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**THEATRE ART IN THE INFORMATION AGE: YOUTH  
AUDIENCE PERCEPTION FEATURES**

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***Abstract***

The article reflects the long-term experience of studying the youth audience artistic perception of modern theatrical art. The research relevance is confirmed by the change in the modern adolescents perception of art works, which are determined by the qualitative changes in the sociocultural situation in the information society. The authors are looking for an answer to the question: "How do teens perceive modern performances staged from classical plays included in the school curriculum for compulsory study?" (this article presents the material on the A. Griboyedov play "Woe from Wit"). The dissonance that arises between the students' needs in mastering theatrical art and the possibilities that Russian theatres provide confirms the insufficiency of the developing artistic perception ways among students in the educational system. The authors of the article reveal the interests and high school students' perception peculiarities of both classical productions and postmodern experimental performances. To study of the adolescents artistic perception features, the diagnosis of artistic perception was used, presented in the article and built on the theory basis of the relationship between real and theatrical reality. The article presents the results of research obtained in the course of statistical data analysis and pedagogical observation, such as the levels of modern adolescents artistic perception of theatrical art; the artistic perception development stages of the play within the pedagogical conditions complex and the basic specific pedagogical conditions of the Moscow region students communication development in mastering theatrical art sphere.

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**Keywords:** Theatre art, artistic perception, youth audience.



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## 1. Introduction

Bell (1973) in his studies attaches great importance to the phenomenon of culture, arguing that it should bring stability and continuity to the society. The modern society is interpreted in science as an informational one, “an organism, in which telecommunications and computers perform the key role in the production and exchange of information and knowledge” (Bell, 1973, p.224).

Today, the world is experiencing a subjective acceleration of time (in particular, classical music works are performed today at a faster pace than before), a contraction of space (the world has become closer in an informational and psychological sense), an increasing visualization of culture, which affects the spontaneous formation of the younger generation.

Modern culture is characterized by constant acceleration, expansion and updating of the information space, and, consequently, today a new person is being formed, differing from previous generations in the context of psychological, social, cultural manifestations. These changes are expressed in new forms of communication (virtual communication) and language (simplified slang of the Internet space or SMS messages), in the interruption of the communication between generations, in reducing (and sometimes disappearing) the credibility of cultural values of the past, in transforming many traditional moral norms, in spreading of a typified mass culture, in escaping of young people from solving life problems into virtual reality.

In classical art, including literature and theatre, a modern schoolchild lacks speed and constant movement (which is why the “action” genre is so demanded today), he does not stand up to long contemplations, preferring to entertain, not to think. Virtualization of life and “carnivalization” (Bahtin, 2015) of communication on the Internet makes it possible to use game, parody, violation of the norms in everyday life and, therefore, in any cultural phenomena. Adolescents make similar demands on art (Bahtin, 2015).

## 2. Problem Statement

Based on the Strauss–Howe generational theory, it can be argued that today's teenagers, the so-called generation Z, are immersed in the virtual world from birth, and the real world is not of interest to them (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Modern schoolchildren differ from those of previous generations by changed value orientations, self-motivated interests, infantilism and even mental changes (VanRullen, 2017). According to psychologists, one of their main features is the lack of interest in something because of the abundance of information and, as a result, the postmodern (mosaic) perception, thinking and behavior, consumer attitude to education and culture (Olesina & Stukalova, 2016; Polyudova, 2018). However, positive features of the generation Z should be also noted. Teenagers born in the XXI century, feature very original vision, creativity of thinking, the striving for creative transformation of the world.

Today, the information society keenly poses the question of the significance for adolescents of art and, in particular, of theatre, about which Herzen wrote, as “the highest instance for solving life problems”. Survey showed that modern schoolchildren understand the importance of this type of art (68%), but only 21% of respondents like to go to the theatre. On the one hand, teenagers are intimidated by real interpersonal communication, and on the other hand they are fascinated by live communication

with the world of art, actors and directors (Hager & Winkler, 2012; Montgomery, 2017; Sedgman, 2017; Wing, Glos, & Kenson, 2017).

There is no doubt that one of the leading traits of high school students is their active desire to understand the art of theatre, both classical and modern. The need for the exploration of theatrical art is explained by young people by the actualization of creative industries offering more interesting forms of future professional activity. Pupils also emphasize the importance of theatre for personal development, that is the importance of the theatre for the development of emotional and communication skills (Lobman, 2017; Yakovlyuk, 2016).

