

Teacher's Notes

by peter gray

What a wise choice your school has made! By this action you are helping to keep alive the live performer, as well as steer future audiences towards the magic of live entertainment!

Having a live theatre performance at your school will indeed bring educational opportunities for your students and teachers... if the moment is utilised!

The whole experience should not be left just to the performer, or the performance. There are two ways teachers can help - these are preparation and follow up.

Enclosed is material to stimulate discussion, writing, drawing and other forms of expression as a result of my visit.

Easy to understand diagrams introducing circus skills are also included. Together we can give the students a lot to think about, which will help play a positive part in developing their lives ahead.

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Discussion Starters

peter gray - Train of Thoughts

1. When old man Nelligan was young, what do you think he spent most of his time doing? (*Learning how to juggle, balance, entertain using his imagination*)
2. How do you spend your time when you are not doing schoolwork?
3. How we spend our time today affects our lives ahead. (**Discuss**)
4. Nelligan as an old man, enjoyed one thing most of all, even above doing circus tricks. What was it? (*Sharing his life with others - How did he go about this?*)
5. Do you know any older people who have something special to share?
6. Have you observed an older person as they go about their business and ever wondered what they might have been like when they were babies, children, teenagers, and people in the peak of their lives?
7. Have you visited an old people's home or a hospital? What did you learn and observe?
8. Have you learned anything of value from an older person? Something that you could not possibly have learned from a young person, and in more ways than one has made you a better person for it.
9. Memories become more important as one grows older. While we are younger it is sensible to do positive things each day so we in time will have good memories. The decisions and choices we make each day play a major part in mapping out the sort of future we will have. (**Discuss**)
10. Nelligan had fond memories. What type of belongings did Nelligan have to remind him of his past? (*Old photo, shiny black boots, waist coat, juggling equip.*)
11. My skills of slackwire, juggling and balancing took over the years a great deal of (*2 words starting with the letter P - Patience and Practice*)
12. To learn anything and to do it well takes time and effort. What sort of things might you have your sights set on? While you are young is a good time to start!
13. To get his story across, old man Nelligan didn't speak in words like we do. What various methods did he use to keep us interested? (*Face and body expression, humour, sadness, music, props, clever skills, help from members of the audience*)
14. What is the most important thing you would like to do before your last breath?
15. Having the courage to step out in life will bring it's fair share of challenges, and those experiences both hurtful and exhilarating will through time add wrinkles of wisdom. (**Discuss**)





Discussion Starters continued

peter gray - Train of Thoughts

16. Without hearing words we can observe at a distance people's body language. We can tell their possible feelings, not by hearing, but more by looking. Look at a person's face, because their eyes and facial expressions tell you a lot about what they might mean behind the words they say. Words by themselves, most times tell you very little about what a person is trying to express. Words combined with face and body tell you a whole lot more. How a person dresses, and how a person walks gives us some more clues about that person. e.g. a person walking with their head upwards tends to be happier in their life, while a person walking with their head downwards tends to be sadder. **(Discuss)**
17. In my performance the importance of character is high on the agenda. It is the centre of what I do. It is even more of a priority than juggling and balancing. The character is what relates to the audience, and is the means of involving their emotions. I like to end the performance knowing that through the character I've had an experience with the audience that could be likened to that of a conversation with a good friend. A live theatre experience is like being engaged in eye-to-eye conversation. **(Discuss)**
18. **Please discuss** - Live entertainment: It's place in our lives as a spectator or participator it's relevance today and into the future.
19. What your students have experienced is a live theatre performance. For some, it may be one of a few live theatrical experiences they will ever have, because our society today spends more time entertaining itself through technological gadgetry than ever before. **(Discuss)**
20. Do you think as more home entertainment inventions arrive in our lounge rooms: The world of virtual reality may begin to cloud our vision as to what is real or unreal. **(Discuss)** The world of live entertainment and live communication may one day disappear in future societies. **(Discuss)**

NOTES:





The Art Of Balance

by peter gray

Balance is to do with the equilibrium of a weight. In the dictionary equilibrium means a state of steadiness. So basically if something or someone is balanced, the weight would need to be evenly distributed between two points - the bottom point the weight is supported on, and the top most point of that weight.

Right from the time we are born we are engaged in a balancing act. While babies, we learn to balance our weight as we crawl, and of course again as we stand on our two feet. Then throughout life as we freely move about, our bodies are constantly distributing weight evenly between our head and feet.

For those who wish to take balance beyond our basic human functions, here are some things to think about.

When first balancing anything or on anything, the body will find it strange. In order not to over balance, or in other words have a fall, you will need to allow time for the body to become familiar with what it's required to do. Often the mind gets impatient when the body is not catching up, but the only way to get results is to mix patience with practice repetitiously showing the body each time the required technique. In the early stages this will be mentally exhausting. Naturally it will take concentration for the body's reflexes to move appropriately. After the body becomes aware of the necessary moves, the art of balance begins to take place. The body takes over from the mind, and you start to feel more relaxed. It's still important however for the mind to stay always in the background ready to jump in and correct the balance when a new situation arises.

