainstream representation of a limb difference I had as a child—he looked like me. No one else looked like me. But I really wanted to see myself as the hero, the good guy. I really wanted a main character with a limb difference that everyone roots for.

#### Enter: Nemo.

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I have to say, I don't remember the first time I watched Finding Nemo. As a millennial, it's just ingrained in our popular culture and collective memory. And, to be honest, I definitely didn't clock the limb difference reference right away — it was only in later years that I began to put the pieces together. But when I did, it all hit me: "Whoa, this is what I was looking for, and here it is." I only wish that I had made that connection sooner. Being able to see myself in a strong protagonist — one who embarks on such an amazing journey both inside and out - would have profoundly affected my selfesteem in my early childhood years. It would have helped me believe in myself when the world was telling me not to.

I really wanted a main character with a limb difference that everyone roots for.

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I remember the first time I met someone who looked like me: I was in Kindergarten, and she was a girl in line at a bakery who also had a limb difference. Our moms attempted to chat and made an awkward introduction, but nothing ever came of it. After all those years, that girl and that bakery encounter are still so clear in my mind, because that moment was formative for me; it was the first time I realized that I wasn't alone in the world.



Nemo and Gill, Melody Lane Performing Arts Center, Cape Coral, FL

So I know exactly how Nemo feels when they first meet Gill: wow, this is someone who looks like ME! Who has my same disability! And who gets exactly what I'm going through! And isn't an evil pirate! Because of the age difference between them, Gill becomes a mentor for Nemo, challenging our hero's perception of their ability and encouraging them to defy their own expectations.

It wasn't until after college and moving to New York City that I met other disabled theater professionals, both on & off the stage. I met people with cerebral palsy, amputees, little persons, and other people with chronic, invisible illnesses. And one day, I actually met a woman with a limb difference rigging lights at the theater where I worked. It was the first time Lever saw someone who looked like me in my industry. To see yourself in someone older than you is to recognize another person that understands your story; has felt what you felt, has dealt with the same highs and lows, and has made it through. Meeting these older disabled actors, playwrights, and production workers who are thriving in the business helped me challenge my own internal ableism about being disabled in the arts industry and gave me the determination to keep reaching towards my goals.

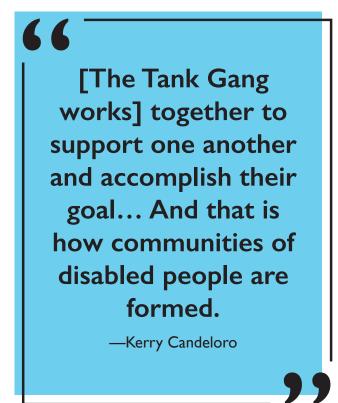
Similarly, in that tank, not only does Nemo find another fish with a limb difference, but they also find fish with qualities that connect and resonate with a range of disabled people. For example, Bubbles communicates using only one word. In the human world, some neurodivergent people communicate similarly. Gurgle has specific needs related to the cleanliness of the tank. Some people with **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder experience** similar needs. And they work together to support one another and accomplish their goal, concocting an elaborate escape plan that requires each of them to contribute their own unique skills. And that is how communities of disabled people are formed.

In Western societies, we are often taught to be completely independent and that any dependency on another person to



The Tank Gang, Spark of Creation, South San Francisco, CA

live our daily lives is a sign of weakness. But, as our friends in the tank realize, we all need each other to thrive! In disability culture, we call that interdependence: the recognition of unique skills and strengths and how we might work together to achieve a goal. In *Finding Nemo JR*., we see that interdependence at work when Gill tells the Tank Gang that Nemo's lucky fin and tiny body is the key to jamming the filter, and when Dory's musical pneumonic to remember P Sherman 42 Wallaby Way Sydney (Just Keep Swimming!) leads the fish after they get lost.



## A Big Blue Legacy

While the undercurrent of disability in *Finding Nemo* may not be so clear to the general public, the disabled community at large wholeheartedly embraced the representation in the film. Back in 2003, disability studies scholar Ann Millet-Gallant wrote that the film "paints disability as a flavorful ingredient in cultural diversity — both remarkable, yet necessarily everyday, perhaps even disguised in the tides of life." Furthermore, she describes how disability serves as an undercurrent to the film, undetected by the mainstream audience clearly recognizable to a more disability-aware viewer. Millet-Gallant argues, then, that the disabled audience has a more nuanced take on the film, resonating with the characters and uncovering meanings in deeper, more personal ways.