A special place in the life of adolescents belongs to the theatre art, which, on the one hand, seems to be simple and understandable, and, on the other hand, postmodern performances often cause bewilderment due to the complexity of perception. The majority of schoolchildren acknowledge the insufficiency of their knowledge about art, especially about theatre, which they receive in school or as part of an extra education, and which is being supplement by active self-education.

The dissonance that arises between the needs of schoolchildren in exploring and mastering of theatrical art and the possibilities that Russian theatres provide, is the evidence of insufficiency of the ways of developing artistic perception among schoolchildren within the system of education (Savenkova & Radomskaya, 2016; Spohn, 2008; Urrutiaguer, 2016; Wilson, Williams, Brown, & Syron, 2018).

Thus, a problematic vicious circle arises young people want to join the theatre, but the lack of knowledge and underdeveloped artistic perception pushes adolescents away from communicating with this kind of art. In our opinion, this problem can be solved exclusively on the basis of pedagogical research on the peculiarities of the artistic perception of theatrical art.

The above factors actualize the problem of studying the perception of modern theatre art by the youth: whether the study of theatre is sufficiently presented at school, what works are studied in school, what plays do theatres play and how are modern performances perceived by teenagers?

### **3. Research Questions**

This article presents some of the results obtained in the framework of the project known as “Socio-cultural portrait of a modern child at different stages of childhood: age and individual characteristics of the formation of artistic perception and thinking”, which has been implemented from 2013 to the present time at the Federal State Budget Scientific Institution “Institute of Art Education and Cultural Studies of the Russian Academy of Education”. The study of the artistic perception of a theatre performance by children and young people was conducted with the participation of the Charity Foundation for the Promotion of Socio-Cultural Initiatives and Guardianship “Way of Life”.

To study the artistic perception of the theatre performance, we have chosen 10-11 grade students of Moscow schools, who were offered the “Woe from Wit”, famous play by Griboyedov (2016), which is part of the school curriculum on literature and enjoying success in metropolitan theatres.

The “Woe from Wit” comedy has a complicated fate, and during the life of the author the performance was not staged in a theatre. However, its significance for Russian culture is immeasurable, catch phrases from the play began to live their own lives. It should be noted, that the students noted the

unusual modernity of the play and emphasized that the problems raised in the work are also characteristic of today.

The following performances were chosen and viewed by the teachers for the study: “Woe from Wit” in the Maly Theatre (directed by Sergei Zhenovach), in the Theatre on Pokrovka (directed by Sergei Artsibashev), in the Sovremennik Theatre (directed by Rimas Tuminas), “Woe from Wit - Woe to Wit - Woe of Wit” in the Taganka Theatre (directed by Yuri Lyubimov).

The main question that the research was aimed at is how do modern teens perceive theatrical art, and how the level of artistic perception of schoolchildren could be developed?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the characteristics of the artistic perception of theatrical art by adolescents with the subsequent pedagogical correction of the result.

In view of that purpose, the following tasks were completed:

to determine the degree of interest of pupils to the theatre;

to identify some features of the perception and understanding of a theatrical performance by adolescents;

to determine pedagogical lacunae and techniques that could fill the lack of integrated knowledge that contributes to the perception of theatrical art.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The study employed certain theoretical methods, such as the analysis of pedagogical, psychological, cultural, and art critic literature; as well as applied methods: pedagogical experiment; pedagogical observation; sociological methods: survey, interviewing (based on the zone of proximal development by L.S. Vygotsky); diagnosis of artistic perception; comparative statistical analysis of final data (Vygotsky, 2017).

The state budgetary educational institution of the city of Moscow “School No. 46”, the state budgetary institution of the city of Moscow “School No. 345”, the state budgetary educational institution of the city of Moscow “School No. 354” and the State budgetary educational institution of the city of Moscow “School №875 ” became an experimental basis for the study.

The study covered 234 students of 10-11 grades, who were surveyed in the 2014-15 academic year, and another 273 high school students who were surveyed in the 2018-19 academic year. In total, 507 schoolchildren of 10-11 grades and 6 teachers took part in the study.