Riding a two-wheel bicycle or pushbike at the beginning took some learning. Now when riding a bike to the shop our minds think of all sorts of other things, rather than being aware our bodies are actually balancing. With practice our bodies will become one with the bike, and so begins the wonderful sensation that this type of balance brings. In similar ways other forms of balance gives us enjoyable experiences. e.g. skateboards, sail boards, ice-skating, surfing and skiing. All are challenging, but met with patience and practice there will be more thrills than spills!

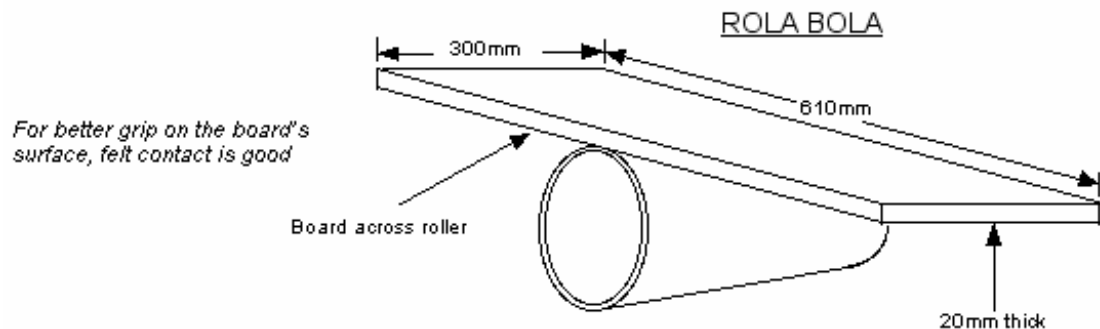
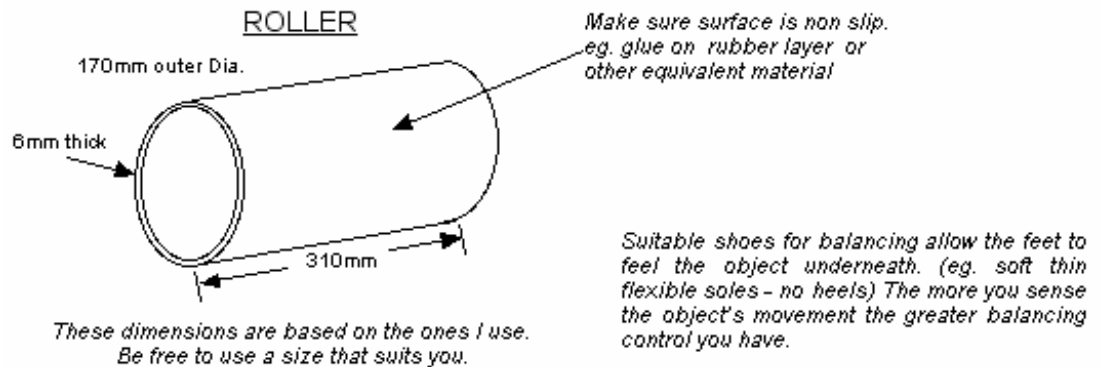


Rollers & Rola Bolas

by peter gray

Years ago, some workmen were busy laying pipes outside where I lived. As I passed, I suddenly had the idea those pipes would be ideal to roll and balance on. The pipes were light being plastic, and at the same time very strong. I politely asked the workmen whether they had any off-cuts, and to my surprise they threw an off-cut into my yard at the end of their work day. Since that day the original off-cut has travelled extensively entertaining people from all parts of the world, and of course has accompanied me in workshops giving many students challenging experiences.

When I first tried rolling on the plastic pipe it slipped on most surfaces, so I glued a rubber layer around the rolling perimeter of the pipe for grip. After having lots of fun rolling forwards and backwards, I then added a board across it on which I placed a foot on each end giving me a different balance sensation. In the circus world this is called a Rola Bola.



MATERIAL SUPPLIES

Piping - Plumbing Supplies, Gas & Fuel depots etc.
Rubber - Clarke Rubber stores (or similar)
Board - Hardware stores, Building Supplies etc.
Felt Contact - Hardware stores, Craft shops



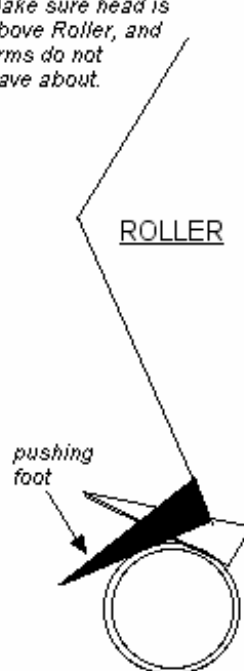
Rollers & Rola Bolas

(continued)

by peter gray

Balancing on objects requires utmost care and commonsense. It is fun at some risk!

Make sure head is above Roller, and arms do not wave about.



ROLLER

pushing foot

To roll on a roller, it is mainly all to do with toes and heels. The toes, or the front part of the feet control the direction of the roller. The heels act as a brake.

the heel helps slow Roller, at the same time as controlling the forward push of the front foot.

An upside down 'V' shape is created with your feet keeping Roller always beneath head.

