

The Word

Access Guide

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About *The Word*

The Word is a multi-disciplinary theatrical performance incorporating text, movement, music, and video projection. It is performed by a cast of 11 young people aged between 14 and 20, and created with a team of professional adult artists.

Inside the imposing architecture of Abbotsford Convent, *The Word* deals with the past, the imagined future, and the immediate. The young people delved into their own stories and feelings, creatively exploring real world events and pre-existing texts, and their own personal writings. *The Word* wrestles with systems of power to reclaim and rewrite new future trajectories.

There is a variety of seating options including floor cushions, traditional seats, and bar stools, from which the audience will remain for the duration of the performance. The audience is invited to reflect on their own relationship with words and languages, and if they are comfortable, they may volunteer to participate in an interactive moment during the performance to share their words.

The performance runs for 75 minutes, from 7:30pm-8:45pm with no interval.

About This Guide

This guide has been developed by Alice Qin, with consultation and guidance by Artemis Muñoz. It is designed with the intention of assisting the audience to mentally prepare for what to expect when they come to see *The Word*. It has information about all kinds of access but is specifically designed with neurodivergent audiences in mind. If any of this information is not useful to you, you are encouraged to skip or disregard it. This is a lengthy document. It is here to help, not to stress you out. Use the contents page to find what information is relevant to you.

ACCESS OVERVIEW

Auslan

The Word is Auslan interpreted on Thursday 23 May. We will do our best to ensure that every seat would have good view of the interpreters, but if you let front of house staff know that you would like to access the interpretation, they will guide you to the seats with optimal view.

Wheelchair Access

The venue is fully wheelchair accessible. There is a unisex accessible toilet near the performance space. The pathways

from the street outside through to the building that the Magdalen Laundry is inside are all paved, although not fully flat.



There is a ramp to enter the performance space with a width measuring 110 cms.

If you have a wheelchair that requires a wider passageway, there is a back entrance to the space that is available, however we need to note that the back entrance would require going over cobblestone for a short distance. Please contact Alice on alice@stmartinsyouth.com.au and we would be able to assist you.

Tactile Tour

A tactile tour will be available for audience members who are blind or have low vision, or for audience members who would like to have a hands-on experience of the work. The stage manager Steph will be the guide and they will describe the set, as well as allow some props to be touched. A few cast members would also be present to introduce themselves, describe the costumes, and allow the participants to touch the material of the costumes.

If you would like to participate in the tactile tour, please contact Alice on alice@stmartinsyouth.com.au

Audio Description

Audio Description will be available in the second week of performances. Audiences who would like to experience the show with audio description will wear headphones during the performance and hear a description of the visual aspects of the performance.

If you would like to use audio description services, please contact Alice at your earliest convenience on alice@stmartinsyouth.com.au

