

**ALEX  
ZERBE**

**THE PROFESSIONAL ZANIAC**

Presents



# COME ALIVE!

**INSPIRING KIDS' CREATIVITY THROUGH  
PHYSICAL EDUCATION, ART AND LITERACY.**

**("CREATIVITY" AND "LITERACY" ARE A SOFT RHYME)**

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**This study guide is intended for K-8.  
Some activities are better suited for younger or older students.**

Step 1 - Do one of the fun pre-performance activities

Step 2 - Watch the show.

Step 3 - Do one of the fantastic post-performance activities

Step 4 - You are now awesome.

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*“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you **come alive**, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have **come alive**.” - Howard Thurman*

## **What to Expect - Performance Overview**

The Zaniac Comedy Show is a cultural experience that exposes students to the worlds of comedy, music, circus arts, and self-expression while emphasizing creativity, literacy, and persistence.

With captivating amounts of energy, The Zaniac moves like a rubber band from one end of the stage to the other. Beatboxing, juggling, dancing, rapping and live music looping are just a few of the things that led Piers Morgan of America’s Got Talent to call Alex, “The total package.”

Prepare to be blown away with an onslaught of visual and verbal comedy as Alex zigzags between absurd ideas and odd skills. He entices audience volunteers out of their shell and encourages self-expression.

*Every audience volunteer leaves the stage in triumph!*

Alex’s unique personality is living proof that it’s okay to be different, to act and dress differently and to explore anything that makes you passionate.



## Alex Zerbe's Biography



Alex Zerbe dreamed of being a cartoonist, a radio DJ, a stand-up comedian, an actor and anything else that would give him the attention he craved as an only child. These dreams got put on hold when he became obsessed with the sport of freestyle footbag (Hacky Sack) in high school. After seeing a great freestyler in Portland, OR, Alex was told by his best friend, "You will never be that good."

Alex proved his friend wrong and went on to place 8th at the World Freestyle Footbag Championships, receive a Guinness World Record for a specific freestyle trick and use his passion for the sport to launch a career in the performing arts. He even met his wife, Jane, at a freestyle footbag tournament. Jane was recently inducted to the Footabag Hall of Fame! Now their most impressive trick is juggling the two cutest children in the world.

Since performing his first school program in 1998, Alex has performed in 14 countries, appeared on two national television shows (America's Got Talent and Last Comic Standing), and performed at over 1,500 schools. He loves blowing the minds of young people, getting them excited about their future and inspiring them to "Come Alive!"

## Vocabulary Terms

- **Live Music Looper:** A device that allows someone to instantly record sound and immediately play it back. Using a music looping device allows a musician to accompany him or herself.
- **Stand-up Comedy:** A live performance where a person stands on stage and makes the audience laugh by telling jokes and/or stories
- **Sight gag:** A comic bit or effect that depends on sight rather than words.
- **Creativity:** The ability to make new things or think of new ideas.

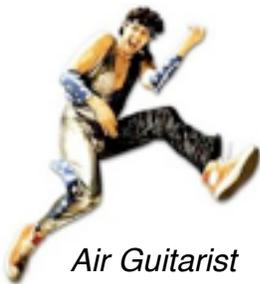


*Live Music Looper*

- **Beatboxing:** A form of vocal percussion where the mouth is used to produce drum beats and musical sounds.
- **Call and Response:** A musical phrase in which the first and often solo part is answered by a second and often ensemble part
- **Diabolo:** Also known as a Chinese yo-yo. A juggling prop consisting of an axle and two cups or discs. This object is spun using a string attached to two hand sticks.