The study of the problem was carried out in three stages:

- the first stage was dedicated to the selection of theatrical performances to be viewed and discussed by schoolchildren; as well as to the analysis of the performances by teachers and educators-scientists (2013-14 academic year);

- at the II stage we studied the artistic perception of theatrical performances by high school students (2014-15 academic year);

- at the III stage, we studied the artistic perception of theatrical performances by high school students (2018-19 academic year); we also conducted comparative analysis of the obtained statistical and pedagogical data.

The object of the studies was the process of artistic perception of theatrical art by adolescents and the capabilities for pedagogical adjustment of the bottom process.

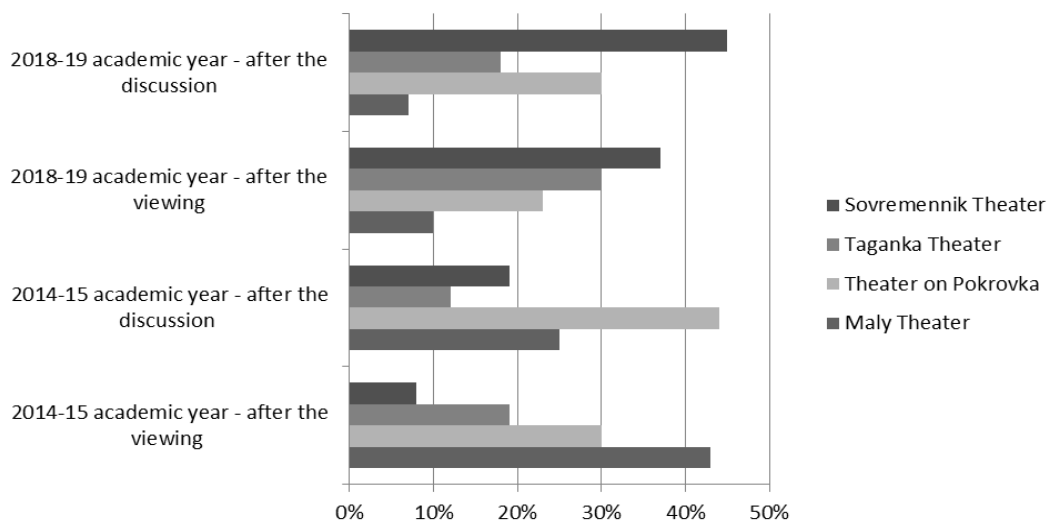
## **6. Findings**

To study the peculiarities of the artistic perception of adolescents, the diagnosis of artistic perception was used, which includes the following steps: 1) reading the literary basis; 2) discussion of the play; 3) exchange of expectations; 4) viewing the performance; 5) discussion of the performance (steps 1 to 5 are repeated with regard to each performance); 6) writing an essay about the play; comparison of all performances and reflection on this matter (Carrie, 2017).

The discussion of the performances was based on the theory of the relationship between real and theatrical reality, in which three stages can be distinguished: 1) the reality of objectively shown reality, transformed by the playwright's imagination into a dramatic work; 2) dramatic work embodied by the theatre (director, actors) in a performance; 3) stage life, perceived by the audience and becoming a part of their experiences, merged with the life of the audience and, thus, again returned to reality (Nekrasova, 2017). We additionally completed this with the stages of perception of the stage work, analysis and discussion.

At first, students were offered to re-read (or read) the play, then a lesson was held to discuss the work: the main idea, plot, conflict, composition, characters, set design. In the course of discussion, students used numerous clichés drawn from a textbook of literature: "realistic comedy", "social and political conflict", "civic duty of a person", etc. Of course, the answers were correct, but lacking some personal emotional attitude, even negative. This trend is typical for all high school students, only 41 people (8%). Then the high school students attended all the proposed performances, and after each they discussed with the teacher the staging and wrote an essay about their perception and understanding of the play.

To identify the primary artistic perception, the students immediately after viewing a performance were requested to answer the question: "Did you like the performance or not?" Only the next stage was the reflection and discussion of what they saw, and then the students decided once again whether they liked the show or not (the first and second surveys were time-spaced by periods from two to four months, and many students did not remember what they had answered for the first time) (see Figure 01).



