

ARCO JNR

By Adam Kelly & James Berlyn



Theatre / Accessible Theatre

Recommended for Primary and Middle School (Ages 7+)

Show Summary

ARCO Jnr takes a heartfelt look at the life and struggles of an autistic gentleman trying to make connections with the people and world around him. Join Adam and Finbar as they dance, draw, fly and joke their way into your hearts.

ARCO Jnr is an illuminating exploration of what it means to be autistic, from one young man's perspective. Reflecting on the dominant themes of his young life, those captured by the show's title acronym (autism, rejection, community, and optimism), Adam reminds audiences of the universality of rejection and yearning to connect.

Links to the Curriculum Standards

Subjects: The Arts (Dance, Drama), English, Humanities and Social Sciences

Cross curriculum priorities: Sustainability (social sustainability and inclusive communities)

Content descriptor: Students experience how movement, drawing, and storytelling can communicate personal experience and identity. Through contemporary performance, students are encouraged to consider different ways people connect with others and the world. *ARCO Jnr* supports discussion of empathy, inclusion, and shared emotional experiences.

General capabilities:

Literacy: Engaging with narrative, character, and meaning across performance forms.

Critical and Creative Thinking: Interpreting symbolic movement and non-verbal communication.

Personal and Social Capability: Developing empathy, self-awareness, and respect for difference.

Ethical Understanding: Reflecting on inclusion, fairness, and how communities respond to difference.

Themes

- Connection, belonging, and community
- Difference, identity, and self-expression
- Rejection, resilience, and optimism

Pre-performance Discussion

- **Making connections:** What are some different ways people communicate besides talking? Have you ever wanted to make a new friend but found it difficult?
- **Understanding difference:** What does it mean that everyone experiences the world differently?
- **Exploring autism respectfully:** What do you already know about autism? Why is it important not to assume that all autistic people are the same?

Pre-performance Activities

- **Share in pairs:** Ask students to pair up and share one thing they enjoy doing and one thing they find difficult. Discuss as a group how everyone has strengths and challenges.
- **Exploring differences:** Show an optical illusion or play a piece of music and ask students what they notice. Highlight how different perspectives can all be valid.
- **Drawing task:** Express different emotions using lines and colours.
- **R for Rejection:** Create a class list of positive ways people can respond when they feel left out or disappointed.

Post-performance Discussion

- **First reactions:** What surprised you about the show? How did the performance make you feel? Was there a moment that made you laugh, think, or feel emotional?
- **Understanding Adam's perspective:** What did you learn about Adam from the show? What strengths, talents, or interests did Adam have?
- **Autism and diversity:** What did you learn about autism? How did Adam experience the world differently from some other people? What similarities did you notice between Adam and yourself? Emphasise that Adam is sharing *his* experience of autism, and that autistic people are all different.
- **Community:** Who were the people that helped Adam feel supported? What makes a strong community? How can we make our classroom more welcoming?

Post-performance Activities

- **Draw your superpower:** Adam's story highlights strengths as well as challenges. Ask students: What is your superpower? This could be: kindness, creativity, problem-solving, drawing, sport, helping friends. Students create a superhero self-portrait featuring their strength.
- **Connection Circles:** Students stand in a circle. Call out statements such as: Loves drawing, likes animals, has felt nervous meeting someone new, enjoys making people laugh, has helped a friend etc. Students step into the circle if the statement applies to them. This activity highlights common experiences and reinforces the show's message that we share many similarities despite our differences.
- **Inclusion challenge:** Brainstorm as a class, what things can we do around the school this week to help everyone feel included? E.g. Invite someone to join a game, learn someone's name, listen without interrupting, include others in group work, celebrate different strengths. Create a class pledge and revisit it throughout the term.
- **Letter to Adam:** Students write a short letter or postcard to Adam including something they learned, a question they still have, a moment they enjoyed, and a message of thanks.

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