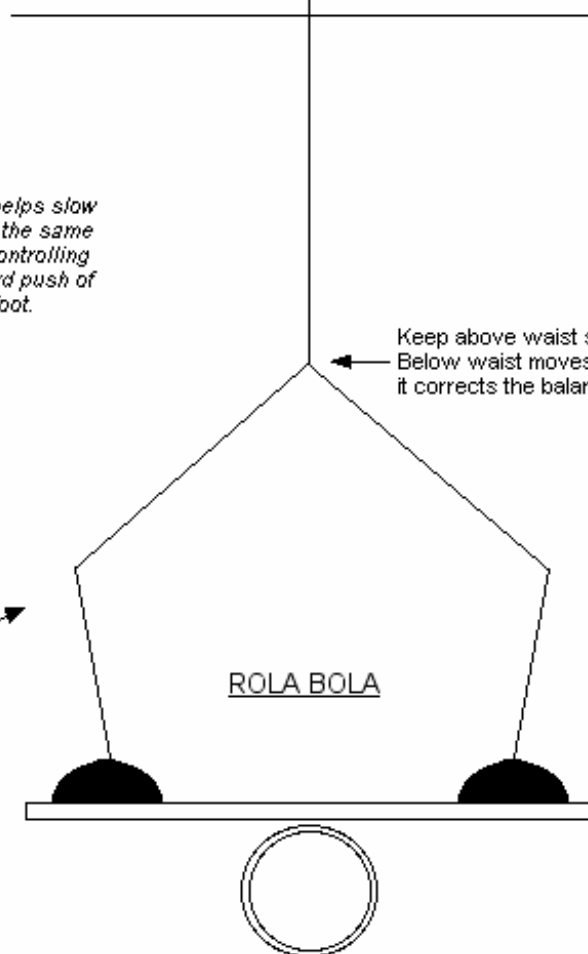
knees slightly bent



head over Roller

Keep an eye on the position of Roller, or go by sensing where the Roller is under the board.

Keep above waist still. Below waist moves as it corrects the balance



ROLA BOLA

SAFETY HINTS

When students begin to learn Rollers and Rola Bolas, they should work in pairs, so one can act as a spotter, or fall break while the other has their turn at balancing.

If you fall off a Roller, the most awkward way would be backwards, so make sure there are no obstacles on floor to blindly fall on.

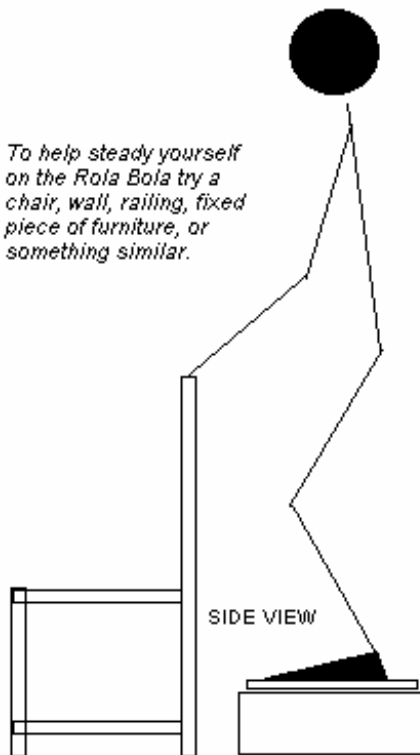


Rola Bolas

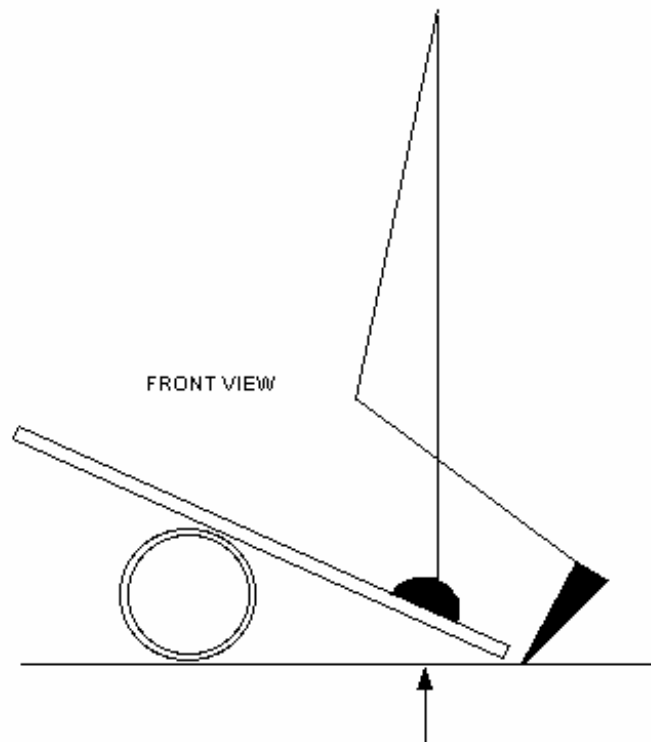
by peter gray

It is wise to hold on to something stable while familiarizing yourself with the Roller, or Rola Bola.

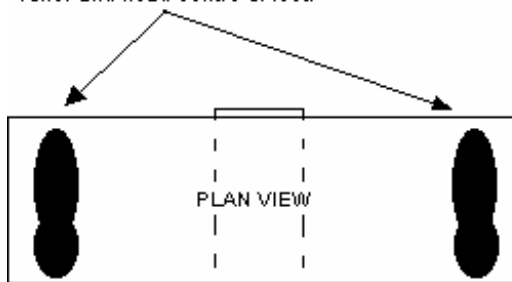
To help steady yourself on the Rola Bola try a chair, wall, railing, fixed piece of furniture, or something similar.