**Figure 01.** The perception of a performance after viewing and after discussion and reflection

It should be noted, that contemporary adolescents more often prefer not academic-style performances, but rather those built on the principles of postmodernism. In the 2018–19 academic year the schoolchildren preferred “Woe from Wit”, staged by Rimas Tuminas (about 40% of respondents), and in the 2014–15 school year their choice was the performance staged by the Maly Theatre (about 45% of respondents). In the 2014-15 school year, schoolchildren liked the academic staging of the play at the Maly Theatre, because it is “understandable”, “corresponds to the text”, “realistic”; in 2018-19 academic year, more students preferred the staging by Sovremennik Theatre, because in their opinion it was “incomprehensible”, “original”, “cool”.

Figure 1 shows the diagram of the perception of a performance after viewing and after discussion and reflection.

It should be further noted, that in the first and second cases, adolescents perceived the performance in a superficial way, not accepting and not understanding the conventionality of the theatre as a game, “disappearance of reality”, its principal inaccessibility, “simulation” by characters that obscure the game (Mankovskaya, 2000).

The significance of the subsequent collective discussion and reflection on the performance is unquestionable, since such work not only increases the students' interest in the art work, but also forms a positive viewer mood for the perception of theatrical performance (Vygotsky, 2017).

It is indisputable that a postmodern performance must be perceived by a prepared person, otherwise the play becomes an incomprehensible cultural text. A modern performance is a complex token space based on deconstruction and simulacra, inter-text and citation, suggesting the audience knowing artistic culture. After the discussions and comprehension of the performances, the students began to see hidden meanings, “quotes”, allegories and so on. For example, in the staging by the Maly Theatre, young people noted the “indistinct dialect” of Chatsky, which differs from the standard stage speech, and which can be explained by the antagonism of the main character to the society; the strange dance moves of the characters engaged in the play of the Taganka Theatre were compared to marionettes, the people who could be controlled by tugging at their ambitions and greed as if they were strings; in the performance

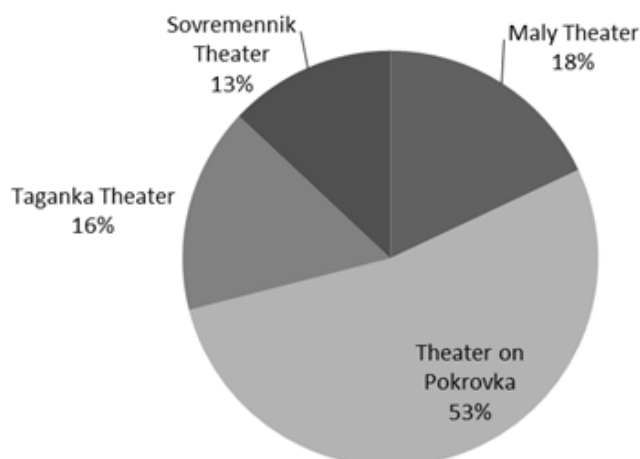
staged by the Theatre on Pokrovka, guests at the ball were present in the form of “talking heads”, which the trainees defined as “the callousness of people without hearts”.

The most difficult in this context was the performance by the *Sovremennik* Theatre, since it is filled with signs and meanings that can be interpreted very in different ways. For example, the Russian stove in the center of the hall caused a heated discussion; however, in the 2014-15 academic year, high school students gave it a public meaning – a “pyramid”, a “throne”, a “power vertical”, while in the 2018-19 academic year more attention was paid to human moral sense – “purity”, “truth”, “morality”, “Russian soul”, “alien to the house of Famusov.” The art of postmodernism does not reflect the world realistically and adequately but raises the question that this is impossible at all, and as a result, there is an “explosion of form,” including the theatrical one. Schoolchildren begin to penetrate the implications of a modern performance, and then the artistic perception occurs, followed by the adoption of theatrical art.

It would seem that the character of Chatsky, the protagonist of the comedy, is quite understandable, however, the four different ways to portrait this character, presented in different performances, were evaluated by students differently.

Figure 2 shows a diagram reflecting positive perception of the artistic image of Chatsky in the performances by various theatres.