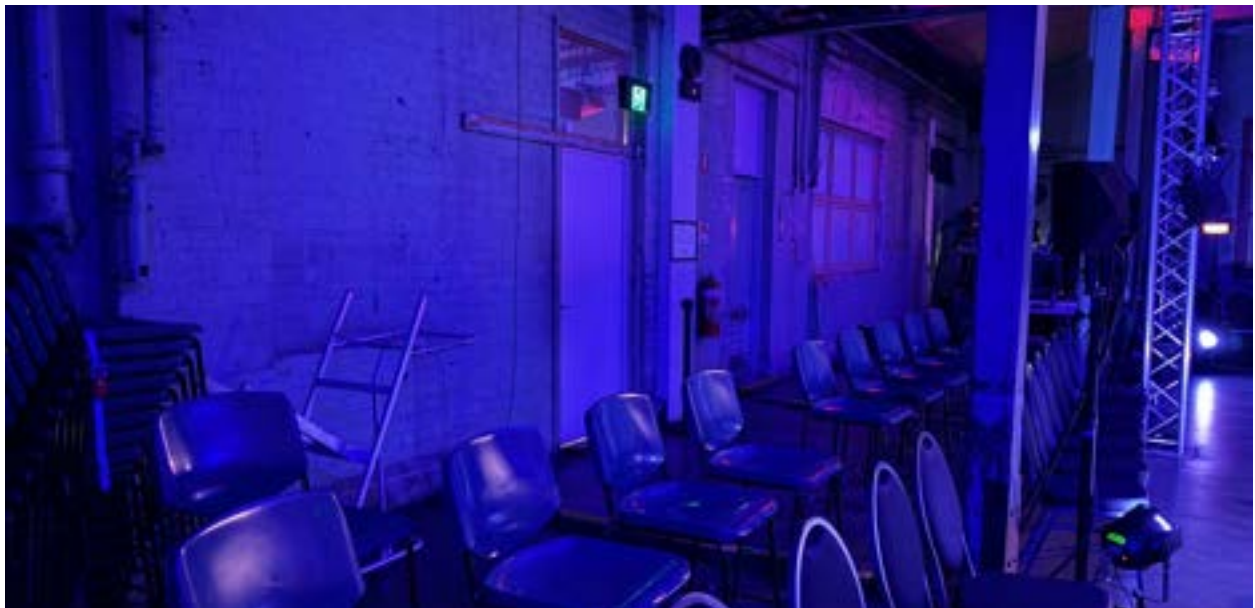
Guide Dogs and Service Animals

The venue is very friendly to service animals. If you are bringing a service animal into the performance, please contact Alice on alice@stmartinsyouth.com.au and we will remind the team of service animal etiquette and have a water bowl prepared.

Sensory Tools and Breakout Areas

The Word was designed to be a world to step into, and enjoyed for the duration of the performance. We will have some ear muffs and other sensory tools such as stim objects and fidgets on hand, but you are encouraged to bring your own tools that will help with self-regulating.

There is an exit that is accessible from behind the seating area which you will be able to use after the show has begun. There is an exit sign above this door.



There are certain seats which would be more discreet and would not disturb the other audience members if at any point you need to get up and out of the space. The bar stools behind the chairs would have aisles every 7 seats apart.

Once you exit the space using the back exit, you will be in a corridor which will have low lighting, and a toilet to the left.



If you continue on and exit through the glass doors at the other side of the corridor, you will be back in the courtyard area where you checked in.

There is no designated quiet space available to use, however there are a few areas nearby that can be suitable for decompression or self-regulation before, during, or after the event as needed.

Mercator Lawn:

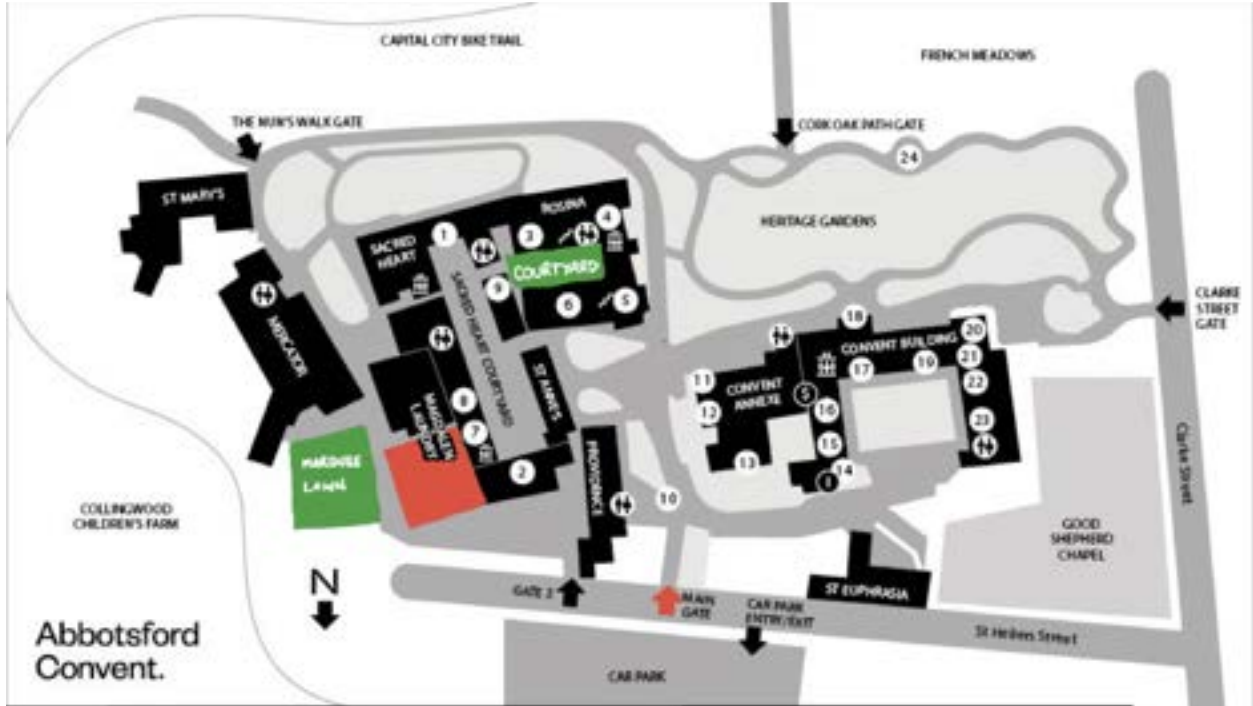
Through the corridor by the performance space, there is a lawn with a marquee which is removed from the more populated areas of the venue. We will have some chairs and blankets in this area available for anyone who needs it.