*Diabolo*



*Air Guitarist*

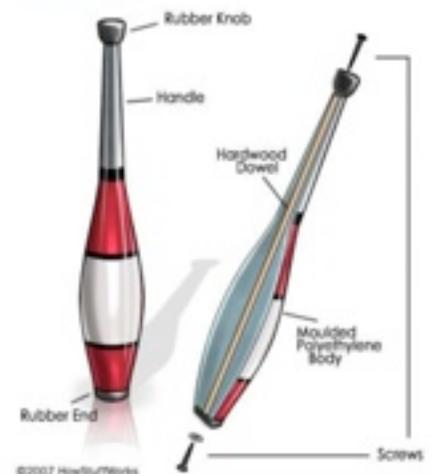
-**Rap:** Spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics. Rap is different from poetry because it is performed with musical accompaniment

-**Air Guitar:** A form of dance and movement in which a performer pretends to play an imaginary guitar.

-**Brainstorming:** A creativity technique where all members of a group spontaneously generate information and ideas.

- **Persistence:** Continuing on a course of action despite difficulty, opposition, or repeated failure. Persistence is essential to accomplishing important goals.
- **Soft Rhyme and True Rhyme:** A hard rhyme is something that rhymes exactly, like be and me. A soft rhyme is something that doesn't quite rhyme but is close enough, like dine and time.
- **Juggling Clubs:** A prop used by jugglers. They are similar to bowling pins but are different in size, weight and weight distribution.

*Juggling Club*



## Pre-Performance Activities

### Time to Rhyme

Think of a word and then try to rhyme as many words as possible with that word. What words are perfect rhymes? What words are soft rhymes? Here's some words to get you started

- Shoe
- Tree
- Cherry
- Weird

### Self-Expression, Let's get Goofy

1. Students stand in a semi-circle and perform one at a time.
2. A student moves into the performance area and makes a funny face and a sound. Use a made up sound, not a real word. Use your imagination, be creative.
3. Be original, try not to make a face or sound that has been performed already.

### Air Guitar, Time to be a Rock Star

1. Pick a song. I recommend one with a guitar. Here's a few good ones that have simple riffs. All of these can be found on YouTube
  - a. Seven Nation Army by The White Stripes
  - b. Back in Black by AC/DC
  - c. I Love Rock and Roll by Joan Jett
  - d. Smells like Teen Spirit by Nirvana
2. Divide your class up into groups of four. Each student will be assigned or choose an instrument to play in their air band, guitar, bass guitar, drums and vocals.
3. Play the song once or twice (not all the way through, cut the song after a minute or so) and have each group practice their parts.
4. Tell students to listen to the part of the song they're pretending to play so their movements match the music.
5. Now do it again and have each group perform for the whole class.
6. Air guitar is an amazing cardio exercise and it gives people a chance to feel what it's like to be a rock star.

### Word Association

Students sit in a semi-circle and someone starts by saying a word. The next student listens to that word and says the first word that pops into his or her mind. Don't think, just say the first word you think of. These associations may be bizarre and might not make sense. Just keep saying words until every student has had a chance to contribute. What did you observe? Did you notice any patterns? Pay attention to emotional associations, how did the words make you feel?



## Learn to Beatbox (kindergarten to age 103)



Beatboxing is the art of making drum sounds with your mouth. It's one of my favorite things to do because the only thing you need is your mouth and a willingness to be a little silly. If you write a rap song in one of the following exercises, you can create your own music for it by learning to beatbox.

There are three different sounds you should master to make a basic beat, the kick drum sound (b), the hi-hat sound (t), and the snare drum sound (k). Let's start with the kick drum sound

The simplest way to make the kick drum sound (b) is to start by saying the sound "Buh" Try to emphasize the consonant sound, not the vowel sound. Now try it again but build the pressure behind your lips and then release . Eventually you'll eliminate the vowel sound all together. The better you get the tighter and punchier it should sound.

To make the hi-hat sound (t), make the sound "Ts." Keep your teeth closed or lightly closed. The tip of your tongue should be pressed where your upper teeth meet your gums. Push the sound through your teeth. You can experiment by drawing out the "s" sound or keeping it short and tight or "staccato" I think this is the easiest of the three sounds to make.

