

# Costumes

**C**ostumes communicate character to both the actors who wear them and the audience who sees them. Consider how your overarching design concept can be reflected in the garments each character wears, while still communicating important details of your storytelling. As with other design elements, inspiration is a natural part of the creative process, but replication of another's designs without proper compensation – whether a professional production's or another school's – is never acceptable.

## Costume Designs

Research the time period and location of the show, as well as the types of characters in it (for example, sea witches or hyenas) to help you develop your costume designs. Consider how you might create a costume concept that informs all your designs. For example, actors could use hats or headbands to signify their characters, or they could simply wear t-shirts that are character-themed. Remember, simpler is often better. Base costumes are extremely useful when costuming a large ensemble, and can easily suggest a character with the addition of one or two detailed accessories. Consider asking cast members to provide their own base costumes, which could consist of black pants, black t-shirts, and black shoes and socks. Your costume committee can create, acquire, or borrow additional pieces that can be added over the base costume as appropriate for each scene.

Another way to help your audience identify characters is by using a specific color palette. Costume groups of characters in similar colors to immediately unify them. You can also provide clues as to which characters belong together by costuming them similarly from the beginning of the show, long before their relationships appear in the text. Purchase a bolt of fabric and incorporate lengths of it onto each character's base costume to create an inexpensive but cohesive design. Don't forget to consider the colors of the theater's curtains and any backdrops or scenery being used in the production when creating your designs. Try to avoid costumes that blend into the scenery as doing so can make it difficult for the audience to see the actors from the house.

Most importantly, all your costumes need to be functional for the actors wearing them. Remember that the actors need to be able to act, move, and breathe in their costumes. Lights add shadows, hats will inevitably fall off, and an understudy may have to wear another actor's costumes. Keep your wardrobe simple to get into (Velcro and snaps work wonders for quick changes), yet sturdy enough to hold up during the performances.

## Acquiring or Creating Costumes

As with all aspects of your production, the focus of costume design is on storytelling. Keep this in mind as you begin to build a costume closet for your school by sourcing commonly used wardrobe pieces. Clothing staples like suit jackets, slacks, dress shirts, blouses, and footwear will be useful for many musicals. Consider holding a costume drive for your production to jumpstart a costume collection for your school. Students outgrow clothing quickly – help them clear out their closets by asking students, parents, and fellow teachers to donate specific items of clothing that they no longer use. Secondhand stores are another great place to look for costume pieces. You can always alter items to fit young actors. Even if you can't use a particular piece for this production, chances are you'll be able to use it in the next show you produce!

Remember that your costumes need to look good from afar, but don't need extensive details that can only be seen up close. Start with broad strokes when building your costumes and fill in the details later. You can even lean on your community to get involved in the costume creation. Perhaps there is a sewing circle at the community center or crafty parents who might be eager to help. If you can't find volunteers who know how to sew, glue guns and safety pins can be your key to creating exciting designs.

Once you've gathered and created all of your costumes, it's time for a "costume parade," or a moment for you to see all of your actors in costume well before opening night. Be sure to build this time into your schedule and have your costume designer on hand to take notes and make any necessary changes or alterations.

## Costumes for *Finding Nemo JR.*

There is great flexibility in costuming this vast world of underwater creatures, leaving room to make these characters as realistic or stylized as your resources and design choices allow. Use color to distinguish between each different species to make your storytelling clear and to illustrate the beauty of the Great Barrier Reef. In addition to various colors, think of the way that your costumes can help illustrate the many shapes and sizes of creatures living under the sea. For all your characters, you might consider using makeup to give a little extra sparkle to the faces of your aquatic creatures.

To start, give each actor a “base costume” in a solid color, which you can adorn with fins, shells, tentacles, claws, and tails. Having a simple base made up of solid color pants, tights, t-shirts, or leotards allows your actors to transform into multiple characters by changing their accessories, without having to complete a full costume change every time they play a different character. For a more abstract approach, think of the essences of each animal character and create inspired costumes with “human” clothing, such as overalls, sundresses, jean jackets, sweater vests, etc.

When it comes to costuming the many varieties of fish, remember that most fish have a gleam and shimmer to their scales. Consider using metallic or other shiny fabrics for your fish base layer and their fins. Tulle can also be a great fabric to create flowy fins or billowing tutus. You might also experiment with using armbands, belts, or hats to attach the fins in different places, making them easier for your performers to manipulate.

The more you can repurpose, reuse, and recycle your costumes, the less waste you’ll generate, reducing your production’s impact on the Earth and its oceans (which helps our fish friends like Nemo!) Sustainable costuming is better for your budget and the environment, so it’s important to weigh all your options before deciding to buy or build a new costume. For more tips on costuming your show in an eco-conscious way, visit Broadway Green Alliance ([www.broadwaygreen.com](http://www.broadwaygreen.com).)

Below is a list of specific costume suggestions for each character in *Finding Nemo JR.* Feel free to follow or adapt these suggestions to best fit the needs of your production and resources, and, as always, involve your performers in driving the creative design of the show.