The students recognized Chatsky performed by Yevgeny Buldakov (*Theatre on Pokrovka*) as the most striking one. After discussion, high school students came to the conclusion that Buldakov played a story of love and betrayal, and this attracts the modern youngsters more than the social and political struggle. It would seem that the character of Chatsky, the protagonist of the comedy, is quite understandable, however, the four different ways to portrait this character, presented in different performances, and were evaluated by students differently (Panero, Goldstein, Rosenberg, Hughes, & Winner, 2016). The students recognized Chatsky performed by Yevgeny Buldakov (*Theatre on Pokrovka*) as the most striking one. After discussion, high school students came to the conclusion that Buldakov played a story of love and betrayal, and this attracts the modern youngsters more than the social and political struggle. The students also noted that in this performance Molchalin and Skalozub are presented in an unusual way – as young and beautiful people. Experiences and actions of Chatsky against the background of such opponents become brighter and more convincing, while in the classical version, where Molchalin is nasty and deceitful, and Skalozub is a stupid warrior, it seems like the main character has no one to argue with: why argue with people who are so obviously stupid. Modern teenagers no longer want to just follow the plot, they long for deep feelings and emotions, perhaps sensing their lack in their own lives. We also revealed another feature of the perception of theatrical cultural text by young people – the desire to comprehend everything, even emotions (see Figure 02).



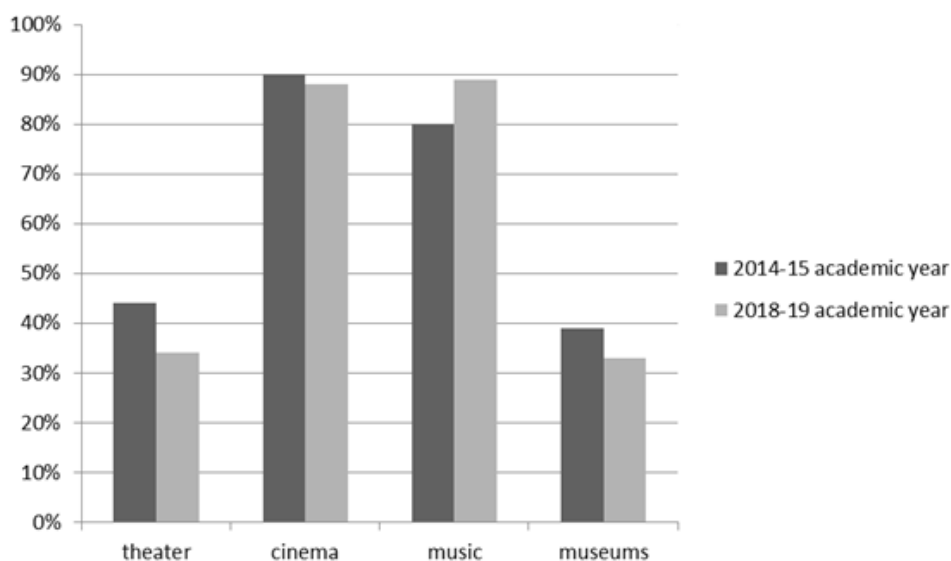
**Figure 02.** Positive perception of the artistic image of Chatsky in the performances by various theatres

The schoolchildren named Marina Aleksandrova (Sovremennik Theatre) an actress who embodied the most vivid image of Sophia. Almost everyone noted that the behavior of Sophia is incomprehensible to them, since modern girls are more active and decisive, and the knowledge of history and the peculiarities of historical life in young people, unfortunately, are not very deep. Aleksandrova was able to bring the author's image and modern idea of an intelligent and educated girl, able to stand up for herself.

The Tuminas' staging struck young people with an abundance of complex characters and the opportunity to explore the types of genre forms (codes) used, the nature of their connection and interaction with cultural tradition (hybrid, chaotic diffusion, irony, absurdity, parody, etc.) and the semantic outcome of these transformations. This is a difficult process, but it only encourages modern high school students. We will not evaluate the fact that the emotional perception of the performance by young people over the past few years (from 2014 to 2019) is increasingly moving from emotional and artistic to intellectual, that is, adolescents are trying to analyze and explain any emotion. However, this trend is obvious, and it shows the disadvantages of teaching art in a general education school, where the foundations of mastering art are laid. If, in adolescence, the development of the emotional-sensual and aesthetic perception of art is missed, then this becomes an almost irreplaceable factor.