To make the snare drum (k) sound, use your mouth to make the letter "K." Just like the bass drum sound, accentuate the consonant part, and try to eliminate the vowel sound. Put the middle part of your tongue to the roof of your mouth, use your breath to build up some pressure, then release, making a hard "K" sound.

Once you feel comfortable making all three sounds, practice putting them together. The basic pattern is {b, t, k, t, repeat}. Go slowly at first and accentuate each sound.

Experiment with different rhythms and and patterns. Try forming different shapes with your mouth and creating your own sounds. Experimentation is an essential part of creativity. A big part of being successful is not being afraid to fail.

Below is a link to a great tutorial video or search YouTube: beatbox tutorial basic beats by FatTonyBBX

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhgj8V0RyfM&feature=c4-overview-vl&list=PL4C797BBE89098DF2>

## **Balancing an Object** - an exercise is persistence (kindergarten\* - age 99)

Learning to balance an object on your hand or your chin is relatively simple, it just takes practice. The easiest things to learn with are things that tip over slowly. The taller an object is, the easier it is to balance. Here's some common objects.

Brooms, hockey sticks, golf clubs, canes, umbrellas and dowels cut to at least a meter, 120 cm is better.

\*Peacock feathers are great and necessary if you're teaching kids younger than 3rd grade

Make sure you have some space. When your object falls, you don't want to hit anybody or break anything.

Place the object on the palm of your hand or the end of two fingers, try to get it as straight as you can and then let go.

**LOOK AT THE TOP OF THE OBJECT!** That's the most important part. Stay focused and never take your eyes off the top of the object.

When the object's center of gravity is directly above your hand, it will be perfectly balanced. If your object moves to the right, move your hand to the right, if your object moves forward, move your hand forward and so on.

Pay attention, notice what direction your object falls. If you keep making the same mistake over and over again, pay attention and work to correct it.

It's better to practice a little bit everyday than to practice for a long time on one day. When you practice something everyday, your subconscious mind starts working on it even you're not.

Once you can balance the object on your hand without moving your feet and without moving your hand much, you're ready to try balancing the object on your chin.

This is a great exercise to try 5 days in a row for 5-10 minutes. By the end of the week you will see a noticeable improvement in your ability.

Don't get frustrated if you can't do it right away, failure is not permanent. Remember, **ALWAYS LOOK AT THE TOP!**



## **How to Write a Rap Song** (grades 5+)

This is an activity that you can do individually or with a group.

### **Step 1 - Pick a topic**

The great part about writing a rap is you can talk about anything you want. Pick a topic that you know about so you'll have lots of information to draw upon. As an example I'll use my song, "At the Library!"

### **Step 2 - Brainstorm**

Write down everything you can think of about that topic. The more information you write down, the more resources you will have to draw upon when you're writing your song. There are no wrong answers when you brainstorm

### **Step 3 - Write Lines**

Think of a few things you want to say. This is your opportunity to express how you feel about your topic. Try to end these statements with words that are easy to rhyme. Remember, the bigger your vocabulary is, the easier it will be to think of words to rhyme. Write down lots of these lines. You can always get rid of the ones you don't like in the final draft of your song.

Examples:

The food groups for your mouth are veggies, meat and dairy,  
the food that feeds your brain is at the library.

Learn to cook from a book  
mom will think you're off the hook!

### **Step 4 -Write a Hook.**

The most challenging part of writing a song is writing the "hook" or chorus. The hook is the part of the song that gets stuck in your head. Keep it simple, look to your favorite songs as examples.

Example:

At the library! At the library!

### **Step 5 - putting it all together**

Below you'll find a standard structure for a rap song. The great thing about being creative is that you can do things your own way. You don't have to stick with this structure but it is a good starting point.