*Nemo and Marlin*  
Aspire Performing Arts Company; Bloomfield, NJ



*Dory*  
Spark of Creation; South San Francisco, CA



*Sea Chorus*  
Melody Lane Performing Arts Center; Cape Coral, FL



**NEMO, MARLIN, and CORAL** – For these bright clownfish, consider using an orange base — perhaps a t-shirt, hoodie, or leotard — that you can adorn with the signature white stripes and fins. For Coral, you could employ an orange sundress, romper, or overalls. You might want to give these clownfish a headpiece or hat to attach an additional fin or two. To distinguish between father and child, feel free to play with giving Marlin a bowtie or other sort of “fatherly” accessory. Nemo will also need one fin that is smaller than the other to create a “lucky fin.” Overall, these fish are simple and sleek, so comfort and movability are priority number one.

**DORY** – For this chatty and ever-optimistic fish, allow Dory’s shining personality to inspire your costume choices. To represent a blue tang fish, incorporate royal blue and bright yellow, with fabric that is flexible and flowy. You might even use fabric that has a little shine or glitter to it. A fluffy tutu, bell bottoms, a blue dress with yellow tights, or ruffled pants could all be fun options for Dory. It is important that no matter what Dory wears, she is comfortable and able to freely float about without restriction.

The **SEA CHORUS**, including **ANGELFISH, DAMSELFISH, FISH “FRIENDS,” GROUPE**

– If you have designated a specific group of actors to comprise the Sea Chorus ensemble, costume them all as various fish and underwater creatures so the stage is alive with animals of all colors and shapes. Alternatively, this chorus can be comprised of actors who double as other featured roles. In that case, they can remain in their featured role costume, populating the Sea Chorus with Sea Turtles, Sharks, Moonfish, Seahorses, Octopuses, etc. However, it is suggested that Jellyfish, Barracuda, Bruce, and Crush do not appear in the Sea Chorus and that actors portraying these characters receive different sea creature costumes for chorus moments so as not to confuse the storytelling.

**BARRACUDA** – To capture the size of this fish, consider using a Chinese Dragon-style puppet manipulated by either a single actor or a group of actors to sweep in and swipe away Coral and the eggs. Creating a bold, villainous headpiece with a long trailing cape can also be another option for costuming your Barracuda. You might also use shimmering, metallic fabric in a dark hue that resembles the shine of this menacing predator.



*Professor Ray and Reef Kids  
Spark of Creation; South San Francisco, CA*



*Barracuda  
Weston Drama Workshop; Weston, MA*



*Nemo  
Weston Drama Workshop; Weston, MA*

**SHARKS** – For this group, including **BRUCE**, **CHUM**, and **ANCHOR**, consider dressing your performers in a gray base and adding a headpiece to create a dorsal fin. Backpack straps or suspenders could securely and comfortably fasten a shark tail that can be made from cardboard, papier-mâché, or fabric. You might choose to make your sharks identical or opt to differentiate them — perhaps making Bruce the biggest to signify leadership status.

**MOONFISH** – For this organized school of shapeshifters, consider using puppets to allow your performers to create the various shapes that direct Marlin and Dory towards Sydney. You could attach your puppet fish to dowels or sticks to allow your actors to hold one in each hand, or you could build hand puppets out of oven mitts to facilitate easy movement. Alternatively, if puppets are not used, you may create any sort of glimmering fish look using shiny fabric, as long as it is uniform.

**JELLYFISH** – Consider repurposing umbrellas or wide-brimmed sun hats to create a larger-than-life swarm of jellyfish. Paint the umbrellas or hats in silvery-pink tones and add long tendrils of ruffled fabric to create their many tentacles. To resemble these often vibrant, luminescent creatures, try using metallic or iridescent fabric. You might make each costume identical or opt to create jellyfish of varying sizes and colors. Note that if you opt to use umbrellas, this costume feature will double as a prop, so the earlier actors have access to these props in the rehearsal room, the more comfortable they'll be with them on stage. If you opt to use hats, ensure that the actors' faces are still visible even under stage lights!

**REEF KIDS** and **REEF PARENTS** – Consider ways in which the parents and their children can look alike, whether in the color and shape of their costumes or in similar unifying elements. To show their age difference, consider giving the parents glasses, bowties, a string of pearls, etc.

**PEARL** and **PEARL'S PARENT** – These octopuses have gelatinous bodies that fan out around them as they move through water. Consider using a purple base and fluffy tulle to mimic these creatures' parachute-like movements, or creating long tubes made from stuffed socks or stockings adhered to a belt to represent their eight tentacles. A similar design should be used for Octopus 1 and 2 in "One Dedicated Father."



*Dory and Marlin*  
Aspire Performing Arts Company; Bloomfield, NJ



*Moonfish*  
Aspire Performing Arts Company; Bloomfield, NJ



*Sharks*  
Weston Drama Workshop; Weston, MA



**SHELDON and SHELDON'S PARENT** – For these seahorses, you might use a brown base and create a headpiece and tail made of tulle, cardboard, or another type of fabric to create a signature seahorse s-curve shape that attaches to your actors' backs using backpacks. A similar design should be used for Seahorse 1 and 2 in "One Dedicated Father."