Unfortunately, even among schoolchildren who prefer humanities, theatrical art is not significant among other forms of art (Figure 03). The first place for modern youth is steadily occupied by cinema (it should be noted that the majority of high school students (59%) claimed to prefer author cinema, not blockbusters) and music (the students themselves note that this is more entertaining music, which is listened to as a background with headphones).





**Figure 03.** The significance of the types of art for modern youth

Thus, the main feature of postmodernism is determined by the fact that reality is available to us exclusively in a form mediated by language, therefore modern young people want to see modern problems in the play, to find parallels between the plot and their lives. Teenagers from a huge number of catch phrases from the “Woe from Wit” comedy highlighted those that, in their opinion, are significant today: “Happiness takes no note of time...”, “I’d like to serve, but not to be a servant”, “blessed is the mind too small for doubt“, “this hard to credit now, though fresh is its renown”.

Thus, one can state the undoubted interest of modern schoolchildren in the theatre art, but the lack of knowledge and artistic experience hinders the perception of theatre art by young people.

## 7. Conclusion

As a result of the study of the features of artistic perception of theatrical art by modern high school students, the levels of perception are defined, the stages of mastering a work of art and the direction for enhancement of the development students in mastering of theatrical art.

The levels of artistic perception of theatrical art by modern youngsters are determined in the course of the analysis of statistical data (Table 1).

The level of approach to art is the lowest one, expressed in the lack of interest in the theatre as a type of art, as it does not comply with the rules of mass culture. Schoolchildren who are at the level of entering the art sometimes show interest in some performances, but more often in those widely advertised by media. The level of interest is the most widespread and mobile, since the interest, combined with knowledge and artistic experience, allows students to develop ways to perceive and interpret a work. The level of rational perception of art is inherent to those adolescents who are prone to natural science knowledge and usually have a large amount of information on literature, art history and cultural studies, but do not show emotional interest and responsiveness. The level of emotional perception of art, which is characterized by the perception of the play only on the basis of sensory perception, without understanding

what they see. The level of creative perception of art is the highest level, combining interest with knowledge and emotionality in the perception of a theatrical production.

**Table 01.** Levels of perception of theatre art by adolescents before and after the package of classes.

Levels	2013-14 academic year		2018-19 academic year	
	Before	After	Before	After
The level of approach to art	15%	7%	17%	10%
The level of entering an art	21%	10%	14%	9%
The level of interest in art	17%	23%	22%	21%
The level of rational perception of art	17%	21%	26%	19%
The level of emotional perception of art	18%	19%	12%	16%
The level of creative perception of art	12%	20%	9%	25%

The data displayed in the table show the dynamics of the pupils' level of perception of a performance. The study showed a close relationship between the level of perception and the breadth of students' viewing experience. Based on this, the stages of development of the artistic perception of performance within the complex of pedagogical conditions were identified.

At the passive stage, adolescents have neither interest nor emotion about the performance, there is no desire to discuss and share impressions with friends (4%). Schoolchildren who are at the reproductive stage of perception of a theatrical production are able of hearing, seeing and remembering, but they can actually reproduce only the storyline (41%). The emotional and sensual apparatus of these adolescents is not developed, they have a weak imagination, therefore they do not show real interest in the theatre. The active stage, when students perceive art with interest, try to listen to their feelings, interpret the work, but the statements are most often are stereotypical, they lack the breadth of artistic horizons (47%). High school students who are on the active and creative stage of development of artistic perception, being in possession of knowledge in the field of theatrical art, are liberated in their perception of a play, they have original associations, interpretations, unusual judgments and reflection (8%). It should be noted that the passive and active-creative stage of development of artistic perception in adolescents are quite rare.

The study revealed the main specific pedagogical conditions for the development of students in the field of mastering of theatrical art, such as:

The development of aesthetic perception of theatrical art and the ability to interpret the artistic image.

Mastering by the students of artistic culture and aesthetic space.

Acquisition of knowledge about the history and development of theatrical art in world culture.

The urge to self-creative understanding of the performance by students.

Educating schoolchildren of feelings of love and interest in theatre and art in general.

Awareness of the dependence of art forms in the theatre on cultural codes and features of modern art.

The development of imagination, fancy thinking and ideas about art through the comprehension of theatrical art.

Development of creative thinking and artistic perception of adolescents through the creative development of theatrical culture.

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