If you fall off a Rola Bola, it will most likely be beyond the ends of the board, so once again leave no obstacles on floor at least 2 metres to the left & right ends of board. If not alert the Rola Bola can throw you and the board horizontally to either side.



Position of feet should be symmetrical to the roller at centre of board. If roller creeps towards either foot, the foot closest to the roller becomes the controller. Weight of the body needs to be distributed via the foot closest to the roller in order to correct the balance. The idea is to always keep roller and head centre of feet.



There are various ways of dismounting from the Rola bola. One easier way is moving your weight to one side, resting the end of the board on the level floor. (as shown above) Then take the upside foot, and place it firmly on the floor first. You can either pass the upside foot in front or back of the foot still on the board. To mount the Rola Bola, this procedure can be reversed.

Roller out a fraction so you can see it's position.



Canes

by peter gray

When I was about 18 I travelled with a circus, and one of my duties was sweeping the seats. As I swept, I watched performers practice many hours a day in the circus ring. This inspired me to at first balance a broom on my finger, then on my chin, forehead and foot. I'm so glad I started practising when I was younger, because what I learned from balancing a broom led to many other interesting objects eg. pushbikes, chairs and glasses of water!

To the audience that don't know the techniques, balancing those objects can look difficult and almost impossible, but once the technique is applied it is certainly possible. Below are some activities for you to practice, and once they are mastered you will amaze your friends. Just remember practice + patience = perfection

What I call a cane is:

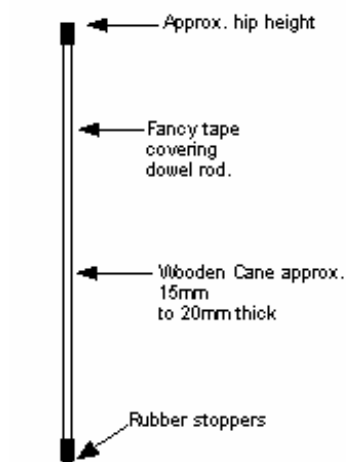
*A round wooden pole approx. half as thick as a broom handle.
Standing vertically on floor it should reach to approx. hip height.*

Make a cane presentable with:

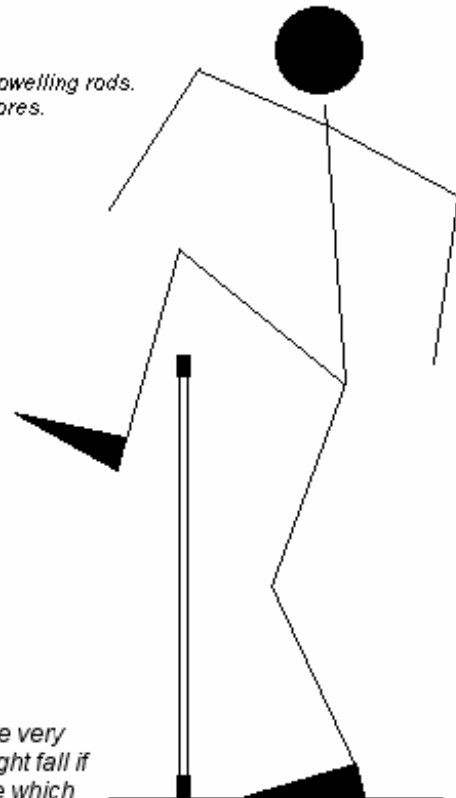
*Coloured, or fancy tape covering length of pole.
Rubber stoppers on each end.*

Material Supplies

Round wooden pole - *Hardware and Timber supplies. Ask for dowelling rods.*
Coloured, or fancy tape - *Hardware stores, art supplies, auto stores.*
Rubber stoppers - *Clarke Rubber Stores, Hardware stores.*



1



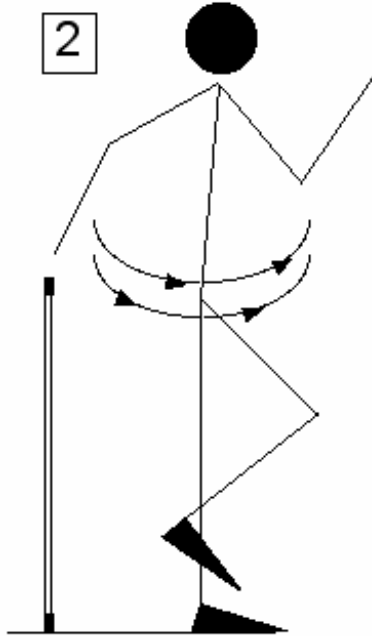
Place the cane vertically on the floor and hold it lightly at the very top between your finger and thumb. Sense which way it might fall if you let it go. When you get the feeling the cane can't decide which way it will fall, let it go quickly moving your hand upward. Before it falls swing your leg over it, then hold it with the same hand once again. If you hold the cane in your right hand, it will be easier to move your right leg over it from left to right. In your left hand it will be the opposite.