And about Dory's short-term memory specifically, Angus MacLane, an animator on *Finding Nemo* and co-director of its sequel *Finding Dory*, stated how "sometimes [Dory's] disability has such clear disadvantages, but also has advantages that aren't necessarily clear at first blush." Ultimately, that's what Marlin, as well as the non-disabled viewer, comes to realize in the film.

There's even a disability-awareness organization that references *Finding Nemo* in its very name. Established in 2010, The Lucky Fin Project's mission is "to raise awareness and celebrate children and individuals born with symbrachydactyly or other limb differences (upper, lower, congenital, and amputee)."

It just goes to show that beyond the sea and the screen, the disability representation in *Finding Nemo* has been making waves for disabled people for years, and hopefully productions like yours of *Finding Nemo JR*. will bring that awareness to light for more and more people. So the next time a young disabled person is looking to see themselves represented onscreen, they won't have to spend half their life "fishing" around for a hero; instead, they'll look to the diversity of *Finding Nemo* and find themselves reflected under the sea.

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## You Think That You Can Do These Things

Script Excerpts

## **CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**

**MARLIN:** an anxious clownfish and Nemo's overprotective father, who, after the tragic death of his wife Coral, prefers the safety of his anemone to the frightening unknowns of the open ocean. Forced to travel across the sea in search of Nemo, Marlin develops the courage to face the unpredictable ocean and the wisdom to trust others – including his own kid.

**NEMO:** a curious young clownfish who brims with excitement to explore the wonders that lie beyond the Great Barrier Reef. Born with a "lucky fin" – or what humans would call a limb difference – Nemo quickly learns that the world possesses incredible dangers in addition to the promise of big adventures. By making new friends, finding strength within, and practicing teamwork, Nemo transforms into a capable and brave leader, able to self-advocate and take on challenges big and small.

©Disney/Pixar

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## **"YOU CAN'T!" SCENE**

(excerpted from Finding Nemo JR.)

WHO:	
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(MARLIN enters, distressed and frantic, and begins scolding NEMO. TAD, SHELDON, and PEARL quickly swim back to safety.)

MARLIN

NEMO! NO! YOU CAN'T BE ANYWHERE NEAR HERE!

NEMO

l wasn't gonna—

### MARLIN

YOU'RE TOO LITTLE! I WAS RIGHT! WE'LL TRY SCHOOL AGAIN NEXT YEAR.

NEMO

But Dad!

MARLIN YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN'T SWIM WELL

## NEMO

l can!

## MARLIN

NO, YOU CAN'T! NOW, COME ALONG! YOU THINK THAT YOU CAN DO THESE THINGS BUT YOU ARE WRONG!

## NEMO

I hate you.

## **"YOU CAN!" SCENE**

(excerpted from Finding Nemo JR.)

WHO:	
WHAT:	
WHERE:	
WHEN:	
WHY:	

#### MOONFISH

Watch out! There's a net! Swim away! Swim away!

(DORY and the MOONFISH are caught in a giant fishing net.)

**DORY** Help! Help! Get us out!

(NEMO studies the net, swims towards it, and looks for a way in. MARLIN grabs NEMO.)

MARLIN NEMO, YOU GET BACK HERE!

**NEMO** I KNOW WHAT TO DO! WE HAVE TO SAVE DORY!

> MARLIN I HAVE TO THINK OF YOU!

**NEMO** BUT I'M SMALL ENOUGH TO GET IN THERE! DAD, I HAVE A PLAN!

#### MARLIN

YOU THINK THAT YOU CAN DO THESE THINGS BUT... (catches himself) I know you can.

#### NEMO

We have to break the net! Tell everybody to swim down! TOGETHER, SWIM DOWN TOGETHER

(NEMO swims into the net.)

MARLIN You heard my kid!

## You Think That You Can Do These Things

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & SCRIPT ANALYSIS**

**USE THIS LESSON TO:** conduct script analysis for a few scenes from *Finding Nemo JR*.

#### TIME: 45 minutes

#### **MATERIALS:**

- Copies of Script Excerpts (provided as a Downloadable Resource)
- Paper and pencils

#### **OBJECTIVES:** Students will:

- Explore the parent-child relationship of Marlin and Nemo.
- Learn how to break down a scene and conduct script analysis.
- Create tableaus to embody character relationships.

