



Imagination Makers Theater Company
"Bringing Professional Theater to Young People in Schools..."

TEACHER'S GUIDE

for

"Our Best Stories"

Imagination Makers Theater Company
2590 Walnut Street, Suite 3
Boulder, Colorado 80302
www.imaginationmakers.org

TEACHER'S FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do you have any materials to help prepare my class for the play?

Yes, this Teacher's Guide contains suggestions for ways to prepare your students for the play, as well as follow-up activities and discussion questions. In a past season, a child was overheard talking to her mother after a performance of one of our plays. She said she was going to go home and become a writer! We hope you can use this play as a valuable inspiration to enhance *your* students' excitement about writing.

My students have never seen a play. What should I tell them?

We have included some basic guidelines on attending a theater performance under "Some Notes for Students" -- see p. 3.

I've gone to some really awful assemblies. How do I know this one will be good?

There is no guarantee you will like our play, but we do have a good track record of meeting the needs of students and teachers (We are still around after 31 years!). Last year on evaluation forms, 98% of teachers rated our plays "Outstanding" or "Very Good".

We receive these high ratings because the company employs experienced, professional directors, actors and musicians who enjoy performing for young people. The actors you will see in *Our Best Stories* have college degrees in theater and credentials that include not only theater for young audiences, but also critically acclaimed regional and local productions ranging from dinner theater to Shakespeare. We perform in schools because the mission of Imagination Makers is to give as many kids as possible a chance to see live theater--especially those who would not ordinarily have the opportunity to do so.

Is there any way I can preview the show?

Yes! You can view some segments of this show as well as past productions on our Youtube page at www.youtube.com/user/imaginationmakers.

When should we arrive at the performance?

Please arrive at the gym 5-10 minutes before the performance start time. Your early arrival will ensure that we can get everyone seated and ready to go in a timely fashion. Sometimes there is a second show at your school or we must go directly to another school to do a show. If you arrive after the performance has started, you will still get to see the show; however, we will seat your class in the back of the audience.

May I take pictures during the show?

So that our audience (and the performers) can stay focused, we ask that you not take flash photographs during the show. For picture taking purposes, we will re-enact any part of the play for you after the performance is over.

Why don't you create separate plays for primary and intermediate grades?

While it is not financially viable for Imagination Makers to tour separate plays for primary and intermediate grades (It costs approximately \$20,000 to create a new play!), we have designed this play so that the emotional aspects are meaningful to all ages. Although we realize that not all content will appeal to all grade levels--some may be over the heads of the youngest students or seem "babyish" to the

oldest--we do our best to balance the needs of students K-6. Our goal is that all grade levels find much of the material relevant, and that all audience members (Including you!) will be thoroughly entertained.

Will there be an opportunity for my class to meet the performers after the show?

Yes. The performers always stand outside the exit door so that they can greet your class as they leave. This is a great time for students to ask a quick question, make a comment or just say, "Hello."

How can I let the company know what I thought of the performance?

You will receive an evaluation form from us at the performance. Please take a few minutes after the play to fill this out, preferably with your students (if time permits). One of the reasons we are still in business after 31 years is that WE LISTEN TO YOUR FEEDBACK! We use your comments to help us make our plays the very best they can be. Your ratings are also essential for reporting the results of our work to granting organizations. (Your school pays approximately one third of what it costs us to bring a show to your school. The rest of the money comes from grants.)

I don't have time to go to an assembly--I'm swamped and need to correct papers during the show. What should I do?

We understand that sometimes you may need to do paperwork during the performance. If this is the case, we respectfully request that, after seating your students, you sit at the rear of the audience. We would like to express our appreciation, in advance, for your cooperation during the performance. We have noticed that when teachers come to the show with their class, stay for the entire time, and give their full attention to the performance, the students model this audience behavior. The students then benefit more from the play and its themes, and everybody, including the performers, has a more rewarding experience.

Can my students write letters to the performers?

YES! We love to receive letters and artwork from students. We include some of these in our grant evaluations. We also save the best ones for our scrapbook and pick some of our favorite pictures to frame and put up in our office. Our address is:

*Imagination Makers Theater Company, 2590 Walnut Street, Suite 3, Boulder, CO 80302
Our email: info@imaginationmakers.org*

Are there any considerations for special education students?

If you would like to discuss how Imagination Makers can make the performance more accessible to your students, please call our Performance Manager, Mary McGroary at 720-565-1055 or e-mail mary@imaginationmakers.org. We will be happy to provide a copy of the script ahead of time for sign language interpreters. We will try to meet any special disability needs as best we can. We can also arrange for students with special needs to come to the performance early and meet the performers.