Canes

by peter gray

2

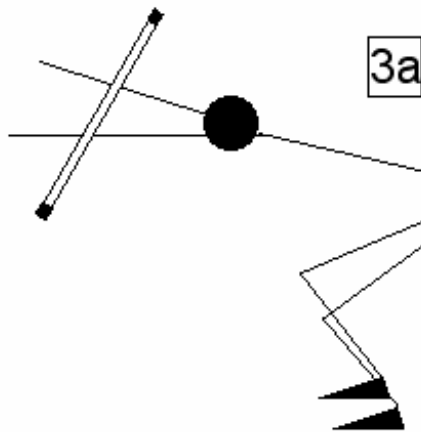


Place the cane vertical, and at the top hold lightly sensing it between thumb and finger as in step 1. When all is steady let the cane go, and spin around quickly taking hold of it again with the same hand before it has a chance to fall to the floor.

If you are right handed I recommend you hold cane in right hand, and spin on the left foot anti clockwise (to the left) if left handed, do the opposite.

Also please make sure that the surface you spin on, and the soles of your shoes have no friction. eg. shoes with grippy soles on carpet - In these conditions you might find your leg could stop spinning, and the rest of your body continue.

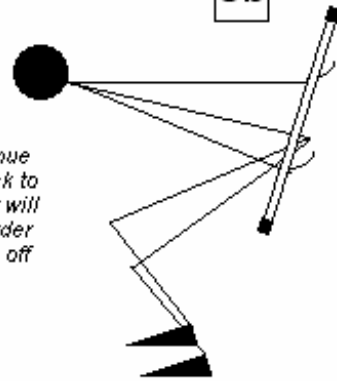
HINT: Before you spin it is best to look at the top of the cane (where you are holding it) As you spin your eyes are the last to leave the point of focus and the first to arrive back to the point of focus. This is called spotting. Watch ice-skaters or ballet dancers. When spinning they will show you this technique in action.



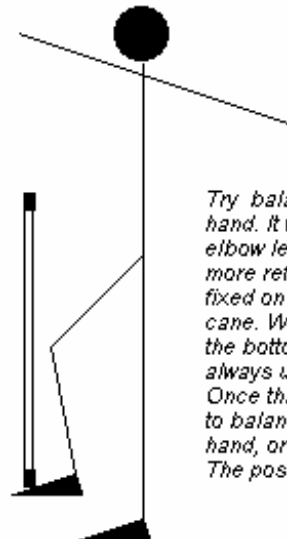
3a

Try rolling the cane along straight arms towards head, then ducking head at the last moment. This will allow the cane to continue along your straight back to be caught by hands. It will help to cup hands in order to stop the cane rolling off on to floor.

3b



4



Try balancing the cane on your foot. The technique is the same as the hand keeping eyes fixed to the top most point of cane. To begin with while standing on one leg hold on to something with your free hand in order to steady your body. Also it will help to have the cane balancing leg's knee reasonably bent for more reflex control.

Try balancing a cane on your hand. It will help to have your elbow level with your waist for more reflex control. Keep eyes fixed on the top most point of cane. Where ever the top wanders the bottom most point should be always under it to maintain balance. Once this is mastered you can go on to balancing the cane on your other hand, or on the tip of your thumb. The possibilities are endless.



Canes

by peter gray

continued

Hand balance

If left handed, your instructions are the opposite.

If wishing to learn the technique of balancing a cane, or any object on your chin, forehead, and foot it is best to start first with your hand. If you are right handed, place the cane on your right hand holding the cane vertically in your left hand between your thumb and finger. As you do this keep your eyes focused on the top most point of the cane. (as shown in step 5)

Once you sense (between finger and thumb) that the cane almost wants to stand up by itself, you are then ready to let it go. At this stage, do not look down. Look at the top, then release your left hand leaving the cane free to wander where it wishes. Of course, if left in this state of motion, the cane will soon fall, so in order to control the cane's direction, you'll have to tell the right hand what to do.

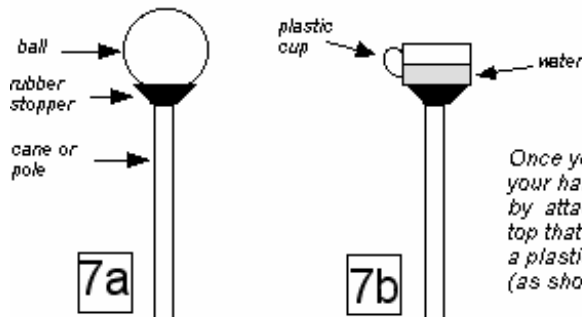
Follow these 3 simple steps, and you shouldn't have any problems!

- 1. Keep feet apart to assist a quicker reflex action from the body.*
- 2. Aim to keep the bottom point always under the top point.*
- 3. No matter what, always keep your eyes focused on the top point.*