Rosina Courtyard:

There is also a courtyard nearby which has seating under cover and would be away from crowds.





As both of these spaces are outdoors, it may be cold. Please dress accordingly.

Re-entry into the space

If you have wandered away from the performance space, you will need to identify the glass door that you exited from at the end of the big Sacred Heart Courtyard.



VENUE INFORMATION

Getting to Abbotsford Convent

This performance will take place at the Magdalen Laundry (North) inside Abbotsford Convent. Abbotsford Convent is a large arts and cultural precinct with multiple buildings, gardens, and businesses. It can be an overwhelming venue for first time visitors, and even for people who have visited a few times, it is easy to get lost.

All the directions given in this guide start from the Main Gate located on St Heliers Street. The entrance to the car park is directly across the street from the Main Gate, and that is also the entrance which is closest to the nearest public transport.

Public Transport

Catch a Mernda or Hurstbridge line train to Victoria Park Station. The train station is a 10 – 15 minute walk to the Convent, or you can catch the 200 or 207 bus down Johnston Street to the Clarke Street stop. The bus stop is a 3 – 5 minute walk to the Convent.

The ride or walk to the Convent is spectacular, with the Capital City cycling and walking path directly passing the precinct. The

St Heliers Street turn-off is opposite the entrance to the Collingwood Children’s Farm.

Parking

All day parking is available in the car park directly across from the Convent on St Heliers Street. There are several accessible parking spaces available. The machines accept credit cards, notes and gold coins. Funds from the car park go towards the restoration and daily operation of the Convent, and also support Collingwood Children’s Farm. There is also street parking nearby.



Getting to Magdalen Laundry

There is plenty of signage inside the convent that point you in the direction you need to go, but sometimes these are confusing to follow. Cardinaly, we are due East of the main entrance. You would never have to leave the paved pathways to get to the performance space.

Starting from inside the car park area, the parking ticket machines are to the right of the yellow bollards, and the Main Entrance is directly across the zebra crossing.



Once through the Main Entrance, there is a large precinct map on the left side with a tree behind it.



You can take either path around the tree, as long as you are headed towards the left.