What if I still have more questions?

We are dedicated to serving students and teachers. Feel free to call 720-565-1055 or e-mail us at mary@imaginationmakers.org with any questions or comments you have.



Become our fan and "like" us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/imaginationmakers.

Imagination Makers is a nonprofit 501(3)(c) organization, and we appreciate tax-deductible donations to help us continue our work in the community. If you are interested in helping us reach more children, feel free to visit our website imaginationmakers.org/donate/

SOME NOTES FOR STUDENTS:

Theater is an incredible experience, and we are pleased that you get to see our play, *Our Best Stories!* Here are some things about seeing a play that are different from watching TV and movies:

Theater is live!

At a play, the audience is an important part of the performance. This is because the performers can hear everything that goes on in the audience. When you laugh at the funny parts, are quiet at the serious parts, and give your total attention to what's going on in the play, you actually *help* the actors. If you do a great job as an audience, then the actors do a great job performing and you will see a fantastic show!

Listening is very important

Once the show starts, be respectful of the people in the audience. If you talk to others around you, they will miss part of the play and so will you. You can't rewind a play! Save your thoughts and comments for the conversations you will have with friends and your class after the play is over.

Imagine

The name of our company is Imagination Makers because you will need to use your imagination when you are watching the play. For example, there are three actors playing many different characters. The play has a simple set of benches and cubes that become anything from a garden to a ski slope. There are lots of different colored cloths of that are used to represent all costumes and objects in the play, like a blue cloth turns into water spilled out of a glass and sparkly green cloth is used as a Christmas present.

Applause

The performers work very hard to give you a great show. The way to show them that you like what they are doing is to clap. Applause can be short and polite if you think the play is just "Okay," or it can be loud and long if you have really enjoyed the play.

Feedback

After the play, the performers will greet you as you leave. This is a good time to shake their hands, ask a question, or tell them what you liked about the play. If you have more to say to the performers, they would be happy to receive a letter from you. Your teacher has our address. (*Teachers: This can be found on p. 2.*) **HAVE FUN!**

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Have you ever played in a football game where you ran the wrong way with the ball, slipped and had your shoe come off, and tackled your own teammate?

One boy's good-hearted look at his misadventures is among the 13 true stories and 6 songs in *Our Best Stories*. Written by kids of different racial, socio-economic, and geographic backgrounds, this play includes amusing tales of a 'polar dip', snowboarding, and a football game gone wrong. There are also stories relating the moving experiences of a girl living in a homeless shelter and one who became disabled from a childhood bout with cancer. Two bilingual kid-authors wrote stories utilizing both English and Spanish.

The performers animate the students' work with power and perception, while maintaining the authenticity of their writing. Teachers keep raving about this play because it entertains and inspires children to write!

List of Stories and Songs

Song: Stories
Roller Coaster
Grandma
The Halloween Night
Song: My Siblings
My Funny Story
Clide
Song: Curiosity
Snow boarding
Abuelito

Homeless
Song: Friends
Polar Dip
Song: Homework
Trouble With Homework
This is Then and Now
Blue Devils
Song: Color Blues
The Best Christmas Ever
Song: Stories (*reprise*)

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

PLEASE NOTE: The following suggestions are only a guide. You will need to judge what is appropriate for your grade level and individual class.

BEFORE THE PLAY

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Approach the play enthusiastically and intelligently with an understanding of what to expect.
- Review audience skills.
- Begin thinking about the theme areas of the play.

DISCUSSION

Choose from among the following topics to discuss with your students:

1. Discuss “Some Notes for Students” (*Teachers: This can be found on p. 3.*)
2. Plays in general
 - Have you been to an Imagination Makers play before? If so, what do you remember about it?
 - Have you been to other plays? What do you remember about them?
 - Has anyone in the class ever been in a play?
3. Concepts of the play (*Teachers: This will get students thinking about some of the things that will be presented in the play, so when they see the story, they will have a deeper connection to it.*)
 - Have you been to an amusement park? What was your favorite ride?
 - Do you have a funny Halloween memory?
 - Think about a time you didn’t have any friends. What are some of the ways that you made some?
 - Have you ever lost a friend, family member, or pet? How did you feel?

ACTIVITIES

Art

This activity is a great way to generate enthusiasm for the performance within your class and also throughout the school.

1. Make posters advertising the play: “Imagination Makers presents *Our Best Stories* at (name of school) in the (gym or cafeteria) on (date of performance).” Include pictures of one of the following:
 - Riding a roller coaster
 - Dressing up for Halloween
 - Waiting to open presents on Christmas
 - Snowboarding
 - Playing a football game
 - Doing homework

AFTER THE PLAY

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the play.
- Deepen the understanding of the theme areas and apply this understanding in their own lives.
- Relate appropriate curriculum areas to the play.