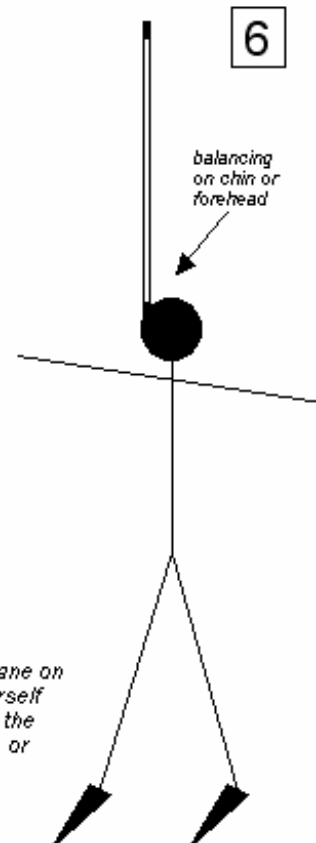
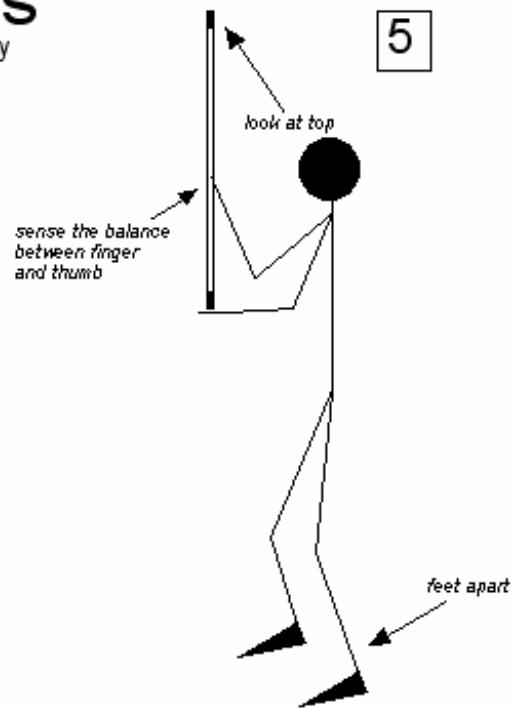
As you practice your mind will get better at correcting any move needed to keep the bottom always under the top. At first you'll be travelling over a wider space in order to keep the cane balanced, then as you improve your feet will remain firmly in the one spot, with just your upper half of the body and arms in motion.

When you reach the stage of the cane appearing to be completely steady you can give yourself a clap. You are now ready to try balancing a cane on your chin, forehead, or foot. (using the same technique)

HINT: What ever the object, make sure before you let it go that it's in the steadiest position. If it is not, you will create more work for yourself as you try to correct the balance. Those first few moments of concentration are critical.



Once you master balancing the cane on your hand, you can challenge yourself by attaching a rubber stopper on the top that allows you to place a ball, or a plastic cup of water on the top. (as shown in steps 7a & 7b)



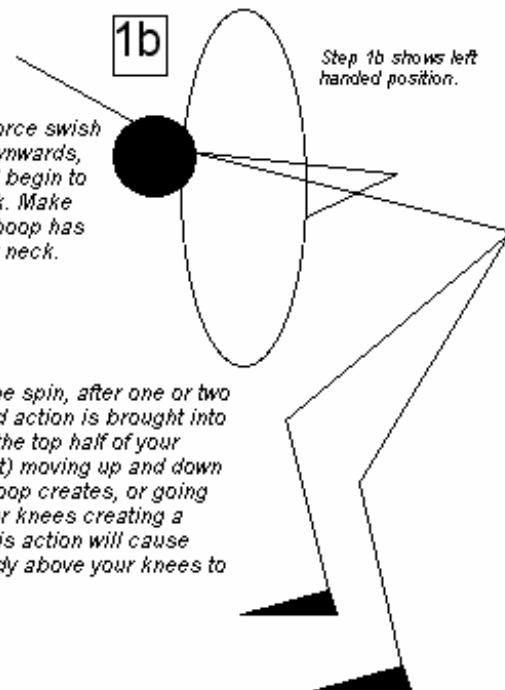
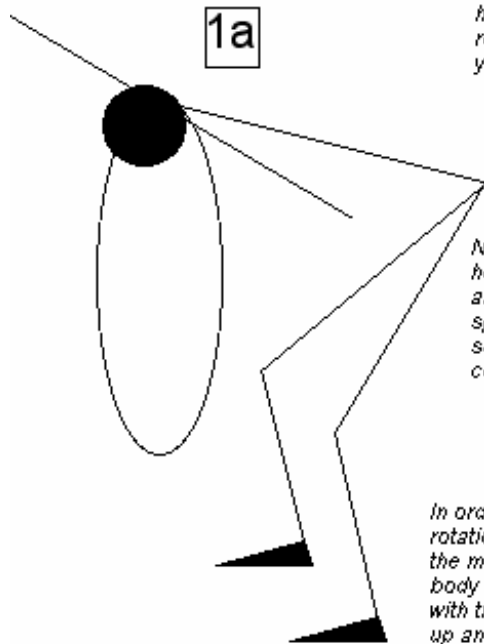
Hoops

by peter gray

Spinning Hoop on neck

*Feet apart with knees slightly bent.
Bend at waist with straight back almost
parallel to floor. Hang hoop on neck.*

*Make sure your knees are not in the spinning path of the hoop.
Now position hand on hoop, then hold the hoop outwards so the
hoop is against the side of neck. If you hold the hoop in your right
hand, the hoop would be out to the right of your neck, with the hoop
resting against the left side of your neck. If you hold the hoop in
your left hand the opposite is followed as shown in step 1b.*