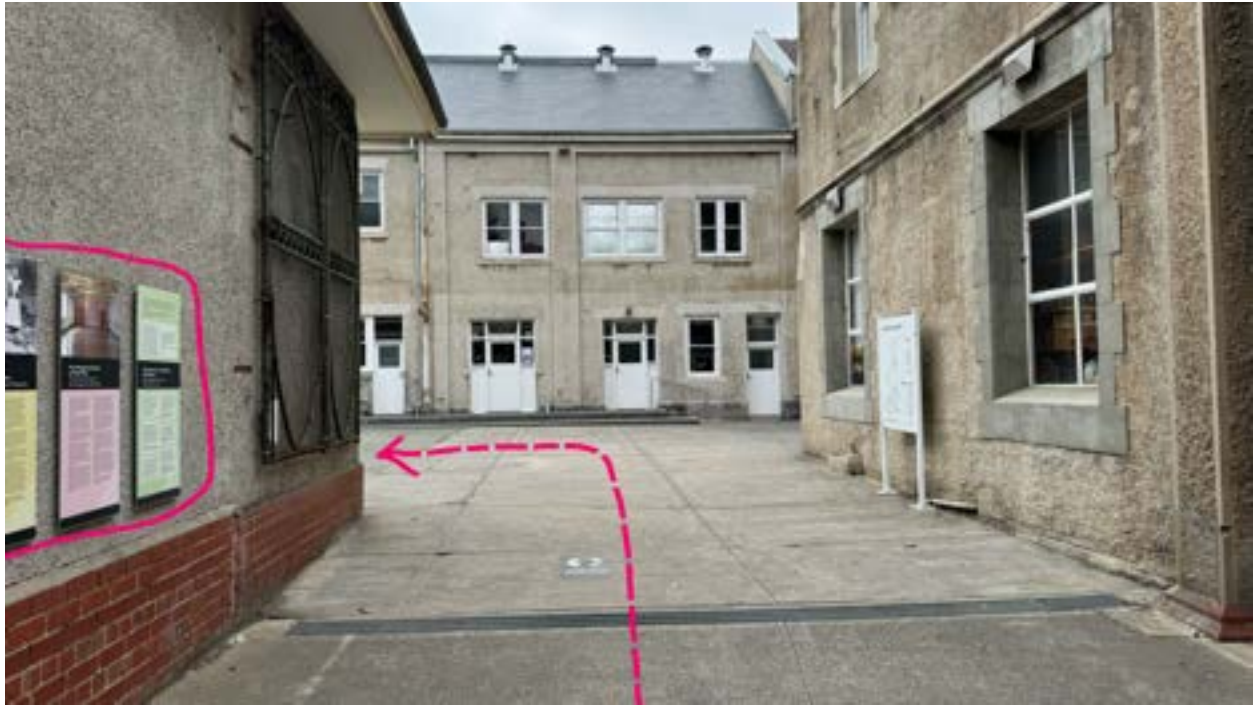
You will pass a water station where you can drink some water or fill up a water bottle. Be on the lookout for a sign letting you know the studios that are open.



If you keep to the left of the sign, you'll come to an opening between 2 buildings.



When you turn left, you'll find posters on the left hand side with historical information about the convent. Our performance space is to the left, the toilets are to the right.

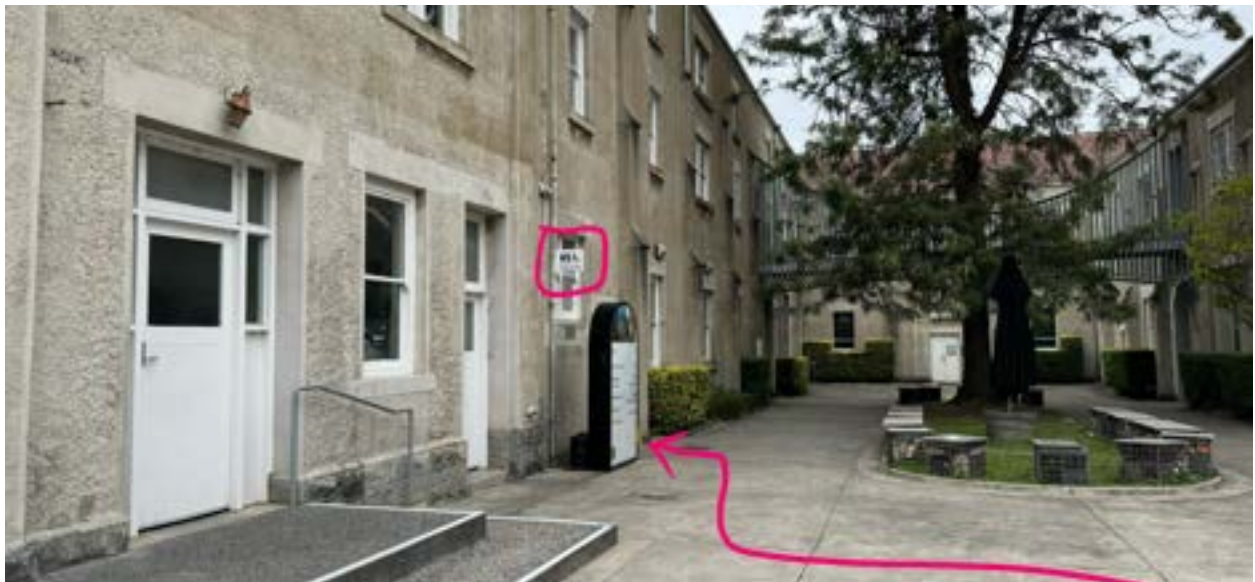


When you turn left, you will see a large courtyard and there is a black archway structure that looks more modern than the buildings around it. We are inside that doorway.



Our box office would be set up here and there would be plenty of front of house staff members wearing St Martins t-shirts to help you at this point.