## Standard rap song structure

Intro - this is where you can introduce yourself or check the mic or just say “aww yeah”

Verse 1 - Verses are composed of a few lines

Chorus - That’s the hook, the part of the song that gets stuck in your head

Verse 2 - More lines, they need to be different from verse 1

Chorus - There’s the hook again, it should be the same as before

Verse 3 - More lines

Breakdown or Bridge - This is where the music or beat changes, you can rap over this part or not.

Chorus - One last time

Outro - The music fades out and you can thank people here or give “shout outs”

## **A Note About Learning to Juggle**

Including a juggling activity would take up some serious page space so instead I’ll recommend a great book and a very effective YouTube video.

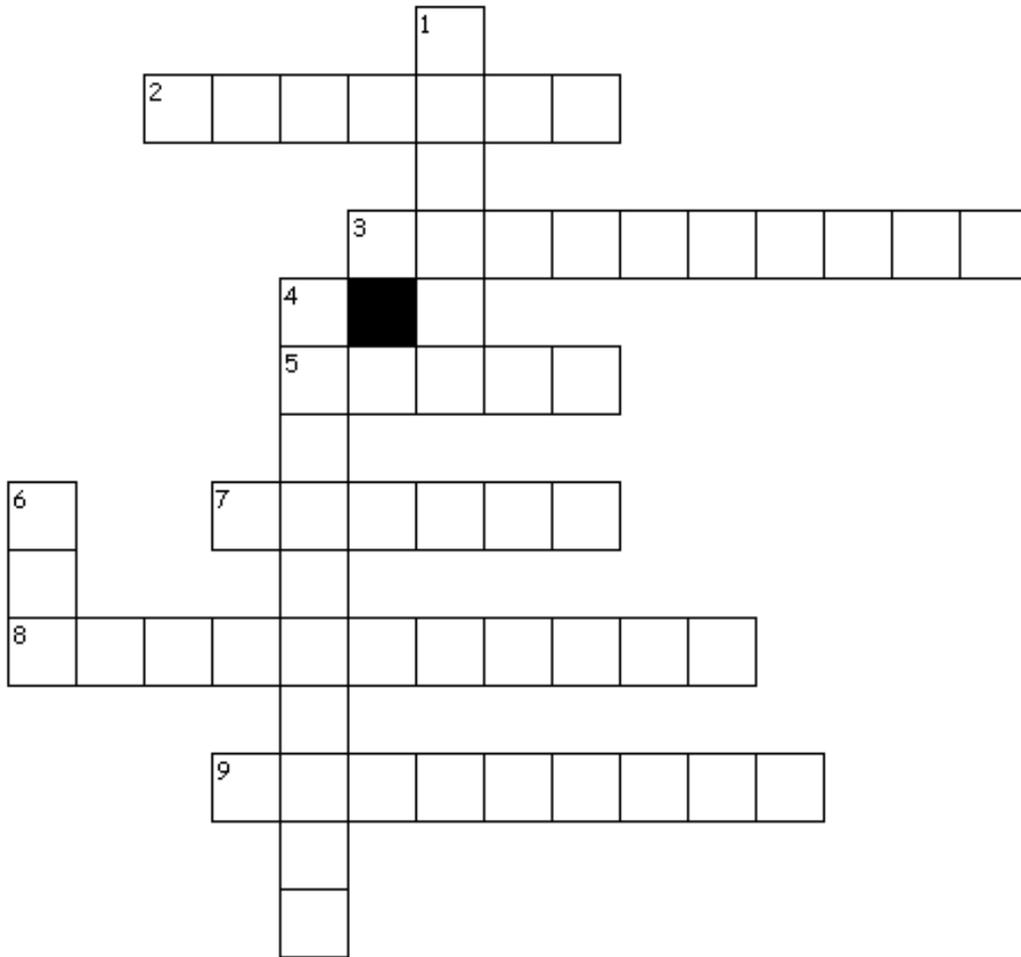
Juggling for the Complete Klutz by John Cassidy and B. C. Rimbeaux

How to Juggle 3 Balls by WorldJuggling on YouTube

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T16\\_BVIFFPQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T16_BVIFFPQ)

YouTube Search: How to Juggle - At the creation of this document, it is the third hit.