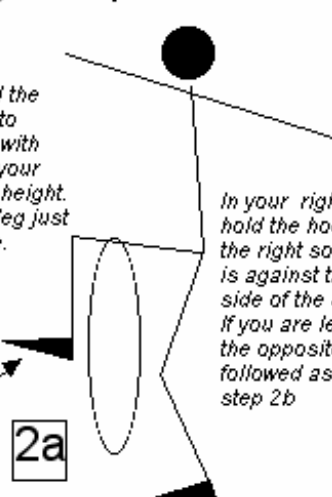
*Now with some force swish
hoop directly downwards,
and the hoop will begin to
spin around neck. Make
sure always the hoop has
contact with your neck.*

*In order to keep up the spin, after one or two
rotations a downward action is brought into
the motion either by the top half of your
body (from your waist) moving up and down
with the rhythm the hoop creates, or going
up and down with your knees creating a
bouncing motion. This action will cause
every part of your body above your knees to
go up and down.*

Spinning Hoop on knee

*If you are right handed the
easiest way would be to
stand on your left leg, with
the hoop threaded on your
right leg bent at waist height.
Hang hoop on raised leg just
inward from bent knee.*

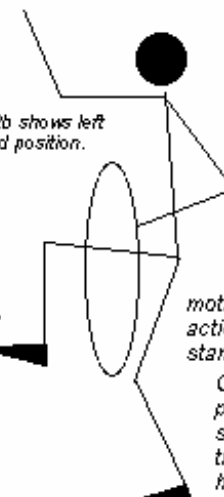
*Make sure foot
is away from
spinning path.*



*In your right hand
hold the hoop out to
the right so the hoop
is against the inner
side of the upper leg.
If you are left handed
the opposite is
followed as shown in
step 2b*

2b

*Step 2b shows left
handed position.*



*Now you are ready.
Push hoop directly
downwards to cause
spin. Then in an up
and down motion bring
the leg with hoop on it
into action, or you may
choose to put your whole
body into an up and
down*

*motion by a bouncing knee
action from the leg you are
standing on.*

*Of course there is no
particular set way to
start as long as you get
the up and down motion
happening.*



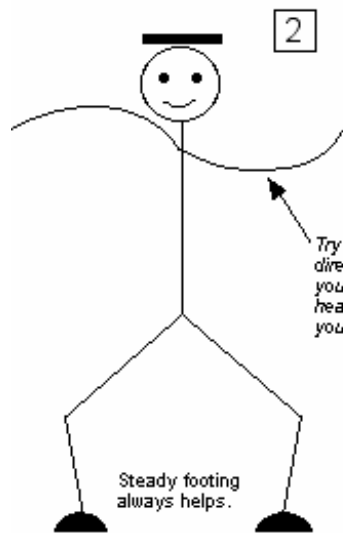
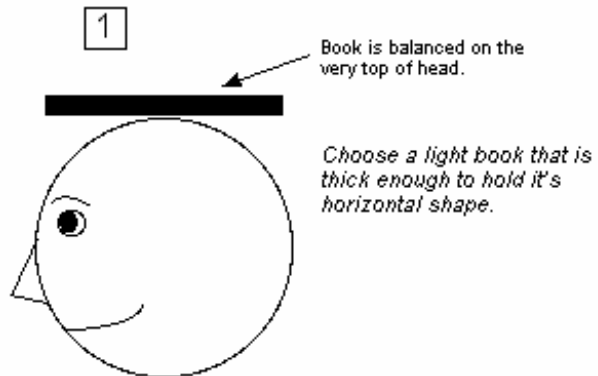
Book Balancing

by peter gray

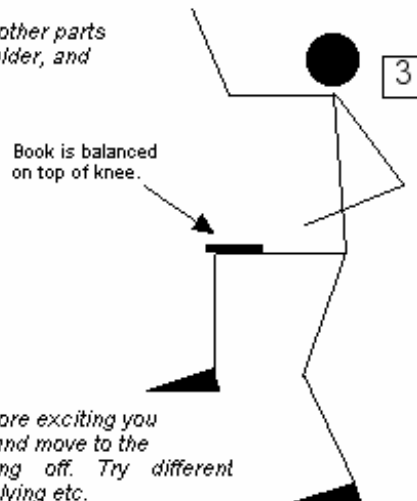
Book balancing can be a lot of fun, and a challenge if you use your imagination! A book as a circus prop does not look very exciting in comparison with flashy juggling clubs, or trapeze apparatus, however the introductory skills of balance can easily be achieved through these simple book balancing exercises. By using just a book you will discover and develop your own sense of balance.

Of course you do not need to use a book at all. You might find something else that could serve the same purpose. A book however is an ideal solution.

To make book balancing more interesting perhaps you could wrap and glue a book up like a parcel using a white sheet of paper or cloth, then paint your own design on it. This will give it a special look with it's own unique attraction. If you don't wish to paint it, you could always gift wrap it in fancy paper to achieve the same result.

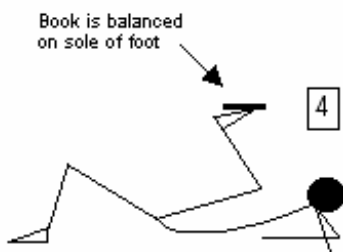


Try balancing your book on other parts of your body. eg elbow, shoulder, and knee as shown in diagram 1.



To make book balancing even more exciting you could play your favourite music, and move to the mood without the book falling off. Try different challenges eg. squatting, sitting, lying etc. Walk about - forwards, backwards, sideways.