The toilets are towards the other side of the courtyard. If you turn right and from the Laundry space, you will see a small toilet sign that's above a light box. Inside you will find the accessible toilet, a unisex toilet with urinals, as well as another unisex toilet without urinals, both with multiple stalls.



All of these areas will be lit at night, but it would look different from these photos.

Arrival

Once our front of house has checked you in, you will be given a postcard and a pen. This would function as your ticket into the space, so you can take your time and get yourself settled before

going in to find your seat. There will also be a table with printed programs for your perusal. A QR code directing to the digital program would also be on the postcard if you wish to read the contents digitally.

The postcard will have 10 prompts, inviting you to write down a word for each prompt. The prompts are questions such as “What’s a word that silenced you?”, or “What’s a word that you’ve left behind in your childhood?”. You are encouraged to contemplate your own relationship with words before the performance begins. This is to help you enter into the world of words, and to experience a little bit of the journey that the creative team has taken to bring this show to life. You will be asked to hold on to this card, and your words.

There is an opportunity halfway through the show when a few audience members will be invited to share their words into a microphone, and contribute to the texture of the show.

Latecomers Policy

Once the show has begun, we will have a no-admission period for the first few scenes so as not to disrupt the flow. We will then have a scene in which we will seat all latecomers, after which there will be no more admission. This occurs around 20

minutes after the start of the show. To avoid disappointment, we recommend allowing for plenty of time in your travel plan.

Dining Options

Cam's Kiosk inside the Convent will be open in the evenings. They serve Italian cuisine that is suitable both for individual dining as well as sharing. Other vendors inside the convent will be closed by 7pm. There are more options further away so plan ahead accordingly.

CONTENTS NOTES

Sensory Notes

This section of the guide aims to give you some details about what to expect from the sensory experience of the show.

If any part of the design or environment is uncomfortable or unpleasant, you are encouraged to bring tools and objects in anticipation and to self soothe in whatever manner would make you feel most comfortable.

Please note that if you do need to remove yourself from the performance space, and would like to come back to the performance after a break, please be mindful of the other audience members as you exit and re-enter the space.

The architecture of the performance space itself can be imposing. There is the vast scale of the high ceilings, with a mixture of the old heritage building, and the new infrastructure inside it. The walls are painted mint green and there is a lot of texture on the walls.



The seating area is in an L shape along two edges of the walls. The viewing experience from the different sides of the seating area will be different. We will work hard on making sure the difference is an interesting one, and not to cause a feeling of there being a hierarchy of seat quality.

As it is a devised theatre piece, the script moves from moment to moment with abstracted logic and leaping through time.

There are scenes in which the young people are playing characters, and monologues that are more personal, there are movement scores that are not fully explained but make dramaturgical sense. These leaps might feel frenetic, or you might experience this as quite slow and meditative. There are songs and musical moments that are grounded in the logic of the show, but might feel like they're coming out of nowhere. This piece can be enjoyed both as a narrative that you solve, or as like a watercolour, with each element building another layer of meaning culminating as a complete experience.

Sounds

There is a musical score underpinning every moment of *The Word*. This is made with instruments, mainly double bass, but many others, as well as nature sounds such as birds or wind rustling through leaves. There is the use of a loop pedal which builds the lushness and depth of the sound. There is also the sound of breath amplified by a microphone which punctuates most transitions.

All of the music is pre-recorded, however there will be live singing by some of the cast. There are 4 singing moments in total. These will all be amplified with a microphone.

The acoustics of Magdalen Laundry is quite echoey due to the large size and hard surfaces, which is beautiful for music, but

makes performing text much harder. As a result, the cast will all be wearing headset microphones so that you'll be able to hear them speak more clearly.

There may be times when some of the text is in a language other than English, there may be times when you will not be able to catch everything that is being said, that is okay. *The Word* was designed in a way that allows for miscommunication, for when words fail us.

There might be moments when it is loud, there might be moments that are quieter, there are no sudden loud noises. If tools such as ear plugs or muffs are useful for you, we recommend you bring them to use as necessary.

Visuals

The set consists of many objects, vessels, busts, basins, vases, some fully visible, and some wrapped in calico and twine.

Visually there are a lot of details that can be stimulating. The walls of the performance are Mint Green, and the costumes are the exact same colour. There will be large pink curtains that hang in several places. The cast will already be in the space when you enter. Initially this might be a lot to take in.