DISCUSSION

Choose from among the following topics to discuss with your students.

1. The play in general (*Teachers: The list of stories and songs can be found on p. 4.*)
 - Which story was your favorite? Were there any you didn't like?
 - Which characters were your favorite? Least favorite? Why?
 - Did you like the music? Why? What song did you like the best?
2. Concepts of the play
 - Did you learn anything from seeing the play? What?
 - Did the stories or songs in the play relate to anything you've experienced? Which ones?
 - In which stories did you see an experience you have NOT had? Did the writer help you to “walk in his or her shoes?” How?
 - What great lines or images from the stories do you remember?

ACTIVITIES

Writing

This play is based on writing by kids in the Denver metro area. We hope that your students come back to the classroom begging for the chance to write their own story! In case that happens, we have included a list of many of the exercises we used to get the stories you saw in the play.

1. Write your own true stories. The themes used to gather the stories in the play were: Families, friends, pets, tragedies, sports, school, holidays, and vacations. When finished, share your story with someone else in class.
2. Brainstorm a list of words and/or phrases that the play evoked: Impressions, thoughts, feelings, images, etc. Use these words and phrases to create a poem about the play.
3. Write a letter to:
 - The actors. Tell them what you liked about the play.
 - A character in the play.
 - The parent group, principal, or whoever sponsored the show in your school. Tell them what you liked about the play and thank them for sponsoring it.

(Teacher hint: Here are some “starters” for letters: “The part of the play that really stuck in my mind was...”, “I had a connection to the play because...”)
4. Write a newspaper review of the play. Include such elements as:
 - How you felt about the play in general.
 - Whether you thought the costumes and set were good and fit the play.
 - What you thought of the acting; whether you thought it believable and realistic.
 - If you liked the music.
 - Give the performance a star rating (1 is lowest, 5 is highest) and say whether you would recommend it to other people.

Art

Many fun art projects can result from students’ impressions of the play. Here are some suggestions:

1. Draw a picture of your favorite part of the play or your favorite character.
2. Make a mural that depicts all of the stories and songs in the play.

Drama

Now that your students have seen live theater, they might enjoy doing some acting of their own.

1. Get into groups and act out your favorite part of the play. *(Teacher hint: This is a very easy drama activity and it helps students to process the play. It takes no theater expertise on your part, and their interpretations of the play can be a lot of fun!)*
2. Do the above activity, but instead of acting, do a tableau of your favorite part of the play. A tableau is like a frozen picture – like in the game "Statues." Use your bodies to pose the picture. Then, each group shows their picture to the rest of the class.
3. Perform your own play based on the stories the class has written. You can do it with or without costumes and set.

ABOUT IMAGINATION MAKERS THEATER COMPANY

Imagination Makers is a professional company presenting innovative theater that is both entertaining and emotionally powerful. Internationally acclaimed, the company has given over 4,000 performances and reached closed to one million kids with performances of 27 original plays since 1980. Reaching over 60,000 audience members on average per year, Imagination Makers ranks first in the state among theater companies for the number of kids served yearly. In all, the company reaches one out of every four public elementary school students in the metro area with its productions.

Some examples of shows include a play about a family of Irish immigrants who move to America at the turn of the century, a play based on true stories of children who lived in early Colorado, and two student rewritten versions of Shakespeare's, *The Merchant of Venice*--one for elementary schools and one for middle and high schools.

For 31 years, Imagination Makers has toured successfully in Colorado. Out of state, we have done shows in New York, Connecticut, and England. Highlights include invitations to perform in London at the Newham International Festival of Theater in Education, and Take Off, an international theater festival. We were selected to perform at the national conference of the American Alliance for Theater and Education. A play created by Imagination Makers, in collaboration with students from Brighton High School, was performed by those students at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. IMTC is a proud recipient of 2010 and 2011 grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The company has completed 36 Drama Residency programs at schools across Colorado. In the last few years, we have designed and conducted residencies that are intensive writing and theater experiences for students.

Imagination Makers is supported by grants from the following organizations: The National Endowment for the Arts, the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) through the Cultural Councils of Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Douglas, and Jefferson counties, the Denver Foundation, the Boulder Arts Commission (an agency of the Boulder City Council), Target, the Broomfield Community Foundation, the Community Foundation Serving Greeley and Weld County, Kinder Morgan, as well as donations from numerous individuals.



THE DENVER FOUNDATION



NATIONAL
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Scientific & Cultural
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Making It Possible.



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720-565-1055 (phone) 720-565-1681 (fax)
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