When you get good at balancing one book, perhaps you could add extra books in the balance. eg. a book on your head, a book on your knee, as well as one on your elbow. You could also build up more books on your head and so on.



Balance on your bottom with book on knee keeping both feet off the floor.



More exercise ideas!



Ribbon Rhythmics!

Have a go at twirling a ribbon, and paint patterns in the air.

Take hold of a stick with a ribbon streamer attached to the end.

Ribbon Rhythmics is like painting a picture. Instead of a brush, paint and paper, you have a stick, coloured ribbon and air space.

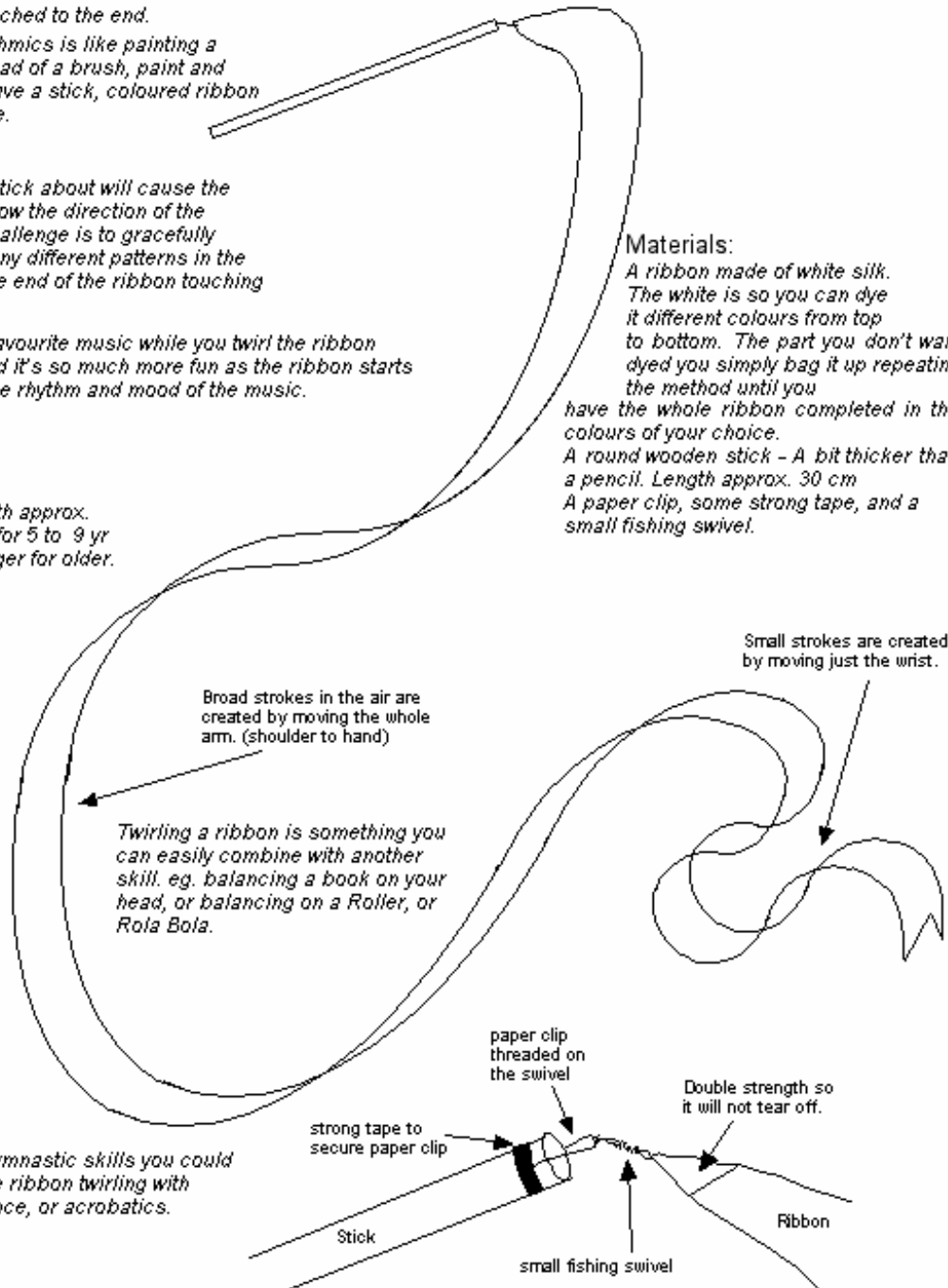
Waving the stick about will cause the ribbon to follow the direction of the stick. The challenge is to gracefully create as many different patterns in the air without the end of the ribbon touching the floor.

Put on your favourite music while you twirl the ribbon and you'll find it's so much more fun as the ribbon starts to express the rhythm and mood of the music.

Ribbon length approx.
1.50 metres for 5 to 9 yr olds and longer for older.

Materials:

A ribbon made of white silk.
The white is so you can dye it different colours from top to bottom. The part you don't want dyed you simply bag it up repeating the method until you have the whole ribbon completed in the colours of your choice.
A round wooden stick - A bit thicker than a pencil. Length approx. 30 cm
A paper clip, some strong tape, and a small fishing swivel.



If you have gymnastic skills you could also combine ribbon twirling with tumbling, dance, or acrobatics.

HINT: Always keep the ribbon out in front of the stick or else it will get tangled around the stick.