The show will be lit by theatrical lighting. There will be colours used to heighten moments. There may be times when the lighting state is a little dimmer overall, such as when we focus in on one or two characters, and there will be moments when it might be brightly lit. These changes will not be sudden. There are no strobing effects used in this piece.

There are 3 floor lights that are pointed up and towards the performers. As the seating is in an L shape, you will be able to see one or two of them. If bright light is something you are sensitive to, we recommend you look at the angles that the floor lights are pointed in and avoid being in direct line of them. They do not move during the show.

There is also a disco ball which will be activated at around 60 minutes into the show. It will spin at a moderate speed and the lights will dance across all the surfaces.

There are multiple projection surfaces on our set. The two big pink curtains will be one, as well as a big white portrait sized projection surface. All of the projection surfaces are fabric with folds and organic shapes, therefore the projection will not appear smoothly or with perfect crispness. This is by design.

Some of the projected text will also be too small to read, or sometimes they are distorted or in fragments. This is also by design as it is the theme of the overall work.

There will be a moments when the projections spill onto the floor or on the performers faces and bodies.

The projections will mainly consist of words in high contrast. They are mostly just a few words or phrases at a time. They will not blink with speed so they are not in danger of causing a strobe like effect. There will be times when the words will scroll across the screen and that can be visually busy. There is one moment of animation which jumps from one image to the next in a fairly quick succession. The projected images are not bright enough to cause a strobe effect however it can be visually overwhelming. This will occur around halfway through the piece when the young people are laying the objects on the floor in a grid pattern.

There will also be projected live video feed at points, as well as a video of a collection of facial features of the performers such as eyes and mouths. The mouths will be making shapes of syllables.

Other Sensory Experiences

During the opening sequence of the show, there is a moment when the performers are shaking the set and the objects to cause a rumbling effect. The sound also supports this effect. It can be quite loud and sometimes some of the smaller objects can fall to the floor.

There is also a moment when all the objects are stacked on top of each other, into a mountain. There is a little shouting that happens during this scene and it could feel loud and precarious.

Both these moments are well rehearsed and very safe. The performers also step up and down some wooden plinths. They are very well practised at this and we have had all the necessary discussions on the safety of this movement.

Being in the convent itself can be a very sensorially overwhelming experience. There is a lot of nature all around with the different textures and smells, there are the beautiful buildings themselves, as well as the rich and tumultuous history of the site.

PERFORMANCE AND TEXT NOTES

Performers

The cast of *The Word* is made up of 11 diverse young people, aged between 14 and 20. They are part of St Martins Congress, a think tank and testing ground for ideas big and small. They have previously performed together in the last major work of St Martins, *Gene Tree: Listen. Now. Again.* in 2022, and have been exploring the ideas of *The Word* for the past 18 months.

They will wear costumes that are the same colour as the walls, in styles that look like regular casual clothes individually, but when together and seen in their uniformity, may look like work uniforms.

Text

The contents of the piece touch on deeper topics of power and control, censorship, using words as weapons, as well as lighter topics such as the kids TV show *Giggle and Hoot* and the etiquette of pointing. At times it asks the audience to contemplate what words mean to them, how they use them.

The young people tell personal stories of when they have struggled with words, when they felt less fluent in their mother tongue, when the loss of native speakers of First Nations languages means they have less expertise over their own

language. We also evoke the history of the convent and the girls that worked in the laundry. While all the darker topics are handled delicately and with good humour, it may still cause discomfort for some.

Audience Participation

The show invites audience members to consider their own relationship with words and languages throughout the performance.

This consideration is first held in a structured way via the postcard which the audience members are invited to write on, responding to prompts. They are then invited to speak their words out loud into a microphone which a performer will hold for them. This invites an adult voice into a piece of young voices which is designed to provoke further reflection.

This participation is purely voluntary and you are not required to do this if you are uncomfortable, the cast member will simply look for volunteers who are eager and have indicated they would like to participate.

Performers may make eye-contact with the audience from time to time. You are welcome to disengage with this if this is not

something you would find an enjoyable aspect of the performance.

Performance

Most of what the performers do with their bodies is similar to what people do in their day to day lives. They will sit, stand, walk, raise their arms, hide and occasionally run or dance. They may shake, stack, and move objects that appear to be very heavy. They may also climb up and down objects. The performers are safe and are very comfortable doing these actions.