**TAD and TAD'S PARENT** – Consider using a yellow base for these bright butterflyfish adorned with white and black stripes. A bright baseball cap or headpiece could also be used to resemble these creatures' sword-like mouths.

**PROFESSOR RAY** – This giant stingray instructor glides through the water, guiding students on adventures throughout the ocean. Give this professor a large, dark cape that the Reef Kids can hold onto when setting off to explore the big blue world. Alternatively, you could attach a kite with long tails to your actor's back to mimic the rippling movement of a stingray gliding through the water. You might explore giving this educator a professorial accessory, such as a sweater vest or pair of glasses.

**SCUBA MASK DANCER** – Comfort and flexibility are essential for this free-flowing dancer. Consider using a leotard adorned with flowing fabrics to make your performer seem like they are floating through water. To highlight the mask prop, you might dress the Scuba Mask Dancer in blues so they seem one with the water. Remember that the mask prop can be worn by your dancer, or an oversized version can be held while dancing.

**BUBBLES** – Consider costuming this bright and bubbly yellow tang with a flowing, loose-fitting top or perhaps a dress over yellow leggings.

**BLOAT** – For this blowfish, consider using fluffy brown and cream-colored fabrics and perhaps even a hoop skirt to create Bloat's signature round shape. You might build a hoop skirt by sewing different-sized hoops made of plastic boning into your skirt fabric. If you don't have access to boning, small hula hoops could also create the same effect.

**GURGLE** – Gramma fish are primarily purple with yellow tails, so consider layering a purple dress or flowy shirt over a pair of yellow leggings. A bright yellow tutu or a purple top could also create fun combinations to outfit this germ-wary gramma.



*The Tank Gang  
Riverdale Children's Theatre; Riverdale, NY*



*Nemo and Gill  
Melody Lane Performing Arts Center; Cape Coral, FL*

**PEACH** – Depending on your resources, you might choose to create this compassionate starfish by sewing pink fabric into a star shape or using cardboard cut in the shape of a star that hangs from your actor using shoulder straps. Your performer could also create the star shape using their body, with a cone-shaped headpiece added to create the fifth starfish appendage.

**GILL** – Consider giving this tough fish a black base, perhaps incorporating leather-like fabric or a black jean jacket to represent Gill's tenacity and grit. Like Nemo, Gill will also need one fin that is smaller than the other. Gill's fin difference is acquired through injury rather than birth, so try reflecting that through fraying and distressing the costume materials. Yellow accents and accessories such as belts, headbands, hats, or other pieces might be used to honor this Moorish idol's bright stripes.

**NIGEL** – For this well-informed bird, consider creating feathers attached to arm straps out of layered black, white, and gray paper or ruffled fabric. An orange hat could top off this look to resemble a pelican's large, stretchy beak. You might also make Nigel a puppet to allow them to "fly" in and out of the aquarium.

**SEAGULLS** – Create a uniform look for your pesky group of seagulls. Consider using orange or yellow baseball caps to create your birds' beaks and a vest of fluffy white and gray feathers. Orange tights and white or grey tutus could all also make great additions to these squawking birds. To create the effect of a large flock with a small group of actors, you might attach small origami seagulls to your actors' baseball caps with pipe cleaners or wire to make it seem like additional birds are perched on your actors' hats.

**VACATIONER** – The Vacationer provides comic relief throughout the story, so feel free to make this tourist as quirky as you please. Consider using staple tourist attire such as an "I Heart Sydney" shirt, floral button-ups, khaki shorts, a bathing suit and cover-up, sunglasses, etc. Be sure to include a hat where this clever Sydney visitor can triumphantly hide their snack for the final Boardwalk scene.

**SEA TURTLES** – For this group of righteous green sea turtles, including the **SEA TURTLE KIDS, CRUSH, SQUIRT, BREEZE, KAI, and SEA TURTLES 1 & 2**, let the laid-back style of surfers inspire you. Think green board shorts, graphic tees, or hoodies for this chill bunch. Beanies, backwards baseball caps, or bucket hats could all make great headpieces for these easy-going turtles. If you choose to create shells, consider using cardboard or spray-painted foil pans to shape your turtle backs. Stuffed and decorated backpacks could also make excellent shells.

**LOBSTERS 1 & 2** – Consider using a red base and creating claws using gloves, oven mitts, or cardboard for these flaming red lobsters. A headband with antennae and a red outer layer such as a coat, shawl, or sweater over a neutral base would make quick changes a little easier on these performers if they are needed for roles in preceding or following scenes.

**ELECTRIC EELS 1 & 2** – Consider using black unitards or puppets to make your slithery eels. Shimmering or metallic fabric could make fun additions to these electricity-generating creatures.



*Sea Turtles*  
Spark of Creation; South San Francisco, CA



*Vacationer and Seagulls*  
Aspire Performing Arts Company; Bloomfield, NJ



*Sea Turtles*  
Aspire Performing Arts Company; Bloomfield, NJ