#### READ ALOUD: (1 minute)

In *Finding Nemo JR*., we meet a father and child pair named Marlin and Nemo. For much of the musical, they cannot see eye to eye. It's only after they are separated and each have their own underwater adventure that they understand each other a bit better. Today, we'll conduct script analysis to foster a greater understanding of how their relationship evolves.

#### WARM-UP: (9 minutes)

- 1. To introduce your students to the themes present in *Finding Nemo JR*. and begin developing a movement vocabulary, lead your students through the following "personal statues" game.
- 2. Share with students that you are going to call out a word or phrase and they should strike a pose that embodies that word or the feeling they associate with it. Your facilitation could sound like this:
  - When you think of the word "love," how does it make you feel?
  - Strike a pose that embodies "love" in 3...2...1...
- 3. Repeat the above prompt using the following words:
  - Home
  - Friendship
  - Independence
  - Trust
  - Fear
  - Disagreement
  - Understanding
- 4. As you complete the warm-up, observe what you see (e.g., "I see a lot of smiles", "I notice everyone's posture turned inward").
- 5. Invite students to keep these ideas and associated poses in mind throughout the lesson.

#### HOOK: (15 minutes)

- 1. Distribute copies of the Script Excerpts.
- 2. Begin by reading aloud the character descriptions for Marlin and Nemo and facilitating a brief discussion:
  - What do we know about Marlin?
  - What do we know about Nemo?
  - What do we know about their relationship?
  - Based on what we know, what conflicts do you think may come up in this parent-child relationship?
- 3. Next, explain that you'll be reading two scenes from *Finding Nemo JR*. and conducting script analysis. Explain that one scene is near the beginning of the story and the other is near the end of the story. You'll need readers for the following characters/roles:
  - First scene "You Can't!": Marlin, Nemo, stage directions (these are notes from the author to the actors, written in italics)
  - Second scene "You Can!": Moonfish, Dory, Marlin, Nemo
- 4. Explain that the text written in all caps is lyrics to a song but that students can simply read it like dialogue for this activity.
- 5. After reading the first scene, guide students through the prompts in the callout box at the top of the scene:
  - **WHO:** (who is in the scene?) You can share that while we only see dialogue between Marlin and Nemo, Nemo's classmates and teacher are also in the scene observing the interaction between Marlin and Nemo.
  - WHAT: (what is going on in the scene?)
  - WHERE: (where do we think this scene is happening?)
  - WHEN: (when do we think this scene is happening?) After hearing some guesses, you can share that this scene is happening at the beginning of Nemo's first day of school.
  - WHY: (why do we think this scene is happening?) You can encourage students to think more deeply by asking what the conflict between Marlin and Nemo is and why this might be important to the story.
- 6. Next, read the second scene and then guide students through the prompts in the callout box at the top of the scene:
  - For the **WHY** prompt, encourage students to dig even deeper by asking what changes students notice between Marlin and Nemo.

#### MAIN ACTIVITY: (15 minutes)

- 1. Divide the class into groups of 5 and explain that now students will have the opportunity to bring their script analysis to life.
- 2. Remind students of the warm-up and how they used their bodies to communicate a feeling. Share that now students are going to build on their work of creating personal statues to create tableaus, which are frozen group pictures that tell a story.
- 3. Invite the groups to select who from their group will portray Marlin and Nemo. The remaining students will make up the other characters present within the scenes. For the first scene, that's Nemo's classmates. For the second scene, that's Dory and the Moonfish.
- 4. Explain that the groups will create two tableaus, one for each scene. The goal of the tableau is to communicate what's happening in the scenes and, specifically, the relationship between Marlin and Nemo.
- 5. Give students time to work on their creations, and float about the room to provide encouragement and guidance. Encourage groups to consider how they can make it clear to an audience who each of the characters in the tableau is and how they feel about what's happening.

- 6. Once groups have developed their tableaus, pause the group and add one additional challenge. Ask students to consider once more what changed in Marlin and Nemo's relationship between the two scenes. Invite the groups to develop a transition from the first tableau to the second tableau that illustrates that change. Students can use sound and movement to communicate this change as they move from the first tableau to the second.
- 7. Next, invite each group to share their tableaus with the transition with the class.
- 8. Always encourage the rest of the class to support their classmates with applause and praise after they share their work.