## The Zaniac's Crossword



### Across

2. A Chinese juggling prop that you spin
3. The art of making drum beats with your mouth
5. Words that end with the same sound
7. Another word to describe Alex Zerbe
8. Continuing on a course of action despite difficulty or opposition
9. Pretending to play guitar

### Down

1. The art of making people laugh
4. The ability to make something new
6. Spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics

## Technical Requirements

- The performance typically runs 45-50 minutes but can be lengthened or shortened if necessary
- Alex likes to have an hour to set-up his show but can do it in 30 minutes if necessary. He can set up his props on the side of the gym and move them into place if the gym or stage is being used by a class.
- It takes Alex about 30 minutes to pack up his gear, longer if he's being mobbed by students ;-)
- Alex needs a space that's at least 4 meters deep and 5-6 meters wide.
- Alex would like to talk with someone about how the students will be sitting to make sure he knows where the front row will be, how many kids there are and to establish an aisle up the middle.
- Alex provides his own sound system that is great for up to 700 kids. The person who introduces Alex will need their own microphone because Alex's mic is taped to his face.
- Alex will provide a written introduction. It's laminated, ooooo fancy.
- Alex needs electricity so depending on where the nearest outlet is he may need an extension cord.
- Alex likes to get out of sight before kids start loading into the gym or auditorium and would like to hide out in an equipment closet or teacher office.

## Audience Etiquette

Alex Zerbe's performance is exciting and fast paced. Students should be reminded before the show what it means to be a good audience.

- Don't talk to your neighbors
- Show your appreciation by clapping, not screaming
- Alex uses volunteers during the performance and only picks students who are sitting quietly.
- Remember any questions that you think of, Alex will take as many as he can near the end of the show.

## Crossword Answers

Across

2. Diabolo
3. Beatboxing
5. Rhyme
7. Zaniac
8. Persistence
9. Air Guitar

Down

1. Comedy
4. Creativity
6. Rap

## Curriculum Connections

### The Arts:

**Music:** Alex plays a simple song on a recorder in a creative way. Recorders are used in many music programs and seeing a professional artist use an accessible instrument is a great way to inspire.

He uses a live music looper [refer to your study guide] and collaborates with a student to create an one of a kind piece of music. It's a great demonstration of how technology can be incorporated into the arts.

**Dance:** Every volunteer who comes onstage is encouraged to express themselves through dance. The climax of the show is a routine that combines dance and hat juggling and prompted a reviewer from CultureMob to write, "Rarely have I seen such an example of physical grace."

**Drama:** There are two masks associated with drama, comedy and tragedy and there's no tragedy in this performance (except that it comes to an end). Students will experience a live comedy show featuring physical, verbal and prop comedy. They'll see the creative process at work and witness several different circus arts. They will love it.

### Physical Education:

Create Yourself is a physical theater experience that showcases the joy of movement. World class juggling skills are used to demonstrate the concept of muscle memory. Alex discusses the process of learning a physical skill and stresses the importance of practice and persistence. Kids are taught and shown that learning a new skill takes time and that failure is not permanent. Alex shows the audience how to embrace failure and teaches that, in fact, failure is an essential component of success. Alex Zerbe also has a background in alternative and cooperative sports.

### Literacy:

Alex uses his original hip hop song, "At the Library" to excite students about the world of books, and reading. It's very appropriate that song writing and word play is the vehicle he uses to promote literacy. The second largest library system in the United States recently booked Alex into over 50 schools to promote reading. Imagine your entire school chanting "At the Library!"

If you have any questions or ideas on how to improve either the study guide or performance, please send Alex an email or give him a call. Really, he want's to hear your constructive criticism.

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