## **Access Check**

While your students are creating their tableaus together, be sure to encourage respect and consent in any physical touch between students.

#### **REFLECTION:** (5 minutes)

Facilitate a brief discussion using the following prompts:

- 1. What are some differences you noticed between each group's performances? What might this tell us about theatrical interpretation?
- 2. What did you learn about script analysis today?
- 3. Does anyone relate to the scenes or themes we explored? How and why?

## **Go With the Flow**

#### **SCIENCE & CHOREOGRAPHY**

**USE THIS LESSON TO:** explore and understand the relevance and importance of ocean currents through movement.

#### TIME: 45 minutes

#### **MATERIALS:**

• Video or other resources to learn about ocean currents (example provided)

#### **OBJECTIVES:** Students will:

- Learn about oceanic currents and how they stitch together all the oceans of the world into a single global fabric.
- Translate the concepts of oceanic currents into movement.
- Work as team to achieve a goal.

#### **READ ALOUD:** (1 minute)

*Finding Nemo JR*. takes place in the ocean, and the characters rely on oceanic currents to travel great distances throughout the show. Today, we'll explore currents and translate them into movement.

#### WARM-UP: (5 minutes)

- 1. Find or clear an open space in the room and invite students to join you in the open space.
- 2. Facilitate a very brief discussion using these prompts:
  - What do you know about oceans?
  - How does the water in the ocean move?
  - What words would you use to describe those movements?
- 3. Next, ask students to find a partner and then determine who will be person A and who will be person B.
- 4. Explain that in pairs, they will now do a mirroring exercise. Person A will lead first and initiate movement that Person B will mirror. Remind students of the words they used to describe ocean movement and encourage students to embody those oceanic qualities in their movement.
- 5. After about a minute, encourage students to switch so that Person B is leading.
- 6. Allow the pairs to switch a couple of times and then encourage the pair to try moving as one without either of the pair leading.

#### HOOK: (9 minutes)

- 1. Invite students to return to their seats as you transition into learning about ocean currents.
- 2. Ask students to share anything they may know about currents. If necessary, you can describe currents as the motion of the ocean.
- 3. Share a short video (approximately 4 minutes) on ocean currents with your class. You may use a preferred video that you research on your own, or you can use this video that was available to the public at the time of this publication: https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/ocean-currents-and-climate
- 4. Reiterate a few main points about currents for your students:
  - Currents are driven by three global forces: 1. Tides, 2. Wind, 3. Heat & salinity (sea salt).
  - Changes in heat and salt content change the density of ocean water, which then shifts the movement of the water.
  - Some examples of major currents in our oceans: The Gulf Stream (south of Florida) and the Kuroshio Current (east coast of Japan).

- 5. Invite students back into the open space and share that you're now going to explore those changes in ocean density through movement.
- 6. Explain that to do this, you will play a call-and-response game using the following prompts:
  - When I say "cold," you say "low" and move your body low toward the ground.
  - When I say "warm," you say "high" and move your body high into the air.
- 7. Practice the prompts a few times until students have mastered the prompts. Encourage them to incorporate the oceanic movement qualities they explored before.
- 8. Now, ask students to raise their hands if they were Person A in the warm-up. Do the same for Person B. Explain that when you say "go," the As will sink low to the ground and then rise high while the Bs will rise high first and then sink low to the ground.
- 9. Say "go" and watch as the group begins to embody the rise and fall of ocean water. Encourage them to keep those waterlike movement qualities and even add ocean sounds if they'd like.

## **Access Check**

In the warm-up and hook, encourage students to participate in the way that is most comfortable for their bodies. If needed, encourage them to have conversations with their partner about any necessary boundaries (e.g., "I'd prefer to not squat to the ground.").

#### MAIN ACTIVITY: (20 minutes)

- 1. As your students rest from the previous activity, share a few more facts about currents:
  - Ocean currents are pathways in the sea that help move migrating species from habitat to habitat. Many larger sea creatures, like sharks, whales, and sea turtles, travel the ocean currents in order to feed and reproduce.
  - Smaller creatures sometimes follow these bigger creatures to hitch a ride on these sea highways. They do this for protection but also for food! Smaller animals cling to the skin of larger creatures in order to gobble up food scraps and dead skin. This is a symbiotic relationship from which both animals benefit.
- 2. Share that in *Finding Nemo JR.*, some of the characters travel along the East Australian Current (EAC):
  - The EAC is a real ocean current on the east side of the Australian coast that flows in a southward direction from the Great Barrier Reef.
  - Relevant to Finding Nemo JR., the EAC is used to transport turtles between habitats.
  - In *Finding Nemo JR.*, the characters of Marlin and Dory hitch a ride along the EAC with the sea turtle Crush's family.
- 3. Next, invite your students back into the open space and explain that as a group, they are going to create a moving current.
- 4. Invite or select 10 students to participate in the activity first. The remainder can watch until it is their turn. Gather the 10 students into a clump, all facing one direction, within the open space.
- 5. Invite the group of students to imagine they are an ocean current, ebbing and flowing together. The goal of the current is to move together as one, just as we did in the warm-up mirroring activity. This group activity is called flocking:
  - Identify one member of group, or yourself, as the leader.
  - The leader should move slowly, experimenting with all of the movements previously explored, including rising high and sinking low. The rest of the group should mimic the leader's movements exactly.

- When the leader is ready, they should change the direction of the group to face a different side of the room. Whoever is at the front of the clump is now the leader of the "flock."
- Encourage the group to imagine these changes in direction as the moving pathways of the current.

## **Access Check**

Always remind your students that the goal of flocking is to move as ONE. Not one student should be left behind, which means that the leader of the flock should not intentionally perform movements that would be uncomfortable for other students.

- 6. Once the group has successfully changed directions multiple times, share that it's now time for a challenge. Ask for three volunteers who are comfortable dancing or moving separately from the flock. Once identified, assign the volunteers the characters of Marlin, Dory, and Crush. Crush should be moving within the flock, "riding" the current. Marlin and Dory should start outside of the flock and join Crush in "riding" the current. Encourage them to be creative and keep in mind that there is no wrong answer.
- 7. Repeat the activity a few times until everyone in the class has a turn being a part of the current or one of the solo characters.

#### **REFLECTION:** (5 minutes)

Facilitate a brief discussion using the following prompts:

- What have you learned about ocean currents today?
- How might a choreographer use research into currents to create the dances for a show?
- How did it feel to move together as a team?

## **Oceans: Further Reading**



Dive deeper into the big blue world! Below is a list of resources to help you and your cast explore the vast underwater environment of *Finding Nemo JR*. From sharks and sea turtles to currents and conservation, this collection from National Geographic Kids encourages you to discover more about the extraordinary ocean ecosystem that Nemo, Marlin, and Dory call home.

## Ocean Animals: Who's Who in the Deep Blue

Meet the real underwater critters from *Finding Nemo JR.*, including the blue tang fish and clownfish. (*Ages 8–12*)



## Weird But True! Ocean

Glimpse the ocean's weirdest wildlife, uncover shocking shipwrecks, and meet sensational seafarers in this book filled with 300 wacky facts and pictures. (Ages 8–12)



### Ultimate Oceanpedia: The Most Complete Ocean Reference Ever

From tsunamis and sea turtles to riptides and reefs, learn all about the creatures, science, and ecology of our oceans. (Ages 7–10)



## <u>Captain Aquatica's</u> <u>Awesome Ocean</u>

Take to the seas with marine conservationist and shark researcher Captain Aquatica and her hammerhead shark sidekick, Fin, to explore the ocean's wettest and wildest depths! (Ages 8–12)



### <u>Can't Get Enough Shark</u> <u>Stuff: Fun Facts, Awesome</u> <u>Info, Cool Games, Silly</u> <u>Jokes, and More!</u>

The perfect combination of facts, stories, and photos all about the ocean's most fascinating predator. (Ages 7–10)



### <u>The Ultimate Book of</u> Sharks

Join this amazing underwater adventure to track the sharks of the world, from the teeniest dogfish to the feared great white. (Ages 8–12)



### Extreme Oceans: Amazing Animals, High-Tech Gear, Record-Breaking Depths, and More

Discover the most outrageous aspects of the deep blue in this action-packed combination of science and adventure. (Ages 8–12)



## <u>Mission: Shark Rescue:</u> All About Sharks and How to Save Them

Meet real-life sharks and learn about their habitats, challenges, and successes, plus ways you can help save these amazing endangered creatures. (Ages 10–14)

